

# Shelter Scotland Education Support Service

Working with homeless children and families,  
to help address the barriers to learning caused  
by homelessness



Photo: Jan Erik Posh

Shelter Keys to the Future



## Who we are

Shelter Scotland's Children's Service offers educational support to local children affected by homelessness. It is a pilot service, set up by Shelter with funding from the Big Lottery Fund and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and part of a three-year programme to tackle homelessness and bad housing among Scotland's children. We have Education Liaison Workers in Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and South Lanarkshire.

## Our aim

We want to achieve fairer outcomes for children affected by homelessness, and we work to do this by:

- supporting them in their educational development
- helping them to build their self-esteem
- working at a strategic level to ensure the educational support needs of children affected by homelessness are addressed, and that response measures and services improve.

# What is homelessness?

'Homelessness' is having no permanent place to live.

You don't have to be sleeping rough to be homeless.

Homeless people are:

- placed in temporary accommodation by the local council
- living in a hostel or bed and breakfast hotel, or
- staying with friends or family.

In 2006/07, a total of 18,109 families with children presented as 'homeless' in Scotland.

The causes and impacts of homelessness are diverse. Living in temporary housing can have a devastating impact on a young person's education and life chances.

## Impacts on education

**Homelessness is listed as a possible indicator of additional support needs, provision for which is made in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.**

### Key facts

- 'Additional support for learning' needs among homeless children were four times higher than the national average in 2003. *Living in limbo, Shelter, 2004*
- Research into homeless children's school attendance has shown that, on average, they miss out on a quarter of their education. *Living in limbo, Shelter, 2004*
- The emotional upheaval of moving from place to place, and possibly changing schools a number of times, can affect a child's ability to learn. It may also impact upon their behaviour and health. *Against the odds, Shelter, 2006*
- Some homeless children struggle to attend school and keep up with lessons or homework, particularly when they have long distances to travel and lack space to work where the family are staying. (*Sources: research reports into the negative effects of living in temporary accommodation.*)



## What we do

Our service provides direct help to children, aged 5–16 years, whose families live in temporary accommodation or who have just recently been resettled in permanent housing.

We listen to what the children themselves have to say, and we communicate their experiences to the people who can make a difference – in schools, local councils and the Scottish Government.

- We can arrange homework groups and/or one-to-one practical educational support at home and at school, or in the community.
- We encourage children and young people to develop a positive attitude towards learning and to build their self-esteem.
- We help parents to engage with the schools, as well as giving them guidance on how best to support their children's learning.



## The difference you can make

There are a number of ways in which agencies, in contact or working with families affected by homelessness, can help:

- Be aware of the emotional impact of homelessness upon children, and the effect it can have on their education.
- (for schools) Appoint a 'buddy' to look after a new child, showing them around while they settle in school.
- Keep up regular, informal contact with parents to help break down any barriers they may have in connecting with other people. For example, they could feel excluded, isolated or intimidated in a school environment.
- Understand that the family may have money worries. If they have become homeless suddenly, it may take some time for their finances and benefits to be sorted out.



# Referrals to our service

Our service is currently working with the children of families who have approached Shelter for advice and support as well as children who have been referred from outside agencies. We aim to expand the service to help other homeless children in Scotland.

If you're working with a family or know a child whose schoolwork may be suffering as a result of their housing situation, please get in touch with us to discuss the possibility of a referral. Let the family know what we do and, with their permission, you can refer the children to our service. Contact the listed Education Liaison Worker for your area.

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## ■ Edinburgh

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