Understanding Childhoods

Growing Up in Hard Times

March 2017

'Better arguments, maybe even better policies, get formulated when we know more about ordinary lives.'

Katherine Boo, 2012, Behind the Beautiful Forevers

Foreword

Edward Rudolf, The Children's Society's founder, was appalled by what he saw because of poverty's damaging impact on children's lives. He was determined to help vulnerable children and set up our organisation to promote social action. That was 136 years ago. Today, child poverty still blights children's futures and it's as important as ever to bring the issue to the fore. More importantly, still, we must listen to what children tell us about their lives so that, together, we can effectively tackle the problems facing children and young people today.

Right now, in this country, 4 million children are living in poverty. The number is rising. We know all too well the devastating effects poverty can have on children's lives and future prospects. By learning from children themselves how poverty affects their day-to-day lives, we can shape the ways we help children and young people.

Building on our 136-year history of tackling child poverty, this first Understanding Childhoods report marks the beginning of a longitudinal study following the lives of 60 children. This unique long-term study will uncover a child's-eye view of growing up in poverty in Britain today.
This report highlights how children are shouldering many of the burdens of living in poverty while parents are struggling to make ends meet. In today's society, it's unacceptable that children are being forced to repeatedly pack up their lives and move home because of inadequate housing and a drastic decline in support for struggling families.

Our findings in this study show difficulties at school, with children facing punishment for missing uniform or equipment they simply can't afford. Children also told us they're worried about living in dangerous and dirty neighbourhoods. The many facets of poverty are putting the health, education and happiness of millions of children at serious risk. At a time when more and more families are struggling financially, we are continuing to call on the Government to increase support with housing costs in keeping with rent rises, to make sure all children can have the security of a stable home.

We are proud to partner with Professor Tess Ridge OBE at The University of Bath to bring you this illuminating series, which promises to give a unique insight into the experiences of children growing up in poverty, as we continue to strive to make sure children's voices are heard.

Matthew

Matthew Reed
Chief Executive
The Children's Society

Executive summary

written by Sorcha Mahony

There are 4 million children living in poverty the UK.[1] This number has been increasing in recent years and is forecast to rise further still, with five million children expected to live in poverty by the end of the decade.[2]

We know that poverty has a profound impact on children's education, health and future chances in life, and yet too often policy is failing to improve the lives of children growing up in low income families. The most radical programme of welfare reform since the creation of the welfare state is resulting in ongoing reductions to the incomes of some of the most economically fragile households. The repeal of the 2010 Child Poverty Act means that the Government no longer faces a legal obligation to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and local authorities are no longer legally bound to produce Child Poverty Strategies. Increased devolution and localism mean that there is more scope for a postcode lottery when it comes to tackling poverty in childhood.

In this context, increasing our understanding of poverty in childhood becomes crucial. We already know a good deal about the issue – about trends over time, causes and effects, and the lived experiences of poverty at given points in children's lives. But we know relatively little about children's experiences of growing up in poverty as these are played out over time. We also know little about the ways in which children in low-income households negotiate key transitions in their lives, or the many shifting facets of life more broadly.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of these issues, The Children's Society is partnering with senior scholar Professor Tess Ridge, OBE at The University of Bath, to conduct a qualitative, longitudinal study: 'Understanding Childhoods: Growing Up in Hard Times.' This report marks the launch of this study over three years, which began in 2015 with a sample of 60 young people who are interviewed annually.

Here we share some preliminary insights from our cross-sectional analysis of the first wave of data. We focus on four key themes: residential transience, experiences of school, neighbourhoods, and money and material things.

In the discussion of residential transience we highlight how frequent house moves can be a striking and problematic feature of life, albeit one that is normalised. We note how, for those experiencing transience, a sense of control can help to mitigate the negative effects of housing instability. We also explore how transience can entail a search for rootedness, which in turn can lead to outcomes that – ironically – present further challenges in everyday life.

In the discussion of school, we look into the ways in which school life can be difficult for some young people living in low-income households, particularly at secondary level. We consider the challenges sometimes faced accessing adequate, desirable food in a non-stigmatising way. And we note how the costs of school for those in poverty can be prohibitive of certain learning and enrichment opportunities and how issues of poverty can be treated as behavioural infringements and penalised accordingly. We also note how maintaining friendships outside school or during school transitions can be especially hard for young people with less access to communication technologies than their wealthier peers.

In the discussion of neighbourhood, we explore participants' experiences of living in deprived areas, reflecting on common concerns around safety and violence, noise and traffic, aggressive adults and neighbours, bullying and gangs, and animals, rubbish and mess. We also explore the powerlessness felt by children to change their physical environment despite a desire to do so.

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1. http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying
2. https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8957

In the discussion of money and material things we consider how children living in poverty have varying experiences of these, but note the keen awareness of financial hardship and the strong desire to fit in with peers, even though fitting in can come at a cost. We also explore the lengths to which some children go in protecting their families from the effects of poverty, sometimes going without and sometimes contributing their own money to household budgets. We highlight the importance of wider kin networks for the material well-being of young people living in low-income households, and point to the resourcefulness of those young people and families who get by, and struggle to get ahead, with the odds stacked against them.

In each of these thematic areas we see that for young people growing up in poverty, childhood can be marked by a series of struggles. However, we also highlight their active involvement in managing their lives, and point to some of the potential routes to changing the policy context which can be so formative of their experiences.

As we move into longitudinal analysis we will publish further outputs which will deepen and expand our understanding of some of the themes covered in this report and explore other themes, such as poor health, safety and violence, family networks and resources, and identity and belonging. Importantly, our analysis will begin to consider the ways in which the different thematic areas interact with each other so that we can explore how multiple disadvantage plays out in our participants' lives, shaping material, psychological, social and temporal dimensions of experience. Through these endeavours we hope to explore additional routes to challenging poverty and inequality, and the effects of these on some of the most disadvantaged young people in the country.

The preliminary findings reported here provide further evidence for some of the policy recommendations that The Children's Society has made previously. These include:

1. Housing

Ensure that support with housing costs for those families renting privately increases in line with increases in local rents.

2. School

Provide all teachers with training on childhood poverty and its impact on children's education.

Ensure that Ofsted inspects schools on how they support the poorest pupils.

Allow children to have a say in how Pupil Premium money is spent.

Ensure schools make uniforms affordable.

3. Neighbourhood

Continue to produce Child Poverty Strategies at the Local Authority level and allow children to be involved in developing these strategies.

4. Money and material things

End the freeze on Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit and reinstate the link between benefit levels and inflation as soon as possible.

Introduction and methodology

written by Sorcha Mahony

The issue of childhood poverty has been at the heart of The Children's Society's work for over a century. From our earliest days in the late 1800s under Edward Rudolf providing 'cottage homes' for children affected by poverty and homelessness, through to our recent lobbying work on the impacts of problem debt on children, understanding and challenging poverty in childhood has always been central to what we do.

The Children's Society's commitment in this area began as part of a rich seam of work by scholars, philanthropists, writers and social critics in the 19th century – a moment in Britain's socio-economic history when the spectre of poverty loomed large over the workhouses of the cities and the fields of the countryside, and was becoming increasingly evident to those in the corridors of power. To this day, we remain at the forefront of the anti-poverty movement, ensuring that the voices of children are represented in debates about them.

There are 4 million children living in poverty across the UK[3] and the Institute for Fiscal Studies has predicted this figure will rise in coming years. The policy context in which these children are growing up is fundamental in shaping the extent and experiences of poverty, and whilst this context may be on the periphery of public awareness, it is at the forefront of determining the fabric of everyday life and future outcomes.

Recent reforms to the welfare system mark an important shift in the way that childhood poverty is both addressed and conceptualised. Reductions in various benefits mean that some of the poorest households face ongoing reductions in income, and the repeal of the 2010 Child Poverty Act means that the Government no longer has a legally binding target to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The issue of money is dropping away from official discourses on poverty, replaced by other concepts – such as 'life chances' and 'social justice' – and an understanding of poverty that is less about income and more about a raft of related issues and the perceived ability of people to get on in life, importantly treated as separable from income. Perhaps more tangentially, increased devolution and localism mean that, whilst there is potentially more opportunity for anti-poverty measures to take place at the local level, there is also an increased risk that children in low-income households face unwarranted variations in terms of provision and access to services. The election of 'Metro Mayors' around the country from May 2017 also means that certain powers will be devolved from central government, including around health, transport, employment and regeneration – all of which have the potential to affect the lives of children in economically fragile households.

Deepening our knowledge of childhood poverty is paramount. There is already a sizeable body of knowledge about this issue: we know that the number of children in poverty has grown in recent years, despite reductions over the previous two decades.[4] We know that two thirds of children living in poverty reside in households where at least one person is gainfully employed[5] – contrary to some of the stereotypes now so prominent in public consciousness. We also know that children are more likely to grow up in poverty if they live in lone parent households, if someone in the household is affected by illness or disability, or if they have more than two siblings.[6] We know too that the effects of growing up in a context of socio-economic disadvantage can be devastating: educational and health outcomes for children in poverty are significantly worse than those for their wealthier peers.[7]

Recent scholarship in this area has also seen a move towards gaining an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of growing up in economically insecure environments, and drawing

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3. http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying
4. http://www.cpag.org.uk/child-poverty-facts-and-figures
5. Ibid
6 Ibid
7. Ibid

on testimony from children themselves to build a more holistic picture of various aspects of their lives. Through the pioneering work of child-centred poverty researchers, we now have a greater appreciation of the multiple, everyday, micro-level experiences that can beset children in low-income backgrounds – experiences that are often invisible in large-scale surveys yet can be damaging to those affected.[8] In particular, through this work we have been afforded a greater understanding of how, far from being passive victims, children living in poverty are actively engaged in managing, coping and navigating the terrain of their circumstances, albeit in conditions of multiple and severe constraint.

Despite the more established quantitative knowledge about poverty in childhood – about trends over time and about its causes and effects – and the evolving qualitative knowledge concerning the lived experiences of poverty at given points in children's lives, there is much to learn about the dynamic and evolving nature of poverty from children's own perspectives as they grow, change and make their way in the world.

To address this knowledge gap, The Children's Society is partnering with Professor Tess Ridge at The University of Bath, to conduct a qualitative, longitudinal study which places children's own views and experiences at the centre of analysis. Through this partnership we hope to combine

our research and influencing capabilities to bring the voices of low-income children into the accumulating knowledge about them.

We began fieldwork for this research in 2015 and use annual, semi-structured interviews as our primary method of data collection. We have 60 participants – 20 each in three locations in England (a rural town, a small city and a large city, in the southwest, southeast and the middle of the country). Through primary and secondary schools in each location we recruited a cohort of children in Year 5 (ages 9 and 10) and a cohort in Year 7 (ages 11 and 12). Just over half our sample are girls and just under half are boys. At the beginning of the study all participants were living in low-income households, measured using eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM). We recognise that using FSM entitlement as a proxy indicator for childhood poverty has limitations, for example in not capturing young people whose parents work over 16 hours per week and still live on low incomes. Nevertheless FSM entitlement is a widely-used measure of economic disadvantage, and a practicable indicator for sampling purposes in this study.

We took an innovative approach to recruiting participants, designed to ensure that consent to take part in the study was as voluntary and informed as possible. We began by running whole-class consultation sessions based on the broad theme of well-being –

a process that grew out of The Children's Society's 2006 Good Childhood Inquiry, and which forms an integral component of our ongoing well-being programme of work. Having gained a presence and familiarity with pupils through those sessions, we followed up with a series of smaller focus group discussions with boys and girls who were eligible for FSM. In these discussions we raised the issue of living in low-income households and our interest in the perspectives of children therein. At the end of these sessions we introduced the longitudinal study and our desire to recruit participants for it, explaining that participation would entail taking part in individual interviews each year for three years. We provided a ballot box and ballot papers on which children could become, or decline to become, participants. Parents were given the option to 'opt out' of the study on behalf of their children, and from those who voted to take part in the study whose parents had not opted out, we randomly selected 60 young people.

In the first wave of individual interviews we asked our study participants about many aspects of their lives, selecting broad themes that we know from existing literature are important for young people – for their experiences of everyday life, their well-being and their futures. We asked about family and friends, home, neighbourhoods, school, and money and material possessions. We also asked a set of broader psychologically-oriented questions

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8. Ridge 2002

about what makes them happy, what makes them worry, what they would change in their lives if they could, and about their aspirations for the future. In addition, we ensured that each interview allowed space for participants to discuss issues and experiences that were important for them, but which we had not asked them about directly.

In this publication we report on our analysis of the first wave of data. In line with our approach to the interviews, the report explores a mixture of pre-determined and emergent themes. We have selected our focal themes for this report by identifying those that have some resonance throughout the data set, that are particularly striking in some way, or that resonated strongly with other elements of work at The Children's Society. In this report, our key focal themes are:

- Residential transience
- School
- Neighbourhood
- Money and material things

This publication marks the official launch of this groundbreaking study. Through this report we aim to do three main things:

- Introduce our qualitative, longitudinal research project and provide an account of the methodology and the stage we are at.
- Introduce some of the key themes that we hope to explore in greater depth over the course of the study and offer some preliminary insights into the analysis of the first wave of data.
- Introduce some of our study participants, whose lives we will follow over time.

There are four main sections in this report, each based on one of the key focal themes we identified. For the most part these sections draw on analysis of the individual interviews (although at points we also draw on data collected within the whole class sessions and focus group discussions). The analysis presented is preliminary and cross-sectional, and the individual stories that form the opening to each section are illustrative rather than representative, as well as being thematically selective. All data has been anonymised and acronyms used. As we move into analysing our longitudinal data, our focal themes will broaden and different aspects of our participants' lives will come into focus.

Section 1 – Residential transience

written by Sorcha Mahony

'I'm grateful for having a roof over my head.'

Abilene, 12

Abilene's story

When we met Abilene she was in Year 7 and struggling with life. She didn't have many friends. She had been bullied since starting secondary school, to such an extent that she had stopped attending for two months and returned only because she wanted to move school and needed to improve her attendance record to do so. Abilene found studying difficult: she struggled to keep up in some lessons and didn't feel well supported with her learning in them.

Abilene played a crucial role at home, looking after her mum who suffered with a chronic health condition, helping to take care of her younger siblings and doing domestic chores. When her mum's condition got really debilitating Abilene would vacuum the house, wash the dishes, do the laundry, help her mum get up and dressed, get her siblings dressed, fed and ready for the day, take them to school and do their chores for them. She fought with her mum and siblings and would sometimes not return home when she was supposed to, on occasion necessitating the involvement of the local police.

For Abilene, these and other difficulties had been played out against a backdrop of residential transience. By the age of 12 she had moved seven times within the same city, and in some cases within the same local area. At the time of her first interview she was expecting another imminent move, out of the flat on the busy road where she, her mum and siblings were housed temporarily, and into permanent housing.

Abilene knew the immediate reasons for some of the moves: one was to a refuge for women and children experiencing domestic violence where her mum had taken her and her siblings to escape her abusive husband and, as she understands it, the subsequent move was to a hotel whilst her mum struggled to find a longer-term housing solution. Abilene was not sure why the other moves had taken place, and had mixed feelings about those she could remember. Moving away from domestic violence had enabled Abilene and her sisters to avoid going into care, but she missed her dad. She had gained experience of living in different places and valued this, but struggled to build peer networks around her. She was looking forward to moving away from her anti-social neighbours and to having a bright pink bedroom and a garden in the next place, but there was an air of uncertainty over the pending move:

'I think it's definitely happening. Not really sure. Yes.'

Whilst Abilene's situation is unique, it reflects experiences shared by some within the broader sample of children in our study.

Background

We never set out to research residential transience. In fact, to reduce the potential for attrition, we asked our gatekeeper schools to exclude children who were known to be highly mobile from the list of potential participants. But it emerged nonetheless as a significant issue for some, in discussions around housing during the first wave of fieldwork.

Over the past two decades, residential transience has received increasing attention within scholarly circles, from a range of academic disciplines. Within this body of knowledge there are diverging approaches to conceptualising it.[9] Some use a quantitative approach, implicitly or explicitly defining it according to the number of times children have moved in their lives.[10] Others have suggested a more qualitative approach – partly to separate out positive, voluntary forms of moving from more negative or enforced forms – and define it according to the type and nature of moves, as in the following: 'a patterning

9. Gilbert and Bull 2007
10. For example, see Brown et al. 2012

of abrupt, unforeseen changes in short-tenure occupancies that are driven by imperative need'.[11] In this study we draw on both of these approaches, conceptualising residential transience in terms of multiple moves and/or moves that are driven by imperative need. Importantly, we do not impose overly strict definitional criteria, so that we can understand the experiences and perspectives of children who may be affected by a current housing instability but who may not be considered transient using other, stricter definitions.

Following the diverse approaches to defining the issue, there is some debate over the effects that residential transience has on young people. A minority of studies show its effects to be of little significance, or even to have potential positive effects – for example showing that over the longer term it is associated with increased educational attainment.[12] However, the majority of studies point to the increased risk of poor health and negative educational, social or psychological outcomes, especially when it is understood in terms of multiple, enforced moves related to imperative need[13],[14],[15],[16]. The debate that exists over the precise effects of residential transience hinges mostly on the way studies are designed and on the extent to which scholars have considered the role of confounding, mediating and moderating factors – namely poverty, family structure and

transience of schooling. Within this growing body of knowledge, there is a recognition that the experience of residential transience of the enforced, more negative type is associated with lower socio-economic status.[17] This can be understood, at least in part, with relation to the shortage of social housing in particular and of affordable homes more generally; to the concomitant growth of the private rental sector which is characterised by short term contracts and unpredictable rent rises. It can also be understood in relation to regressive housing policies such as restrictions on Housing Benefit entitlements for those in the private rented sector, as well as the introduction of the under-occupancy charge (aka the 'bedroom tax') which requires those living in social housing to move or pay extra if they are deemed to have 'spare' bedrooms in their house[18].

Within this burgeoning field of enquiry one thing is certain: the literature on residential transience in childhood is marked by an overwhelming lack of attention to the voices of children themselves. Even in studies that offer in-depth explorations of families' experiences[19], research has not been sufficiently attuned to children's perspectives. With the data from our study we can begin to address this gap – to bring children's voices to the centre of analysis and increase our understanding of how residential

transience plays out in the lives of young people living in low-income households.

Our data

Basic information

Whilst the issue of moving house did not arise in our interviews with every participant in Wave 1, a sizable proportion of children (50 out of 60) did talk about their housing histories. Whilst some of these had enjoyed residential stability, never having moved or having moved only once or twice, others had moved three, four, five, six, seven, eight or nine times in their young lives. Rasmus, who was in his first year of secondary school when we met him, described his housing history in some detail:

'When I was born I lived in [one area of the city]...and when I was about four or five we moved to...where the train station is... I used to live right in front of there...and then someone else bought the house, so we had to move... and then we never found nowhere so

11. Parker-Cotton 2016
12. Hango 2006
13. Brown et al. 2012
14. Hanie et al. 2006
15. Parker-Cotton 2016
16. Scanlon and Devine 2001
17. For example see Jellyman and Spencer 2007, Tunstall et al. 2012, Busacker and Kasehagen 2012, Parker-Cotton and Schwartz-Barcott 2016
18. Shelter 2013. It should be noted that this charge already existed for those living in private rental housing
19. Shelter 2004

I was living with my grandma...and then we found a place and moved out, then we moved from there to...on top of [a shop], then we moved from [there] to [a nearby neighbourhood], then we moved from [that neighbourhood] to [another nearby neighbourhood], and then we moved...to... where we are now.'

Some of our participants had moved short distances whilst others had moved across cities, between different cities in England, from one European country to another or across continents. Some had experienced a mixture of these short, medium and long distance moves. Leanna had lived in five different places by the time we met her in Year 7, having moved from southern Europe to the east of England where she stayed with her mum and sisters at her mum's friend's house, then to one area of a big city to stay with a different friend, then to a different area in the same city to stay in temporary accommodation provided by the local authority, and then to the outskirts of that city to another temporary place. When we spoke, Leanna was expecting another local move within the same area – this time into permanent housing:

'Now we received the good news too, that we have our house that we can have like forever or something in [the area we live in now]...So now we're going to stay where we are and not moving.'

As we might expect, more of our older participants had moved than younger ones. Most had moved as family units, even if moves entailed a reconfiguration of those units, although a small minority had moved out of the primary family home on their own for temporary periods. Karen, also in her first year of secondary school when we met her, had moved out of her family home for a period to live with a relative:

'I moved here last year. Basically my mum had to go into rehab...so I almost got sent to care but luckily my granddad like took me in so I ended up living with my granddad for a few years.'

Reasons for moving

The reasons that young people had moved varied widely. Where reasons were discussed, those

given included the following: to build a better life in the UK; to accommodate growing numbers of siblings; to live closer to extended family; because one parent was starting a new life with a new partner; to escape domestic violence; to escape harassment by estranged fathers; to escape neighbourhood violence; bullying and crime; because of the breakdown of family units; because of eviction due to non-payment of rent; because of landlords selling rented homes; to move out of poor quality housing; to live elsewhere temporarily whilst primary carers recovered from health problems; and because current accommodation was only ever intended to be temporary.

'We moved to a rental place... because there wasn't enough room in that house. My mum, because she was having my little brother.'
Boy, 11

'I came here because...my other sister...had problems with her [health], so then my mum came here to look for a better life for my sister.'
Girl, 12

'Some of the houses had a problem, like... there were rats... Then when we moved to [the next place] there was just dead rats, they were just dead and no-one took them out.'

Boy, 10

'We got evicted from our old house.'

Girl, 10

The different reasons for moving are not mutually exclusive and some children had experienced moves related to several of them. In addition, the reasons for some moves were difficult to categorise or summarise, and it wasn't always clear why participants had moved at all. Whatever the reasons, the issue of poverty seems ever-present, sometimes in obvious ways – in cases of eviction, of living in properties that were unfit for human habitation, and of living in temporary accommodation. In other cases the links between poverty and residential transience were less transparent but present nonetheless, determining when and where families were able to move, or necessitating excessively long journeys to school. As we delve deeper into our data we hope to explore in more detail the ways in which poverty and residential transience interact.

Experiences of moving

Normalisation

Some participants spoke positively about aspects of moving, for example if it allowed them to leave behind a facet of life that was negative such as poor housing or harassment, or if there was something specific to look forward to. Indeed, some participants expressed a disquiet about staying put if current living situations were difficult:

'In my old house there was like bullies there and there's more bullies now. Because I used to have another house as well and I want a new house again because there's more bullies.'

Boy, 10

Other participants spoke more negatively about moving, especially if they had moved away from friends:

'I was quite upset because I missed all my friends...I really miss my friends...I can't really like chat to them or Skype

them because I'm trying to get the numbers from my old phone.'

Girl, 12

Many spoke of positive and negative aspects of moving – of acquiring a garden but having to travel further to school, of acquiring a bigger bedroom but having no furniture in it, of no longer taking up space in a grandparent's house but having to restrict energy usage more in their new abode, of expecting to move to a bigger house but having to forsake family pets:

'We might be moving soon to a three bedroom house...but that means we have to give [our dog] and [our cat] away...The person who owns the house doesn't like dogs and cats.'

Girl, 9

However participants experienced moves, their narratives suggest a sense in which residential transience had become somewhat normalised – a fact of childhood for some, communicated candidly and with little sense of the how it highlighted the shortcomings of the policy and political context in which they live.

Control and constraint

Participants appeared to have little active influence on their overall housing trajectories. Whilst it may be unsurprising that decisions around moving tend to rest with adults, the sense of being buffeted around from home to home with no choice in the matter was particularly pronounced for some:

'I'm just thinking why couldn't they just let us live in one place instead of keep moving around? So it's just, it's just that really, it's like, so in a few months yes it'll be a bit more difficult. Whereas if we stay there for like two, three, four months then we have to start packing again, then we have to leave, unpack. Yes, it just keeps going like that.'

Boy, 11

'My mum's going to move again but because it's only temporary they can move her at any time.'

Girl, 12

Despite this, and in the face of what could be an unsettling experience, there were numerous ways in which participants' narratives reflect an active involvement in the process of moving. One form this took was of a practical nature, wherein young people had helped to clear, pack and unpack possessions in the lead up to and in the wake of the move itself:

'Well yes, I helped my mum, sort of help her with packing, packing my room myself. Helping sort through stuff and what not to keep and what to keep. It's only a small flat so we had to chuck away like half of the stuff.'

Boy, 11

Another key way in which some young people were actively involved in the process of moving came in the form of jointly planning for life in a new home. In Abilene's case this entailed helping to devise her sister's birthday party and designing the décor in her prospective bedroom. A further, related form of active involvement was through the conversations that children had with parents concerning house moves. Depending on the nature of those conversations, they are likely to be beneficial for young people.[20] Ebahi had moved four times to his knowledge when we met him in Year 5, and at the time he was living with the contents of his house packed up in cardboard boxes as his mum had started to prepare for their next move. The discussions with his mum about it are likely to have worked as something of a protective factor against potential negative or unsettling feelings:

'In [our old place] my mum said "how would you feel to move?" Then I said "you can choose because you're the boss" because I didn't really know how it was like to move to another country. So then after when we moved…she said again "how would you feel if we were moving to another country?" Then I said "I wouldn't feel fine".

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20. We know from other research that when children are able to express their ideas and opinions about issues that affect them, they are more likely to have higher well-being than those who are not (The Children's Society 2013). We also know, from the literature on divorce, that being informed about significant changes in their lives can help children to buffer against related forms of stress, especially that related to attributing problems to themselves (The Children's Society 2007). Something similar is likely to apply in the context of moving house.

Whilst our participants were involved in various ways in different aspects of moving, it is also clear that, to some degree, they were reshaping their lives to fit with residential transience and the constraints it imposed upon them – picking their way around cardboard boxes to navigate the physical terrain at home, spending time discussing pending moves and dealing with the many practical aspects of moving, creating dreams around what new dwellings would enable them to do, dealing with the long journeys to and from school that moves sometimes necessitated, and in some cases helping parents through the cumbersome paperwork that accompanied problems related to housing instability. As our study develops we will be able to explore this further and shed light on the tensions that exist at the interface of residential transience and human action designed to cope with it.

Uncertainty and rootedness

One of the key issues to stand out for residentially transient participants is the sense of uncertainty that characterises their narratives around moving. This was particularly strong for some of those who were either expecting to move imminently or who suspected that a move might be on the horizon. For these young people, there was a palpable sense of uncertainty – questions about their lives that seemed to remain unresolved:

'What if, one day, where my mum's so much in debt that we get evicted and then I come back from school and all our stuff is outside? And then we've got nowhere to live. But obviously we'd go to, like, my grandma's house or something but, like, what if that happens?'

Girl, 11

'I'm worried about moving…because first, if you can't find a house you might have to go to the homeless place and then those houses are really little.'

Boy, 10

In this context, retaining a sense of security, or 'rootedness'[21] can become particularly important. Our preliminary analysis of the first wave of interviews suggests that there are two ways in particular in which a search for security might manifest: first, through retaining connections with friends and peer networks from previous neighbourhoods and/or schools,

and second – linked to the first – through remaining in the same school. However, for some, retaining a sense of stability in these ways was out of reach, and even for those who did manage to, it could come at a cost. Some, like Abilene, were staying in a school where they were deeply unhappy until their housing situation became more settled. Others, like 11 year old Samantha, were staying with relatives other than parents, in order to travel to and from school. Others still travelled considerable journeys to remain in the same school whilst their housing situation was in flux, and until it became more settled:

'I wake up about five in the morning… me and my mum leave the house at the same time…we walk from our house to the shopping centre…you can go straight through there to [the train station] and we go from there until [two stops away] and then…I'm going to [one] bus but before I get [it] I like meet my friend…at the bus stop…and then we…pick [another

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21. Crowley 2003

bus]...then we go to Tesco almost every morning...and we walk from Tesco to school.'

Girl, 11

For this girl's family there are also potentially serious health costs related to residential transience:

'When [my sister] has an asthma attack...the doctor said if she really has an asthma attack she should go to the hospital, straight to them, don't go to the GP...because... our GP was in [the area where we used to live], we moved to [another area] but we didn't move our GP...because we thought like, our house was temporary so there's no point moving from [the old area] to then move again [to the next area], again to the new area or something.'

As we begin to analyse our data longitudinally, we can develop a more detailed picture of residential transience in our participant's lives. We will be able to explore in more depth the key themes to emerge from this preliminary analysis: the normalisation of transience, the interplay between transience and participants' endeavours to negotiate the challenges it presents in everyday life, and the search for rootedness that often accompanies the uncertainty of residential instability. We will be able to explore what might work to mitigate negative effects and provide support for those who experience residential transience as they move through childhood.

Section 2 – Experiences of school

written by Jim Davis and Tess Ridge

Lucy's story

Lucy is 11 years old and lives in a rural town with her mum, stepdad and older sister. She is the youngest of five siblings and is an auntie to three nieces and nephews, although they all live in another town. She is in her first year of secondary school and previously attended a local primary school close to her home. Lucy has moved frequently in her life and has lived in the town for just over a year. They moved to the area to start a new life with her stepdad. Lucy misses the friends she left behind when they moved but is making new friends in school. She walks to school each day with her older sister who tolerates her being with her but likes to ignore her once they are in school. School is a mix of bad and good things for Lucy. Her favourite lesson is probably maths or English, though English is hard work.

'Because even though I'm kind of in a low group, I'm in a medium group, but the thing is my reading is holding me back so I'm in special English and, like, middle of maths, so if I get my reading up to speed I'll probably be in the top group.'

Lucy has free school meals and is given a £2 a day allowance to buy her lunch, although she has the option to have an additional free drink at the start of the school day. If she wanted more food than her £2 allowance could buy, she would need to have her account topped up by her Mum or add cash to it using a machine at school. There are activities and clubs available at school but Lucy doesn't access them and she isn't sure she will as previously it proved difficult.

'Well, there is this thing that I used to want to do at my old school. It was – I've forgotten what it's called. Trumpet lessons. And it cost money and my mum said, "oh" and I keep forgetting to bring money in and I couldn't do it in the end because my mum said that you don't really need, "do you really need trumpet lessons?" And I go no, not really.'

Adjusting to new rules and conditions is something that worries Lucy most about being in secondary school. The sanctions for not having the correct uniform, being late or not producing homework on time bother her a little, as does the cost of some of the small things.

'It would be to kind of have a free area like you – because if – if you lose your timetable which I have – many times you have to pay 20p. Kind of like make it free. Because you don't pay for your lessons so I think you should not pay for where you're going to your lessons.'

Lucy hopes to do well at school but would like to see some changes, although they may not be changes that are possible or welcomed by the school.

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'School uniform. I'd change it to non-school uniform because you feel freer – I'd allow chewing gum and headphones and eating in the hallways.'

Lucy's experiences, and those of other low-income children in our study tell us much about how low-income children experience school.

Background

School plays a key role in the lives of children and young people, in the development of their social and human capital, the quality of childhood they experience and their future well-being. Increasingly there is an acknowledgement that schools can make a significant difference in disadvantaged children's lives (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014). The type of education a child receives, the school environment and the quality of teaching within the learning environment can all make a real difference in children's lives (Sylva, K. et al, 2012). However, with 6 out of 10 disadvantaged children in England failing to achieve a basic set of qualifications compared to only 1 in 3 children from more advantaged backgrounds, the need for schools to improve outcomes for children is pressing (ibid; 2014:1). The Child Poverty Strategy 2014–2017 highlighted the role that schools can play

supporting and nourishing disadvantaged children, however previous research has shown that school experiences for low-income children are frequently excluding and challenging (Ridge, 2011, The Children's Commission on Poverty, 2014).

In Growing up in Hard Times we are keen to understand the everyday lives and experiences of two groups of low-income children as they move through their school careers and negotiate key transitions in their school lives, including the significant move from primary to secondary. In our first baseline interviews we explored with children some of the key elements that make up their school experience including important social aspects such as friendships and social relationships, sharing food together, opportunities for wider social and learning experiences and their perceptions of the rules and regulations that inform the governance of their everyday school lives.

Our focus on these key social experiences was drawn from a body of research with disadvantaged children which has shown that social aspects of school can present particular challenges for children affected by low income at home and at school (Hirsch, 2007; Sutton et al; 2007; Ridge, 2011). The provision of food at school for children is a vital part of the school day, it is a social event and an opportunity to nourish and support children's growth and well-being. For disadvantaged children a hot meal provided as part of their

free school meals entitlement is a vital support for those who may be finding food in short supply at home. But the provision of free school meals can be highly stigmatised and poorly delivered within schools (The Children's Society, 2012). Research by the Institute for Social and Economic Research found that nearly one third of all children eligible for free school meals preferred not to take them, with stigma in the delivery of meals identified as one of the main reasons against uptake (Holford, 2012). All of the children in this study were eligible for free school meals when the research began, and in this section we explore their experiences both in accessing meals and the type and quality of food they felt was available to them.

The costs of the school day are also of key concern for low-income children and their families. Although school is perceived as free, there are a significant number of costs, many of them everyday costs, that impact on children's experiences of school life and affect their opportunities for equal access to participation with their peers (The Children's Society, 2014). Our interest however, was wider than each of these important elements of school life, and embraces the individual experiences of each child as they negotiate their school lives, revealing, over time, the issues and concerns that they identify as they grow and age within the formal school structure. In this first report we start to see how deeply embedded disadvantage is within the school day.

Access to food during the school day

The school day is a long one and access to adequate and nourishing food is an important element of support for children in low-income families. All of the children in the study were at the outset eligible for a free school meal. But their experiences of food during the school day varied significantly, both in terms of the quantity of food they could access and the quality and desirability of the food. For children at primary school, food during the day was largely limited to lunch time, with some also taking breakfast at school. At secondary school food was available at break times as well as lunch times and at the start of the day. At primary school the distinction between children was based on whether they had dinners or sandwiches and if they had dinners whether they were meat or vegetarian. A key issue for children is how food is delivered and the stigma associated with that delivery (The Children's Society, 2014). In this study children in the primary schools were generally satisfied with the way that they accessed their food, and this was a result of eligibility being discreet and non-stigmatised. Unlike the secondary schools the point of purchase for food at primary school was not in the canteen, so free school meals were not identified as different to any other meal delivered. Choice of food is important when food at home could be limited, but quality and desirability of food also counted for children. Choosing to have dinners or not seemed to have more to do with liking the dinners or not, and some children were only having school dinners on the days they liked the food.

> 'Sometimes I have school dinners on Wednesday and Friday. Maybe Thursday, because Friday's fish and chips and pizza. And Wednesday is roast.'
>
> **Boy, 9**

At secondary school the experience is considerably different. There is greater potential for stigma as the point of purchase is at the canteen where children choose what to eat and how much to spend. Children on free school meals were given a daily allowance which varied considerably between schools and was a limit on what they could buy, and in some cases when they could buy it. For some in the study the amount available was limiting the food they could have:

> 'You get dinner and a pudding and then you go to, like, the sandwich place and just get a drink. If you want to, like, but that will be, like, £2.30 but you only get £1.85 for a free school meal.'
>
> **Boy, 11**

Of the 15 boys in the study at secondary school, seven were spending their allowance or money on eating at the start of the school day, when they may well be hungriest, rather than at lunchtime when they would go without or with less. Being hungry during the school day was a challenge for the six secondary age children who said they leave the house before 7.30 to get to school on time and may not have had breakfast. Adequacy, availability, desirability and the potential for stigmatising delivery all presented challenges to children and young people trying to negotiate their food needs during the school day.

The cost of school

School is not free, presenting particular challenges for children living in families with severely constrained incomes. Some of the children in both cohorts expressed concerns about the costs of uniform and of school trips, clubs and activities. Extracurricular activities are increasingly seen as an essential part of 'getting on' at school. More affluent parents and top earners are almost four times as likely as lower income families to have paid for extracurricular classes to enrich their children's school experiences (The Sutton Trust: 2014). The cost of extracurricular activities is something that many children in the study were acutely aware of. Some activities were free at the schools and these were valued by the children, others could generate additional costs (like music lessons requiring the purchase or hire of an instrument to be able to practice).

School trips were seen by children as important social events and in general primary schools were often paying the majority of the cost, but even a small contribution can be difficult for families to manage and cause anxieties for children. For example Mandy wanted to go to the pantomine, but it was £8 and she had to find drinks and snacks as well, and was worried about asking her mum (in the end she felt she had to, as she wanted to go so much). In the secondary schools there were few trip opportunities in this first year and we will catch up with these children next year and see how they fared in the second year.

Rules and regulations

The school environment is bounded by rules and regulations to aid the smooth running of the school, but also to control and censure children when the school deems it necessary. Understanding the rules and being able to negotiate them and recover from transgressions is an essential life skill for children.

For children at primary school the rules and behaviour policies were broadly understood and something that children could conform with. One or two children did express unhappiness with individual teachers and some were also contending with bullying issues and the risks of getting into trouble. But for most children at primary school, for most of the time school was okay and something they were content with. For those children in secondary school, the move

up from primary was a transition that provided new challenges and situations to navigate. This was particularly true for the experience of understanding and conforming to the rules and regulations of school life. The demands relating to school uniform were greater, the interaction with a broader range of staff meant negotiating many relationships and the accumulation of sanctions for minor issues could turn small difficulties into bigger concerns. Children thought that it was easy to get detentions for small infringements of rules and for those who had complicated or long journeys to and from school, detentions were a significant burden. For the cohort of children living in the large city, travel to and from school often involved more than one mode of public transport and for some, journey times of more than an hour.

'I got a C2[22] and then I just looked back and I asked for a calculator. And then he gave me a C3 just for asking for a calculator.'

Boy, 12

Being able to comply with the expectations around uniform was particularly difficult when it included sports kit, as well as the proper shoes and bag. When children had siblings in the same school or other schools they recognised the cost of having all the right uniform was a burden

on their parents. Some schools did help with uniform costs for children starting out at secondary school, but that didn't help the costs of replacing lost, stolen or worn out uniform. Children spoke of having to pay for new ties or other school kit, or getting into trouble. Not having the right school uniform made it difficult to fit in with peers, but it was also treated as a behavioural issue and resulted in the same sanctions that were incurred for behaving badly:

'Sometimes like school shoes break and you've got to get more. You get detentions if you haven't got the right uniform.'

Girl, 11

In the first year of secondary school some children already felt marked and in breach of rules and expectations.

'It's not been a hard time yet because I know everyone but still it just feels a bit weird because I don't know the teachers and I can't be myself properly yet, until I know them and after...Like when a

22. C2 and C3 refer to a behaviour management system in the school that ranges from C1 to C4, the latter usually entailing time spent in 'isolation'.

teacher gets rid of me I don't want to move to another tutor group yet, it's just…oh I don't know. It's just that I don't want to get in trouble or anything no more.'

Boy, 11

Avoiding trouble was something all the children wanted to do, but when there were so many ways of being in trouble it seems like a struggle, particularly when not having basic equipment or uniform was dealt with as a breach of the rules. Repeated transgressions of rules was also often a signifier that some children were struggling to manage their relationships at school with peers and with teachers.

School relationships

It is easy to forget that school is a vital social environment as well as an academic one, a place and time where they learn to be themselves, and how to 'fit in and join in' with others (Ridge, 2011). Nourishing and facilitating good social relationships at school is as important for children as academic attainment, and should be taken very seriously by schools.

Managing relationships at school

Children's accounts of school friendships reveal how important friends are for children with regard to their security and social status. For these children, having good friends affected how they felt about school. Friends were protective from bullying and generated a greater feeling of security at school, and this was particularly so for children at primary school.

The younger children in the study often found it difficult to maintain their school friendships outside of school due to insecurity and a lack of safety in their neighbourhoods (see next chapter). For the secondary school children who were in their first year, moving schools had meant the loss of friendships for some, for others friends were protective in settling into a new and strange environment. There were also concerns expressed by children about fighting, gangs and bullying. For some children maintaining school friendships was challenging, particularly with regard to experiencing transience between schools. Moving frequently is very challenging for children and can be the result of other unsettling changes at home (see Section 1 looking at transience). Moving between schools can be liberating for some children where they feel trapped in difficult school environments, but for most of the children who were experiencing transience between schools there was a negative impact on their relationships and security at school and how they saw their teachers. Transience was often associated with instability at home, domestic violence, homelessness and neighbourhood bullying. Transient children expressed anxieties about maintaining friendships and worries about being secure.

Transience between schools can also mean children waiting some time before they can get a place in another school.

Peter is nine years old and was very transient, experiencing over eight moves and four schools in his short life. He found school quite scary and was uncertain about making friends.

'Coming in you don't know what they are going to be like.'

Boy, 9

Relationships with schoolteachers can be a fundamental component of whether a child feels settled or unhappy at school (Horgan, 2007; Ridge, 2011). School can bring security to otherwise unstable lives, for example one girl who had been evicted from her home felt at her most secure and settled at school. Generally feedback on primary school teachers was very positive and at this age and stage teachers are appreciated and generally have good relationships with children. They intervene in problems and are trusted overall to do so. For older children there was an adjustment needed to a new, often much bigger, and more tightly regulated school environment. Relationships with teachers were more complex as children moved from class to class and were exposed to considerably more teachers and their individual expectations. There was more unhappiness amongst the older children with regard to their teachers, although where they encountered what they felt was a

'good teacher' these relationships were highly valued. But the change in governance style from primary to secondary was particularly challenging for some children.

'Most of the teachers are very, very horrible but it's one of those things you just have to deal with it and if you're good they're nice to you, if you're naughty they hate you, it's one of those things. Teachers don't care if you are learning just if you are listening!'

Girl, 12

For children like Abi, a new migrant, understanding the rules and getting on with the teachers was particularly difficult. Abi's struggle to understand English had resulted in her getting repeated warnings and 'negative points' when she had not understood the rules – this in turn resulted in her feeling that she hated the teachers.

We started our engagement with these children at key times in their school lives, when younger children were coming to the end of their time at primary school and starting to look forward to the challenges of moving up to secondary. The older children had just negotiated that very significant transition and were beginning their new lives at secondary school. We have already seen that disadvantage presents its own challenges in children's everyday lives at school. As we follow these children through the years ahead we will gain a unique insight from children themselves into how they negotiate the challenges and opportunities that present themselves, and how their lives develop over time.

Section 3 – Neighbourhood

written by Tess Ridge

Pia's story

Pia is a nine year old girl living with her mum, stepdad and eight year old sister. Her dad lives nearby with her stepmum and they are expecting a baby very soon. She has lots of friends who live on her road, but it isn't safe to play out because the road is busy and dangerous. Pia's mum is worried about her playing in the road as recently a car

'…bashed into our fence and my mum don't like me playing out anymore.'

The car also killed one of their pets and damaged their car.

'On the day they crashed into our car, they killed one of my cats as well, like one of my cats…And they was laughing when they went up the road.'

The family now have a guard dog and have installed security cameras.

'And when they did the fence, someone did the fence and then they was knocking all the thingys down, so my mum shouted out "why you doing that?" And then they was like "oh I didn't mean to"…That's why mum's got cameras all over the house… She's got them near the fence, she's got them everywhere.'

The neighbourhood has a park but for many of the children in the study, and especially younger children, parks are not necessarily seen as safe areas. Pia doesn't like to play there because it's poorly lit and she feels unsafe.

'I don't like it because there's a park, but it's no park and it's, there's no lights around in the park and like you hear noises and I just don't like it.'

She doesn't envisage the park improving as she gets older.

'I think it'll just be like, because it's a mess in there, there's nothing in there like, all grass, so I think it will just be a mess when I get older.'

Her mum and dad are worried about her safety and don't want her to play outside unless someone accompanies her. Like many of the other younger children in the study, meeting up with friends out of school was often significantly compromised by their parent's fears about safety in the neighbourhood.

'My dad don't even let me out once. He lets me out…he bought me a bike and he don't let me out until he goes out or my biggest cousin.'

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'We're not allowed out on our own because like, there's like in [place] someone got kidnapped, a little kid. That's why dad don't let us out anymore.'

Pia is a bright, sparky young girl – she is interested in improving where she lives and has a keen sense about what changes she would like to see in her neighbourhood and the improvements she would make.

'Like making like the roads a bit smaller so it's not a main road all the time you could cut through. Instead of like say the main roads, you could have every little road and then on one bit you could go to the same road but you can cut through so it's not bad traffic. And like you should have like stuff instead of like dog muck and like bubble gum all over, you can just have like this thing…you could have like people like picking it up like, or have like a cleaner coming around, because we haven't even got a cleaner on our road to clean up, we've only got a bin but no one uses it.'

Pia's experiences are replicated by many of the low-income children in our study and their accounts of their experiences in their neighbourhoods tell a very similar story.

Background

Childhood poverty tends to be a very localised experience – children grow and develop in their neighbourhoods and the quality of that environment is of critical importance to their present and future well-being.

Neighbourhoods provide the backdrop to children's everyday lives; a good neighbourhood can nourish and support children in their friendships and the development of social and human capital. A bad neighbourhood can lead to uncertainty, insecurity, and for some children transience and/or social isolation. We know from research that children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are significantly less happy, and more likely to be anxious than children living in more affluent neighbourhoods (Chanfreau et al, 2013). A deprived neighbourhood can also be a dangerous place to grow up in: there are a series of risks that low-income children encounter in their everyday lives including a risk of injury from road traffic collisions and poor health through degraded environments. There is a clear link between increasing deprivation and traffic accidents involving child pedestrians (Hewson, 2004). Children in deprived areas are particularly vulnerable and are likely to be playing in the streets due to a lack of appropriate child friendly green spaces. Good quality green spaces such as parks and other open spaces can be vitally important for children's well-being and their mental and physical health (National Children's Bureau, 2012). Access to safe and welcoming outdoor space is essential for many disadvantaged children who may find their home space to be insecure, overcrowded and in poor physical condition. Insufficient safe, warm and private space within a home can also affect children's health, academic opportunities, and familial relationships (ibid). The quality of neighbourhood environment available to children is of great significance for their childhood well-being. Noise and environmental degradation have an impact on growing bodies, and children are at high risk of being affected by noise pollution, including noise from traffic and noisy neighbours. This can result in poor cognitive performance and have an impact on school work and outside play activities (Haines et al, 2003).

Outdoor spaces provide an opportunity for social and physical play away from the adult gaze and much of childhood is enacted in a

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neighbourhood setting. It is a key space for autonomous growth and social relational development with peers (Rogers, 2012). As Rogers' research with children and young people has shown 'Physically active play allows children "to be present in the present" removing them from past and future concerns and this experience contributing to their resilience and sense of well-being' (ibid:498). This is especially important when we understand that here we are engaging with the experiences of low-income children who may have many concerns and anxieties in their lives, including worries about money, social inclusion and security. Therefore, the opportunity to play freely and safely in their neighbourhoods for these children can play a key role in supporting their well-being.

The Good Childhood Report (2016) found that children's perceptions of their neighbourhoods and their experiences of their local area were clearly linked to their well-being. Residential mobility is a key issue for children, especially children who experience socio-economic disadvantage. An exploration of the impact of residential mobility – over time – on children in the Millennium Cohort Study, found that for children living in disadvantaged households, prior to a family move there was an increased risk of experiencing emotional problems when their families moved either within or between deprived neighbourhoods (Flouri et al, 2012). This is particularly salient when we consider the transience experienced by some children within the study.

In this section we look in more depth at the views and experiences of children in our research in relation to the neighbourhoods in which they live. Children are key informants about their social worlds and their neighbourhoods, they have their own perspectives on their environments and the challenges and opportunities that are open to them, they generally know which places to avoid and where they are welcome and where they are not. Neighbourhood is the first step out from home, it can open up opportunities for social engagement, fun and healthy activities, but it can also engender anxiety and frustration.

Living in impoverished neighbourhoods – children's accounts of everyday life

Underpinning the findings in this section is evidence from the children and young people in the two cohorts of children we are following over time, but this section also draws more widely on findings from a range of primary school children who were involved in the first stages of our research. At that initial stage we worked with much larger groups of children in our participating schools, working towards understanding the everyday experiences of low-income childhood in these disadvantaged areas.

We conducted several research exercises with children including a classroom exercise with Year 5 children in all of the schools we were working with. The classroom children came from a range of financial backgrounds and not all were on either free school meals or Pupil Premium, therefore there was some variation in experiences – although almost all were still living in deprived areas. One of these exercises was called 'Tops and Pants'. This exercise ultimately involved over 150 Year 5 children in four different schools, and allowed them to participate freely in exploring what they valued in their neighbourhoods (what was tops) and what they disliked about their

neighbourhoods (what was pants). Children wrote on their cards and then hung them anonymously on the washing line in the classroom – we then had a wide-ranging discussion with the children based on the washing lines.

What was 'tops' about their neighbourhoods for the Year 5 children?

These primary school children were very clear about what they did value in their neighbourhoods, but also what they would like to see improved, although sadly for many in the classes this was not possible. Some children were unable to even find anything to write about that they liked.

'I don't like anything about where I live.'

Boy, Year 5

For those that could articulate good things, a good neighbourhood for children meant safety, being well-lit and welcoming to children, and providing open spaces to play in. Places to meet friends and enjoy time together were highly valued, as were appropriate and well-tended parks, a lack of noise and an environment free of fighting and adult aggravation. Above all children wanted lots to do and nice neighbours.

'It's good, there is a football club, there is a drama club, there is a park, nice neighbours.'

Boy, Year 5

A good environment was clearly possible for some children in the study, and when these elements came together there was a secure and settled nature to children's accounts: they were happy. Good neighbours were essential, and played key roles in supporting children and their families, and creating a wider ring of security and freedom for the children to play safely at home and in their immediate neighbourhoods.

'I like that everybody is friendly and our street hardly ever has rubbish on it and if there is, someone who lives on the road picks it up.'

Girl, Year 5

'The cats are friendly, half of the neighbours are friendly, some of the dogs are friendly, I got friends, I have fun.'

Girl, Year 5

'I like my street lots because nobody bullies me.'

Boy, Year 5

What was 'pants' about their neighbourhoods for the Year 5 children?

When children were asked to identify things that were 'pants' about their neighbourhoods their responses revealed a litany of disturbing problems which were repeated again and again by children across all of the schools we worked with. Their concerns fell into several key areas, chief among them were concerns about safety and violence, noise and traffic, troublesome adults and neighbours, bullying and gangs, animals, rubbish and mess. One girl's response about what was pants about her neighbourhood summed up many others:

'Dogs poo, some neighbours are horrible, we can't play outside, there's rubbish on the streets.'

Girl, Year 5

Noise, dog mess and rubbish were important issues for children who were very aware of the poor quality of the local environment in which they were living.

'There are no trees on my road and when you go out of your house everything looks all grey.'

Girl, Year 5

Dogs were often problematic for children, although some children lived in families where dogs had been bought to keep them 'safe', for many other children other people's dogs created a lot of mess and could be dangerous. Parks are potentially safe spaces for children to meet up with their friends and have fun, and as we have seen from the contributions from children above, when parks are well tended, well lit and appropriate for children they are highly valued.

However alongside some children's good experiences of park space, many voiced concerns about not being able to access such good-quality spaces to play. Having access to safe green places to play in has been shown to be particularly important for children's health and well-being. As the Marmott Review (2010) found: 'The more deprived the neighbourhood, the more likely it is to have social and environmental characteristics presenting risks to health. These include poor housing; higher rates of crime, poorer air quality, a lack of green spaces and places for children to play and more risks to safety from traffic.' (2010:77-78).

Without safe park space children were often playing in the streets, and street space was considered to be extremely unsafe by children. In the discussion with classroom groups it was evident that many children knew of, or were related to, children who had been knocked down by cars.

'Sometimes when it's icy the cars still speed down really fast and skid round and round, also people smash glass everywhere.'

Girl, Year 5

Cars, ambulances, police cars and trucks formed a constant noisy backdrop to some children's lives. We are only just beginning to understand the impact of noise on children's lives and well-being. A recent report by the EU found that high noise levels were associated in children with hyperactivity, difficulties in maintaining attention and emotional problems (European Commission, 2015).

'All I hear is trucks when I wake up.'

Boy, Year 5

'In the night all of the buses, trucks and cars are always more busier and noisier.'

Boy, Year 5

The children in this research were often living on very run-down estates where there was considerable transience. This could create a tense and unsettled environment. Children's accounts indicated that they were often very anxious and unhappy about fighting and swearing in

the streets, aggressive adults and, for this younger group, the perceived danger of large groups of teenagers and gangs.

'I don't like it when people have fights and the noise.'

Boy, Year 5

'I don't like my road because I've been attacked at my house four times.'

Girl, Year 5

'Police cars come down our street a lot.'

Boy, Year 5

'I don't like my house because there is usually police in the street.'

Girl, Year 5

The responses set out in this section reflect the nature of this wider classroom sample of Year 5s. For the 60 low-income children who belong to our ongoing study, neighbourhood experiences were considerably more problematic, and their experiences echoed those identified by children in the 'pants' cards section hung up by the wider group.

For the 30 children in the younger age group in particular, difficulties in accessing safe space and living in challenging neighbourhoods were affecting their opportunities to go out with their friends. Parents were understandably anxious about children going out and about after school when the streets were poorly lit and there had been incidents of violence or aggression. As a result many children were spending their after-school time indoors.

However for some children, like Beth, housing itself could be problematic, temporary, damp and/or overcrowded. Beth is nine years old and had recently moved to the local primary school and was trying to make new friends. Her family was evicted from their previous house and they have had to move into a much smaller house. Her bedroom is very small and all her things are in a box under the bed as there is only room for the bed in the room. She is sad that she had to leave her dog and a hamster behind because no pets were allowed in her current house. To compound her feelings of displacement and upheaval, she has found herself living in a difficult neighbourhood where she feels unsafe, particularly about neighbours who drink and take drugs. Because of concerns about safety she is never allowed to have her windows open no matter how hot her room is in the summer. Beth was anxious, unsettled and sad about her home environment when we met.

Peter was also nine years old and had experienced considerable transience in his short life. In his current home he is concerned about gangs and fearful for his mother when she is out and about. His brother came home with a broken nose, and he wishes he could get rid of gangs in his neighbourhood and feel safer. Fear of older children and gangs was an issue for some young people, and groups of older children gathering within parks and other play spaces was threatening. Some areas also had very bad reputations.

Kara had also moved around a lot and had lived in some places with a bad reputation. She was also aware that where she lived now was close to where one of her distant cousins had been shot and killed. She felt that where she currently lived was better than her previous neighbourhood, but it was still seen as a bad place. But everything is relative and for Kara, despite its reputation, it was an everyday backdrop to her life and she had no real choice other than to negotiate it.

'I don't think that it's bad I just think it's normal, I know like everybody near enough but where I'm living I don't really like my neighbours next door or straight facing across the road because the people across the road always have motorbikes and they're only 16 so I don't think they should have motorbikes, but they do anyway. The people from next door like that way, they're always screaming and shouting and the dog's always barking and that way they're just opening and closing their doors 24/7 and I don't like it.'

For the older cohort of children in the ongoing study, neighbourhoods were still presenting significant problems, but there were some signs that as children grew older some of them were becoming better able to negotiate some of the challenges that faced them. This group of young people were not yet teenagers at their first interview, and future waves of the research will give the opportunity to explore how the children in the study negotiate the spoiled and even dangerous environments in which they often find themselves. For older children public space is an essential part of seeing and being seen, and the desire to go out into the world and explore the social environment can be strong. However, as these young people start to move out into their local areas, the issues that may face

them with regard to gangs, drugs and personal safety may become more acute.

We will pick up the stories from both younger and older children in future stages of the research and see what has happened to these children in their neighbourhoods as the research progresses.

Section 4 – Money and material things

written by Larissa Pople

Remy's story

Everyone in Remy's family but him has a learning disability: his mum, older sister and younger brother. His younger brother has the most significant needs.

'I was the lucky one to not have it.'

Remy, who is 11, and his sister have their own bedrooms, and his little brother sleeps in his mum's bedroom. There is a top floor that is unfinished – it has bare floorboards – but the council won't do anything about it. His mum puts stuff in front of the door to stop Remy's little brother going up there because it's unsafe.

There is very little money in Remy's household, and Remy doesn't like asking his mum for things because he knows she can't afford it. He doesn't get pocket money, but he sometimes asks his mum for money so he can buy a drink or a snack. He's not bothered about clothes or trainers and doesn't mind what he wears. But he does need sports stuff for school because he plays in the rugby team, and he is growing fast.

For his birthday, his mum always bakes him a cake, but this year he didn't ask for a present, he just waited for Christmas. He was over the moon at Christmas because he got a PlayStation, which he had wanted for a long time. He thinks that his mum's friend helped pay

for it. Instead of asking for new computer games, he gets old ones that don't cost so much.

They're better off at the moment than they have been, but it still gets pretty bad sometimes when they can't afford to pay the bills and his mum worries how she's going to pay for food. She tries to handle things herself but if things get really bad she asks his nan for money.

A year ago, Remy was robbed in the park on his way home from school and he had his phone stolen. He asked his mum for a new phone for his birthday but she couldn't afford it, so he didn't have a phone for a long time. Happily his nan bought him a replacement phone in the summer holidays, so now he can call or text his friends and family, using the internet so he doesn't need to buy credit. To do his homework he has to go to the school library though, as he doesn't have a computer at home.

Remy is fairly typical of our study participants. He isn't the most deprived of all the children we interviewed – far from it – but he is used to missing out on things that other children his age take for granted.

Background

Money and possessions was a theme that we asked about deliberately and in quite considerable detail in the first and second waves of our interviews.

We knew from earlier qualitative research with children in low-income families that poverty can often mean not being able to afford the same activities as friends, and not having the same possessions, spending money or clothes as other children (Ridge, 2002). We also know from The Children's Society's development of a child-centred 'deprivation index' in partnership with the University of York, that certain items and experiences – such as going on family trips and having the right clothes to fit in with others their age – are seen by children as being part of 'a normal kind of life'. Yet many families living on low incomes struggle to afford these material items (Main and Pople, 2012).

An important shortcoming of much of the research into children's material circumstances is that the unit of analysis is generally the household, and the research respondent is usually an adult. Yet we know that intra-household sharing is far from straightforward (Main and Bradshaw, 2014). Parents often try to protect children from deprivation (Main and Bradshaw, 2016) and children, in turn, may try to hide their experiences of deprivation from parents to spare their anguish (Ridge, 2002). Moreover, children live in a variety of different familial situations (Davies, 2015), and the distribution of resources within and between households are particular to

the circumstances of individual children.

Most importantly, children's voices about what they need to enjoy life and to fit in with others their age are largely absent from discussions of child poverty. The deprivation index mentioned previously was the first exploration of what children themselves think they need to enjoy a 'normal kind of life', although it is now being replicated in other countries around the world. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to contribute to the small but growing literature (including the studies cited previously) that sheds light on children's views and experiences of 'having' and 'not having' material possessions, and to better understand the experience of poverty from children's perspectives.

Our 'Understanding Childhoods: Growing up in Hard Times' study offers us the opportunity to explore the theme of money and possessions longitudinally to see whether children's experiences of 'having' and 'not having' change over time as they get older and are exposed to different influences around them. In this report, however, we are providing a snapshot of how this topic was experienced by children in Wave 1 of the study.

Children's awareness of hardship

It is sometimes thought that children living in poverty know very little about their family's financial hardship. But evidence from our study suggests that this is often not the case.

Children's comments reveal a keen awareness of their family's financial situation, which may require them to live in an immediate, 'hand-to-mouth' fashion.

'Because mum's buying all of this stuff for us, she never knows when she might run out of money.'

Boy, 11

Children were aware not only of the cost of things, but also of the strategies that they and their families used to address the divergence between what they wanted to spend money on and what they could afford. This included an understanding of the need for budgeting – such as shopping at low-cost outlets and buying low-cost brands – and being aware of the expense of utilities such as electricity and gas.

'We go to Aldi or Pound Stretchers, because Pound Stretchers is only, like, for food, it's £1 per decent meal.'

Girl, 9

Children were conscious of the additional cost of celebrations like Christmas and birthdays, and the strain that these could place on

the family finances. Some altered their expectations accordingly, for example by not asking for the presents that they would like. Others talked about the strategies that their family would draw on to deal with the additional financial burden of Christmas, such as working extra hours in the run up to Christmas.

Children were aware that holidays away from home – particularly overseas – were a high-cost expense that were out of reach for all but a very few of them.

'We still get, like, a couple of holidays off, but we just have a staycation, like, have a couple of tents into the house and then we just try to have an outside campfire that my dad builds that's really big…'

Girl, 9

Some children had been to countries where they had family, and some had been on an overseas holiday, such as to Spain. However, a more common experience was to have been on holiday in the UK once or twice in their lives and to never have been abroad. Of the children that had been on holiday within the UK, low-cost options such as Butlin's and Haven were common.

Fitting in

The desire to have 'the same' as others and to be able to participate in shared activities is one of the most important qualitative insights to be drawn from child-centred research on poverty (Ridge, 2002). Indeed, our well-being research has shown that it is having the same as friends – rather than having more than them – that is most important for children's well-being (The Children's Society, 2016). However, the subtleties of what 'having' means to children, and how this can be achieved, are far from straightforward.
It was clear in children's comments that they were not aspiring to excessive wealth, but rather to having 'enough' or a 'normal' amount of money for their families.

'I don't want to have too much money where we just think that we're snobs and really rich...and we don't care about anyone else and I start falling out with my friends because I've got loads of money. I just want like money, just normal money.'

Girl, 11

However, just having enough to 'fit in' with others can be expensive.

There were different perspectives amongst children in our study about how important it is to have particular clothes or shoes. Some contended that what they wear is not of great consequence, while others freely admitted that brand names are important. Interestingly though, amongst both groups there was recognition of the desirability of expensive, brand-name trainers. This – and the cost implications that this has for the finances of low-income families – is an important context to the experience of childhood poverty that cannot be ignored. This is consistent with other research that we have conducted with children (Main and Pople, 2012).

'If it's like expensive or if I don't know if it's expensive yet I would search on my tablet, say like "Adidas shoes" and it'll come up with... the new Adidas shoes and if I'm like "they're a bit expensive" and they could, say, have a little offer on them and when they have an offer on them, I'm like "oh yes".'

Boy, 11

Clothing that allows children to fit in with their peers and not stand out as visibly different appears to be particularly important for children. The ability of families to afford this can be particularly difficult, since children in the study were of an age when they grow out of things quickly – meaning that clothing can be a considerable expense for low-income families. In terms of technology and possessions, it was not always the case that children did not have the same or similar items to their peers. Many of the children in our study – particularly those at secondary school – had a mobile phone, and many also had access to a games consoles, tablets and/or computers in their households that they could use and, in some cases, which they owned themselves. A common explanation for having a phone – particularly among the girls and younger children – was that parents felt this to be essential from a safety point of view.

'Dad bought me a phone for my birthday, but that was only to be called when...I go home by myself.'

Girl, 9

However, more typically for the children in our study, it was less about 'having the latest thing' and more about 'making do' with what they could get. Sometimes this meant that the items that they owned were broken or of limited

use

'I do have a phone but it's not like one of those modern ones; it's just simple.'

Boy, 11

'I bought my tablet myself like…from Cash Generator…Yes, it was only like £30. Or £40, yes £40.'

Boy, 11

'The screen [on the tablet] is cracked like that and you can't press anything in the cracked part.'

Girl, 9

A smaller group of children appear to be missing out completely on the material items that their peers have.

'Everybody else has a phone. Loads of people have phones. Everybody in my class has a phone.'

Boy, 11

'We don't have a computer at my mum's and our TV is broken…'

Boy, 11

'The computer homework is quite hard because I don't have a computer.'

Boy, 11

Children also talked about non-electronic items such as a bicycle, scooter, skates or a trampoline, which were often prized possessions. But children were aware of the cost of these and if they broke, it was not always possible to repair them.

'Probably, like, not a lot of people, like, can afford a bike.'

Boy, 11

'I've got a bike, but it's, like, the chain fell off…I'm waiting till, like, my sister's boyfriend comes back. But I think I'm going to have to try and fix it for myself, because he's in [another city] for six months.'

Girl, 11

Protecting their families

It is well established that parents living on low-incomes often try to protect their children from the harshest effects of poverty – for example, by prioritising the needs of their children over their own. However, less well understood is the extent to which children do the same. Evidence from our study, similar to that presented in Ridge (2002), shows the strong desire of children to help with – or protect their family from – the strain associated with having very little money. Some of the children in our study talked about this explicitly and in relation to everyday situations, such as holding back from asking family for money or material items.

'Well, I kind of know [not to ask mum for money] because my brother was like, "oh, I wanted to go football"…and he asked my mum to go yesterday and he said, "Mum, can I have £2?"…and then my mum said, "no, I haven't got any money".'

Girl, 11

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'If my friends say "can I stop at yours tonight?" and my mum says yes but then they say "will you ask your mum if you can buy loads of munchies for us so we can have like a proper munch out" and then I say "yes of course I'll ask her, I'll go ask her" and then I'll just walk downstairs, sit downstairs, watch TV for five minutes then come back and tell them that I've asked her and she said no...because I don't really want to ask her for loads of things because if she says no, I'm going to feel bad.'

Girl, 11

The children in our study were not old enough to be contributing their own earned income to the family finances, but many of them talked about spending their own money – which they may have received as a birthday or Christmas present, or from another family member – on essential items for the family.

'Sometimes I save [my pocket money] up but sometimes I spend it on shopping like, I don't know, food, toilet roll, butter, bread, stuff like that, yes.'

Boy, 11

In one of the most striking accounts of how children contribute to the household income, one girl told us how she and her siblings would take it in turns to go begging – both from friends/family and from strangers on the street – when the family is really struggling for money.

'We try to beg people for money because we only have £10. And mostly my dad picks whose turn it is to try to see if they can get someone to give us, like, £10 a month.'

Girl, 9

The resourcefulness of children and their families

Children in our study recognised that their families often try to protect them from experiences of deprivation.

There was an awareness that their family might not be able to buy items that they ask for straight away. However, there was also a clear sense that families would strive to do so if they possibly can, and usually manage to somehow or other.

'My mum don't mind how much it is...she would say "okay" but she don't have enough money for it, she'd be like "I'll get it for you tomorrow" and make sure.'

Girl, 11

It is not clear from this study how families organised their finances to be able to provide their children with what they asked for. However other research (eg Main and Bradshaw, 2016) shows that in poor households, adults are likely to sacrifice their own needs to prioritise their children's, for example by skimping on food or holding back from socialising.

Children in our study also had their own strategies to acquire costly items. They revealed financial shrewdness by scouring online shops for discounted items, or by going 'window shopping' in brand-name shops and then buying similar but lower-cost items from more affordable outlets.

Some of the children in our study told us that they receive pocket money, but a large number said that they do not.

'It used to be when we go shopping every week we got £2. But it didn't happen because obviously my mum hasn't got the money to give it to us.'

Girl, 11

A common explanation was that if children wanted something – particularly something expensive – they would ask their family for it, or save up the money that they get for their birthday or for Christmas.

Another common approach was to save up their own money and then see if their parents or other family members could pay the rest.

Children also talked about sharing items with several other family members, having second-hand items or hand-me-downs from parents and siblings.

'My mum got a new phone, because this one is like not working properly [so she gave hers to me].'

Girl, 11

Family networks

An important strand of children's comments relates to the various ways in which children felt that their extended family, social networks and neighbours would help each other out. This ranged from neighbours giving them milk when they run out, to one mother taking people into her home because they had nowhere else to go. A striking feature of this strand of comments was the extent to which children's networks of family and friends could protect them from the harshest effects of poverty. Financial support came from non-resident parents (eg fathers), as well as from grandparents, step-parents, aunts and uncles, older siblings, godparents and more peripheral characters such as mum's ex-boyfriend.

'Well normally at weekends, my uncle, because he gets his wages now...when he first started to get his wages he took my mum out and then he takes me out, then he takes my brother, then he takes my [sibling]... yes and then it goes in order. Then on a Sunday, well him and my mum go half,

like, we go out for a breakfast.'

Girl, 11

Other evidence supports the idea that children's perceptions of who is within their 'family' are much broader than the typical unit of poverty measurement, ie the household (Davies, 2015). Non-resident grandparents, in particular, fulfil an important role in caring for and providing for children. Furthermore, children may gain new siblings if parents re-partner, and the existence and structure of new families will have an impact on what resources are available to individual children.

In our study, children recognised that extended family and social networks might help by buying items for them, or by offering hand-me-downs. For a few children, however, financial support such as this was significant in its absence.

'I'd ask my dad [for money] and my dad says "I'm going to send it to you on Saturday" and then I wait until Saturday, he doesn't send it. That's what he's done to me lots of times...My sister's dad always sends her money

and I sometimes feel a little bit embarrassed…There are so many trips that I've missed because…I haven't got money and stuff.'

Girl, 11

A handful of children seemed to have many of the material items that they wanted because networks of family and friends that extend well beyond the household act as important providers of resources.

When children in our study received regular pocket money or ad hoc spending money, they were often drawing on extended networks of family and friends for support.

'I get pocket money from my nan and she gives me five pound every week but now she's putting it in my bank account, so now I've got lots of money at my house now and I'm just saving it and saving it and saving it and saving it.'

Boy, 11

Birthdays, Christmas and other celebrations were also an opportunity for children in our study to acquire high-cost items – eg a phone, tablet, a games console, trainers or clothes – or some money to spend on themselves. Presents could come from anyone within children's extended families and social networks, and therefore were not constrained by how much money was available in their immediate household.

'I've got one phone that actually works and I've just got it, like, on Christmas, on Boxing Day, and it was from my uncle…'

Girl, 9

'My mum went halves with my sister on a bike because I wanted a really expensive bike.'

Girl, 11

Closing thoughts

The children in our study were in a variety of different material situations. Some seemed to have many of the items that they wanted for themselves; others had low-cost alternatives, hand-me-downs or shared items with other family members; and others had very little or nothing.

There appeared to be a variety of explanations for these differences, but the existence of networks of extended family and friends, as well as other factors such as children's individual preferences and strategies for acquiring money and possessions, go some way to explaining these differences.

This study contributes to our understanding of what experiences and possessions children living in low-income families think it is important to have, and whether and how they are able to afford to access them. It is interesting to highlight that although these reflect children's priorities, many of the items and experiences that they mention – including a computer at home, money to save, toys, celebrations on birthdays, holidays away from home and family day trips – are considered by a majority of adults to be necessities for children (Main and Bradshaw, 2014). What children want – and what adults think they need – often coincides. As we explore our data longitudinally, we will be able to further explore this theme as they move through childhood.

In a place of conclusion

written by Sorcha Mahony

This launch report marks the beginning of our journey in deepening our understanding of the lives of children growing up in poverty, and as such it is not appropriate to offer 'conclusions' at this stage. Instead we close with a summary of our key, cross-sectional findings so far, an outline of the recommendations that The Children's Society has already made which are further supported by our new data, and an indication of our plans for further analysis and publications.

Summary

In this report we have shared some preliminary insights into the everyday lives of children growing up in poverty in England, focusing on four key themes and principally based on analysis of data from the first wave of our qualitative, longitudinal study 'Understanding Childhoods: Growing up in Hard Times.' We have offered cross-sectional glimpses into the ways in which our participants navigate some of the challenges they face with housing, at school, in their neighbourhoods and with reference to money and material things.

We have explored how, for some young people, residential transience can be a striking and problematic feature of life, albeit one that is normalised. We have highlighted how, for those experiencing transience, finding a sense of control can help to mitigate the disempowering reality of their housing trajectories, and considered how the search for rootedness amidst the uncertainty that accompanies transience can lead to outcomes that in turn present further challenges in everyday life.

We have reflected on the ways in which school life can be difficult for some young people living in low-income households, particularly at secondary school. We looked into the challenges sometimes faced accessing adequate, desirable food in a non-stigmatising way. And we have explored how the costs of school for those in poverty can be prohibitive of certain learning and enriching opportunities, how issues of poverty can be treated as behavioural infringements and penalised accordingly, and how maintaining friendships outside school (or during school transitions) can be especially hard for young people with less access to communication technologies than their wealthier peers.

This report has also considered participants' experiences of living in deprived neighbourhoods, noting common concerns around safety and violence, noise and traffic, aggressive adults and neighbours, bullying and gangs, animals, rubbish and mess. We have also discuss the powerlessness felt by children when they are unable to change their physical environment despite a desire to do so.

Finally we considered how children living in poverty can have varying experiences of money and material things, but highlighted the awareness of financial hardship and the strong desire to fit in with peers, even though fitting in can come at a cost. We have noted how far some children go in protecting their families from the effects of poverty, sometimes going without and sometimes contributing their own money to household budgets. We have explored the importance of wider kin networks for the material well-being of young people living in low-income households, and pointed to the resourcefulness of those young people and their families, who get by and struggle to get ahead in the face of considerable adversity.

In all four of these thematic areas we have seen that for those at the sharp end of the inequality spectrum, childhood can take on particular meanings and occasion particular experiences which, for some, may be seen as inevitable. But there is nothing inevitable about growing up in poverty, about watching as your wealthier peers gain access to the resources that make everyday life in the present easier, and life in the future more likely to be manageable. There is nothing inevitable about living in a neighbourhood that is not really fit for the purpose of growing up, about attending a school that is ill-equipped to equalise resources, experiences and opportunities, or about such instability of housing that everyday life comes

to be shaped by the absence of a permanent or long-term home. Childhood poverty is a stain on our collective conscience. But it is one that can be removed. The responsibility to take action lies with those who have the means to shine a light on the processes by which poverty gets reproduced and explore how it manifests in everyday experience, and for those with policy and political decision-making power to seek to eradicate it. If we do not do this then we will have failed in our duty to protect and provide for some of the most disadvantaged in our society.

Recommendations

At The Children's Society we have already made a number of recommendations that we believe will go some way towards improving the lives of children growing up in poverty. The findings from the analysis presented in this report support a number of these recommendations, so it is worth reiterating them here.

Housing

In the 2017 report Feeling the Pinch, produced by the End Child Poverty coalition (currently chaired by The Children's Society), we called on the Government to:

Ensure that support with housing costs for those families renting privately increases in line with increases in local rents.

The data on residential transience from our study Growing Up in Hard Times supports this recommendation by highlighting some of the negative effects that children can experience when their housing situations are unstable

due to issues related to poverty. For some children, residential instability may be caused by a shortfall between the support families receive towards rent and the price they pay for their home.

School

In our 2014 report Through Young Eyes – The Children's Commission on Poverty, The Children's Society made a number of recommendations aimed at improving experiences of school for children in low-income households:

For all teachers to receive training on childhood poverty and its impact on children's education, for Ofsted to inspect schools on how they support the poorest pupils, for children to have a say in how Pupil Premium money is spent, and for schools to make uniforms affordable.

The data on school from Growing Up in Hard Times supports these recommendations, by demonstrating the persistence of blurred lines between poverty and behavioural infringements, by highlighting the persistent inaccessibility of extra-curricular activities (which Pupil Premium money could be used for), and by pointing to continued difficulties around affordability of school uniform for some.

Neighbourhood

The Children's Society has previously recommended that, despite the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 and its repealing of the legal duty on local authorities to produce Child Poverty Strategies, that:

All local authorities should continue to produce Child Poverty Strategies and that children should be involved in developing them. This would recognise the significance of local neighbourhoods in shaping children's lives, well-being and future outcomes.

The analysis presented in the 'Neighbourhood' section of Growing Up in Hard Times provides further support for this recommendation, by pointing to the continued negative experiences of children growing up in deprived neighbourhoods as well as the desire to bring about change in this regard.

Money and material things

In the 2017 report Feeling the Pinch, the End Child Poverty coalition called on the Government to:

End the freeze on Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit and reinstate the link between benefit levels and inflation as soon as possible.

The analysis in our 'Money and material things' section of Growing up in Hard Times supports this recommendation by pointing to a number of ways in which children's lives are negatively affected by low household incomes, as they struggle to fit in with peers and suffer financially in the pursuit of such social integration, and as they go to considerable lengths to protect their families from the effects of poverty.

Next steps

Following this launch report, we will be producing further outputs based on our analysis of the longitudinal data. In these, we will consider in more detail the themes covered in this report and we will begin to explore the other themes that are emerging as significant in the lives of young people growing up in hard times but which we have only been able to allude to here – for example experiences of poor health, safety and violence, and family networks and resources. Importantly, our analyses will begin to consider the ways in which each of the different thematic areas interact with each other so that we can investigate how multiple disadvantage plays out in our participants' lives, shaping material, psychological, social and temporal dimensions of experience. Through these endeavours we hope to better understand the effects of poverty and inequality on some of the most disadvantaged young people in the country, and to identify new approaches with which to challenge them.

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It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect. Too often their problems are ignored and their voices unheard. Now it is time to listen and to act.

The Children's Society is a national charity that runs local services, helping children and young people when they are at their most vulnerable, and have nowhere left to turn.

We also campaign for changes to laws affecting children and young people, to stop the mistakes of the past being repeated in the future.

Our supporters around the country fund our services and join our campaigns to show children and young people they are on their side.

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