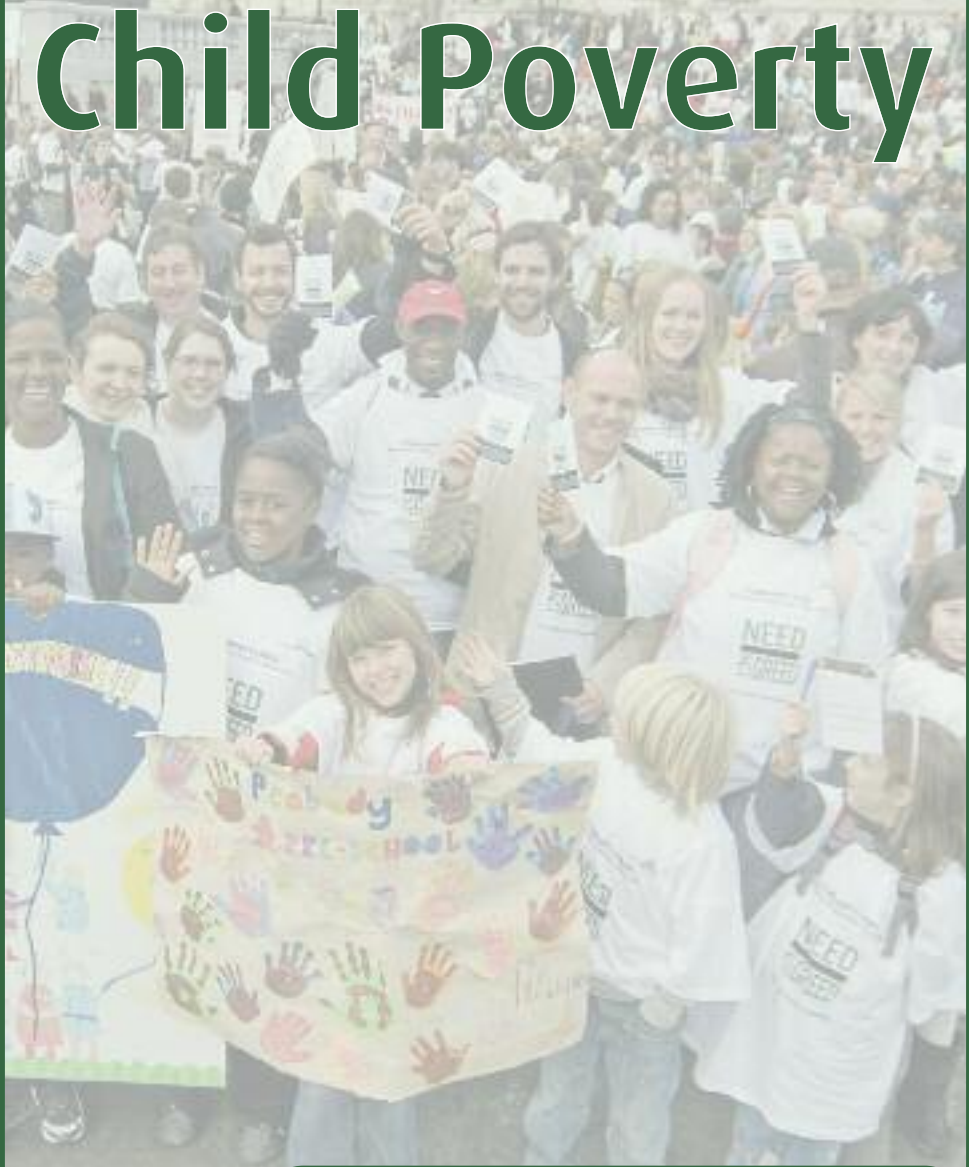


communitylinks

Child Poverty



Social Change Series: 2

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Community Links Social Change series draws together information from our existing reports detailing our position and track record on significant, complex issues which we, as a multi-purpose organisation, are engaged with on several levels.

This edition focuses on child poverty in east London. We highlight the extent of child poverty in Newham, summarise our recent research and set out our key recommendations, including the need for government to increase its investment to meet its child poverty targets by 2010; increasing the number of decent jobs that pay people to work their way out of poverty; and encouraging local authorities to focus on their role in eradicating child poverty.

Case studies are included throughout to illustrate the complex characteristics of child poverty which many people in Newham experience daily. These case studies provide a stark reminder about how our next generation is dealing with the challenges of growing up in poverty. Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

We hope that this booklet will offer an introduction to our work to friends, partners, service users and those new to Community Links.

Did you know?

- Poverty affects 3.9 million (1 in 3) children in Britain
- In 174 constituencies in Britain half or more children live in poverty
- 55% of Newham's children and young people are growing up in poverty.

Community Links and Child Poverty: Our vision

Our vision is to create opportunities for every child and young person to enjoy play and have fun; to engage in mutually supportive relationships; to gain confidence with aspirations for their future and the means to achieve these goals whilst making a positive contribution to their local community.

Community Links works hard to eradicate child poverty. Our innovative, inclusive provision seeks to maximise the potential of every child and young person. 'Everything matters'; *how* we do things is as important as *what* we do. We learn from others, taking the best ideas from elsewhere and adapting them to meet local needs. In turn we share what we know; what we have found works best and most importantly what children and young people want.

Child poverty is unacceptable. A collective determined effort is required by civil society, by our politicians, businesses, unions, public sector organisations and charities to end child poverty. Of course, poverty alleviation must continue in the short term, but substantial changes to policy, budgets, public services and business practices must happen over the longer term to end child poverty. Our local service provision and our national research, communications and policy campaigns ensure that Community Links contributes to both.

We want to live in a country where all our children go to school on a full stomach, where they can sleep in a warm room, receive birthday presents, gain a useful education that truly prepares them for the world of work, ultimately where our children can grow up to lead full and productive lives for themselves, their families, their communities and society as a whole. Together we can make this happen.

Defining Poverty

Poverty is most commonly defined by income levels – people live in poverty if their income is below 60% of the current national median income. To live above the 60% poverty line (NPI, 2005/06) the first adult needs £112 per week after taxes and housing costs, with each additional adult and child over 14 requiring £74 per week, and each child under 14 requiring £37 per week. So for Sally and her family (see case study no.3) to live on the poverty line, their income should be £297 a week. Her weekly income is in fact £108.67. So she and her three children are living £183.33 below the poverty line each week. Recent food and fuel price increases put further pressure on these limited funds.

It is problematic that government is committed to completely eradicating something gauged by a relative measure – and therefore statistically impossible to remove. Yet poverty is relative and represents so much more than material deprivation. Poverty expert, Professor Peter Townsend argues that poverty extends from material considerations to the ability to fully participate in society. His wider definition of poverty is often used:

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life”

Nelson Mandela

“Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong.”

Nelson Mandela also recognised this. *“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life”.*

Case Study 1: Anne

“I only have £5 in my purse by Wednesday, though I get my money on Saturday”. This “doesn’t make you feel good, at times I feel ashamed and depressed... I feel pretty low sometimes.”

Anne, 28, is a single parent raising her daughter, Natasha, aged 8. Anne has always lived “*in borderline poverty*”. Her turbulent upbringing included incidents of domestic violence. She effectively raised her younger sisters as “*my parents could not afford child care, so I was the live-in nanny*”. As a result she had difficulties at school, ran away from home and lived in various foster and care homes.

Anne is currently not working but studying and caring for her daughter, with no support from the father. “*He isn’t interested in his child*”. She has been in receipt of benefits since 2006. She feels strongly that they “*don’t have enough to live on, no, no, no*”. She doesn’t “*have enough to provide for my daughter... so many things I can’t afford to do.*” Their flat is not well furnished “*I don’t want anything expensive*”. For three months Anne only had £30 a week from Child Tax Credit, which is “*difficult to live off*”, after a catalogue of errors from Jobcentre Plus, CSA and the local council.

Financially, life is a struggle “*this doesn’t make you feel good, at times I feel ashamed and depressed ... I feel pretty low*”. For Anne and her daughter to live above the poverty line their household income should be £149 per week, whereas they are living £40.33 below the poverty line on £108.67 per week.

For her daughter, living in poverty is tough. “*My daughter dreads holidays and going back to school... she hasn’t been anywhere, like her classmates have ... My daughter can’t have toys ... I can’t afford birthday parties. ‘Why can’t I have a birthday party’, she asks. It makes her feel down and disheartened ... I feel down, under constant pressure ... can’t lead the life I want to live.*”

2 KEEPING THE PROMISE TO END CHILD POVERTY

Aaron Barbour, linksUK Research & Policy Manager, sets out the policy context for tackling child poverty and demonstrates the importance of understanding the complex issues at a local level.

I was reminded recently of the London Health Observatory statistic that for every tube stop on the Jubilee line going east from Westminster to Canning Town (where we work), life expectancy decreases by one year. A more shocking report from the World Health Organisation recently claimed that life expectancy in two different neighbourhoods of Glasgow (a 10 minute drive apart) vary by as much as 28 years. The main factor accounting for this huge disparity is poverty. The proportion of children living in poverty has also grown from 1 in 10 in 1979 to 1 in 3 in 1998. Staggeringly, the gap between rich and poor has continued to grow over the last 10 years under a Labour government.

Poverty has a life-time impact on our children and young people. Children are growing up now, lacking resources and educational and employment opportunities; they will become the next generation of struggling parents. So the cycle continues. Child poverty in the UK is unacceptable. We are the fourth largest economy in the world, a centre for the world's financial markets, a rich and prosperous country, and yet:

“Child poverty not only impacts negatively on children themselves, but is costly to wider society, both in terms of public spending and economic growth”

- 3.9 million (1 in 3) children are living in poverty in Britain
- 41% of those children living in poverty in London are in families where at least one adult is working

- 55% of children in the London borough of Newham, where we work, live in poverty
- UNICEF placed the UK 21 out of 24 industrialised countries for child poverty, only better than Ireland, Hungary and Poland.

In 1999 the government pledged to end child poverty by 2020. Since then 600,000 children have been lifted out of poverty, which we applaud. In his speech to the 2008 Labour conference Gordon Brown committed the government to *“introduce ground-breaking legislation to enshrine in law Labour’s pledge to end child poverty.”*

This is a crucial time for the eradication of child poverty. If the Government is to meet its targets to halve child poverty levels by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020, it will need to have programmes in place, adequately funded in the budget, by spring 2009. With an uncertain financial situation, the government has to take action, and quickly which it will only do with significant public pressure. This is why Community Links supports the ‘End Child Poverty’ Campaign.

As the life expectancy statistics demonstrate, poverty is a slow poison for many. Poverty is a complex problem, which threatens quality of life and community cohesion. High rates of poverty and social exclusion impact negatively on health, education, skills in the changing labour market, relationships within the family, and between ethnic groups.

We recently conducted research to gain an understanding of how children and their families in our local borough of Newham in east London are affected by living in poverty. We looked at the services that residents access for support, and the barriers that prevent children and their families move out of poverty. From a snapshot of local families living in poverty we found that:

- All of the families struggle to pay for the basics, including food and energy bills

- Some of the families are not just poor, but severely poor; with some living through periods of absolute poverty, including being unable to buy food
- All of the families interviewed have multiple, complex and interconnected issues, each impacting on their immediate and future circumstances, contributing to a life lived in poverty. Poverty is not a simple issue. Some of the participants are working but remain in poverty; and some are working outside the mainstream for cash-in-hand, simply to provide for their families, as our extensive research into the informal economy shows

“All the people described in these case studies are likely to continue to live in poverty for years to come”

- Generational poverty is persistent. Many children growing up in poverty follow their parents’ footsteps
- Housing is an important issue. Many reported poor quality, cramped and damp accommodation, as well as poor service from the housing department. These issues are affecting residents’ health, employment and ability to move into work
- Debt plays a role for many people living in poverty. Attempts to defer crisis by borrowing can add further complexity
- All of our case studies point towards inconsistent and at times poor experiences of dealing with local and national statutory support services
- The families we spoke to had good ideas and suggested solutions to advance their own situation and improve local services. This resonates strongly with our experience over the last 30 years that people who experience a situation understand it best
- All the people described in these case studies are likely to continue to live in poverty for years to come.

Case Study 2: Mary

“Until Peter is at an age where he doesn’t need so many cuddles from mummy then the situation will stay the same. It’s frustrating. But I try not to let it get me down.”

Mary and her youngest son Peter live in a housing association property; her two older children have left home. She works 15 hours a week for a small company, and is in receipt of child tax credit and income support.

Mary is paid just below the minimum wage. This is *“not illegal. I have told the benefits office and they told me it’s down to me. If I demand more money then I’d be worse off.”* She says she’ll lose her Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit ... *“I stick to my hours, so I don’t break any rules”*. Their weekly income is £124, or £25 below the poverty line of £149.

Although in poor health Mary thinks she is better off working, *“not financially but mentally”*; it *“gives me a release from everyday life”*. Her financial strategies include *“I try to live on child tax credit during the week and at end of each month pay off the bills from my wages. I live from hand to mouth”*. *“Living in poverty does knock your confidence a bit.”* *“When I have money in my pocket I feel more confident than when I’m broke ... It’s more socially accepted having money.”*

“It used to worry me sick. I had to get into debt to provide for my family. I used to think I could get into this much debt and then pay it off this much a week.” She’s had debt collectors at the door in the past, which *“made me feel scared about who’s knocking at the door... they made me feel like dirt on the bottom of their shoe”*.

Poverty is therefore multi-faceted and has damaging effects both in the short and long term on children and young people's personal development and life chances. Child poverty not only impacts negatively on children themselves, but is costly to wider society, both in terms of public spending and economic growth.

At Community Links we have worked over the last 30 years with hundreds of thousands of the UK's poorest children; young people and their families in the east London borough of Newham. Our communities have been at the receiving end of countless government strategies, policies and funding regimes, not to mention initiatives, projects, programmes and more, all aimed at ending or alleviating child poverty and improving the lives of children experiencing it. Policy comes and goes (often full circle) depending on the direction and strength of the political winds, often focusing on the 'sexy', rather than the much needed daily 'bread and butter'. The political cycle is short – we have observed that poverty can be deep-seated, affecting communities over several generations.

What we are left with is an incredibly complex and often contradictory set of strategies and systems.

The government claims a clear vision to eradicate child poverty by 2020, and aims to enshrine this as a legislative commitment. All opposition parties have made commitments and pledges to work towards the 2020 target. Government must now set out firm plans to ensure this becomes the reality. Community Links has been working in east London for over thirty years. On our own we cannot eradicate child poverty, but together with direction from government, support from business and the engagement of a campaigning third sector we can help break the cycle of inequality and empower young people to build their own ladders out of poverty.

“At Community Links we have worked over the last 30 years with hundreds of thousands of the UK's poorest children”

3 STATISTICS ABOUT CHILD POVERTY IN NEWHAM, EAST LONDON

In Newham there is more child poverty than most boroughs across the country and significantly more than other boroughs in London.

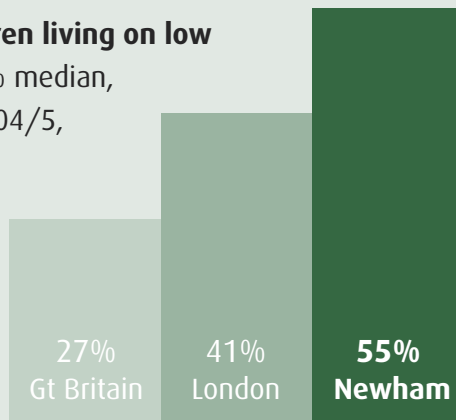
Newham is one of the most deprived boroughs in the UK (*Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2007*). It has one of the highest proportions of households with dependent children (*ONS, Census 2001*), and one of the highest rates of unemployment and economic inactivity (*Labour Force Survey, 2005*), in London, let alone the UK. Children are disproportionately present in low income households (*DWP, 2004/05*). Free school meals are claimed by 43% of all students in Newham.

All of these factors help to explain that over half of the children in Newham live in poverty (*NHPS, Wave 4, 2006*).

Too many local children and young people are growing up in poverty, their families and those services and organisations supporting them

Percentages of **children living on low incomes** (below 60% median, or 'in poverty') in 2004/5, net of housing costs

(*DWP, 2004/05; NHPS, Wave4, 2006*).



are dealing with the issue today – yet these children will be affected for the rest of their lives.

Nationally the government has set a target of halving child poverty by 2010. There are indications (*Harker, 2006; Hirsch, 2006; JRF, 2006; Brewer, 2006*) that it is increasingly unlikely that this target will be met.

There are stark variations in child poverty amongst different ethnic communities. For example, rates of child poverty nationally are especially high for black African children (56%), Pakistani children (60%) and Bangladeshi children (72%), compared with a rate of 25% among white British children (*Platt, 2002*). This is reflected locally in Newham. Household make-up is also a factor. Pakistani and Bangladeshi children living in a household with at least one earner have a more than 50% chance of being in poverty, compared to a 15% risk among white British children living in this type of household.

Many of the reasons for differences in child poverty are employment related: higher unemployment among minority ethnic communities; large differences in rates of economic inactivity; and differential pay rates. For example, Bangladeshi men experience particularly low pay. To understand child poverty, it is important to consider the aggregation of these factors at the household level, as well as other household level characteristics that vary by ethnic grouping. This includes numbers of dependants, numbers of sick and disabled people living in households with children and the extent to which older children remain in post-compulsory education.

“Government set a target of halving child poverty by 2010. There are indications ... that it is unlikely this target will be met”

Research (*DWP, 2008; NHPS, 2003; Cattell & Evans, 1999*) indicates that the defining factor which takes people out of poverty is work, though a move into employment does not guarantee a route out of

poverty. This is demonstrated by the UK having both the highest rates of employment and the highest rate of child poverty in Europe.

“The defining factor which takes people out of poverty is work, though a move into employment does not guarantee a route out of poverty”

Focusing solely on employment will not address all the differences in child poverty. Other relevant policy agendas are important, including benefits, debt, childcare, housing, health, educational attainment levels and skills.

The statistics do not enable us to fully understand the issues. The case studies that illuminate this report seek to capture and explain the complex characteristics of poverty that represent the daily experience of many children and young people in Newham.

Natasha, aged eight (in her own words)

It's alright living with mummy, but I wish we had more money so I can do more things like going to brownies, have swimming lessons, and dancing. I can't always go to cubs every week, because mummy doesn't have enough money. My Nan might not be able to pay for me this time (to go camping with the cubs). I would be a little bit disappointed if I couldn't go.

A couple of times a year we might go to Birmingham where my mum's cousins live, but that depends on how expensive the train ticket is.

Mummy feels a little bit sad when she doesn't have money.

4 SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY LINKS' EXISTING RESEARCH INTO CHILD POVERTY

LinksUK, the national team of Community Links, shares our experience, 'from the ground up', with politicians and civil servants in Westminster to lobby for policy changes to end child poverty. We do this by conducting participative research which in turn informs our national communication plans and policy campaigns.

The following summary highlights publications and research reports which linksUK has produced relating to child poverty.



Full text of linksUK publications are available for free download from Community Links website: www.community-links.org

Tackling Child Poverty Scrutiny Commission

Community Links were commissioned by the London Borough of Newham's Overview and Scrutiny Commission to provide evidence to support the Commission's inquiry into child poverty. The purpose of the research was to gain an understanding of how children and their families in the London Borough of Newham are affected by living in poverty. We looked at the services that residents access for support and the barriers that prevent children and their families from moving out of poverty.

We found that all of the families struggle to pay for the basics, including food and energy bills. Some are living through periods of absolute poverty, for example, not having enough to buy food. All of the families have multiple, complex and interconnected issues each of

Case Study 3: Sally

“I’m not saying I live in poverty, but I’m not exactly living the high life ... I’m not happy where I am. I don’t see myself as living in poverty, because there are people out there that don’t have anything at all... If my mum didn’t support me then I definitely would see myself as living in poverty.”

Sally, 23, is married with three boys under five. They live in a two-bedroomed council flat. Sally’s husband is from Ghana; he is training to be an accountant but is not allowed to work whilst his papers are being considered by the Home Office. He receives no state income, so works part time for cash-in-hand to provide for the family. Sally is in receipt of benefits and also getting “*some money from my mum*” which enables them to live.

For Sally and her family to live on the poverty line, their household income should be £297 per week. Her weekly income is in fact £108.67. So she and her family are living in severe poverty, £188.33 below the poverty line each week.

Growing up was “*hard, very hard, too hard*”. She was sexually abused by her father, and then spent the next few years in foster care, hostels, foyers and bed & breakfast accommodation. Life for Sally is “*hectic. If I had to find one word, it would be hectic*”.

Sally would like to work but feels forced to stay at home with the children. “*Right now the problem is childcare and nursery. I have problems with nurseries; in one nursery they tell you that they can take the other two, but you have to pay extra, because they have to pick them up... So no, I have no other choice right now*”.

which impacts on their immediate and future circumstances, contributing to a life lived in poverty. Poverty is not a simple issue. Some of the participants are working but remain in poverty. A few are working outside of the mainstream for cash-in-hand to provide for their families, as our extensive research into the informal economy shows. All those we interviewed are likely to remain in poverty for years to come.



The full report and case studies are available:
www.newham.gov.uk/Services/Scrutiny/details.htm

‘Ideas Annuals’ on tackling family poverty

The Community Links Ideas Annual series of books have, since 1989, shared practical examples of innovative projects between community practitioners across the country.

The Ideas Annual ‘Ground Up’ was published in 2001 demonstrating exceptional projects alleviating the impact of poverty and making a difference to vulnerable families in some of the UK’s most disadvantaged communities. We worked with government to recommend how a locally distributed small grants scheme and information exchange could encourage people to get involved with community organisations tackling child poverty and give every child the best start in life. This developed into the Local Network Fund for Children and Young People.

In 2002 as a part of the government drive to eradicate child poverty Community Links were commissioned by the Education Dept to research, write and publish ‘Creating Magic’. This report celebrates innovative projects which had been funded during the first year of the Local Network Fund for Children and Young People. In 2004 a follow up report ‘Letting the Future In’ detailed how

“Poverty is not a simple issue. Some are working but remain in poverty. A few are working outside of the mainstream for cash-in-hand to provide for their families”

local community projects continued to work with the most disadvantaged youngsters and demonstrated how small-scale local projects were contributing to the five outcomes of the overarching government strategy for children and young people, 'Every Child Matters'.



The full text of each Ideas Annual is available for download from www.community-links.org/our-national-work/sharing-the-sparks-of-innovation/

People in low-paid informal work: 'Need not Greed'

'Need not Greed', supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, explores the experience of people on low incomes, doing informal paid work, including those working cash-in-hand or undertaking undeclared work whilst claiming benefits. The study is based on one-to-one interviews with people engaged in informal paid work, and follow-up focus groups with practitioners and policy-makers.

We found that people in some deprived areas work informally, out of 'need not greed', in response to poverty. They feared going without basics such as food and heating or facing mounting debt. Three basic issues underpinned most of the informal working in this study: low benefit rates, low wages and rules which limited the hours that people can work. Participants believed that the tax and benefit system created disincentives to returning to formal work, such as the loss of related benefits (for example, free prescriptions) and administrative delays affecting essential income. Respondents wanted to work and had a wide range of underused skills. They felt working informally offered them: increased confidence, skills and work experience, financial support, and potential pathways into formal work. There were also wider social benefits affecting families and communities.

This report aims to improve understanding of the impact of informal working and recommends that government should develop appropriate strategies to harness the informal economy or risk missing its anti-poverty targets.

Cash-in-hand and working rights of young people

Students on our Community Development course carried out a survey into young people's knowledge of working 'cash in hand' and their working rights. A total of 70 young people, aged between 14 and 25, from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds, took part.

Recommendations included incorporating accessible information on working rights into the education system, an increase in professional jobs for young people, and that the government should reconsider differentiated wages for each age group.



*For the full report visit:
www.community-links.org/our-national-work/evidencepapers/*

'Interact': benefits, tax-credits and moving into work

The UK government's twin goals of eradicating child poverty and achieving full employment go hand in hand. However, the mechanisms deployed by government are not adequate and offer insufficient support. Benefits and tax-credits levels are too low. The rate at which benefits are withdrawn when claimants move into or increase their hours of work, the loss of 'passported' benefits, and the complexity of the system were highlighted as inhibiting the desired progress.

The 'Interact' report by Community Links, Low Incomes Tax Reform Group and the Child Poverty Action Group presents a technical and qualitative study of the tax, tax-credit and social security systems highlighting barriers to employment. Claimants' experiences show that social security benefits and tax-credits are intrinsically complex and complex in their interactions with each other. This double layer of complexity leads to confusion among claimants about their entitlements and the impact of changes in their personal circumstances. A number of recommendations are made which include improvements to strategy and governance, as well as systems and processes.

Housing Benefit in 2008

Some 4.6m of the poorest people in the UK receive Housing Benefit, at an annual cost of around £11.5bn. Housing Benefit was introduced in its modern form in 1989; since then it has become the most complex benefit. Numerous amendments have made the current system extremely complicated, resulting in cumbersome administration. This leaves Housing Benefit in 2008 confusing to claimants, staff (across government departments and agencies) and landlords alike. Our Evidence Paper (*EP11*) details some of the issues and concerns that we have with Housing Benefit, particularly using it as an incentive to support people back to work. The paper is illustrated with case studies drawn from clients of our advice team; the report offers a number of constructive solutions and recommendations.



Download the full report from www.community-links.org/our-national-work/evidencepapers/

The effects of high rents in temporary accommodation

Around 6,000 households spend an average of six years in temporary accommodation in Newham. This impermanence has a catastrophic effect on getting parents back into work. Rents have been distorted locally to the maximum allowed under a rent cap, meaning that some people can pay as much as £350 per week (£18,200 per annum) in rent. This can be an almost insurmountable barrier when trying to move into employment, considering the local median wage is £22,642.

“This leaves Housing Benefit in 2008 confusing to claimants, staff ... and landlords alike”

Our Evidence Paper (*EP9*) presents a qualitative study into the effect of

high rents of temporary accommodation, detailing hardships experienced by those meeting shortfalls in housing benefit, and demonstrating the difficulties faced by residents who wish to return to work. The report uses Newham as a case study, although these

issues have a bearing on the rest of London and other areas of the UK. Recommendations are made, including practical solutions to reducing rent levels in temporary accommodation.



For the full report visit:
www.community-links.org/our-national-work/evidencepapers/

CREATE: the Community Allowance

CREATE is a campaign to establish the Community Allowance within the UK benefits system. A Community Allowance would enable community organisations to pay people who work to strengthen their communities, without it affecting any of their benefits.

The CREATE Consortium (made up of Community Links, Development Trust Association, British Urban Regeneration Association, National Community Forum and Slivers of Time) wants to enable community organisations to pay local people who work to strengthen their neighbourhood without this payment affecting their benefits. The campaign is born from the knowledge of opportunities which exist within deprived communities to get people into work. Part-time or sessional work could be undertaken as part of a journey towards the formal labour market and would make a real difference in deprived neighbourhoods. The intention to pilot the Community Allowance was announced in the government's Community Empowerment White Paper recently, but there is still much work to be done.

“A Community Allowance would enable community organisations to pay people who work to strengthen their communities, without it affecting any of their benefits



The CREATE report and a five minute film, 'Benefits Rule', about how benefits regulations stop people from getting paid work in their community can be seen at the CREATE website:
www.communityallowance.org

Case Study 4: Tina

“I had to go around to other people’s houses to eat so that I could feed my son.”

Tina is a single parent of two children, aged seven and two. They live in a privately-rented two-bedroom house. Her partner of eight years lives separately in the same street, as *“we would be a lot worse off financially”* living together. Tina does no paid work, but volunteers in a crèche; *“it keeps me in with things”*. The poverty line for Tina and her children is £186. Her weekly income is currently £121.90, £64.10 below the poverty line.

Tina grew up in a poor, single parent family in Newham. It was *“OK, but we did not have as much as other people had ... I did not realise that we were different from others until I went to primary school. I was picked on at school for having dirty clothes. That’s why I try to make sure that my children have clean and different clothes everyday ... I felt as if I was labelled the tramp”*. This has affected Tina deeply. She wants to give her children a better start.

The early years of bringing up her first son were very difficult for Tina. She felt unable to ask for help from anyone close to her, and had to address her situation urgently. *“I had to go back to work part-time. I found a wonderful child minder and felt happy going back to work. It was horrible and embarrassing not being able to feed yourself ... how can anyone be that low and poor. I did not tell my family.*

“Being a single parent was tough. When I had the first child I had no money ... I used to go around to other people’s houses to eat so that I could feed my son.”

5 WHAT COMMUNITY LINKS IS DOING

To tackle the causes and consequences of poverty, exclusion and inequality, we focus our work to achieve these four aims.

- 1 Raise aspirations for a better life:** we challenge low self-esteem, build confidence and life skills and empower people to make positive choices for themselves and their communities. We help individuals and communities to develop their 'voices', be heard and engage in civic life.
- 2 Extend opportunities in education and employment:** We support individuals for whom progression from school to college to employment does not run smoothly. We ensure that individuals are able to make a positive contribution to their own lives and to their communities.
- 3 Reduce poverty:** We offer practical help and guidance to individuals so that they are equipped to secure their basic rights. We challenge the systems and rules that keep individuals and communities in poverty.
- 4 Reduce inequality and build stronger communities:** We strengthen communities, helping them to be more cohesive, engaging and building bridges across the age range and across diverse communities. We work to build a more equal system for all.

Our national team, linksUK, shares our local experience and learning with practitioners and policymakers nationwide, to encourage positive social change across the country.

Our local work in Newham

All our work with children and young people is conducted within the government's 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) framework, which stresses the importance for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Well-Being.

For organisations providing services to children – from hospitals and schools, to police and voluntary groups – working together is the key to helping children and young people achieve their full potential. At Community Links we design and run all of our activities using the ECM outline to ensure this happens.

Yet within this overarching framework Community Links tailors our service provision to the community we serve. Community Links works best at the 'lowest possible level', with a strong track record of engaging with those considered hard to reach and vulnerable. We take a balanced approach to meeting local needs, including:

- *Year round care schemes* support parents in work or in full-time education by providing positive play-based activities for children and young people and as a means to relieve childhood poverty. Securing sufficient childcare for working parents is vital.

“Community Links works best at the ‘lowest possible level’, with a strong track record of engaging with those considered hard to reach and vulnerable”

- *Year round open access play and clubs* respond to the problems for children and young people not able to play out freely and safely, especially in areas of high disadvantage due to the lack of suitable free, child friendly spaces.

- *Early years work* to provide children with their first formal education experience, and allowing parents the opportunity to take the first steps back into employment and training.
- *Education programmes* ensure those who are finding school a struggle are supported and encouraged to reach their full potential.
- *Young people's work* supports the development of skills with a range of experiences to maximise young people's potential. We provide access to extensive programmes covering youth employment and training (including New Deal), crime diversion, advice and advocacy, volunteering, education and specialist inclusion services for 'at risk' young people.
- *Holiday programmes* combining all the above elements as well as fun days, educational summer schools, trips and residential visits.
- *Advice services* support over 17,000 people every year, ensuring parents and others maximise their incomes, reduce their debt and secure affordable housing.

Future plans

We will build on the expertise of our core work in our Children's and Youth teams and our Advice Services over the next five years, through the creation of community hubs for localised, integrated and accessible services across children, youth and community work. We aim to secure at least one 'under one roof' centre in each quadrant of the borough. We will be well placed to work in partnership with schools and children's centres and assist in the reduction of child poverty by supporting parents in work and providing positive activities for children and young people. We will be developing our open access schemes, education programmes and our work with 'hard to reach' groups, such as 16-18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment and lone parents.

Across the organisation we will look for opportunities for children and young people to participate, have a voice and influence how the

organisation is run. We are developing a 'quality matters' programme including a Children and Youth Forum; a Junior Leaders' mentoring programme; and 'Life Bank', a small grants scheme led by children and young people.

We are developing a national programme of research, policy development and campaigning aiming to empower children and young people. In the coming year we will be reporting on the Community Links model of preventative working with children and young people which demonstrates how to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion. We will also develop our national programme to tackle child poverty and our work with young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).



*For more information about
Community Links work to
end child poverty visit:
www.community-links.org*

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Government has pledged to end Child Poverty. We back this aim and the call for government to keep the promise to the next generation. The following recommendations have been drawn out of our extensive experience of delivering local services to children, young people and their families and our national research and campaign work summarised above.

For government to achieve the alleviation of poverty in the short term and prevent it in the long term we offer recommendations.

National recommendations

To end child poverty every government needs to make it a key priority in its spending reviews, Public Service Agreements and associated budgets. It needs to have a clear, long-term and co-ordinated strategy, working across all departments, and between central and local authorities. To end child poverty government must:

- increase levels of investment (an additional £3bn is needed by 2010 to meet the present government's own targets)
- make changes to the benefit and tax regimes to 'make work pay' for more families, as a move into work does not guarantee a route out of poverty
- support more parents in finding decent jobs, and progressing in work
- improve training and development opportunities
- expand housing choices and improve opportunities for families in social housing
- ensure that all children are fully supported, for example, meals, uniforms and school activities

- increase the level of good quality, affordable and ‘open at all times’ childcare
- simplify the policies and administration of the benefit, tax credit and tax systems.

Local recommendations

At a local level, councils must further integrate their child and anti-poverty policies into their strategic frameworks. They should develop joint working across their own departments, and with statutory, private and voluntary agencies, as well as identifying specific targets and measures that can help to reduce poverty in a practical way.

Local councils should increase levels of investment and work in the following priority areas which will help to reduce child poverty:

● Employment

- increase the number of well paid, sustainable jobs (often they are one of the largest local employers), whilst supporting the development of local labour markets
- increase levels of investment in training and skills development which will help more people to find decent jobs, enabling them to stay and progress in-work
- increase the levels of flexible, part time and sessional jobs.

● Housing

- increase the stock of affordable housing
- reduce time spent on the housing waiting list
- prioritise the reduction of time spent in temporary housing.

● Education and early years/childcare

- Invest in education and early years to break the cycle of poverty for future generations
- Provide good quality, affordable and ‘open at all times’ childcare

A senior member of the local authority and/or cabinet should be designated as the local 'child poverty champion'; and have it as part of their remit to lead their council's efforts to end child poverty.

Finally, councils should continue to lobby central government to end child poverty.

Support for the 'End Child Poverty' Campaign

Community Links will continue to support the End Child Poverty Campaign. As one of over 130 member organisations, together we are campaigning for public and political commitments to meet the goals of halving child poverty by 2010 and ending child poverty by 2020.



Visit:
www.endchildpoverty.org.uk

What you can do

Get in touch if you'd like to:

- work with us
- support our work
- share your stories or reflections on poverty
- be kept updated

e-mail: aaron.barbour@community-links.org

Comment on our blog: www.community-links.org/linksuk

Join our 'Need not Greed' Campaign.
Sign up at: www.neednotgreed.org.uk

Thank You

This booklet summarises the work of many individuals who have researched and analysed the issues facing the communities of Newham. Originators of the research material are all credited in the original documents.

The social change series connects collaborators from across Community Links as well as many friends, partners, funders and supporters from other organisations. We are grateful to them all for their continued commitment.

- Visit the linksUK blog, www.community-links.org/linksUK

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Community Links joined thousands in London's Trafalgar Square on 4th October 2008 to call for an end to child poverty.

Image: www.rebecca-marshall.com



“Community links has provided 30 years of bold and imaginative programmes for and with members of the local community in Newham. Its credibility, authority and first-hand experience underpin this impressive analysis of the scarring impact of child poverty and inform a set of recommendations for what needs to be done.”

Kate Green, Chief Executive of the Child Poverty Action Group

Community Links is an innovative charity running community-based projects in east London. We help thousands of children, young people, adults and older people in deprived neighbourhoods to reach their own potential and build their own ladders out of poverty.

Many have faced difficult challenges. They may be struggling to make ends meet or to make a home in a new country. Some suffer from the consequences of being born into poverty – children excluded from school, poor health, inadequate housing, loneliness and isolation. Others may just need some support to make life a little easier.

Our programme of national work shares the local lessons across the country to widen the impact of our projects and generate lasting social change. The Community Links’ Social Change series draws together information from existing reports detailing our position and track record on significant, complex issues which we, as a multi-purpose organisation, are engaged with on several levels.

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