



Jane Williams

The Magpie Project

Support for mums of under fives in temporary accommodation or at risk of homelessness

Crisis in Newham

4,500 homeless households temporary accommodation – highest in London.

1,700 placed outside borough.

Why?

- Sell off of council housing,
Lowest house building of any borough
- Other boroughs with more spending power house there homeless families here
- 22 years of a local political regime that said:
“If you are too poor to live in Newham you should go elsewhere”

Pathways into homelessness

- No social housing
- Section 21 “no fault” evictions
- Insecure immigration status
- No right to work
- Gentrification, rising rents.
- Low wages/housing benefit cap
- Mental health, addiction issues...

Women's pathways into homelessness

- Family breakdown around childbirth
- Domestic violence
- Forced marriage
- Trafficking
- Domestic slavery

Itinerant, at risk, invisible

50% of under fives who come to us have not visited a children's centre.

In Newham the 'new births list' is not getting to children's centres.

No national register for under fives

Families being moved between boroughs up to 8 times before becoming settled...

How can we keep them safe if we don't know where they are?



There are 2,000 under fives in temporary accommodation in Newham....

- Nowhere to learn to crawl,
- No regular access to clean bathroom,
- No regular access to cooking facilities....
- Strapped in a buggy for long periods of time...
- Disturbed sleep
- More frequent chest infections, asthma, skin infections....

3% NOWHERE TO SLEEP THAT NIGHT

4% SQUATTING

10% EVICTION NOTICE

16% SOFA SURFING/CHURCH FLOORS

26% HOSTEL/REFUGE/NASS ACCOMMODATION

39% TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION INCLUDING B&B

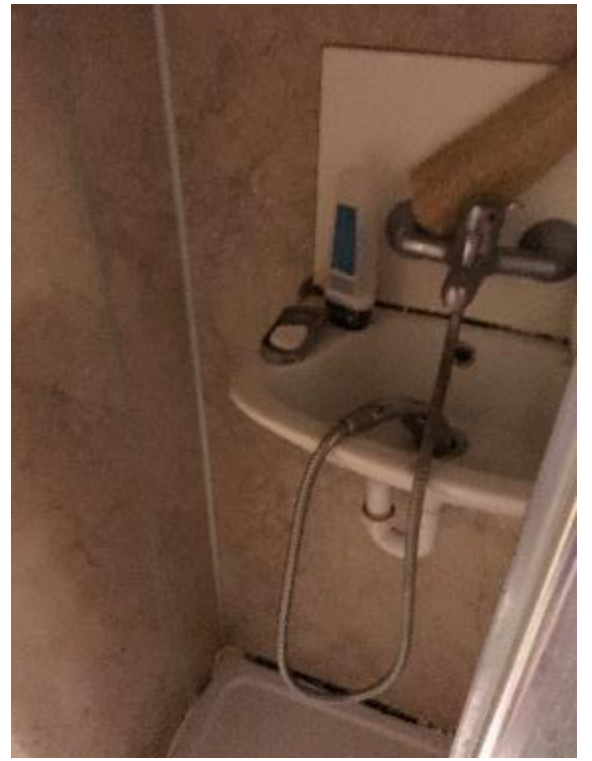
What do we see?

250 mums and 290
children in 18 months.

Why do we not talk about temporary accommodation?

Women with children rarely sleep on the streets but that does not mean they are adequately housed...

.....hidden problem.....



"There were insects all over the bed. I saw one crawl on my baby's face.

There was nowhere for him to sleep safely so I would stay awake all night holding my baby while he slept."

Instead of making sure the place was made clean and safe, the social worker said:

'Don't worry if the insect went up baby's nose the insect would die!'

If I had said that to the social worker she would have started talking about whether I was a fit mother."

Effects on children

- Delayed rolling and crawling
- Flat head syndrome
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Delayed potty training
- Delayed speech
- Trauma so severe it mimics neurological disorder
- Attachment disorder
- Little experience of “play”
- Inappropriate diet ...

Barriers to seeking help

I can't get there on time...if I am late they don't let me in.

I can't afford the bus-fare, It takes too long to walk.

I spent 4 years looking for help. I asked everyone I could think of, nobody listened...

I spend the day trying to get my place clean, do laundry, queue to cook.

I just feel desperate, I don't want to go out.....

**.....I thought they
would take my
children away.....**

How does this make mums feel?

“I felt like I could not do anything, I was stuck, I was failing as a mum.

I thought – they should just take my children away, and I will just crawl away in to the forest. I could not cope any more” ...

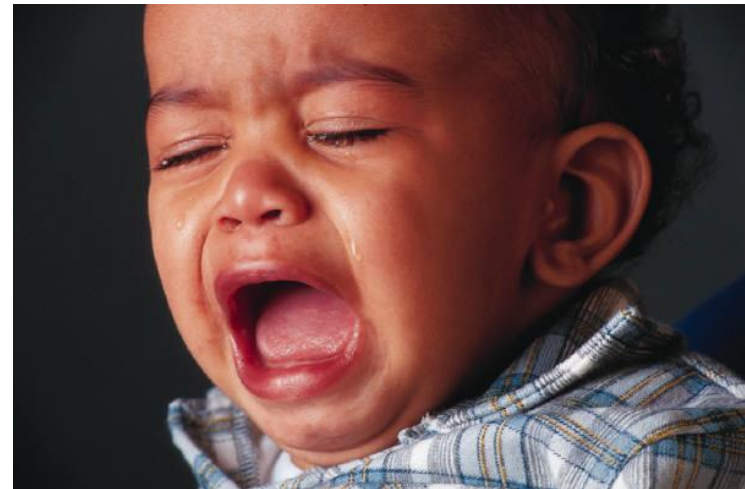


When we found these mums we went to children's services/Housing/Health to tell them what we had found....

- “Not our children”
- “Will not engage”
- “Not our problem talk to: Housing, NRPF team, Health, Education, Early years, Social Services”...and
- “at least they are not on park benches....”



“They” don’t engage....



Hard to reach
VS
Difficult to access....



<https://www.itv.com/news/london/2019-01-29/newham-charity-project-helps-mums-and-their-children-get-back-on-their-feet/>

ZERO expectations – just come





We start from where mums are physically, emotionally, socially, even geographically – not where we think they should be.



We bring

Health visitors,

Nursery nurses,

Family support workers,

Housing advisor from Shelter,

LBWP legal adviser,

Mental health support,

Breastfeeding supporters

Dance artists

Musicians

Yoga instructors

Reiki

Beauticians

Story tellers

The FCA

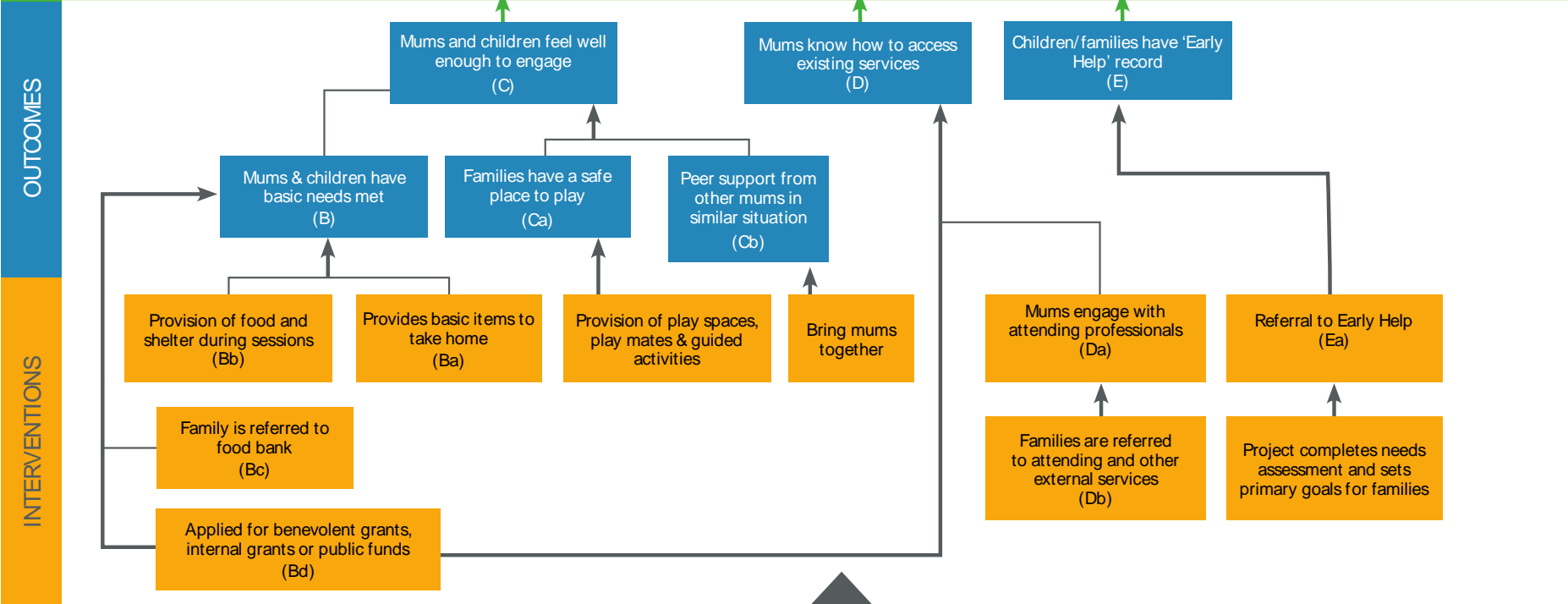
The Mayor

to mums to talk to...





GOAL Families with children under five in temporary/unsuitable accommodation in Newham and adjacent boroughs are connected and engaged with support services (A)





**"I was on the verge of
being sectioned and
having my kids taken
away - The Magpie
Project saved my life"**



""Families felt safe, heard, supported and understood. Children had a safe space to play and multiple agencies came together to support families."

Magpie project professional partner

Housing does not stand alone

- We understand that - for women with children **HOUSING** does not stand apart from health, children's education, mental health, social network, immigration.
- Often **“the answer”** to the housing problem – being housed but in a remote borough or city - **destroys every other aspect of a mum's life**. because she is torn from everything she knows and moved (or deported as our mums call it) – sometimes hundreds of miles away.
- But this as seen as **a box ticked** for a housing officer!

Things to call for

Create woman-centred services:

- Child friendly,
Trauma informed,
Practical considerations: are they hungry, tired, afraid, traumatized, in pain, confused, angry, suspicious – if so deal with that first!

Big picture

- London wide “right to return” swap system for people to get back to their own borough.
- **Housing and social services** housing stock being the same so mums don’t become destitute and homeless when signed off from social services and on to housing benefit.
- **End the aggressive gatekeeping of section 17 support** by Newham council which sees women and children being sent away from social services to sleep the night in all-night McDonalds.



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