

FAMILY FUTURES

Childhood and poverty in urban neighbourhoods



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Housing and
Communities

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What is Family Futures about?

- Bringing up children on low incomes
- Not family problems per se
- But about poor areas
- Through the eyes of 200 families
- 56,000 answers over seven visits
- How changing conditions affect families

I just liked the area from the moment I arrived for my interview at the school. I just walked up the road and thought 'I like it here', which was totally illogical, because it isn't a nice area to look at. It's tower blocks and mid-rise and litter. But I think it's something about the community feel that is what I've always liked about it and the fact that you see a lot of people that you know when you just go out somewhere. There's lots of people who you'll stop and just say hello to, and the friendly sense of it. Which I guess people might not expect to find in London.

[Jane, West-City]

About the Areas

- Not 'ghettos' or 'sinks' or 'dumps'
- Traditional working class areas
- High immigration
- Upheaval of demolition
- Loss of traditional jobs
- North and south
- Contrasts & similarities
- Many different problems – 4 times average

It's had its highs and its lows. It's been good and bad. The good experience was when I moved in and we had older people and they were very community-minded, they'd watch out for your kids. Now the people who've moved in are totally different, they just say 'hi'. It used to be lovely round here, with lovely flowers outside. When it declined, it was just so many different people. You can't help that but with so many people there's no community spirit. I used to know the names of all my neighbours. People just seem to lock their doors and that's it.

[Yetunda, West-City]

The 200 families:

- Mainly mothers as dominant child-carers
- Many disadvantages
- Income, education, work, surrounding conditions
- Vastly complicated by extreme low incomes
- Constantly affected by local conditions
- But tied locally by kids
- Lone and 2 parents; ethnically mixed; working/at home
- Dependent on local services
- Instinctive socialisers

Sure Start, yes, I was with them for over a year, doing voluntary work, before I worked for them. The voluntary work I did included boxing, the fitness side of things, and I did talks on how I got involved, on being a teen parent, and getting into boxing. And I ran a few behavioural courses and training classes for nursery staff too...The feedback was good. I was a single mum, always on the estate, going to lots of groups, and then doing voluntary work and talks, et cetera, and it was a big turn around. It was a success to go from doing nothing, then to do all sorts of things, and sit in a room full of 'professionals' and talk. It was a confidence boost. I always was confident but I was defensive too. I'm not so defensive now. I know that just because I live on a council estate and didn't work, I now know I am capable.

[Cheryl, Kirkside East]

Top worries for parents:

- Income and survival
- Children's safety, happiness and opportunity
- Community & race relations
- Crime, drugs, bullying, bad behaviour
- Local links, neighbours
- Lack of control, 'Voice'

The local high school, it is the worst school I've ever known. And I'm trying to get him out of it. They don't want to know. They just don't want to know. He is badly behaved and has learning difficulties and they don't help. I'd go in every day in tears. I told them he needs help and they didn't want to know.

[Cath, Kirkside East]

Government worries - action

- Part of bit cities with big populations
- Crowded, dense, inescapable
- High costs, high dependence, high crime
- Eye-sores, wasted resources, potential assets
- Threats of disorder – troubled, uneasy
- Government responsible for infrastructure
- Long history of action in cities
- Responding to pressure of multiple problems

There's a playground there but my daughter doesn't play there as it's not safe. She just goes to school. It's not even safe to take the lift. There's all sorts of people around we don't know. They [caretakers] clean the lifts regularly but they pee in them. They're coming to the stairwells to drink and do drugs at night. The staff fix the security door and it gets broken regularly. Usually it's the outsiders that are doing this.

[Yonca, West-City]

The drugs and fighting worry me 'cos they're boys. I feel like putting bars on the windows and not letting them out. I don't want to be here when they're older. I want to be a lot further away. I think drug testing in school is a brilliant idea as it scares the kids into not doing it.

[Elaine, East-Docks]

Seven key themes of Family futures:

- Community, community relations, 'Voice'
- Schools as community anchors
- Space for children and youth to 'let off steam'
- Crime, fear, drugs and safety
- Ill health and environmental pressures
- Work, training, incentives, barriers
- Housing, upgrading, regeneration

The council keeps selling the land and the property. There's no place – they're not giving great big areas over to football pitches anymore. It's all been built up, so children have a lot less.

[Sinead, West-City]

Biggest gaps, most urgent needs:

- More for children & young people
- Meeting points and social spaces
- Secondary schools – keep parents involved
- Training – ‘hand-holding’ and links to work
- Community ‘brokering’
- Affordable housing management
- On-going security

It's funny actually, 'cos I was going to the shops a couple of weeks ago and these two Community Police Officers were talking to this boy but they knew him by his name. His friend was like 'Ah, you mug, how can you let 'em know your name'. And I just thought, 'look, these children, they were so young as well', and I thought 'look, these police'll become familiar at least, and they know their names', d'you know what I mean. So they must be like little tearaways for them to be recognized. And his friend was like, laughing at him, and they said to him 'Why you not at school?' He said, 'I'm going there now'. They said, 'Okay, get in the car, we'll drop you off'.

[Flowella, East-Docks]

Big lessons over 10 years

- Families are vulnerable but
- Searching for opportunity
- Wider infrastructure of support prevents poor areas 'falling off the edge'
- 'Localism' and state must work together
- Complex urban communities, rarely self-organising

Probably, in a way, the feeling that somebody thinks it is worth putting money into the area, yeah. I suppose because it is recognised there are problems and you can't just let them sort themselves out.

[Kerry, The Valley]

I like the job. It's just a cleaning job. I've got a lovely day ward. It's so clean and nice and everybody is nice. But personally I think I'm capable of doing more. I feel a bit frustrated and they can tell that because I keep applying for jobs here and there. They're saying, "oh don't worry, something'll break through soon". I think I'm capable of doing something better. I tried – I wanted to do an Access test- I always pass and get admission, but I don't have the money to go.

[Cynthia, West City]

Five key lessons:

- Pooling scarce resources vital and valuable
 - **Local links and support are life lines**
- Strong need for security and enforcement
 - **Local management of conditions**
- Cultural divisions and conflicts over resources
 - **Need for more bridge building**
- Proactive parents do OK
 - **Unconfident parents struggle, need support**
- Luxury alongside poverty **not** mixed communities
 - **more proximate, harmonious mix**

It is cleaner and the housing market means the house prices have gone up so people need more money to live here, so more with money live here and spend on their properties and gardens, take pride in where they live.

[Rosemary, The Valley]

They are rejuvenating the estate now, new doors and windows and kitchens and rewiring upgrades and updating what we've got, not leaving it. It makes a difference to you wanting to stay and raise your kids there. If things improve you feel confident to stay.

[Louise, Kirkside East]

Did the areas get better?

- **Biggest positive changes:**

- Local environment
- Sure Start
- Decent Homes
- Area – school links

- **Biggest negatives:**

- Programmes ending
- Crime

- **Mixed views**

- Parents say job not finished
- Majority found positives

So much has happened, the renovations around the place. Flats and parks redesigned, transport has really improved... Think about the children and the people who work now, you feel so happy, attracting so many people.

[Sasha, East Docks]

The area is generally nicer, the houses on the main bus route are done up... I can see where the money has gone. Lots of courses for community groups, grants for those. A positive feel.

[Petra, The Valley]

I'd say more people are working. I notice it from people I know and seeing numbers going to work on a morning. Well, you get families who've never worked and now that cycle is stopping.

[Carol, Kirkside East]

