Our children today are our adults of tomorrow ?

Making home a better place for children living in temporary accommodation

CHAMPIONS

https://www.championsproject.co.uk/

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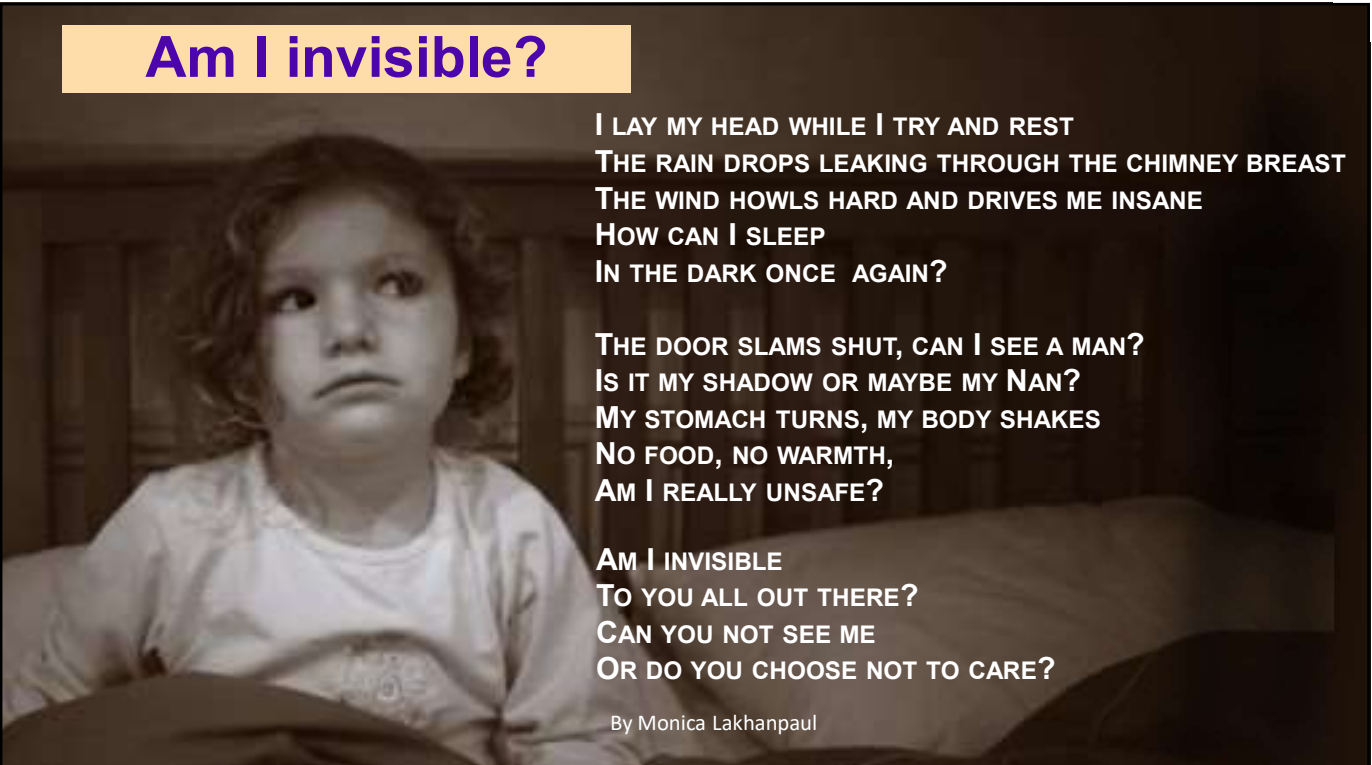
This grant is funded by ESRC as part of UK Research and Innovation rapid response COVID 19.

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Am I invisible?

I LAY MY HEAD WHILE I TRY AND REST
THE RAIN DROPS LEAKING THROUGH THE CHIMNEY BREAST
THE WIND HOWLS HARD AND DRIVES ME INSANE
HOW CAN I SLEEP
IN THE DARK ONCE AGAIN?

THE DOOR SLAMS SHUT, CAN I SEE A MAN?
IS IT MY SHADOW OR MAYBE MY NAN?
MY STOMACH TURNS, MY BODY SHAKES
NO FOOD, NO WARMTH,
AM I REALLY UNSAFE?

AM I INVISIBLE
TO YOU ALL OUT THERE?
CAN YOU NOT SEE ME
OR DO YOU CHOOSE NOT TO CARE?

By Monica Lakhanpaul

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Poverty in the UK

- 1 in 4 children in poverty in the UK (3.9 million)

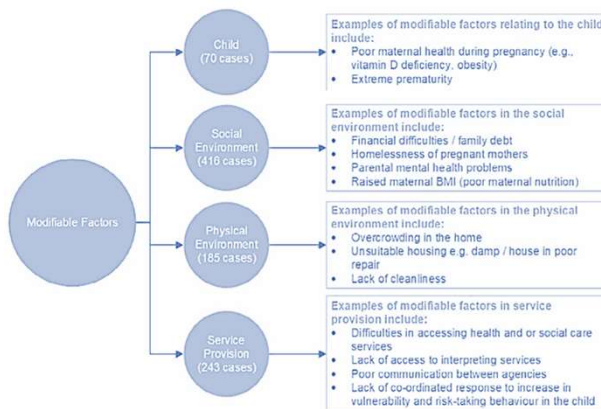- 600,000 children in England are homeless or on verge of homelessness (2020)

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Child mortality linked with health inequality

Child mortality in the UK – factors we can change

Child mortality increased as deprivation increased:
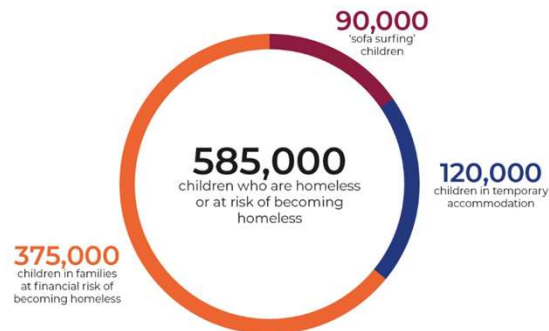
There was a **10% increase** in the risk of death between each decile of increasing deprivation.

Figure by NCMD, 2021.

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Children's Commissioner Report
August 2019

Based on the figures on the previous page, we estimate that there could be between 550,000 and 600,000 children in England who either are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.[9]

90,000
'sofa surfing'
children

585,000
children who are homeless
or at risk of becoming
homeless

120,000
children in temporary
accommodation

375,000
children in families
at financial risk of
becoming homeless

- The wicked problem- poverty, pandemic

  and policy

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TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS

Temporary accommodation (TA) is used as stopgap to shelter families before the council can offer more permanent housing

Hostel

B&Bs

Sofa Surfing

Private sector

Short-let social housing

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Mortality Rate

- **6,970** of children who died in the period **1 April 2019 – 31 March 2022**, in **34** cases, homelessness and temporary accommodation related to their vulnerability and deaths.

- **39** child deaths related to overcrowding, threats/enforcement of evictions, and extended family accommodation

- Most of the children were **under the age of 1 year**.

- **1 April 2021**, asking whether there was any indication that the child / child's family lived in poverty and/or deprivation. The answer was recorded as "**Yes**" in **143** child death cases from the period **1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022**

    -APPG report

(Newspaper front page shown: "34 homeless children die in England in three years")

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What does **home** mean to you?

H   O   M   E

CHAMPIONS

| for harmony, hope and happiness | for opportunity, optimism and open-minded | for memory, maturity and motivation | for emotions, entertainment and energy |

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A child engages with the world through all their senses

See	Smell	Hear

A home is not just the walls and roof.

Everything a child encounters impacts their development.

Stressful experiences have negative effects on their brain and mental health, whether that be
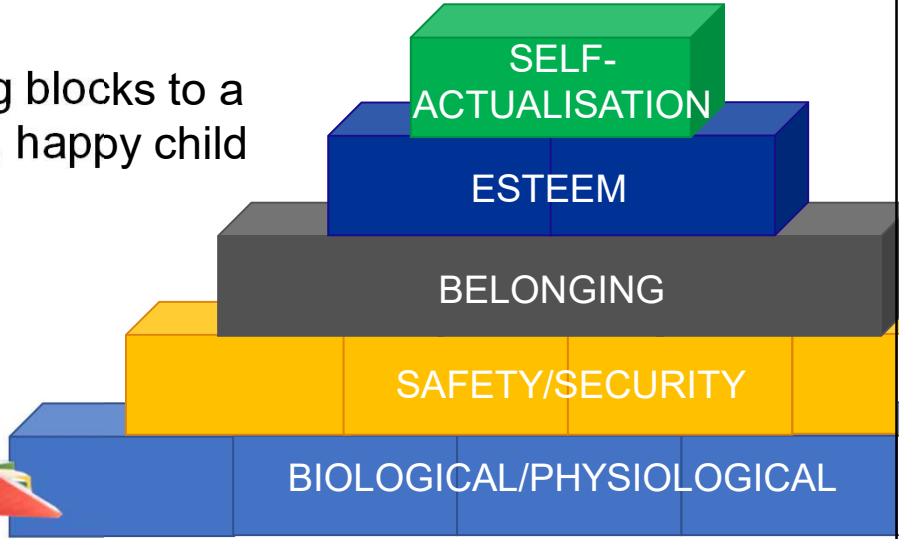
- seeing their parents stressed
- smelling unclean facilities
- or hearing people shouting in the middle of the night

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WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED?

Building blocks to a healthy, happy child

SELF-ACTUALISATION

ESTEEM

BELONGING

SAFETY/SECURITY

BIOLOGICAL/PHYSIOLOGICAL

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Impact on health

Lifestyle — Poverty — Environment — Resources

Less Active — Worse Diet — More time inside — Restricted access to healthcare

Weight gain — Vitamin Deficiency — Poor mental health — Smoke, mould, vermin — Delayed diagnosis/treatment

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Internal pollutants

No heating — Lack of ventilation

Wall damage — Waste — Damp/Mould — Smoking

Vermin — Respiratory Issues

Infections

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SL3 Not sure what you want to call it

Swabey, Laura, 23/02/2021

IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS

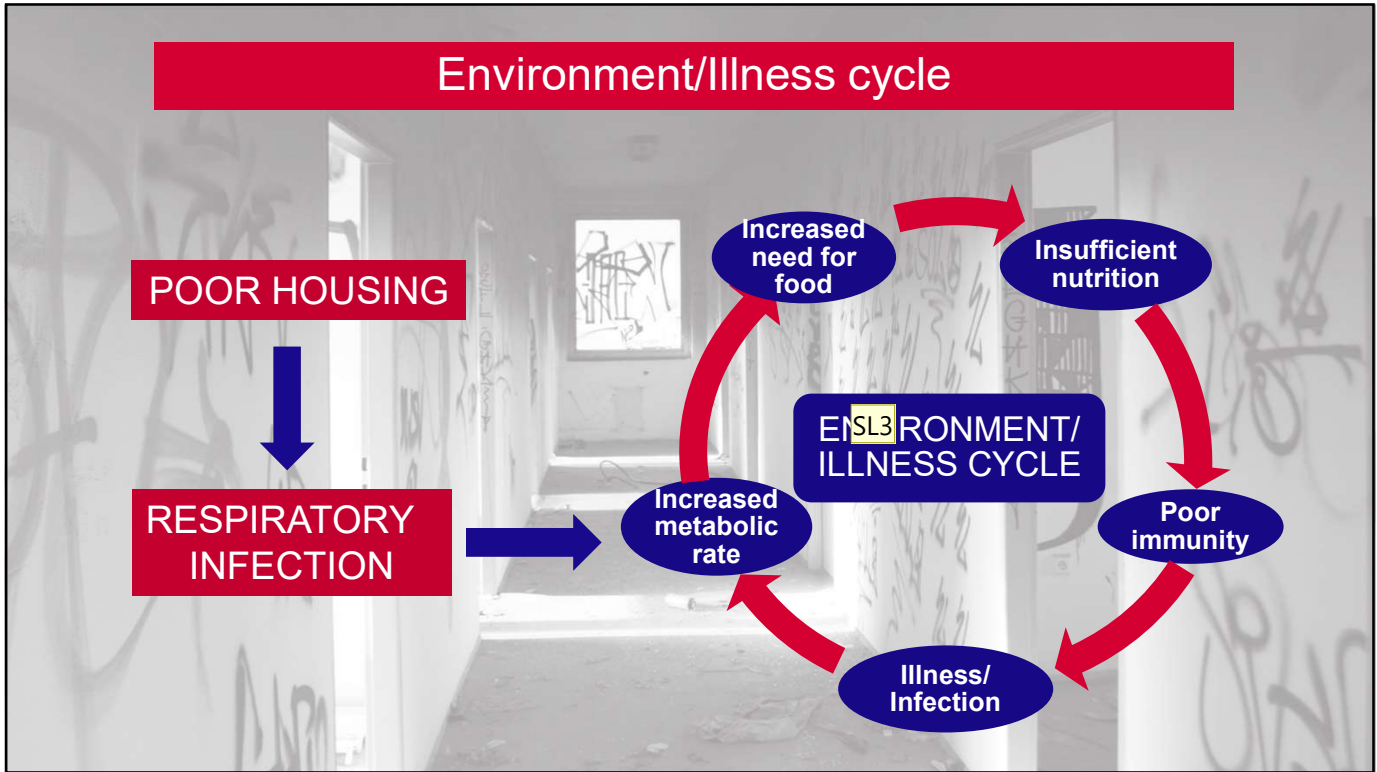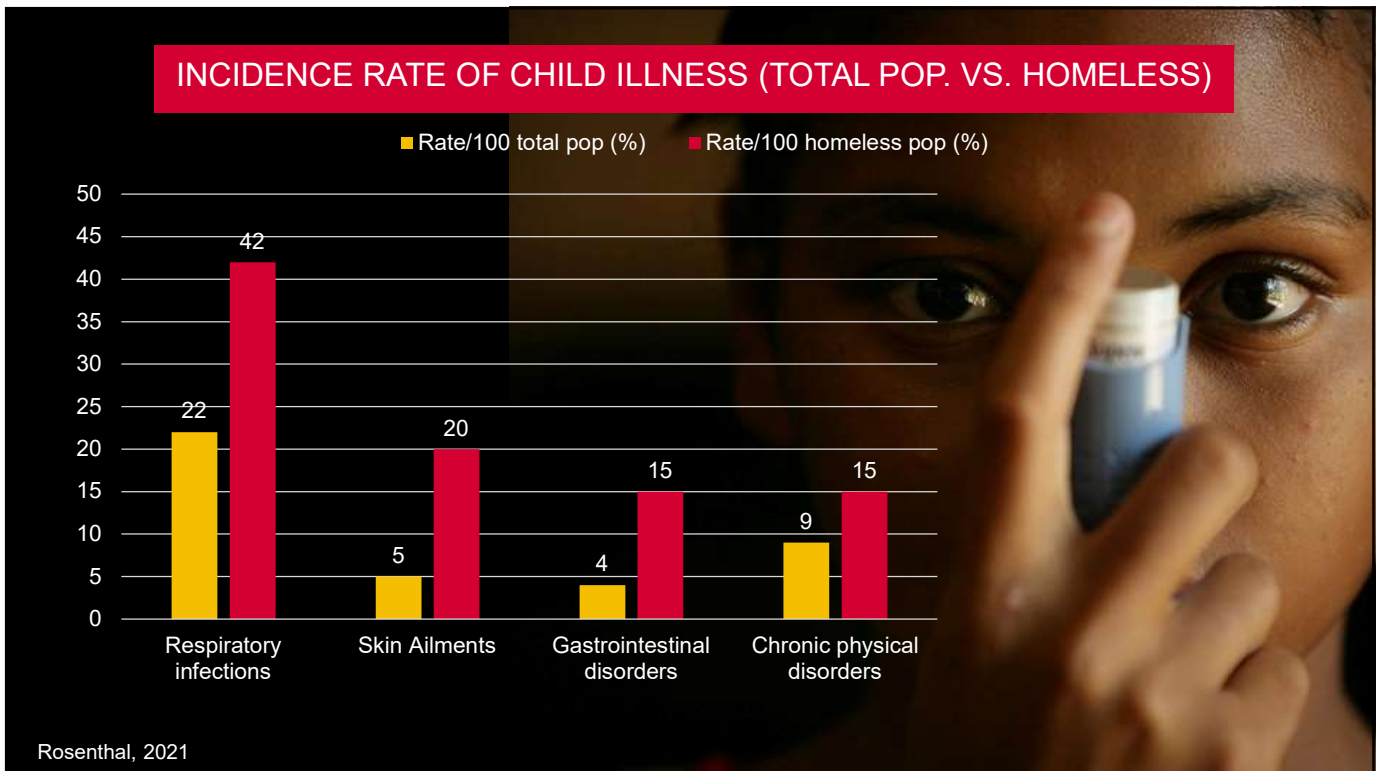| Impact on parents	Impact on developing Foetuses and newborns	Impact on children aged 0-5	Impact on children and young people aged 5-19
Reduced capacity to support	Premature births	Lower GP registration	Behavioural and emotional problems
Stress	Low birth weight	Higher Hospital admission	Increased risk of injury
Stigma	Stillbirth	Missed Immunisations	Childhood obesity
Isolation	SIDS	Developmental delays	Lower school attainment
Poor nutrition/hunger	Disrupted attachments	Chronic health issues	Substance use
Fear of having children removed			Suicide risk

Homeless, 2020

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Long Term Impact of ACEs

Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

Child homelessness

Felitti,1997; CDC.gov, 2020
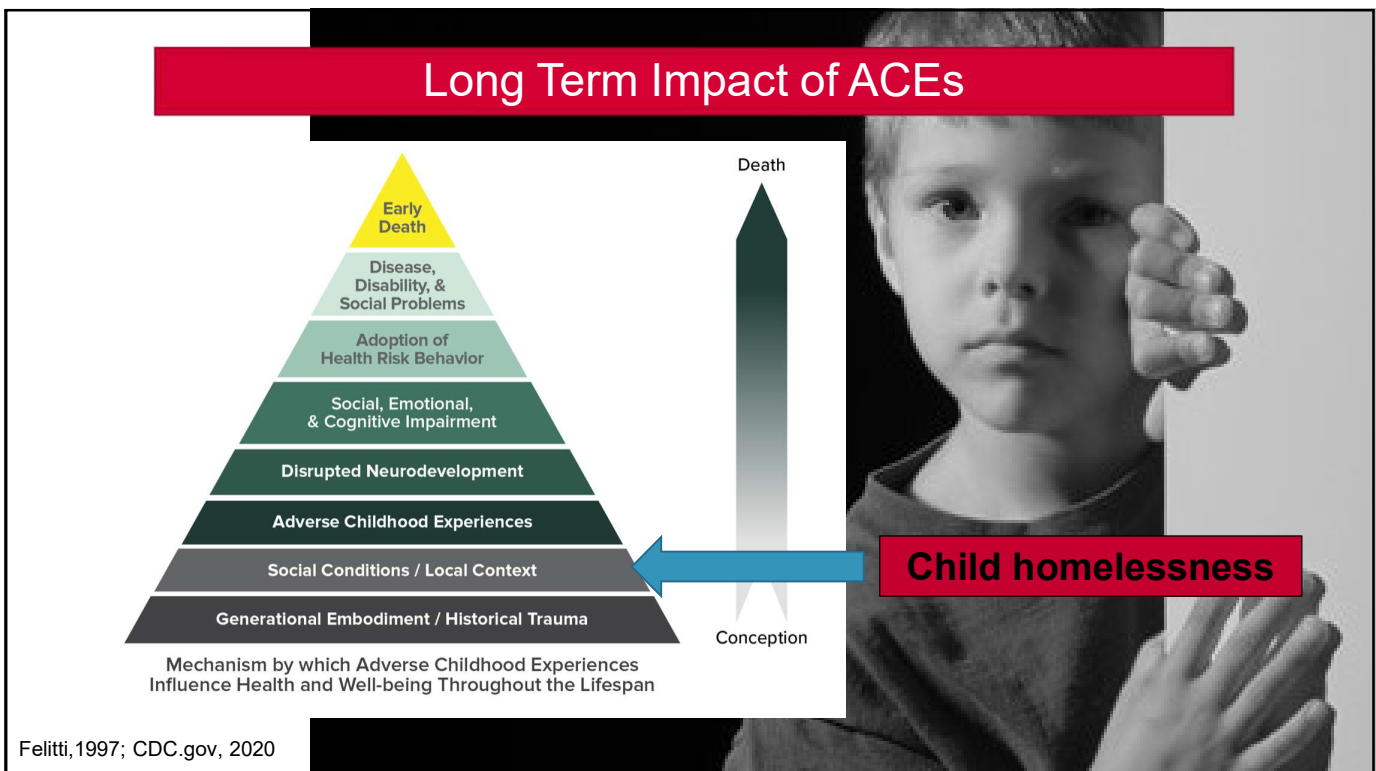
16

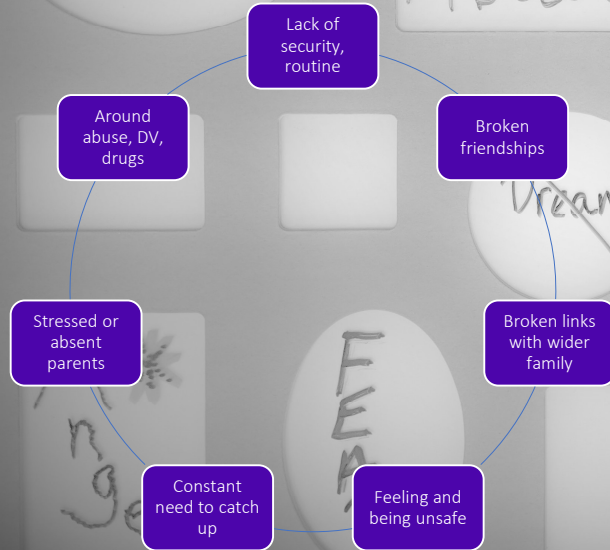# Homelessness and childhood trauma

Lack of security, routine

Around abuse, DV, drugs

Broken friendships

Stressed or absent parents

Broken links with wider family

Constant need to catch up

Feeling and being unsafe

"Professionals may label a child as "hyperactive," "oppositional," "shy," or "spacey," when these behaviours may be fight, flight, or freeze responses to ongoing stress."

What is trauma?
- Involves a threat to physical or emotional well-being.
- Results in intense feelings of fear and lack of control
- Leaves people feeling helpless.
(Bassuk, 2010)

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Families: food, nutrition, sanitation

Limited food availability
- "It was difficult to explain to them that the shelves were empty and that's why I couldn't get them their favourite snacks or foods."

Keeping food clean
- "She was of the age where she wouldn't really touch something and eat it, but had she been this age, I'm definite she would have eaten cockroach."

No consistency
- "Now, whenever I tried to give him what I would feed him before, because he's not had it for a while, he wouldn't eat it."

Shared space and hygiene
- "There is no fridge, there is no washing machine. You share your bathroom with all sorts of people, it was really horrible for my daughter."

No play or laundry outdoors
- "It's infested with mould and in COVID time I was thinking maybe my youngest daughter have... like, she's always wheezing"

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Sanitation and hygiene

It's infested with mould and in COVID time I was thinking maybe my youngest daughter... she's always wheezing."

There was a cockroach infestation of the bottom cupboards, like inside...one night I could see

Five families and we're using one bathroom. You know that my oldest [...] in March he went to do... behind the wardrobe [...] in the clothes. He's scared, he's not going in the bathroom

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Families: relationships and development

Overcrowding	•"My kids have to sleep on the floor because of me [...] Because I'm pregnant I sleep on the bed. My partner has to sleep with them on the floor."
Break in relationships	•"My son cried when he walked through my grandad's door because he hadn't seen my grandad in six months, you know, he didn't recognize him."
Stress	•"I found that all three of them actually started developing mood swings, withdrawn, temper tantrums, which wouldn't have happened before."
Not used to others	•"Even if some child comes to her and is trying to play with her, she's not interested. She runs away and just goes and plays on her own. It's what she's used to."
Noise and feeling unsafe	•"She kept being sick, because of stress and lack of sleep." •"We have to stay in our room. Because she never plays like that, she thinks we are punishing her."

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Real-world experiences

"We had loads of insects. And there was mice outside"

"My daughter kept being sick, because of stress and lack of sleep"

"Since pandemic started, she never came visit us she never called us and then once I tried to call her about my daughter's behaviour, but the phone was off, so. Since pandemic started, we don't have health visitor"

"Access to food drastically dropped"

"My daughter slightly asthmatic, so we had to increase her inhaler"

CHAMPIONS project, 2021

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Closure of play facilities and nurseries

Over-reliance on unsuitable TA contexts for space and facilities to support comprehensive child healthy and safe development

Developmental issues
- Missed chance to socialise – increased loneliness, boredom
- Not learning social skills like sharing, talking
- Delayed crawling and walking in TA due to lack of space

More time indoors
- More time in unsuitable accommodation (mould, vermin, overcrowding)
- Lack of Vitamin D
- Lack of exercise: sleep problems, weight gain, behaviour

Less informal oversight
- Missed chance to pick up and refer developmental problems early on
- Safeguarding concerns missed
- Missing snacks and FSM – support and monitor nutrition and growth

Loss of 'mum support groups'
- Important for parent mental health
- Informal source of health and wellbeing advice

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Findings: Children's mental health

- **Impact of isolation (bonding, stimulation and play)**
- Norm is being with parent all the time, anxiety about being left
- Anxiety about being around other children, adults
- Needs to learn to play and share with others
- Restricted access to parks, play spaces – indoors even more
- **Link with parental mental health**
- Difficulty in accessing mental health support

> She was not in nursery and the pandemic as well, it has affected her mentally, and her wellbeing in general... she started isolating herself from other kids. ... She's now a child that has social anxiety.

> We used to stay in bed till, like, twelve. And she used to sit there watching TV on her own or doing stuff on her own as well, because I didn't have the motivation.

> He doesn't even let his dad play with him sometimes.

> When [school] stopped they noticed more and more the conditions they were living in.

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Changing the narrative

- Focus on children as well as parents
- Address the environmental challenges to support better health and welfare
- Prioritise giving children the best start in life

Eat a balanced diet
- Access to a range of food
- Secure food storage options
- Access to cooking facilities

Do better at school
- Quiet space to do homework
- Affordable internet access for online learning
- Separate bedroom and living room

Feel secure in their home
- Limit time in TA before permanent housing
- More affordable housing
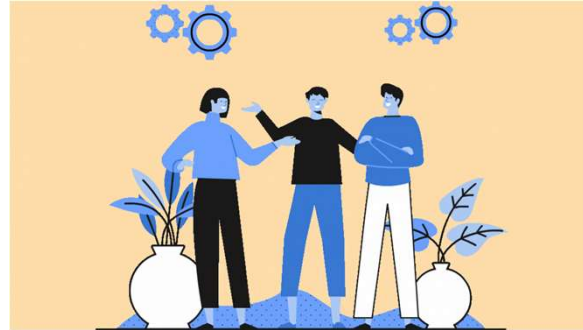- Stay at local school, nursery, play centre

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CHAMPIONS Project
Children in Homeless Accommodation Managing Pandemic Invisibility Or Non-inclusive Strategies

We say:

All children should be safe, healthy, and educated (SHE)

No child should go hungry, cold, or deprived of learning - all children should have a home

They say:

We are not invisible, so don't leave us behind

CHAMPIONS (2022)

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Recommendations from families

Child-friendly accommodation
- Space to play indoors and outdoors
- Own kitchen and bathroom
- Safe space to cook
- Enough bedrooms and beds – no co-sleeping
- Ground floor
- Space to dry clothes
- Repairs, vermin and mould dealt with quickly
- Safe area near shops and schools
- Not mixing single people and families

Changes to the system
- Training and awareness of homeless children's needs
- A cap for duration in TA before moving into permanent accommodation
- A link worker to help with handover when families move, especially out of borough

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Policy Recommendations

1. Mandatory child-centred minimum standards framework for TA

Keep children Safe, Healthy, and Educated by ensuring:
- **Basic necessities**
  - kitchen appliances
  - sanitation
  - laundry
  - safe space to play and learn
- **Controlled environmental health risks (e.g. vermin, mould, pollution).**

2. Adequate/timely provision of healthcare/social support
- **Worsening physical/mental health in this group and a reduction in support services.**
- **Target services at those struggling to access other consistent support.**

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3. Collaborate and share relevant information across sectors
- **Data collection and communication mandatory**
- **Notification systems**
- **Quickly identify priority for support**

4. Support families in navigating local services

Develop tailored and accessible digital and physical resources directing to local:
- **food banks**
- **nurseries/child centres**
- **legal support**
- **housing officers**
- **local authority**
- **citizen's advice**

Allocate dedicated contact for discussing services/resources

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Creative outputs to raise awareness

- Creative arts engages with the public
- Raises awareness of both the issues surrounding TA, and the CHAMPIONS Project

Community stories

- Open invite to share stories with us to promote dialogue around TA

Children's art workshops

- Partnered with Graffwerks, a nationally recognised street art team, local authorities and other organisations
- Children used art to tell us about their experiences of lockdown

Digital stories

- Developing video stories with participants based on their words, audio, video and pictures

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"History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children."

Nelson Mandela

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CHAMPIONS Project

Children in Homeless Accommodation Managing Pandemic Invisibility Or Non-inclusive Strategies

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- The Children's Society
- EKAM Foundation
- British Association for Community Child Health
- Public Arts Health & Us
- National Supporters
- UCL Student Action Against Homelessness Society

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CHAMPIONS Project Supporters

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