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# FIRM FOUNDATIONS:

## An evaluation of the Shelter *Homeless to Home* service

Anwen Jones, Nicholas Pleace and Deborah Quilgars

# Acknowledgements

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Most of all, however, we would like to thank all the families who gave up their time to talk to us about their experiences of using the Shelter *Homeless to Home* service, for their willingness to participate in the research and for their warm hospitality during our visits to their homes in Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield. This report could not have been written without their help. Thanks also go to all the families who responded to the postal survey, as well as to key local authority and voluntary sector players in the three areas who kindly agreed to be interviewed.

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# Contents

## Acknowledgements

## Foreword

Summary .....	9
---------------	---

## Chapter 1

Introduction.....	15
-------------------	----

## Chapter 2

The <i>Homeless to Home</i> service .....	19
---	----

## Chapter 3

Referrals to <i>Homeless to Home</i> : a profile of users and assessment of procedures .....	29
--	----

## Chapter 4

<i>Homeless to Home's</i> work with families .....	47
--	----

## Chapter 5

Moving on and living independently.....	61
---	----

## Chapter 6

Conclusions .....	72
-------------------	----

References .....	77
------------------	----

Appendix 1 .....	79
------------------	----



## Foreword

***I have been to refuge after refuge since I was 17... I've done that for nine years but I never had help like this... I have never been in a house so long. I'm only still here because of Shelter.***

***Homeless to Home* service user**

I am delighted to present this independent evaluation of Shelter's *Homeless to Home* projects, carried out by researchers from the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York. Over 18 months, the researchers have followed nearly 300 families who have used the projects. This report is the conclusion of their work. It demonstrates the complex problems faced by homeless families, the need for more effective support to enable them to sustain their tenancies and the success of the *Homeless to Home* model with its combination of practical and emotional support.

*Homeless to Home* provides a comprehensive package of assistance for families making the transition from homelessness to a permanent home, supporting them as they establish a stable and secure future in their new communities. The projects help families to access benefits, help enrol and settle children into school and find a GP. They offer housing advice, advocacy on a range of issues, practical assistance including help with decorating and gardening and organise support groups and day trips to help families develop their own support networks.

The *Homeless to Home* approach developed from Shelter's practical experience of working with homeless families. Those coming to us for help have often become homeless in difficult and traumatic circumstances, for example following relationship breakdown or domestic violence. Their complex needs are frequently not addressed by the agencies charged with supporting them. As a result, the incidence of repeat homelessness is high as families are often unable to cope and fail to sustain their tenancies.

Shelter asked the Centre for Housing Policy to carry out an independent evaluation of the projects to see what lessons could be learnt from their approach. As well as a survey and face to face interviews with families who have used the projects, the evaluation also involved focus groups, case work analysis and interviews with staff and partner agencies. We are indebted to the researchers, *Homeless to Home* staff, the families and others who kindly took part. There was strong evidence of success across all the projects: 83 per cent of families rated *Homeless to Home* a 'really good service'. The results also reveal that nine out of ten families who had ceased to use the service were still in permanent housing.

Effective policy making demands innovation, input from stakeholders including service-users and, above all, a strong evidence base. In the context of the Government's new National Homelessness Strategy, and the new duty on local authorities to review and act strategically in response to the problem of homelessness in their area, we believe that this evaluation provides evidence of what works in preventing homelessness and building stable communities. With more than 65,000 homeless families in England, this evidence could not be more timely.

**Chris Holmes**  
**Director**

# Tables and Figures

## Tables

Table 2.1 Local authority homelessness statistics 1999/2000, <i>Homeless to Home</i> areas .....	19
Table 3.1 Ethnicity of <i>Homeless to Home</i> users, by project.....	31
Table 3.2 Health and disability amongst homeless families .....	33
Table 3.3 Main reason for homelessness, by project.....	34
Table 3.4 Accommodation on referral, by project.....	35
Table 3.5 Referral source, by project.....	39
Table 5.1 Typical period of contact with families, by project (closed case families) .....	61
Table 5.2 Reasons for closing cases .....	64
Table 5.3 Broad housing situation of closed case families (as at 30 September 2001).....	67
Table 5.4 Housing status of closed case families by time since last contact (as at 30 September 2001).....	67
Table 5.5 Housing status of closed case families (as at 30 September 2001) .....	68
Table 5.6 Housing status of closed case families who had been out of contact with <i>Homeless to Home</i> for nine months or more (as at 30 September 2001).....	69
Table A1 <i>Homeless to Home</i> records, by project.....	80
Table A2 Number of adult interviews with <i>Homeless to Home</i> users, by project .....	81

## Figures

Figure 2.1 Shelter <i>Homeless to Home</i> service : staffing structure .....	23
Figure 3.1 Household composition of families at referral (percentage) .....	30
Figure 3.2 Economic status of female adult in household at referral (percentage) .....	32
Figure 3.3 'Good things about where we live' (percentage) .....	37
Figure 3.4 Referral and assessment procedures .....	40





# Summary

## Introduction

- i. Shelter *Homeless to Home* was a three year project funded by the Community Fund that was designed to help formerly homeless families sustain a tenancy and live successfully in the community. Projects are currently operating in the cities of Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield. This report presents the results from an independent evaluation of *Homeless to Home* conducted by the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York.
- ii. The projects were established in response to evidence that homeless families often have a range of needs that could make it difficult for them to sustain a tenancy without any form of support. These included needs for practical, emotional and financial support. Services like *Homeless to Home* are usually described as resettlement services. The projects in Bristol and Sheffield were city-wide, while the project in Birmingham was focussed on the Handsworth and Newtown community.
- iii. Shelter described the ethos behind the *Homeless to Home* service in its 2000–2003 Business Plan (p.4) for the service:

*Families who have experienced homelessness will be rehoused without delay in a secure permanent home and community. Families have control and choice in this transition and receive appropriate support to ensure they do not become homeless again. This approach will help to ensure the establishment and maintenance of stable communities and prevent social exclusion.*

## The families who used the *Homeless to Home* service

- iv. The three *Homeless to Home* projects in Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield had provided a service to just over 300 families over 30 months to October 2001. Project records were analysed for 271 families (92 families in Birmingham; 95 families in Bristol and 84 families in Sheffield).
- v. Three quarters (73 per cent) of families were lone parent families, with 78 per cent of families containing children aged under 10 (61 per cent of families only contained children aged under 10). The average size of families was three persons (usually a mother and children), but nearly one in ten families had six or more members.
- vi. A high proportion of families (46 per cent) with whom *Homeless to Home* worked were from a black or minority ethnic background. The majority of families in Bristol (51 per cent) and Sheffield (80 per cent) had a White/European background, however only 30 per cent of families in Birmingham had a White/European background. The service also regularly worked with refugee families that had been granted leave to remain in the UK.
- vii. Families tended to be economically marginalised. Many women lone parents had a full time role in caring for pre-school aged children (64 per cent) and for older lone parents seeking work, crèche facilities were often expensive or not available locally. Families also tended to be housed in areas in which employment opportunities were scarce. Male adults were only present in 26 per cent of households, half were unemployed, a quarter were unable to work and a quarter were in work.

- viii. Previous research has often found health problems among homeless families and seven out of ten families with whom *Homeless to Home* were working self-reported health problems. Depression was commonly reported by adults and children were quite often reported as having asthma, typically affecting more than one child when several were present in a family. Just under a fifth of families contained one or more disabled people.
- ix. The main cause of homelessness for four in ten families was domestic violence, women and children becoming homeless when they left their homes to escape a violent male partner. The next most common causes were relationship breakdown (15 per cent), loss of private rented sector accommodation (9 per cent), harassment from neighbours (8 per cent) and overcrowding (8 per cent). There were many other causes of homelessness among the families, ranging from debt to seeking (and being granted) refugee status in the UK.
- x. The data on previous experience of homelessness were incomplete, but there was information on 103 families, 56 per cent of whom had been homeless before. There was concern in all three cities, prior to the establishment of the three *Homeless to Home* projects, that formerly homeless families were quite often unable to sustain their tenancies after being rehoused.

## The problems families faced in sustaining tenancies and living in the community

- xi. Many homeless families have few personal and financial resources with which to manage a home and take an active part in social and economic life. They may become homeless with only very few, or no, possessions of their own and little prospect of earning a reasonable income. Families will quite often have lost the social supports from friends and family that most of us enjoy. In addition, the experience of homelessness, particularly if they escaped violence, may have left them traumatised and alienated from society.
- xii. Many families also face considerable difficulties following homelessness because of the kinds of housing and the environment they find themselves in after local authorities have discharged their duties under the homelessness legislation. Homeless families may find themselves in poor quality temporary accommodation or permanent housing that is often not ideal and which may be quite unsuitable because it is in poor repair or located in areas with high levels of unemployment, crime and nuisance.
- xiii. Particular problems experienced by some of the families with whom *Homeless to Home* worked included:
  - harassment, including racial harassment, from neighbours
  - fears about safety, drugs and crime
  - problems with children's schooling, including bullying and racism
  - difficulty managing on a low income
  - dissatisfaction with the standard, condition or suitability of their local authority or Registered Social Landlord (RSL) property.
- xiv. Families often found it difficult to manage their home when their sole income was from benefits. Financial pressures could create a situation in which families felt unable to cope with pressure and their general well-being was being undermined.

## The referrals process

- xv. Referrals came mainly from the City Council in Sheffield (nine out of ten), accounted for just under half the referrals in Bristol and were a much smaller proportion of referrals in Birmingham (one in ten). In Birmingham, self referrals accounted for half of referrals, and four in ten referrals in Bristol; Sheffield worked wholly by referral from other agencies.
- xvi. Families reported that they had generally been given sufficient information about the three *Homeless to Home* services at the referral stage. The assessment procedures were generally seen as not being either intrusive or arduous and the families reported that the service had been well explained to them. Full information from the outset, as well as throughout a family's contact with the three *Homeless to Home* projects, helped establish good worker/family relationships.

## The services provided by *Homeless to Home*

- xvii. The three projects each used a service agreement that the family was asked to read and sign. This placed expectations on *Homeless to Home* to provide or arrange services in a respectful way and on the family not to behave in an unacceptable way towards the workers.
- xviii. The three *Homeless to Home* services all offered broadly similar types of support:
  - assistance with housing and moving home
  - practical assistance in making a home
  - financial advice and support
  - help with accessing other services/advocacy
  - social and emotional support.
- xix. *Homeless to Home* projects could help families by visiting prospective properties with them, supporting them through their move and, if the housing they moved into first proved unsuitable, supporting them through the rehousing process (though the Birmingham project was limited here as referrals were made following rehousing).
- xx. *Homeless to Home* projects, drawing on volunteers and half-time handy persons attached to the projects, could assist families with all aspects of making a house into a home. This could involve a range of support including providing white goods like fridges or washing machines, arranging funds for carpeting and providing help and materials for DIY. Housing in which a family was reluctant to stay could sometimes be sufficiently improved to encourage them to remain.
- xxi. A large part of the work of the three *Homeless to Home* projects was in assisting families with benefit claims and in seeking additional sources of income. This included: helping with benefit applications; helping with Social Fund applications; providing advocacy and assistance in appeals processes; helping manage debt and general assistance in managing finances.
- xxii. To provide a flexible and comprehensive service to families, *Homeless to Home* had to work successfully with a range of other agencies. While some of the needs of families could be addressed directly by *Homeless to Home* project workers as providers of housing related support, others required the intervention of a range of other agencies, including the NHS, social services, voluntary sector organisations and specialist services.

- xxiii. The three *Homeless to Home* projects helped families both access the services they needed and acted as advocates for families in dealing with problems related to other service providers. This included representing the families to social landlords when housing was unsatisfactory or required repair work was overdue. Sometimes the project workers could have a wider role, for example liaising with educational welfare officers over children's access to school or with the police and probation if the violent ex-partner whom a family had escaped reappeared.
- xxiv. *Homeless to Home* was a housing related support service, not a counselling service, but a legitimate part of its role as a housing related support service was the provision of some social and emotional support. This was provided both by workers giving direct support to families and also through social events and user involvement organised by the three projects.

## Limits to the service

- xxv. There were some limits to the effectiveness of the *Homeless to Home* service. Whilst occasionally these were related to the way that the service was organised, these limits mainly centred on factors that were outside the direct control of the projects. Factors that contributed to a minority of families not being able to sustain tenancies included:
- problems with the neighbourhood, crime, nuisance and harassment
  - problems with the standard of housing
  - families leaving tenancies to escape a violent male ex-partner
  - debt and problems with benefits, in some cases giving rise to rent arrears.
- xxvi. In some instances, families were facing a combination of personal difficulties and issues related to living in an unpleasant and threatening environment. These conditions could sometimes overwhelm their capacity to cope in an independent tenancy, even with the support of the *Homeless to Home* service. These situations could arise if required inputs from other agencies were not forthcoming despite efforts at joint working by *Homeless to Home*.
- xxvii. Families' social and economic disadvantage and their living situation could be mitigated by the *Homeless to Home* service, which could also help them sustain tenancies. However, while families overcame their homelessness and the risk of further homelessness, their situation of relative disadvantage remained.

## Overall success

- xxviii. There was strong evidence of success across all three *Homeless to Home* projects. In the postal survey conducted for the research, 83 per cent of families rated *Homeless to Home* as a 'really good service' and another 13 per cent rated it as 'quite good'. None described the service as poor or very poor. Only a few families interviewed made suggestions for improving the service further, with the bulk of the families reporting that the service was:
- helpful
  - responsive
  - respectful
  - fair
  - caring
  - communicated clearly with families.

- xxix. Among families with whom the projects had ceased working ('closed cases'), the typical duration of contact with the service had been an average of 261 days (median 224 days). This was well within the planned maximum duration of contact of one year, although all the projects had worked with families for shorter and longer periods.
- xxx. During the period of the evaluation, projects closed cases using different techniques, usually writing to the family concerned and stressing that they could contact the project again if they needed to. One project used an interview with the family to review progress, which gave them data on their overall performance with the family and also an opportunity to review the family's needs and ensure they had been met.<sup>1</sup> This seemed to work particularly well in helping users disengage positively from the service.
- xxxi. Tenancy sustainment figures for the projects showed that, among the 218 families that had ceased to receive the *Homeless to Home* service, approximately nine out of ten families (88 per cent) were still in permanent housing. Among families who had ceased to receive support from *Homeless to Home*, there was evidence of ongoing success in sustaining tenancies. Eighty-two per cent of families that had been out of contact with the service for nine months or more were still housed.
- xxxii. Overall, 64 per cent of families with whom the projects had ceased to be in contact were still in their original tenancies. Families sometimes had to make a planned move, for example if a new household was formed or if the home they were initially allocated proved unsuitable. It was also found that 17 per cent of the families with whom *Homeless to Home* had been in contact had moved away from the city or area covered by *Homeless to Home*. Over half (54 per cent) of closed case families who had not received the service for nine months were found to be still in their original tenancies.

1. All three projects have started using this method of closing cases since the evaluation came to a close.



# 1 Introduction

The Shelter *Homeless to Home* service was set up during late 1998 and early 1999 as a pilot scheme to provide resettlement support to homeless families to enable them to settle successfully both in their accommodation and within the local neighbourhood. The three year initiative, funded by the Community Fund (formerly the English National Lottery Charities Board)<sup>2</sup>, involved services being delivered to families in three areas: Bristol, Birmingham and Sheffield. Due to the innovative nature of the pilot initiative, Shelter commissioned an independent evaluation of the project which was undertaken by the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York.

This report presents the findings of the independent evaluation. A separate good practice report has also been produced that outlines the lessons from the Shelter *Homeless to Home* service and this will be of interest to commissioners and providers considering developing a similar service (Jones et al, 2002).

## Background to the initiative

The plight of homeless families was first recognised nationally in the 1960s with the broadcast of *Cathy Come Home* and subsequent high profile campaigning led by the then newly established organisation, Shelter. This recognition was finally translated into statute in the form of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 (later Part III of the Housing Act 1985) which gave local housing authorities in England and Wales a duty to provide permanent accommodation to unintentionally homeless households with dependent children (along with other priority need groups), who could demonstrate a local connection. In 1998, Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 reduced this duty to one of assisting households to obtain suitable accommodation for a period of two years (including private sector tenancies), although local authorities could use their discretion to continue to provide permanent accommodation for households. The new Homelessness Act once implemented, will effectively restore the link between a homeless acceptance and a social housing tenancy, as well as providing a new power to secure accommodation for non-priority homeless people and a duty to develop a homelessness strategy at a local level. Whilst the level of homelessness acceptances peaked in the 1980s and early 1990s, and showed a decline in the mid to late 1990s, numbers of acceptances remained significant in 2000 at 111,550 households in England alone (DTLR, 2001).

In the last decade or so, homelessness has again been recognised as a major social problem. Yet the attention that has been focussed on homelessness has been concerned mainly with people sleeping rough. To some extent this is because rough sleeping is more visible than family homelessness, but is also in large part because of the existence of the primary homelessness legislation which offers some protection for families. Over the last decade, the Rough Sleepers Initiative and renewed policy emphasis on street homelessness more generally has led to a growth in homelessness services, and particularly resettlement services which aim to assist single homeless people to move into and sustain independent tenancies. Research and experience has clearly demonstrated that without adequate support many single homeless people experience repeat episodes of homelessness (see Pleave, 1995; Randall and Brown, 1995, 1996; Dane, 1998). The forthcoming *Supporting People Guidance on Services for Homeless People* (DTLR, 2002) outlines these services in some detail, revealing the predominance of resettlement services for single homeless people, rather than families, in the sector.

2. The Bristol and Birmingham projects began in late 1998, and the Sheffield project started in March 1999. Funding from the National Lottery Charities Board was originally provided for three years but Board agreed that the funding could be spread to end all three projects in March 2002.



In short, resettlement services for homeless families have to date received virtually no attention nationally. Whilst a considerable amount of research was conducted on family homelessness in the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, this was primarily focussed on effects on families of the use of temporary accommodation, particularly bed and breakfast accommodation (see Thomas and Niner, 1989; London Research Centre, 1991), including poor physical health (see HVA and GMSC, 1988; Richman et al, 1991), mental health problems (Barry et al, 1991; Amery et al, 1995), difficult access to GPs (Victor, 1992) and effects on educational continuity and attainment (see HM Inspectorate of Schools, 1990; Power et al, 1995; University of Edinburgh/ Shelter, 1998). With the recent rise in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation to their highest level since 1991 (12,290 in 2001 (DTLR, 2001)), such research remains important.

However, only relatively recently has research suggested that many of the problems experienced by homeless families in temporary accommodation may continue when families are rehoused. Shelter's own research prior to setting up the *Homeless to Home* project found that a high proportion of rehoused families abandon tenancies following rehousing. The problem of repeat homelessness has also been documented in Scotland (Pawson et al, 2001). Whilst research data is limited, recent studies have suggested families may face a number of problems with settling into their new homes. A longitudinal study (Vostanis et al, 1998) which followed homeless families through the rehousing process found that poor mental health experienced by homeless families continued after rehousing. A recent study also suggested that the experience of homelessness can undermine parenting and coping skills which can lead to difficulties in settling into a new neighbourhood (Walters and East, 2001). Domestic violence, relationship breakdown and anti-social behaviour may also be contributory factors in repeat homelessness (Jones, 2002). Recent research has also suggested that the difference between successful and unsuccessful resettlement, unsurprisingly, can have a large impact on the health and well being of children in the household. Where families are rehoused in self-contained accommodation, in an area they know and where their parents are coping well, children have the ability to cope well. In reverse conditions, however, effects on the children include behavioural changes, bed wetting, physical health problems, reluctance to eat and general failure to thrive (McCrum, 2001; Hall et al, 2001).

Obviously, the prevention of homelessness in the first instance must remain the key policy objective of homelessness organisations and governments. However, whilst family homelessness exists, the research literature suggests that effective resettlement services might be important in assisting homeless families to rebuild their lives. Shelter *Homeless to Home* was set up to test this premise.

## **The *Homeless to Home* service**

In 1998/9 three pilot projects were established in three different areas of England, Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield. The projects were set up to deliver a resettlement service to homeless families, using floating support workers to assist families as they move into and settle into a new home and their new neighbourhood following homelessness. Resettlement services are characterised by the delivery of low level, or low intensity, support, for a limited period, usually involving reduced support as independence increases (DTLR, 2002). The Shelter *Homeless to Home* Business Plan (2000–2003) outlines the *Homeless to Home* vision for the service and the detailed aims of the service.

The *Homeless to Home* Vision:

*Families who have experienced homelessness will be rehoused without delay in a secure, permanent home and community. Families have control and choice in this*

*transition and receive appropriate support to ensure that they do not become homeless again. This approach will help to ensure the establishment and maintenance of stable communities and prevent social exclusion.*

(Homeless to Home Business Plan, 2000-2003, p4)

Ten key aims were included in the *Homeless to Home* Business Plan (p5):

- to assist homeless families in the transition from being homeless and/or in temporary accommodation to secure permanent accommodation
- to provide a quality operational service that actively involves and responds to service user needs
- to help families to develop or regain self-confidence and skills to successfully maintain their homes and to develop links within the community
- to involve local volunteers including ex-service users in the running of the project and the delivery of services
- to work with the family as a whole and to ensure that the needs of children are integrated into our work
- to involve ex-service users and service users in the running of the project and the delivery of the service
- to work in partnership with other agencies to ensure co-ordination of services to homeless families
- to monitor, evaluate and promote good practice
- to ensure sufficient funding for the continuation of the service
- to contribute to Shelter's policy and campaign work.

The projects were necessarily small-scale, but were set up to test different approaches to providing resettlement services, within different local contexts. Two of the projects operated city-wide (Sheffield and Bristol), whilst one took a community focus in one area of Birmingham. Chapter 2 describes the structures and operation of the three projects in some detail.

## Evaluating *Homeless to Home*

The independent evaluation was conducted over an 18 month period from May 2000 to November 2001. *Homeless to Home* had been up and running for one year when the evaluation began, but as the focus of the research was on the full three year pilot period case, records and other data covering the full pilot period were included. The overall aim of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the *Homeless to Home* service met its aims and objectives. A description of the full methodology can be found in Appendix 1, but in brief, a multi-method approach to the evaluation was taken, including the following key aspects:

- **Postal survey:** a postal survey of homeless families supported by *Homeless to Home* to measure levels of satisfaction (undertaken in Summer 2000).
- **Case work monitoring:** analysis of *Homeless to Home* project records<sup>3</sup> containing details of all the families that the projects worked with over the three year period.
- **Interviews with families:** in-depth interviews with 24 homeless families across the three areas, including repeat interviews with five families (at least nine months after the first interview). Fifteen children in five families were also interviewed, separately from their parents, to enable them to feel free to give their own views.
- **User focus groups:** three focus groups were conducted with user groups (two in Birmingham, one in Sheffield).
- **Staff and volunteer interviews:** semi-structured interviews were undertaken with project managers and workers, and volunteers, in all three areas. Staff members were interviewed

3. Families had signed a consent form giving access to their case notes for the purpose of this evaluation.

separately, and project managers were interviewed twice, at the start and the end of the evaluation. In addition, key Shelter staff were interviewed.

- **Key player interviews:** semi-structured interviews were undertaken with partner agency representatives and local authority representatives in the study areas.
- **Qualitative contextual interviews:** a small number of in-depth interviews with homeless families who had been rehoused in the same local authority areas, but had not received resettlement support, were also conducted to gain insight into the process of rehousing without support.

## The report structure

The report is presented in six chapters. The research findings are presented according to the key stages involved in the setting up and operation of the *Homeless to Home* service. Chapter 2 introduces the *Homeless to Home* service in some detail, outlining the main structures and key operational parameters of the projects. Chapter 3 provides a profile of service users, utilising the case work monitoring. It also explains and reviews the referral and assessment procedures utilised in the project, from the perspective of both service users and staff. Chapter 4 examines the detail of service delivery outlining the main components of the service and how these are delivered by projects. The views of services users, *Homeless to Home* staff and volunteers and other key players are compared and contrasted. Pen pictures of homeless families illustrate the complexity of delivering a resettlement service. Chapter 5 explores the process of closing cases and reviews the evidence for the degree of success in helping previously homeless families to sustain their tenancies, both from service user and staff perspectives as well as using project records, and tenancy sustainment figures from partner social landlords. The conclusions of the study are presented in Chapter 6. Case studies of homeless families' experience of the service are also included in the report.

## 2 The *Homeless to Home* service

This chapter introduces the Shelter *Homeless to Home* service. The core elements needed to set up a service of this nature are examined, as well as developments in the direction of the projects over time. The reflections of project managers, workers, volunteers and families are drawn on to highlight the key processes involved in establishing a resettlement service. The chapter begins by examining the project locations, before describing the process of finding local partners, finding an operational base, establishing service parameters, staffing the projects and the role of volunteers and users.

### The project localities

Shelter selected three urban areas, Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield, in which to develop the pilot services. As the service was new and innovative, areas were chosen where local contacts had expressed an interest in the development of such a service, and therefore where local partners could be identified. In addition, previous research undertaken by Bristol City Council and Shelter had identified a high level of tenancy failure among resettled families. In all three local authorities, significant numbers of homeless families were being rehoused each year. Table 2.1 shows that Birmingham had the highest rates of homelessness acceptances, with 5,625 households accepted as being homeless and in priority need in 1999/2000, representing 13.9 households per 1,000 households (the third highest rate for authorities outside London in that year). Bristol also had a high incidence of homelessness acceptances at 6.7 per 1,000 households. Sheffield had the lowest rate of homelessness acceptances but the authority accepted 500 households as homeless and in priority need in 1999/2000.

**TABLE 2.1** Local authority homelessness statistics, 1999/2000, *Homeless to Home* areas

	Number of households (000s)	Accepted as homeless and in priority need (Number)	Accepted as homeless and in priority need (Number per 1,000 households)
England	20,540	105,520	5.1
Birmingham	404	5,625	13.9
Bristol	172	1,153	6.7
Sheffield	228	500	2.2

Source: Department of Environment, Transport and Regions (2001), Table 5, pp.73–89.

Acute housing problems were evident in all three cities. In Birmingham and Sheffield, there was a high level of local authority stock for which waiting times were quite short. However, much of this stock was in quite poor condition and located in deprived areas with high levels of crime and nuisance. In contrast, Bristol had an acute housing shortage that meant homeless families generally had to spend longer periods of time in temporary accommodation.

### A city or local community focus?

Shelter was interested in testing whether a resettlement service for families might work more effectively if a city-wide remit or community focus was taken to its work. The Bristol

and Sheffield projects were set up to operate across the city, working with families rehoused in any area within the city boundaries. The Birmingham project, in contrast, was set up to operate in a specific area of Birmingham, Newtown/Handsworth. This area was chosen as it represented an identifiable community, situated in a particularly deprived part of the city. The perceived advantage of a city-wide service is the facilitation of a much more equitable service, allowing families in greatest need in all areas of the city to benefit from the service. A local project, on the other hand, can have the advantage of being able to work more closely with community members and groups.

## Establishing local partners

Shelter believed that it was important that the three projects should have a local partner in the respective cities to support the development of the service. Partners were chosen where good relationships already existed with Shelter and with organisations who were working in a similar area. In Bristol, the local voluntary organisation, SPACE, which supported homeless families in bed and breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation was chosen as the natural partner. In Sheffield, the partner chosen was the local authority, Sheffield City Council. In Birmingham, a local RSL was selected, Focus HA, to work with Shelter.

The partnership arrangements took different forms in the different areas. In Bristol, *Homeless to Home* had a reasonably close working relationship with SPACE from the outset as they ran a weekly surgery in the SPACE premises. As Chapter 3 shows, a large proportion of self referrals also originated from users of SPACE, again particularly in the early days of operation. Regular joint team meetings were important in order to ensure that communication was maximised as the two projects operated in quite different cultural frameworks.

In Sheffield, the local authority partner also worked in close partnership with the *Homeless to Home* service as, by agreement, they became the sole referral agency for the project via interim accommodation used by the authority. This partnership appeared to flourish for this reason and others including: the authority's interest in the aims of the service from the outset, commitment from individual local authority staff, and clear methods of reporting. In addition, the local authority was able to provide valuable advice on city-wide developments enabling the project to be well-linked into policy and practice. The project manager summarised:

*... it was set up well, there was commitment from them right from the start to the service, they wanted the service and they wanted to offer things to enable the service to develop well and function effectively... What we did from the outset to ensure we had strong links, I met with them regularly so they were kept informed about what we were doing, I was reporting to them and trying to keep them involved and interested. They didn't give us much in terms of practical things but I was able to get advice and was linked in to other things that were happening in the city, so the link with the LA has been very useful (project manager).*

In Birmingham, the partnership was more difficult to establish, mainly because there did not appear to be such an easily identifiable role for the partner agency to adopt. For the most part, joint working with this partner agency operated on a similar basis to joint working with other local agencies.

In addition to formal partners, the *Homeless to Home* projects had local advisory groups, that differed by area. In Sheffield, an advisory group was made up of local professionals from other key agencies including the local authority, health representatives and other local voluntary and community sector projects. In Bristol, the advisory group consisted of previously homeless families, in particular ex-users of SPACE. The Bristol *Homeless to Home* project was also associated with the local multi-agency homelessness forum, Heading Home.

Birmingham did not have a formal advisory group but it did have a well-established *Homeless to Home* user group which informally acted as an advice point for the project (see below).

## Establishing a base

Establishing a base was important to make the services as accessible as possible as well as to provide suitable space to facilitate user events and user involvement more generally. The two city-wide projects, Sheffield and Bristol, were based in the city centre to make them as accessible as possible to families living in different parts of the city. However, whilst this was achieved in both areas, finding an adequate base in Bristol proved particularly problematic; the project had to move twice, first sharing with their partner agency, and then on from a city-centre but small location to larger premises elsewhere in the city. A couple of users and key players remarked that the location of the last office was less than ideal, as some families felt unsafe visiting that area of town (one family said they simply would not visit the offices because of the location), but this proved to be the only affordable area for the project. Essentially, however, this was an outreach service and the base worked well for managing and delivering the service. The Sheffield project also moved once in the early stages of the project's development.

The Birmingham project, on the other hand, chose premises in the local area in which it served. Originally located within their partner agency's offices, they relocated early on to self-contained premises within walking distance for many users of the project. The project base was, however, situated a little way away from the main social housing areas in the area. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, the Birmingham base, located within the local community, appeared to be the most successful; services users mentioned dropping by the project for a chat or cup of coffee at any time, as well as attending the arranged coffee morning and user groups.

## The parameters of the service

All projects aimed to deliver a comprehensive resettlement service which specialised in practical support whilst also delivering emotional and social support. The projects aimed to work with both the family unit (and individual members) and groups of families. Overall, the projects offered a similar range of services and support, encompassing the following main areas:

- **Assistance with housing:** including housing advice, helping families secure suitable housing, accompanied viewing of properties, advice on repairs, advice on tenants' rights, liaising with housing services, supporting families who refuse unsuitable offers, helping families prepare for the move, help obtaining furniture and equipment, making applications to the Social Fund and assistance with the actual move.
- **Practical help in making a home:** this might include the provision of cleaning materials, practical help with decorating and gardening, the loan of tools and equipment, the provision of decorating materials and vouchers and fund-raising for essential items such as beds, cookers and carpets.
- **Assistance with managing household and income:** for example, providing assistance in getting utilities and payment schemes up and running, assistance with benefits, budgeting and bills including negotiating repayment of arrears/debts.
- **Assistance with accessing community services:** for example, registering with a doctor, school enrolment, childcare, help obtaining specialist services such as social work, child counseling services, education welfare services, debt advice, and advice on training and employment.
- **General support and assistance:** this included emotional support and advice, for example around domestic violence issues, liaising with a variety of other agencies and organisations such as parenting support groups, helping families make local contacts with leisure services

and other users, providing group activities and events for families and their children.

Whilst all three projects offered the full range of services, they could be characterised as variations on a theme and there were consequently slight differences in emphasis. The clearest example of this was how the Bristol and Sheffield projects were able to begin work with families living in temporary accommodation, providing more targeted assistance with housing which was not possible in Birmingham where referrals were made later in the rehousing process.

## Staffing structures and roles

The *Homeless to Home* service formed part of Shelter's Housing Services Division. Originally set up within Shelter's Regional Structure from 1999, the service became part of the National Services and Initiatives Team, and was line managed by the National Services and Initiatives Manager.

Each *Homeless to Home* project started with the same basic staffing structure with a manager and two support workers (one full-time; one part-time) to deliver services. Subsequently, however, additional staffing requirements were identified. Due to a project under-spend, some new or extended posts were able to be funded through the original funding, whilst others required the identification of new funding opportunities.

One manager<sup>4</sup> and 1.5 support workers were found to limit capacity in terms of the project being able to offer sufficient support to families, particularly practical support. In consequence, in Sheffield, the part-time support worker's hours were extended from 17.5 to 28 hours, and the Birmingham part-time worker's hours increased to full-time in mid 2000. Sheffield was also invited to bid for additional resources to participate in the City Council's successful pilot bid for a Choice Based Lettings scheme which employed an additional full-time support worker to work with families in the south of the City.

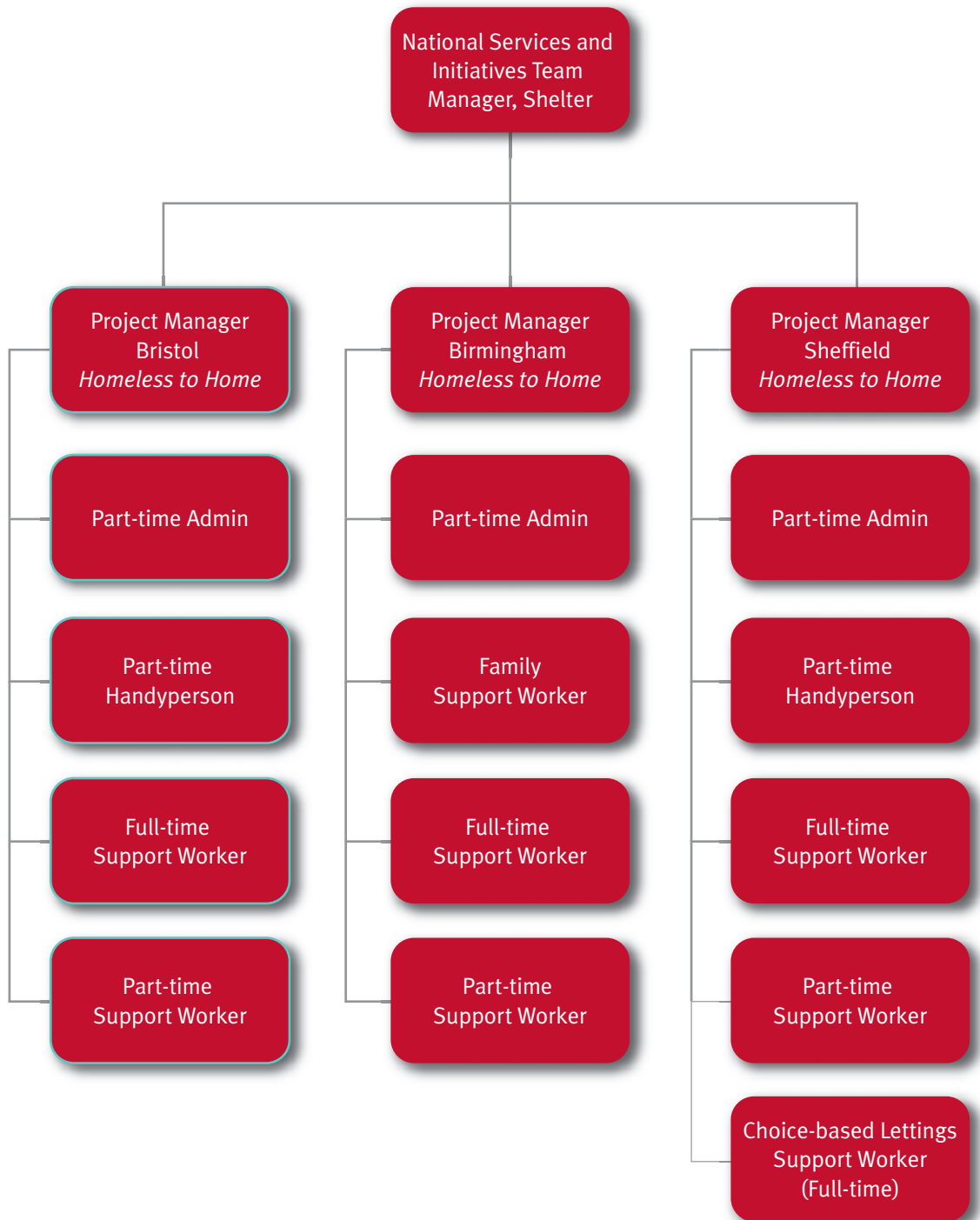
It became clear early on in the project's development that administration was an important and significant part of the projects' work which demanded a good deal of existing staff time, thus reducing the time available for more direct work with families. All three projects subsequently employed a part-time administrator. In addition, two projects, Bristol and Sheffield, employed a half-time handy person to provide specialist practical assistance to families moving into their new homes.

All projects also identified a need for staff who would work specifically with children. In Birmingham, a family support worker was employed in 2000 for a period of 12 months with funds from Birmingham City Council (through City Challenge) to work and develop activities with children and families. This allowed children's needs to be better met than previously; consequently all three projects are seeking to employ children's workers in the future.

The staffing structure for the projects is shown in Figure 2.1 opposite.

4. Initially project managers carried case loads but it became clear that it was not possible or appropriate for managers to undertake this role as well as managing the project. Approximately 12 months after the pilots started it was decided that managers would no longer carry case loads.

FIGURE 2.1 Shelter *Homeless to Home* service: staffing structure







### The role of support workers

The day to day work of the *Homeless to Home* workers was diverse and wide ranging:

*It is about meeting the needs of homeless families – this can include almost anything: sorting out benefits, applying for community care grants and fund raising; viewing a property, advising people on their housing rights; helping them move into their new home and finding furniture and white goods; sometimes cleaning stuff and things for the kids because some people have absolutely nothing; we help them to make it a home by decorating and gardening; helping families register with a doctor or helping to find child care, putting people in touch with community groups or other agencies – everything really (support worker).*

Families' needs varied and project workers had to be flexible to assemble a package of support that would meet those needs. Support workers were also aware that the main objective was to help people to develop the confidence, skills and ability to sustain a tenancy successfully. There was an important role in explaining the nature of the service to families, being realistic about the limitations of the service but at the same time working with other agencies wherever possible to minimise any barriers to effective working. Support workers had to establish supportive, but professional, relationships with families, as well as maintaining good project records to facilitate team working.

### The role of the handy person

Although the job title 'handy person' suggests a purely practical and fairly narrow role, the handy person job was quite diverse. The job demanded organisational and administrative skills and as a new post it also involved development work. The two handy persons liaised over the development of their role and each also worked closely with other project staff and volunteers. It was also necessary for the handy persons to be aware of clients' problems which might affect their working relationship. One handy person explained:

*Basically I am a Jack of all trades and my job is helping people with basic jobs when they move into their new homes – it might be a bit of decorating, gardening, joinery or simple plumbing. Work is organised between all of us (handy person).*

It was important for the handy persons to have well defined roles and that service users understood the limits to the service. Jobs also needed to be well scheduled so that tasks could be completed, to ensure that the process was satisfying for families as well as for the worker and any volunteers involved.

*Generally the first time I meet families is when I go to assess a job, but they know who I am and they have been told all about me, and they have a leaflet explaining who I am and what I do, and they know what I am going to do because this has all been explained beforehand. Sometimes people ask the support workers if I'll decorate another couple of rooms when I have already done a lot – but there are a lot of other families who need help and we try to share it out. It is difficult when people need a lot of help and there is no-one but us, but I'll do two rooms so there is somewhere nice and it gives people an idea of what it could be like – it sort of starts them off (handy person).*

Both handy persons felt that they had an important role in helping people decorate and settle into their new home and in helping people develop the confidence and skills to do some work themselves. One project manager summed the service up:

*It has been great [the handy person service], it took some time to sort things out but we got there – it was challenging working out how to organise his work, how to decide who he would help, but the feedback from families is fantastic, they really*

*appreciate the work – other things we do are important too but for the families it is something really tangible, transforming a horrible room into something nice and cosy... (project manager).*

### **The role of volunteers and service users in Homeless to Home**

A key aim of *Homeless to Home* was to involve volunteers in the delivery of services. It was also envisaged that users of the service would be involved in service delivery, both through traditional routes of user involvement, and also in the role of volunteers once they were settled into their own homes.

### **Recruiting volunteers**

The two city-wide *Homeless to Home* projects were more successful in recruiting volunteers than the community based project. It was likely that volunteers were more attracted to the idea of working for a city-wide organisation, whereas volunteers in Birmingham were more likely to be drawn from the locality, which in effect represented a much smaller potential pool of volunteers. By the end of the pilot period, the Sheffield and Bristol projects were working with between five and ten volunteers, whilst the Birmingham project only had one, albeit important, volunteer, as explained below. Volunteers were recruited through a variety of means including volunteer shops, adverts in local shops and services, newspaper adverts and other media work and student volunteer work fairs. The volunteers came from a range of backgrounds, some had previous experience of voluntary work, some had decorating and DIY skills, some of the younger volunteers had few practical skills but had an interest in homelessness.

All but two of the volunteers were essentially ‘practical’ workers, helping the handy person and other project workers preparing welcome packs, gardening, decorating, assembling furniture, helping people to move house and organising and joining social activities and trips. One of the volunteers, in addition to her more practical role, was also in the role of a befriender helping families to find local community groups and activities, as they had previous experience of working in resettlement with single homeless people. Finally, the Birmingham volunteer began as an administrative assistant for the project, working a few days a week in the office, but after a year’s experience was trained by the team to offer support to new families, working as a ‘volunteer support worker’ on a part-time, unpaid basis, alongside the other support workers. Here the worker had progressed to carrying a small case load, and participated in assessment procedures and in team working like the other two support workers.

The volunteers made a valuable contribution to the work of *Homeless to Home*. In particular, they were often able to undertake some practical tasks that support workers did not have the time to do.

*We can do things they don’t have time to do... We don’t feel separate from them, it’s nice, you feel part of the team even though we are not here all the time, they always make you feel welcome too (volunteer group).*

Most volunteers understood their role and the aims and objectives of the service, and gained satisfaction from the work. Many would have liked to do more in their role and work more regularly with families. Volunteers appreciated getting feedback on the progress of families, though the projects did not always seem able to provide this.

The recruitment, training and retention of volunteers were all key issues for the projects. These processes, done well, took quite a lot of time to organise and led projects to limit the number of volunteers they could support. This situation led project managers to identify the need for a part-time volunteer coordinator in each project.

### User and ex-user participation in *Homeless to Home*

All the projects found the process of attracting ex-users to volunteer a difficult one. It was clear, in all areas, that the majority of ex-users were, understandably, looking to settle and move on from their experience of homelessness. Just one or two users who were interviewed expressed a possible interest in becoming involved in the future:

*I think I would like them to ask other people to get involved to do things, doing things like gardening, I'd rather do it volunteering, I know that everybody needs money, but I like to do things to help people, to achieve things, to help old people, to help young people... (service user)*

It was also clear that to involve and support ex-users effectively would be quite time intensive, and had been something that the projects had found difficult to do within available resources. It was acknowledged by Shelter staff and the project teams that the aim of involving significant numbers of ex-users as volunteers had been over-ambitious. However, the Bristol project was enjoying some success in involving service users in other ways than providing direct support to families. These included fundraising, gathering information on local services, producing a newsletter, and conducting research about formerly homeless families' views and children's issues as part of a 'customer satisfaction group' and 'children's research group' for the local Heading Home Forum.

However, users were involved more generally with the projects in an informal capacity, most specifically in terms of organising social events for other users (see Chapter 4). This had proved much easier to develop in Birmingham with its community focus; in other areas, social events were also organised and users participated in these but rarely took an active role in arranging them. The Just for Laughs user group in Birmingham was particularly well established and it was felt that this group could potentially form a base from which more users might be recruited as volunteers:

*I see them as volunteers because they come in and do any odd job or any trip or anything that we need organising, but I am hoping that a couple of them will formally become volunteers and perhaps run the social morning, coffee morning in a more structured way, I think perhaps we should look at that and expand that, rather than try and start from scratch. (project manager)*

## Summary

Setting up a resettlement service involved a number of important stages that had a significant impact on the future development and success of the projects. A number of key decisions needed to be taken, including whether to focus a project city-wide or in a specific local community area, what kind of agency to work with as a partner, and where to situate the base for the project. Clear service parameters and staffing structures and roles also needed to be established from the outset. The potential role of volunteers and users also needed to be harnessed and structures put into place to support their development.

## Case study

This family was evicted from their private rented house because of arrears caused by a delay in processing housing benefit. The mother and her two children had been homeless on a number of occasions in the past; in part this was a result of domestic violence and abuse but these episodes were also partly due to the insecure nature of the private rented sector. The family spent almost two months in local authority interim accommodation before being offered a local authority tenancy in an area they were unfamiliar with. The property was in a very poor state of repair and the mother was very distressed about the condition of the accommodation. Workers at the interim accommodation told the family about *Homeless to Home* and explained that the service could help. Although initially reluctant the family agreed to meet a support worker from *Homeless to Home*.

*When I met her I was quite defensive – I told her I didn't want support – but she was so nice...she didn't take over... she was very respectful and not there to patronise me. She suggested things, she didn't tell me what to do... I'm not sure what she said but I know I felt a lot better.*

The support worker advised the family about their benefit entitlements and helped them apply for a community care grant and for housing benefit, the worker also accompanied the mother to the housing office to finalise the tenancy agreement and arranged for utilities to be reconnected in time for the move. The project also provided cleaning materials, a fridge-freezer from Powergen and volunteers to help with the move and a handyman to do some basic DIY tasks. The family experienced some problems when they first moved in but the support worker was able to provide reassurance about the neighbourhood and at the time of the first interview, about three months after they had moved in, the family were settling in to their new home. There were problems with drugs and prostitution on the estate and surrounding area but because of the past history of homelessness the family were very keen to settle down and stay in one place until the children were old enough to leave home. At this time *Homeless to Home* were helping the family by liaising with the council over repairs to the property. The family remained in contact with *Homeless to Home* over the coming months, taking part in social activities arranged by the project and occasionally dropping into the project for advice. The support worker continued to contact the family and was able to provide support when the family needed practical advice or emotional support. The family experienced problems with their neighbours and this distressed the family so much that at first, they wanted to move away from the area. The support worker helped the family through this episode by providing emotional support and the matter finally resolved itself. The support worker was also able to provide advice about in work benefits when the mother secured paid employment. At the time of the second interview, approximately 10 months after rehousing, the family were quite settled and felt that they were managing well but said they would approach *Homeless to Home* for help if needed in the future.

*I haven't really needed Homeless to Home... I feel like I am coming to the end with Homeless to Home... I really appreciated the moral support but probably the best thing was that [the support worker] always knew what to do, she knows the system, I will always have problems with forms and I will get in touch with them if I get into a muddle in the future.*

## 3 Referrals to *Homeless to Home*: a profile of users and assessment of procedures

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on referrals to the *Homeless to Home* service. The chapter begins by presenting a profile of the *Homeless to Home* users accepted onto the service, detailing their characteristics, reasons for their homelessness, and housing situation, prior to, and after, rehousing. The chapter then looks at referral and assessment procedures for the scheme, drawing on monitoring data as well as interviews with project workers, local authority and partner agency representatives and families.

### A profile of *Homeless to Home* users

Who were the users of the *Homeless to Home* service? This section provides a profile of the characteristics and situation of the homeless families that used the service from its inception to October 2001, a period of 30 months. The evaluation reviewed information on 271 families, which represented almost all the families using *Homeless to Home* over that period (see Appendix 1).

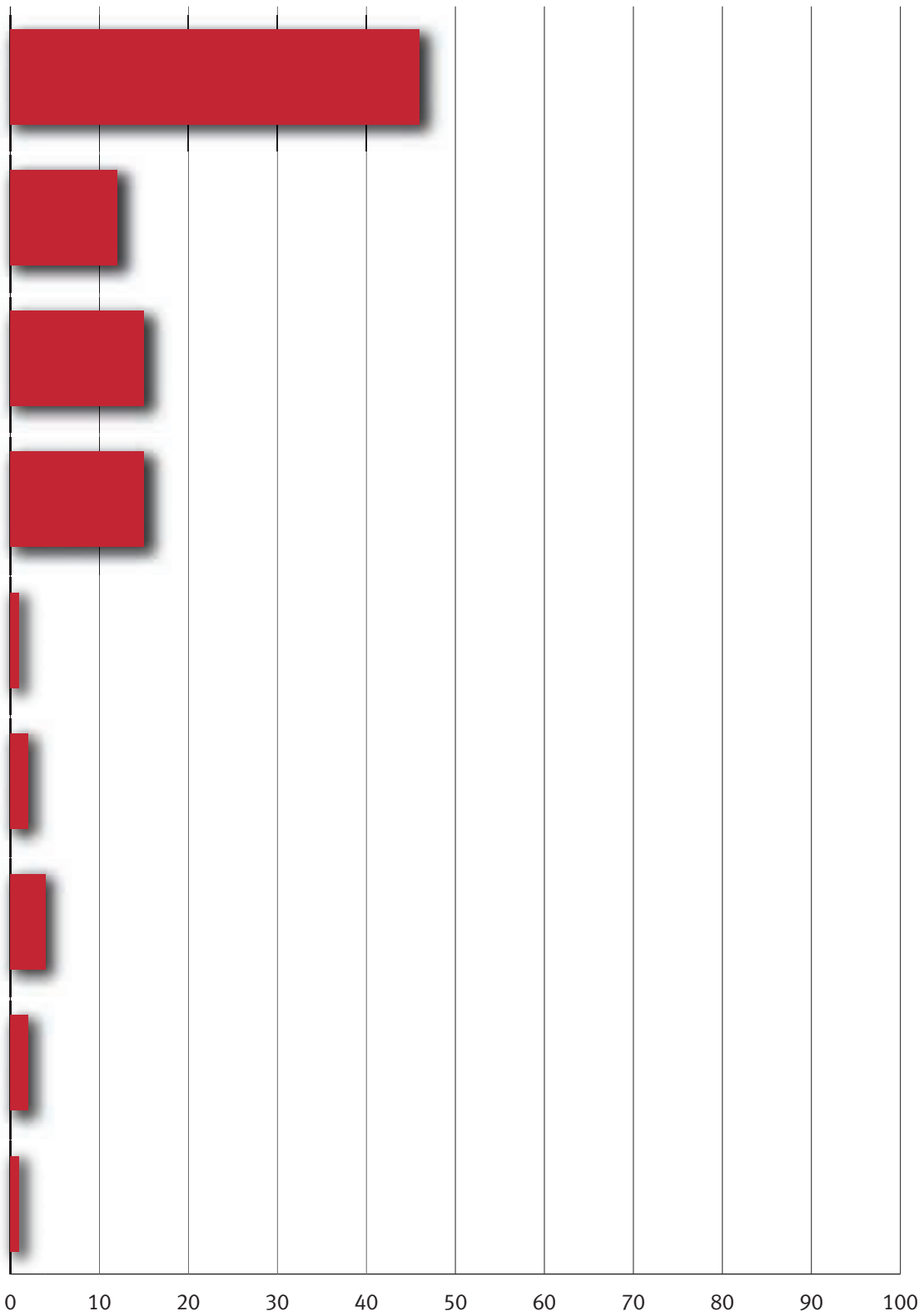
#### Type of household

The *Homeless to Home* service was working with some types of households more than others. Approaching half of the families utilising the service were lone parents (usually a mother) with one or more children under the age of 10 (46 per cent) (Figure 3.1). In total, nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of households were a lone parent family, whilst less than one in six (18 per cent) of households were couples with children. A small percentage of households were single women (4 per cent) and couples (2 per cent) who were expecting a child. Overall, one in six households (16 per cent) contained a pregnant woman. Finally a few families (3 per cent) constituted other types of households, such as extended families.

*Homeless to Home* projects were working with families who predominately had young children in the household. Over three quarters (78 per cent) of families included children under the age of 10, with three fifths (61 per cent) of households only having children under the age of 10. Just one in seven (14 per cent) of families included only children aged 10 or over.

The average (mean) size of families using the service was 3.4 persons including both adult(s) and children or young people. Most families contained between two and five people, with about half (52 per cent) containing two to three people and just over a third, four to five people (35 per cent); however, nearly one in ten families (9 per cent) had six or more family members.

**FIGURE 3.1** Household composition of families at referral (percentage)



LP = Lone Parent; C = Couple

Source: Homeless to Home project records, base: 259 families (Information on household composition was available for 259 out of the 271 families whose records were examined).

### Ethnicity, language and nationality

The ethnic origin of households using the *Homeless to Home* service was diverse (see Table 3.1). Approaching half (46 per cent) of homeless families were from a black and minority ethnic background.

One fifth of families (21 per cent) described themselves as being of African or Caribbean origin. One in twelve (8 per cent) families were Black-British, and the same proportion (8 per cent) were of Asian origin. Table 3.1 shows that there were significant differences in the ethnicity of families by city: two thirds (66 per cent) of the users of the Birmingham project were from black and minority ethnic groups, compared to two fifths (41 per cent) in Bristol and a fifth (20 per cent) of families in Sheffield.

The proportion of families from an ethnic minority background increased over the life of *Homeless to Home* (in the first 18 months it was 40 per cent of families rather than 46 per cent over the full life of the project). A particular increase was noted in the Bristol and Birmingham projects with both projects working with higher proportions of people from an African or Caribbean origin.

**TABLE 3.1** Ethnicity of *Homeless to Home* users, by project

	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	Total No. Households (%)
White/European	30 (34%)	47 (51%)	67 (80%)	144 (54%)
African/Caribbean	28 (32%)	20 (22%)	7 (8%)	55 (21%)
Black-British	12 (14%)	9 (10%)	1 (1%)	22 (8%)
Asian	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	2 (2%)	22 (8%)
Irish	3 (3%)	2 (2%)	-	5 (2%)
Other	6 (7%)	5 (5%)	7 (8%)	18 (7%)
Total	89 (100%)	93 (100%)	84 (100%)	266 100%

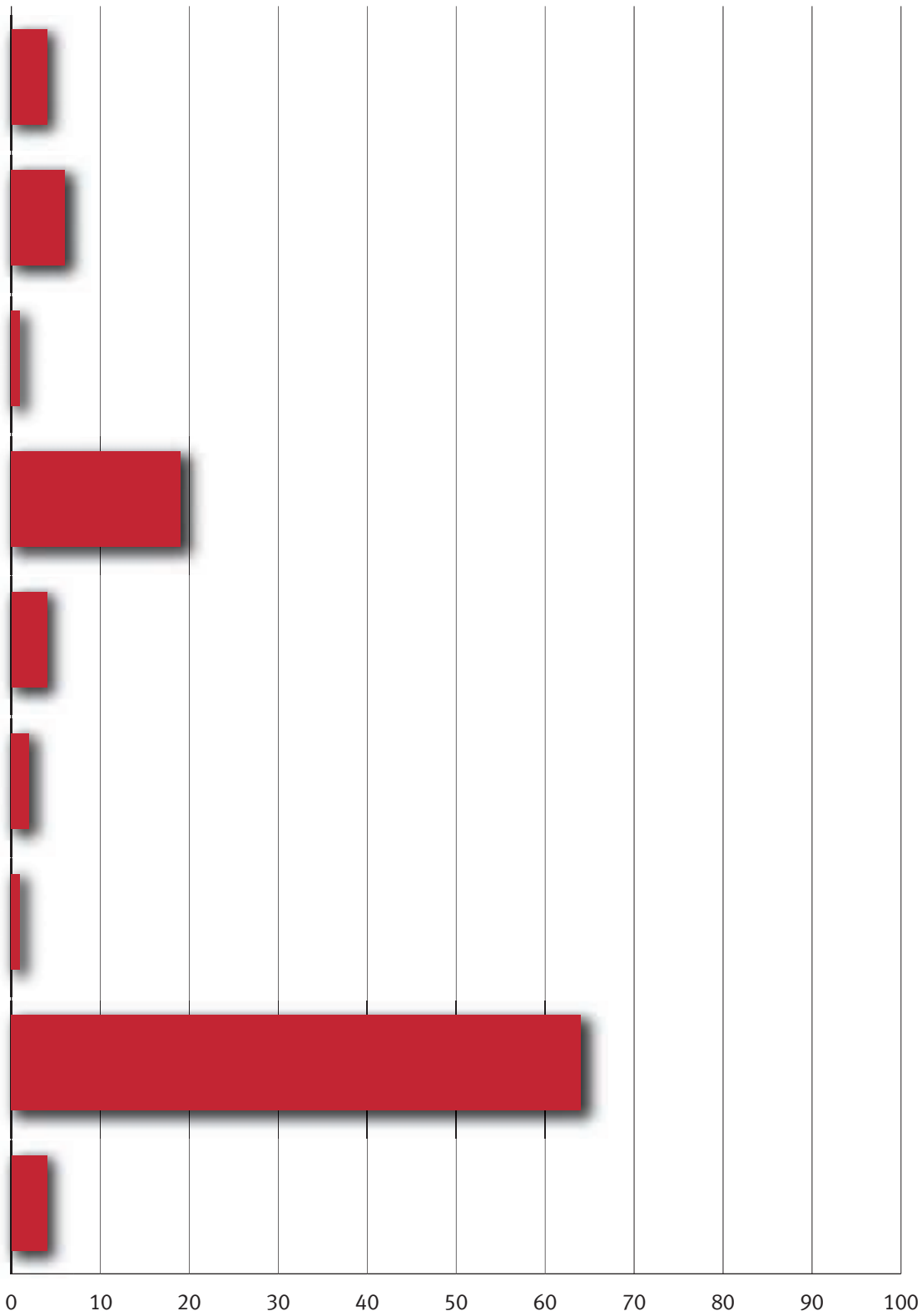
Percentages are rounded. Source: *Homeless to Home* case work records, base: 266 families (Information on ethnicity was available for 266 out of the 271 families whose records were examined).

Whilst the majority of families from a minority ethnic origin had British nationality, one in eight (12 per cent) families did not have British citizenship. In Birmingham, approximately one in seven families did not have British citizenship, one in eight families in Bristol and one in eleven families in Sheffield. In addition, one in six (17 per cent) of families did not have English as their first language. First languages of families included Arabic, Somali, Urdu, Farsi, French and Russian. Most refugees (except two families) did not have English as their first language, as well as a small proportion of British citizens from minority ethnic communities. Again there were some differences by project with 21 per cent of families in Bristol, 18 per cent in Birmingham and 12 per cent in Sheffield, having a first language other than English.

There were a number of implications for projects of working with significant, albeit minority, proportions of refugees and/or families for whom English was not their first language. Not only did projects often have to find additional resources to ensure that the views of these users were adequately understood, families also often had complex needs where intensive work was needed to help families settle into what was often a new culture.



**FIGURE 3.2** Economic status of female adult in household at referral (percentage)



Source: Homeless to Home case work records, base: 222 families (Information on economic status of female adult was available for 222 out of the 271 families whose records were examined).

### Economic status

Unsurprisingly given the close link between homelessness and poverty, the vast majority of households were reliant on state benefits, with most families receiving income support, child benefit and housing benefit. Figure 3.2 shows the economic status of the female adult in the household. Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of women were presently at home looking after young children (this code was used when there was at least one child aged five or under in the household). A further fifth of women were unemployed (19 per cent), defined here as available for work with no pre-school age children. Only one in fourteen mothers were working (three per cent, full-time; four per cent, part-time).

Where a male adult was present in the household, in a quarter of cases (26 per cent), they were in paid work, mainly full-time employment. Half (48 per cent) were unemployed, whilst one in eleven (9 per cent) were presently unable to work due to sickness or illness.

### Health and disability

Research on homelessness has consistently found poorer health status among homeless people than among the general population (see, for example, Pleace and Quilgars, 1996). Table 3.2 shows that health problems were affecting a high proportion of families, with seven out of ten families (71 per cent) having at least one member who was suffering from health problems.

A number of specific health problems were particularly noted in the records, most of which have been documented as being associated with homelessness and poverty more generally. The most common reported problem among adults was depression, followed by asthma. A present or past substance misuse problem was also noted in a number of cases. Other health problems mentioned more rarely included epilepsy, arthritis, heart problems, TB, diabetes, and liver and thyroid problems. In the case of children, the most common health problem noted was asthma which typically affected more than one child in the family. In addition, children were reported as experiencing chest or other breathing problems (sometimes associated with allergies) as well as skin complaints (particularly eczema) in many families. In several cases, behavioural or mental health problems (including hyperactivity, depression, anxiety and disturbed behaviour) were also noted.

**TABLE 3.2** Health and disability amongst homeless families

	Health problems in the family		Disability	
Yes	146	(71%)	25	(19%)
No	60	(29%)	104	(81%)
Total	206	(100%)	129	(100%)

Percentages are rounded. Source: *Homeless to Home* case work records (Information was available on health for 206 families and on disability for 129 families, out of the 271 families whose records were examined).

Table 3.2 also suggests that a fifth (19 per cent) of homeless families included at least one person who had a disability. Whilst this statistic may be unreliable (due to missing data), at least 25 families were known to have a disabled member, including people with a learning disability, hearing loss, back problems, epilepsy, loss of mobility through arthritis, polio and speech problems.

The majority of homeless families appeared to be registered with a doctor at the time of referral although for some their doctor would have been in a different city or part of town. In a few cases, particularly refugees, families were not registered with a GP practice.

### Reasons for homelessness

The main reason for homelessness was recorded in the *Homeless to Home* records. In most cases, the data show the main reason why families were accepted for rehousing by local authorities and/or the homeless families' interpretation of their situation. However, it should be noted that reasons for homelessness are complex and structural factors such as poverty and poor housing supply may underlie the main reasons explored here.

There were seven main reasons why families had become homeless (Table 3.3). The largest single reason for homelessness amongst *Homeless to Home* users was domestic violence (38 per cent). This was usually violence by a male partner against the female partner, with direct violence also sometimes committed against children in the household. This figure was to be anticipated given that male violence towards women is a major cause of homelessness (Jones, 1999).

In addition, a further one in seven families (15 per cent) were homeless as a result of relationship breakdown more generally. This included relationship breakdown between the homeless family and parents or other relatives, as well as between partners. A significant proportion of families (eight per cent) had become homeless following a breakdown in relations with neighbours at their previous address. In most cases, families had experienced local conflict or harassment in their neighbourhood. Some families specified the nature of the conflict, including drug-related harassment and racial harassment.

**TABLE 3.3** Main reason for homelessness, by project

	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	Total No. Households (%)
Domestic violence	26 (30%)	32 (35%)	38 (51%)	96 (38%)
Relationship breakdown	26 (30%)	5 (5%)	17 (8%)	37 (15%)
Asylum seeking	14 (16%)	8 (9%)	5 (7%)	27 (11%)
Loss of PRS accom	2 (2%)	16 (17%)	5 (7%)	23 (9%)
Neighbour harassment	2 (2%)	9 (10%)	10 (13%)	21 (8%)
Overcrowding/ unfit	8 (9%)	13 (14%)	-	21 (8%)
Other	4 (5%)	6 (7%)	7 (9%)	17 (7%)
Debt – other	4 (5%)	3 (3%)	4 (5%)	11 (4%)
Total	86 (100%)	92 (100%)	75 (100%)	253 (100%)

Percentages are rounded. Source: *Homeless to Home* case work records, base: 253 families (Information on reasons for homelessness was available for 253 out of the 271 families whose records were examined).

One in eleven families (nine per cent) had become homeless as a result of losing their private rented sector accommodation. This included families being asked to leave at the end of the tenancy because the landlord wanted the property back for re-sale or a different type of re-let and families who were evicted due to rent arrears. In addition, a further one in 25 families (four per cent) were homeless due to some other form of debt, including mortgage

repossession. Overcrowding in previous accommodation, and/ or unfit housing conditions were a cause of homelessness for one in 12 families (8 per cent). One in nine (11 per cent) of families were homeless directly as a result of fleeing their home country for the UK to claim asylum. Stock condition did appear to have been an important cause of homelessness in Sheffield, although fieldwork in the city suggested that some social rented stock was in poor repair.

### Previous homelessness

*Homeless to Home* was set up in part to attempt to address the ‘revolving door’ of homelessness, that is, where rehoused homeless families become homeless again as they experience difficulties in establishing and sustaining tenancies. Case work records did not contain complete housing histories for each family. However, in 103 cases (38 per cent) information existed as to whether the household had been homeless before. Over half (56 per cent) of these families had already experienced at least one spell of homelessness. Whilst the data were incomplete, a higher proportion (seven in ten) of Sheffield and Birmingham families appeared to have experienced previous homelessness compared to Bristol families (two in five). Tenancy sustainment is examined in Chapter 5 for families who had and had not experienced homelessness before.

### The housing situation of *Homeless to Home* users

The majority (89 per cent) of families using *Homeless to Home* had been accepted as homeless and in priority need by the local authority. The Birmingham project were working with a slightly higher proportion of families (17 per cent) not accepted as statutorily homeless under the legislation, compared to Bristol (8 per cent) and Sheffield (7 per cent).

**TABLE 3.4** Accommodation on referral, by project

	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	Total No. Households (%)
LA house/flat	44 (54%)	9 (12%)	6 (8%)	59 (25%)
RSL house/flat	9(11%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	11 (5%)
Hostel/LA temporary flats	9(11%)	31(40%)	67(88%)	107 (46%)
B&B	--	12 (16%)	1 (1%)	13(6%)
Private sector leased	2 (2%)	2 (3%)	--	4 (2%)
Homeless at home	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	--	2 (1%)
Friends/relatives	12 (15%)	8 (10%)	--	20 (9%)
Other	5 (6%)	13 (17%)	1 (1%)	19 (8%)
Total	82 (100%)	77 (100%)	76 (100%)	235 (100%)

Percentages are rounded. Source: *Homeless to Home* case work records, base: 235 families (Information on accommodation at referral was available for 235 out of the 271 families whose records were examined).

Homeless families tended to be in one of two forms of accommodation when they were referred to *Homeless to Home*. Table 3.4 shows that approaching half (46 per cent) of families were living in local authority specially provided temporary accommodation (usually a hostel or temporary flats). A further three in ten households were already living in a permanent tenancy (including both local authority and RSL accommodation), with the remainder of families living in a range of different forms of temporary accommodation. As would be expected, given the referral arrangements, there were significant differences by *Homeless to Home* area with

respect to the type of accommodation people were occupying on referral. In particular, households were much more likely to be in some form of permanent housing in Birmingham as they were referred after rehousing, compared to Bristol and Sheffield, where high proportions were in temporary accommodation.

The vast majority (79 per cent) of homeless families were rehoused into council housing, with one in five (21 per cent) being rehoused into accommodation provided by RSLs. A higher proportion of families were rehoused into RSL properties in Birmingham (35 per cent, a figure that increased over time) compared to Sheffield (14 per cent) and Bristol (eight per cent). Seven in ten families (69 per cent) were rehoused into a house, with three in ten (31 per cent) accepting the offer of a flat or maisonette. Half (51 per cent) of the properties provided for the homeless families had three bedrooms, over a third (37 per cent) had two bedrooms, and one in ten (10 per cent) had four bedrooms.

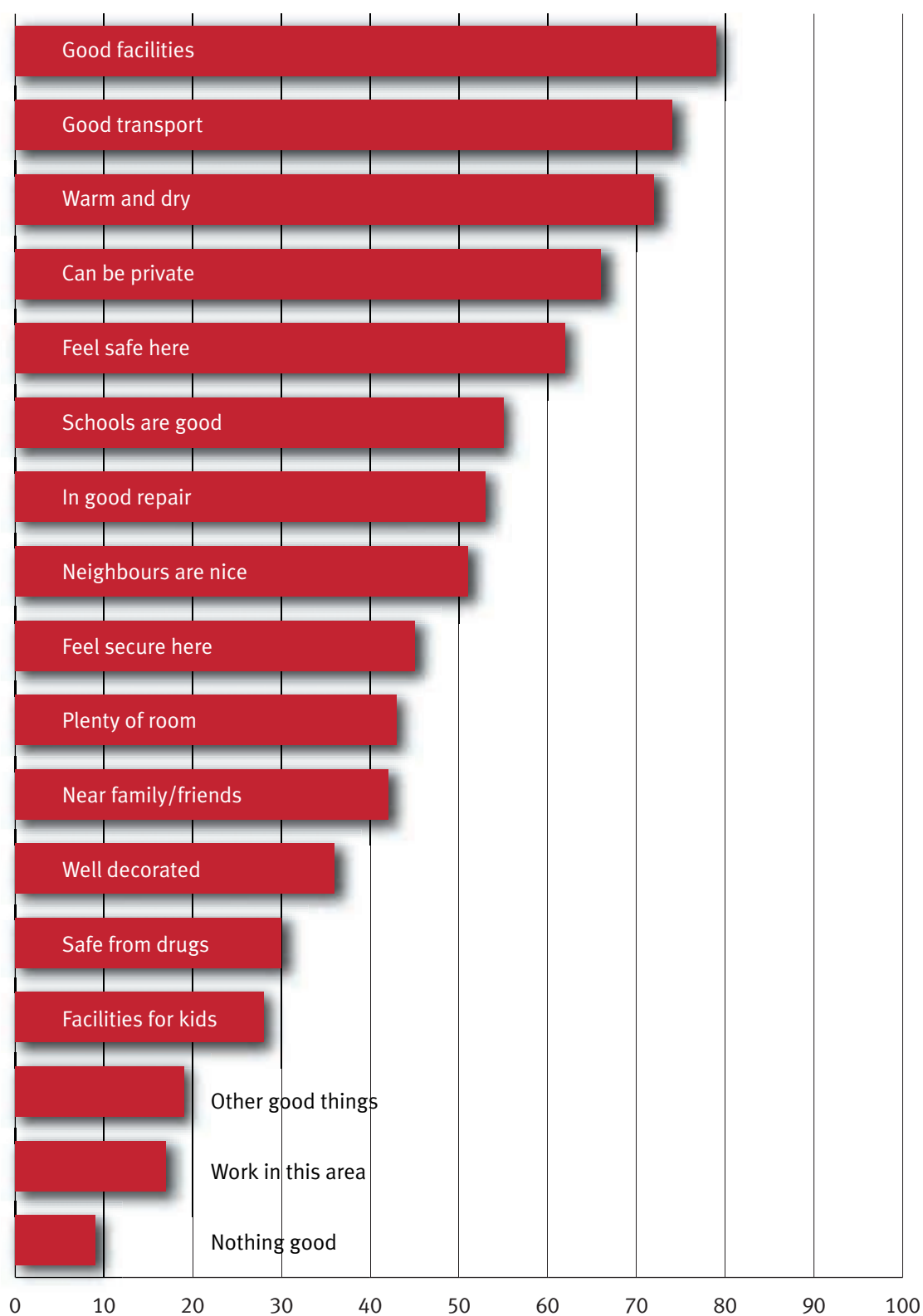
Nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of homeless families were rehoused in the local authority's first offer of accommodation. This in part reflected the fact that, in many cases, families were not given a choice of accommodation. Three in ten (29 per cent) families accepted the second offer of accommodation. A relatively small proportion (six per cent) of households received three or more offers before rehousing. There was little variation between the three projects in this respect, the use of council housing predominating in all three areas.

### **Views of families on their housing and area**

The postal survey (see Appendix 1) provided families views on the housing they had been allocated, as well as their comments on the areas in which they were living.

Figure 3.3 shows the results of a question that presented families with a list of 'good things' about where they lived. While 72 per cent of families reported that their home was warm and dry, only just over half (53 per cent) reported that their home was in good repair and 43 per cent reported that they had plenty of room. Two-thirds of families reported that they could be private in their home and 62 per cent reported that they felt safe in their home. However, less than half the families felt they were secure in their homes (45 per cent). The areas in which families lived were less highly rated than much of the housing that they occupied. Less than a third of families (30 per cent) reported that the areas in which they were living were safe from drugs or that the areas in which they were living were safe for their children to play outside unsupervised (30 per cent). Public transport and the local facilities (such as shops, leisure facilities etc.) tended to be quite highly rated, although only just over half the families reported that the schools in their area were good. Few families reported that there was work in the area within which they were living.

**FIGURE 3.3** ‘Good things about where we live’ (percentage)



Source: Postal Survey of *Homeless to Home* families, base: 53 families

The families were also presented with a list of ‘bad things’ about where they lived. Around a quarter of families reported problems with their housing, such as it being in poor repair (25 per cent), poor decorative order (25 per cent) or too small (23 per cent). A small number of families also reported problems with cold (17 per cent) or damp (15 per cent) in the property. The most commonly reported problem was that children had to share bedrooms (30 per cent). Outside the home, a third of families were concerned that there were drug problems in their area (32 per cent) and that it was not safe to allow children to play on their own (30 per cent). A quarter of families stated that there were no local facilities for the children and that it was hard to find work. Families in Birmingham were more likely to report poor housing conditions and crime related problems than those in other areas.

Households headed by someone who was black or from a minority ethnic group were twice as likely to report harassment from their neighbours as those headed by a White European person (20 per cent compared to 9 per cent). Households that were not headed by a White European person were also more likely to report that their neighbours are not very nice’ (25 per cent compared to 15 per cent).

Just over a quarter of families were ‘very happy’ (27 per cent) with where they were living and another 37 per cent were ‘quite happy’, meaning 64 per cent of families were quite or very satisfied. Another 13 per cent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In contrast, almost a quarter of families reported that they were ‘unhappy’ or ‘very unhappy’ (15 per cent and eight per cent).

## ***Homeless to Home* referral arrangements**

The referral arrangements, and referral sources, differed across *Homeless to Home* projects, reflecting largely the different partnership arrangements and the geographical remit of the projects. Table 3.5 outlines the main sources of referrals for the service. Figure 3.4 also shows the referral and assessment procedures diagrammatically.

The Sheffield project was set up to accept referrals exclusively from the local authority, usually through tenancy support workers or health visitors working from three main sources of temporary accommodation (one directly provided by the housing department; two by RSLs). Towards the end of the pilot period, the referral route was also extended to include families in bed and breakfast accommodation. Table 3.5 shows that over the course of the project, 95 per cent of referrals accepted onto the project were referred by local authority housing workers, with a small number of families being referred by health visitors (three per cent).

Whilst Sheffield did not accept self-referrals, the Bristol and Birmingham projects both encouraged self-referrals alongside (or via) agency routes, accepting around half self, and half agency, referrals over the course of the project. As Table 3.5 shows, the Bristol *Homeless to Home* service received approaching a third of its referrals from homeless families via its partner agency, SPACE (see Chapter 2). In Bristol arrangements were in place to accept referrals from the local authority and the Shelter housing aid centre, as well as other agencies. Over four in ten referrals were received via the local authority, as well as a tenth of referrals coming via the Shelter housing aid centre. The number of local authority referrals increased in the latter stages of the pilot period as a more formal arrangement was put in place.

In Birmingham, the project was set up to work with families who had accepted a tenancy in a specific area (although very latterly the project began to work informally with families before rehousing). The Birmingham project accepted self-referrals via key agencies or via a more formal arrangement with the City Council. The project had a diverse source of referrals,

receiving some from local agencies including Homestart, the Newtown Family Initiative, refuges and hostels, as well as statutory agencies. The very high proportion of self-referrals in large part reflected the fact that the project was working in a small area, with family and friends often referring new users to the project.

**TABLE 3.5** Referral source, by project

	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	Total No. Households (%)
Self	41 (53%)	38 (44%)	-	79 (33%)
– General	41 (53%)	12 (14%)	-	53 (22%)
– SPACE	-	26 (30%)	-	26 (11%)
Local authority	11 (14%)	37 (43%)	72 (95%)	120 (50%)
– HPU/ HO*	4 (5%)	11 (13%)	1 (1%)	16 (7%)
– Interim accom**	-	13 (15%)	53 (70%)	66 (28%)
– unspecified	7 (9%)	13 (15%)	18 (24%)	38 (16%)
SSD/Probation	3 (4%)	-	(1%)	33 (1%)
Health professional	3 (4%)	1 (1%)	7 (3%)	7 (3%)
Shelter housing aid centre	2 (3%)	9 (10%)	-	11 (5%)
Refuge/ hostel	5 (7%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	8 (3%)
Other	12 (16%)	-	-	12 (5%)
Total	77 (100%)	87 (100%)	76 (100%)	240 (100%)

\* HPU/HO, Homeless Persons Unit/ Housing Officer

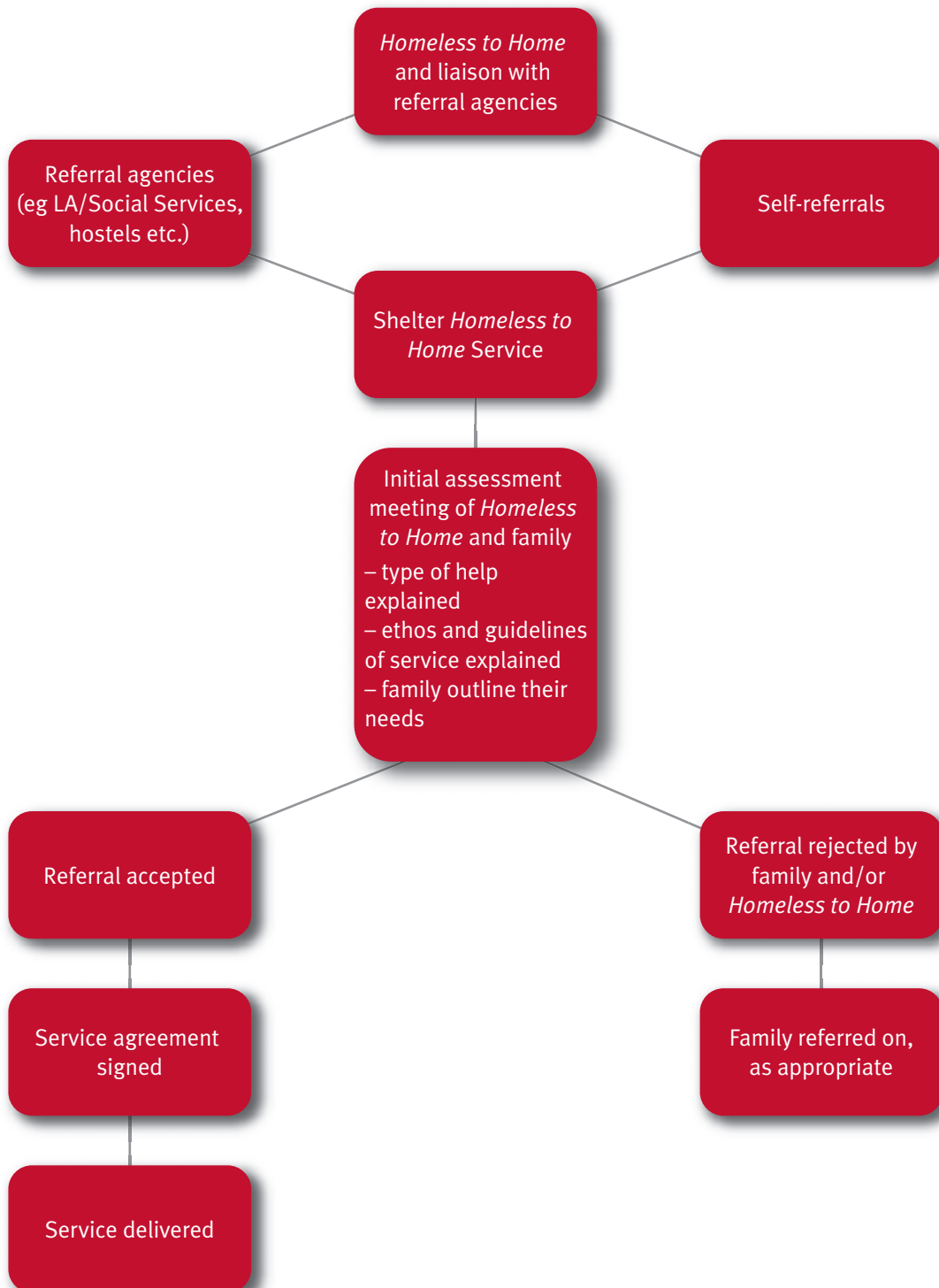
\*\* Referrals via local authority supported interim accommodation including referrals from Registered Social Landlords managing the temporary accommodation and health professionals working from the accommodation as well as local authority workers.

Percentages have been rounded.

Source: *Homeless to Home* case work monitoring records. 240 records of the 271 records that were examined contained information on the source of referral.



FIGURE 3.4 Referral and assessment procedures



### Agency referrals

Many of the families were advised of the existence of the *Homeless to Home* service by local authority workers, workers in the partner agency or other organisations which were able to explain what the service could offer and how it worked with families. However, the level of assessment undertaken by referring agencies varied between areas, with for example Sheffield local authority interim accommodation workers undertaking a first stage assessment, whilst many agencies just simply explained the basics of the service to potential users. These agencies, to varying degrees, therefore acted as first stage gatekeepers to the service.

*We will ask people if they would like the service but we have to decide who needs it most, the problem is that everyone could do with the help... but we can't refer everybody. [Homeless to Home] has to prioritise and take the most needy first... I don't think anyone has been referred and then refused (local authority representative).*

Whilst some agencies circulated information about *Homeless to Home* to their own users, for example, to all families staying in interim accommodation, other agencies preferred to mention the service personally to families they were working with who they thought would benefit from the service. This could occur before a family was rehoused, but equally some agencies (particularly in Birmingham) referred after rehousing:

*We send out a leaflet about the service in every letting pack, if someone says they like the sound of the service then we will refer them, if within the first few weeks we think they are having problems then we will ask the tenant if they would like to be referred. The concierges and caretakers in our accommodation make a lot of the referrals, they are there 12 hours a day and they pick up on problems, people have moved in with no furniture or they are not coping trying to find a school, the concierges assist as much as they can but they know the project really has the resources (local authority representative).*

Most of the local authority and partner agency representatives welcomed and valued the service provided by *Homeless to Home*, especially as there was little resettlement provision for homeless families in any of the three cities and what support there was tended to be targeted at specific groups and/or provided for only a short time. Most local providers were aware of the need for some resettlement support for homeless families and commented on the multiplicity of problems faced by families trying to resettle and the problems which could lead to the abandonment of properties and repeat homelessness.

*People just give up... their benefit hasn't come through, they're in arrears, the house needs decorating and the garden needs doing, they haven't any money to decorate or perhaps they haven't the ability, they might have sorted schools out but still be in conflict with the council or their neighbours and it is all too much – so they just get up and leave (local authority representative).*

Demand was reasonably high for the service and most agencies would have liked to refer far more of the homeless families that they saw to the service. However, one area had a particular problem with generating referrals in their local area. It appeared that the key referral agency had received far fewer homeless nominations than they had expected, and this had also been combined with some lack of understanding about the potential role of *Homeless to Home* amongst their workers. This agency wondered whether other housing workers who had more contact with homeless families, such as caretakers and concierges might have been better placed to make referrals. Whilst agency referrals worked well overall, this example illustrates the importance of agencies having adequate information on the service as well as the need for agencies to engage fully with the service. Most local agencies had a good understanding of what *Homeless to Home* could offer homeless families, however

even here there was a tendency for some to focus on some aspects of the *Homeless to Home* service more than others when explaining it to potential users, for example emphasising the practical aspects of the service and not mentioning emotional support.

### Self-referrals

Self-referral can only work if potential users are aware of the service that is on offer. As most agencies recognised the need for the *Homeless to Home* service and valued the support it could provide, they were generally keen to advertise the projects. Some service users saw leaflets or posters advertising *Homeless to Home* and, as noted above, others were given leaflets explaining the service in their new tenancy packs. Other service users heard about the projects from other professionals. As awareness grew, however, an increasing number of families heard about *Homeless to Home* through word of mouth, from a friend or relative who had used the service. This can be interpreted as a vote of confidence in the service, although it was not without its problems. Service users did not always have a full understanding of the nature of the service possibly because they only heard about certain aspects of the service. This was particularly common among families who sought help from the project and who spoke little or no English.

*We find that we work quite a lot with people who don't quite fit our criteria. We spend quite a lot of time sorting out interviews with interpreters for people who don't actually fit our criteria, for example they are not permanently housed in [area] and not likely to stay (project manager).*

There was clearly a need for the service to be explained to users at the outset, however, this was not always possible and sometimes meant that the projects accepted inappropriate referrals or that families did not receive the support they needed.

*Not all families understand what we do... and so we can't help them as much... We do try to explain all we can offer and I think the homelessness officers explain – but we don't always have a chance, people will ring us and they have to move the next day, we don't like to say 'no, we would like to see you first' so they end up seeing us as a removals service (project manager).*

Whilst *Homeless to Home* staff supported the principle of self-referral where possible and appropriate, there was also an acknowledgment that this route had to be handled carefully to avoid disappointing potential users.

### Timing of referrals

In Birmingham providers appreciated the reasons why the referral system worked as it did but, nevertheless thought it would be very useful and helpful for families to have the support of *Homeless to Home* before they were rehoused.

*It is a pity that the way the service works we can only refer people once they have been rehoused but I think the key is to pick up the need at the time we make a letting, we also do a post-allocation visit so if we haven't picked up on issues at the time of letting we can then and refer them to Homeless to Home if they want the service... (local authority representative).*

Some users also reflected that it might have been helpful to have had support from *Homeless to Home* from the earliest possible opportunity (particularly those in Birmingham). Interestingly, a couple of the qualitative comparison interviewees who had not received any support remarked that for them the early stages of the process of rehousing were particularly traumatic and said they would have appreciated support at this stage. One family had experienced repossession of their house and had been rehoused in an area that they had not selected and commented:

*... it's just like little questions you've got... there was nobody, it was like, it wasn't the homelessness officers' job, it would have been better if there had been somebody that you could just have called every time an idea came into your head... just somebody that you could ask without the getting the attitude, like, that you were asking them a stupid question, and wasting their time, what might seem trivial to them but was important to me... it would have been great, it would have made all the difference (comparison family).*

This need for early intervention, however, needed to be approached carefully where families were receiving support from other agencies. In the first year of the Sheffield project, families were accepted at any point in their stay in interim accommodation, but this was later modified to accept families only after they had been accepted for rehousing. This enabled the role of *Homeless to Home* workers vis-a-vis the interim accommodation workers to be better defined for families. In Bristol, referrals were usually received once the local authority had established that they had a homelessness duty towards the family. In some cases this meant that families were referred while in temporary accommodation, for example, bed and breakfast or hostels.

## **Homeless to Home assessment procedures**

Once a family had been referred to *Homeless to Home*, an initial meeting was arranged. (Figure 3.4) Only where service users had very immediate needs was this meeting delayed (for example, if a family was moving house the following day). Support workers met the referred family at the project, in their interim accommodation or in their new home. At the meeting the *Homeless to Home* service was explained and the needs of the family assessed. The workers and family discussed how the project would work with the family (for example, in the case of couples, whether both partners would be equally involved), the overall ethos of the service and the guidelines under which the service operated (for example, child protection procedures). The workers also explained that the aim of the service was to empower and enable families and that support would taper off once users became more able to cope alone.

The *Homeless to Home* worker explained the range of different kinds of assistance that could be provided (see Chapter 4) and asked the family which services they felt they would need. Perceived needs obviously differed by family, and also as a result of the timing of the meeting (for example, whether the family was still living in temporary accommodation or had been rehoused). If a family was eligible for support and required the help offered then a service agreement was drawn up detailing the services *Homeless to Home* and the family had agreed were required.

Occasionally the initial meeting was the only contact with potential users, sometimes families and project workers decided that they did not need or want the sort of help offered or it was decided that referral to another agency was more appropriate. In some cases families moved out of the area or lost contact with the project for other reasons. In a few cases the projects had to make the decision not to work with families, usually because their needs were high and required more specialist support. These families were referred on to more appropriate agencies wherever possible, for example families were referred to social services where child protection issues were of immediate concern.

## **Users' first reactions to the *Homeless to Home* service**

Most families described being very relieved to hear about *Homeless to Home*. Many had no money or possessions, while those who had belongings often had no means of moving them. For some, the realisation that they would not have to cope alone encouraged them to make a move that they might not otherwise have made.

*I had the tenancy and I wanted to move but I didn't know how to do everything, how to buy things – I was even thinking about giving up the tenancy [and staying with a violent husband] because I didn't know what to do... (service user).*

Only a few were suspicious as they did not know what to expect, but this was usually before they had met the actual workers from the service.

*To be honest I was rather hostile... I did not want somebody taking over and doing things for me because I couldn't cope – anyway the Homeless to Home worker was not at all like that, she wasn't patronising, she was so nice, she didn't take over but suggested things and she was very respectful. She came to look at the place and agreed it was in a bad state but said try to picture what it will be like once it is clean. I can't remember exactly what she said but I can remember feeling a lot better having her there (service user).*

Generally families felt that they had received enough information about the service at the referral and assessment stage of being introduced to the project. The assessment procedures did not seem intrusive or overly arduous to families. They particularly appreciated the fact that the service was explained well and that they were given a list of the different types of support that was available to them. Full information at this early stage appeared to help establish a good user-worker relationship. A couple of users specifically mentioned that they found it useful to be able to refer back to the original list, or their memory of it, when considering asking *Homeless to Home* for assistance. The inverse was also true. In a few instances, in the early days of the *Homeless to Home*, some families felt the service had not been explained adequately. These families had sometimes felt at a loss and occasionally confused and apprehensive at not knowing whether they could ask for support. The provision of consistent, clear and adequate information to users at the earliest stage was therefore very important to the effective working of the service.

## Summary

*Homeless to Home* users were characterised by social and economic marginalisation, as well as their experience of homelessness. A high proportion of service users were lone parents with young children, with minority ethnic families also being over-represented amongst service users. Most families were living on benefits and many suffered from poor health. The majority of users were rehoused in local authority housing, often being given only one offer of accommodation. Whilst many reported satisfaction with their housing, there were also problems with the housing and particularly with the environments in which many families had been resettled.

Overall, the *Homeless to Home* service referral and assessment procedures worked well. Referrals were accepted from a diverse range of sources, including both agency and self-referral. Whilst most agencies and families had a good understanding of the *Homeless to Home* service from the outset, a few problems in the early stages of the project demonstrated the importance of clear and comprehensive information for all parties as part of the referral and assessment procedures.

## Case study

This lone parent and her small child were evicted by their private landlord who decided to sell the property. The family spent six months in temporary accommodation but had to refuse the first offer of a house as it was too close to where the child's father lived. The father had previously committed acts of violence and arson against the family and had court injunctions taken out against him. The family was referred to *Homeless to Home* while living in temporary accommodation and when the family was offered a house project workers accompanied the mother to view the property. The project also helped the mother apply for a Community Care Grant (CCG), helped her measure up for curtains and arranged for beds to be delivered. The mother had relatives in the area and they were able to help with the move and *Homeless to Home* provided cleaning materials. The CCG application was successful and the worker accompanied the mother when she went to buy goods for the house; a worker also accompanied her to the housing office to arrange payment of the rent and to negotiate repayment of rent arrears (from a previous council tenancy) directly from social security benefits. There was no further contact with the family as the client did not respond to letters but the family appeared to have settled in well.



## 4 Homeless to Home's work with families

### Introduction

This chapter draws on the postal survey of families and families' case records<sup>5</sup> and interviews with service users and their children; project staff, including support workers, managers, volunteers and handy persons; and local authority and partner agency representatives. The chapter presents a description of the many and diverse ways in which *Homeless to Home* worked with families and describes the service users', project workers' and local authority and partner agency representatives' views on, and experiences of, the service. The chapter then goes on to discuss some of the barriers to providing the service and the constraints to the service.

### Services provided by Homeless to Home

The *Homeless to Home* service was established to assist homeless families to resettle successfully in their new homes and neighbourhoods. There were, as noted in Chapter 2, some operational differences but the services offered by the projects can be categorised broadly as follows:

- assistance with housing and moving home
- practical help in making a home
- financial advice and support
- accessing community services
- emotional, social and general support.

### Assistance with housing and moving home

As noted earlier, the Birmingham project operated in a specific area of the city (Handsworth and Newtown) and could only accept referrals once a family accepted a tenancy in this area. The Bristol and Sheffield projects were city-wide and could begin working with families living in temporary or interim accommodation. This meant that some aspects of the support offered by the Bristol and Sheffield projects, for example, the accompanied viewing of properties and helping users prepare for the move were not necessary for the Birmingham clients who had usually been rehoused before they came into contact with the service. Where *Homeless to Home* began working with families in temporary or interim accommodation workers could assist users in obtaining accommodation. In some cases local authorities did not accept families as unintentionally homeless or in priority need and therefore had no duty to rehouse them, in such cases the project workers could assist in appeals or write supporting letters for applications to other registered social landlords. Workers also accompanied users when they viewed properties. The standard of accommodation and the desirability of the area varied considerably, some users were very pleased with their new accommodation and were very happy about the location. However, many service users were not so lucky and were offered lower standard accommodation in less desirable areas. Most families felt resigned to accepting the accommodation as the following quote illustrates.

*I didn't think about where I'd like to live, I don't think you do when you don't have any money, you just think where are the council properties and where do I really not want*

5. Families had signed a consent form giving access to their case notes for the purpose of this evaluation.



*to live. It was like, please don't put me on a rough estate but realistically you are not going to get something fancy you know when you are with the council (service user).*

Homeless to Home could help in a number of ways. If properties or the location were unsuitable, for example when the accommodation was located close to the home of a violent ex-partner, the workers advocated on behalf of the client to have the offer changed. Properties, which were otherwise suitable, were often in a poor state of repair and decoration and service users were very disappointed by the condition and appearance of the property. Homeless to Home workers would assess the state of repair of the property and liaise with the landlord to undertake any necessary work and could advise the family on how Homeless to Home, with the help of volunteers and, in Bristol and Sheffield, the handy person could help improve the property.

*Because we can offer volunteers we can say to people yes it does look a bit of a mess at the moment but that perhaps we can do something – perhaps a lick of paint will make a difference (project manager).*

*Some of the properties are in a terrible state, they only get one offer through homeless and if they refuse it that is it... the place might be boarded up, have broken windows, doors off... They [Homeless to Home] can explain what can be done, what they can do to help and advise them better (local authority representative).*

Homeless to Home workers also provided housing and tenancy advice for service users who were sometimes unaware of their rights and responsibilities as tenants. This was particularly important as many people had temporary tenancies and were at risk of becoming homeless again if they breached the tenancy agreement.

## Preparing for the move

Once a family accepted an offer then Homeless to Home could begin to work with them to prepare for the move. Many families had very few possessions and projects helped with benefit and grant applications for the purchase of necessities.

*I didn't have anything. The kids and me only had the clothes we were wearing. They told me about where to get things and helped to get benefits and money for things (service user).*

*Nearly every family, it is startling really, that at every interview you meet a new referral and they say 'I have moved into a property and I haven't got anything' – and they haven't got anything, no cooker, no beds, basic items – nothing (project manager).*

Homeless to Home helped users obtain furniture and equipment, referring them to furniture projects or to second hand shops. In extreme cases, Homeless to Home could draw on its hardship fund to help with the purchase of essential goods or cleaning materials and equipment for the new home. The projects also helped with the actual move, by providing, where necessary, a van and driver, volunteers and child care. The projects could arrange for utilities to be disconnected in the previous home and reconnected in the new property. In some cases Homeless to Home workers had to liaise with the police to ensure the safety of service users and workers during a house move. All these forms of help were important where people had few resources to make a home.

*The housing people told me about Homeless to Home because I had to move quickly, I rang them and they turned up the next day, some men came to move us... Homeless to Home came around and brought a huge pack of things – everything you could*

*think of for cleaning – even clothes pegs and colouring books for the kids – they gave me plates and they lent me a two ring cooker – when you move like that you don't have anything, they are very good (service user).*

*There is a great need for families to have that help to move quickly... some people panic and move without being prepared and then they'll leave the property and they end up homeless again (local authority representative).*

## Practical assistance with making a home

*Homeless to Home* also provided practical help and advice to help families settle into their new homes. The Sheffield and Bristol projects could offer the services of a handy person as well as those of a group of volunteers who helped families with jobs outside the remit of the landlord such as decorating and gardening. Some families were able to undertake practical work themselves and the projects loaned out equipment such as ladders, paint brushes and gardening tools. The projects were also able to provide decorating vouchers, materials such as wallpaper and paint, plants and flower seeds as well as a range of other household equipment and goods which had been donated. This was more than practical support as it began to change and improve the living environment and how service users felt about their surroundings.

*I don't think I would be here because the kitchen would not have been done, the stairs, the garden – I could have done bits of it – I can paint and that but not wallpapering – I don't think I would still be here but for them, I was going to move, I'd just had enough... but [the support worker] came out and spoke to me and I am very glad she did because I am happy, I am happy that I stayed here (service user).*

Families also found it difficult to buy necessary household items; community care grants enabled families to buy some essentials but these payments were not normally sufficient to purchase expensive items such as washing machines and cookers. *Homeless to Home* assisted service users in finding second hand electrical goods or in fundraising to purchase items. More recently, following a successful fundraising initiative with Powergen, *Homeless to Home* was also able to offer families free energy efficient fridge-freezers and light bulbs.

## Assistance with finances

A large part of the *Homeless to Home* service was concerned with helping users deal with financial matters. This included:

- sorting out benefit applications, including income support, child benefit, housing benefit and social fund applications
- raising funds from charitable organisations
- helping clients deal with debt problems
- helping clients manage their finances by negotiating payment schemes and debt repayments.

Benefit and grant application processes could be lengthy and delays meant that families could not move into their new homes immediately, they then became responsible for rent on both their temporary accommodation and their new homes.<sup>6</sup> *Homeless to Home* liaised with agencies to expedite benefit claims or grant applications and liaised with landlords to defer tenancy start dates thus avoiding the accumulation of rent arrears. Sheffield *Homeless to Home*, with other local agencies, liaised with the Benefits Agency and came to an agreement whereby families could apply for a community care grant before they accepted a tenancy, thus expediting the process of moving in.

6. Housing benefit can be paid on two properties for a limited period only if a family has moved into a new property but is still liable for rent on the former home. Delays in processing social fund applications, which can only be made once a family has signed a new tenancy agreement, often means that families cannot move into the new home as they have no furniture or belongings. This means that many homeless families move into new homes with rent arrears that will not be met by housing benefit payments.

Advocating for clients and dealing with bureaucracy was an important part of the projects' work and one on which the workers spent a great deal of time. *Homeless to Home* users often found it difficult to understand the benefits system and to negotiate bureaucratic procedures, especially when feeling stressed and lacking in confidence because of their circumstances. Service users who had poor literacy skills, those who were new to the country and unfamiliar with systems and procedures and/or who could not speak English experienced particular difficulty. The postal survey showed that 30 per cent of users had difficulty with claiming benefits and 25 per cent found it difficult to fill in forms.

*Services are so bureaucratic – it puts people off accessing them so if someone can help you with it... some people don't even realise that they have to fill in forms and apply for benefits. Some people have low educational achievement, lots are young women who left school early, they have poor literacy. It wouldn't be so bad if once the application was in then everything ran smoothly – there is so much for people to deal with (local authority representative).*

The importance of this aspect of *Homeless to Home's* work cannot be over emphasised as families' lack of income and even the most basic possessions was, although by no means their only problem, one of the most pressing and immediate problems for almost every family. Even with the support of *Homeless to Home*, grant applications were often refused or the payment of housing benefit delayed for many weeks, or even months. *Homeless to Home* helped speed up these processes by liaising with the benefits agency and the housing benefit department and supporting appeals against decisions. *Homeless to Home* also liaised with other agencies such as the Immigration Service and refugee councils to seek advice and support, for example in tracing the necessary documentation for benefit claims. As noted earlier, these processes can, and often do, take many months. These delays in processing benefit claims also meant that rent arrears and debt could accrue which could result in users being served with notices to quit or receiving a summons for non-payment of council tax, matters which the projects have to deal with almost routinely.

*We can be on the phone for hours, waiting and ringing back because the number is always engaged, trying to sort out housing benefit – it is a mess, people are not getting their payments for 6 months... it causes real stress for people as they receive through the post computer generated letters issuing them with notices seeking possession because they are so much in arrears... (project manager).*

Although a great deal of *Homeless to Home's* work involves advocacy work and dealing with other agencies on behalf of users, part of the ethos of the project was to enable and empower service users so that they could develop the confidence and skills to deal with such matters themselves. Most service users understood this and realised that they would have to manage alone in the future. Some only required help when they were in the midst of a crisis, others said they had learned how to deal with bureaucracy from listening to the project workers. All project workers emphasised the importance of not encouraging dependence.

*We have to make sure that we are empowering people and not just doing things for people, you act with people and then try and ensure they know exactly what you are doing and why, so that eventually they will be able to do it themselves... (project manager).*

*They helped with the water bill as all the bills came as a bit of a shock but I'm back on my feet now and I can manage but that really helped (service user).*

## Accessing community services

One of the main aims of the *Homeless to Home* service is to help people settle in their new neighbourhoods and project workers helped people do this in a variety of ways. These included providing information on local services such as GPs, nurseries, local amenities and community activities and by providing help, where necessary to access these services.

*They gave me a directory, a booklet with all sorts of information, dentists, doctors, schools and it puts everything in simple terms, the things they can help you with, and that was fantastic because if there was something you were not sure about you could have a look in the book, so you don't pick up the phone and ring them for no reason sort of thing (focus group).*

Most people were able to register with a doctor or find schools for their children without help but some families, especially those from another area and those who could not speak English, appreciated the support of the project in accessing community services. *Homeless to Home* also provided information about employment and training opportunities and could offer advice on the New Deal and advise service users about claiming work benefits such as the working family's tax credit. Some families experienced difficulties accessing services, for example, in securing school places for their children, and in these cases *Homeless to Home* advocated on behalf of the family. The Bristol project also helped users obtain free bus passes so that children did not have to change school.

## Helping children to resettle

All projects worked to alleviate the devastating effects of homelessness on families and their children, however, the projects differ in the extent to which they work directly with children. The Birmingham project was successful in acquiring funding from City Challenge to employ a child support worker and the Bristol project has organised events such as puppet making workshops especially for children. All the projects are keen to develop their work with children, to identify the specific needs of children and, where appropriate, to work more directly with them.

*I would like to have more time to concentrate on the needs of the children, I don't feel we have the resources to do as much, what's happened to the children, how the children are... we do try to incorporate that and ask the parents how they think the children are, any problems relating to the children but it is minimal because we haven't got the workers to actually spend time with the children and see what they are experiencing as a result of homelessness (project manager).*

## Inter-agency working

A major part of the work of *Homeless to Home* was liaising with, and referring families to, other agencies. Where families required more intensive or specialist support than the projects could provide, for example families with children with severe behavioural problems which required specialist professional support, then *Homeless to Home* could liaise with health visitors or other professionals to determine the best course of action.

*If the case is very complicated, you know if there are mental health needs, anything we feel is kind of beyond us then we will act in an advocacy role and try to link them in with other agencies or other organisations... but you know we have found that even with those families there is always something we can do (project worker).*

Many families were already in contact with Social Services and/or their children were on the Child Protection Register; in other cases, project workers had to make referrals to statutory services because families needed this support or because there were concerns about child protection issues.

*There are a lot of families we work with that have contact with Social Services or have a child on the register, it is a regular occurrence, it is not out of the ordinary. The way that we deal with it is to try to be very clear about what our role is and to be clear on where the boundaries of our involvement both with the families and with other agencies involved. The other thing is keeping clear communication with other agencies, usually a health visitor so that we are all aware of what is going on and that any concerns are shared (project manager).*

## Emotional support

Homeless to Home worked in many ways to support families and this included providing emotional or moral support. Over half the respondents in the postal survey said they had received emotional support and a similar proportion (51 per cent) reported that Homeless to Home 'had made us feel better about things'. Almost every family interviewed stressed the importance of 'having someone to listen' and of having some moral support during a very stressful period.

*Knowing there was somebody there who understood what you were going through, I think that was a big part of it, having that emotional support, where you could ring up and have a good whinge and good cry (focus group).*

*We definitely provide both emotional and practical support but I think the emotional support runs through the assistance we give people, we might not write it down in the service plan... and families might not identify it as something you're doing but it is there (project manager).*

Although Homeless to Home is not a befriending service the projects have on occasions identified the need for such a role. Project staff often worked intensively with service users but their time was limited and in this case a volunteer took on the role of befriender.

*I have befriended a client, she had lots of problems so I would go out with her once a week for a few hours just to help her get away from her normal life, we'd go to free art galleries, just to talk and relax for a few hours, I also used to help find out about things going on in her community (volunteer group).*

## Social activities and events

Another important aspect of the projects' work with families involved organising social events and activities such as day trips, Christmas parties, DIY classes, Christmas card making, puppet making and fundraising, research and writing groups. Some of the events were practical and aimed to teach people new skills such as tiling and wallpapering or to develop creative skills through writing. All activities, however, were seen as ways of helping people regain their confidence and of bringing families together to share their experiences and to support each other.

For many families the events organised by Homeless to Home were their only social activity as they simply could not afford to take their children out for the day. The postal survey showed that three quarters of the families had difficulty finding both the time and the money to have



fun and 64 per cent of respondents said they had no time for themselves. *Homeless to Home* organised events for the whole family and activities such as 'pamper' days where parents could relax and enjoy some time to themselves. Both the adults and the children remarked on the generosity of *Homeless to Home* in arranging activities and providing food, sweets and drinks.

*Usually we don't get much of a chance to do things because it costs too much – I don't like taking the kids out because I can't afford to buy them things – so outings are really good and we meet other families and children... (service user).*

*We went to the seaside with Shelter, we got the bus and they gave us crisps, pop, everything we wanted, and they gave us some spending money (service user's children).*

Not all families took part in social activities, some families had well developed social networks of family and friends and felt that other families needed this sort of support more than they did. Other families thought that most events were more suitable for younger children but appreciated *Homeless to Home* supplying them with cinema tickets or inviting them to events suitable for all age groups. Most families had young children and appreciated the provision of transport or help with travel costs although this was more of an issue in Sheffield and Bristol where the service was city-wide. The projects also held drop in sessions which service users enjoyed although, again, it was more difficult for families in Bristol and Sheffield to travel to the project.

*They have groups on a Tuesday where you can go and meet other families and mothers and have a coffee and relax, that's good, you can have a chat and learn about other people's experiences and find out what help they have had, we share information – so it is very useful too (service user).*

## User groups and volunteering

As noted earlier, *Homeless to Home* was keen to empower users and to encourage them to become involved not only in helping themselves but in helping other families in a similar situation. User involvement was seen as an important part of the service, however, the projects had mixed success in getting users involved in a formal way, for example in advisory and planning groups. This was regarded as a rather ambitious objective and all the projects remarked that this, and other events and activities, demanded a good deal of organisation and planning and that service users were often very busy and unable to attend meetings at appointed times. Nevertheless, service users helped to organise one off events and became involved in other initiatives. Service users and their children in Bristol and Birmingham had become involved in gardening and decorating challenges as well as fund raising events which they enjoyed.

*... they had a gardening competition and we all volunteered, we chose two winners and then we had to go and do the garden for a week – the gardens were wrecked and we had a week to get them looking all pretty (service user).*

*... we went to the seaside and we played football – and we have been swimming – for homeless people, I'd like to do that again (children).*

As noted in Chapter 2, a small number of former service users worked as volunteers with the projects and one group of women in Sheffield had produced an information pack for Somali and Arabic speaking families.

## Barriers to meeting service aims and objectives

*Homeless to Home* was providing a valuable service to families but there were a number of external barriers to effective working which were beyond the control of the projects, partner agencies and the families themselves. The problems experienced by many families meant that they were not able to settle in their new homes or in the local area and, in some cases, meant that they would have to move home once again. The postal survey of service users and the interviews with families found that the main problems faced by families were:

- harassment, including racial harassment, from neighbours
- fears about safety, drugs and crime
- problems with children's schooling (including bullying and racism)
- difficulty managing on a low income
- dissatisfaction with the standard, condition and/or suitability of the property.

### Harassment and racial harassment

Some families experienced harassment from neighbours which made it difficult to resettle in their homes. The first family quoted below had experienced harassment since moving in and had been accepted as a priority for rehousing but at the time of the second interview was still waiting to be rehoused. The second family was also living in very overcrowded conditions and had sought the help of the local Shelter housing aid centre.

*We've been living here for 20 months but have been trying to move. We had emergency status because of racial harassment but now we have medical reasons which make us a priority (service user).*

*It is lovely up here but it is white, there have been a few racist remarks and I don't like the kids going far from the house, I have a few more points because of that... but not enough (service user).*

### Fear of crime

The postal survey found that a small percentage (nine per cent) of families felt unsafe in their new homes but a higher proportion (32 per cent) were concerned about a drug problem in the area and felt that the area was unsafe for their children (30 per cent). The following family had experienced violence and the woman, a refugee, described being frightened to leave her flat.

*We have lived here for about six months... some guy he knocked on my door and then one day they just attacked me, it has happened twice (service user).*

### Problems with the children's schooling

As noted earlier, *Homeless to Home* could help families enrol children in schools but some families experienced problems that were beyond the service's control. Although just over half (55 per cent) of the families surveyed thought that the children's schools were good, a few children were simply unhappy in their new school. The case records showed that a small number of families gave up their tenancies and left the area because their children could not settle in their new school or because the family did not want their children to have to move school.

*School is full of racists and bullies, there is fighting every day... It is distracting me from working... Our other school was friendlier but it was not as good educationally and it is too far away but then this school is not nice so we don't want to go (service user's children).*

### Standard and suitability of accommodation and locality

Most families who responded to the postal survey said that their home was warm and dry but only just over half reported that their home was in good repair. Seventeen per cent said that the accommodation was cold and 15 per cent complained that it was damp. Overcrowding was



a problem in all three areas as there was a shortage of large family properties, 23 per cent of survey respondents said that their home was too small, 21 per cent that it was overcrowded and 19 per cent that there was no privacy.

*There are eight of us in a three bed room house, there are two small living rooms and a tiny kitchen, a bathroom and a separate toilet... it is very hard to manage here, as soon as I got this place asked for an exchange. I could scream sometimes it is so hard to do things (service user).*

*This is the sort of house I wanted but I have had a load of problems, the boiler blew up... I am waiting for central heating, it is so cold and damp but the council keep fobbing me off... (service user).*

### Difficulty managing on a low income

Almost all the families interviewed were single parent families who could not work because of illness, disability or because of child care responsibilities and almost every family mentioned the difficulties associated with managing on a low income from benefits. Poor standard accommodation, poor insulation and inefficient heating systems all added to families' financial difficulties. The following family had one partner in work. This did not ease their financial difficulties and the low income from work meant that it would be very difficult to move to a larger property if they were able to find one.

*Space and managing on the money we get are the difficult things, you think you'll be better off working but you've got rent to pay and school dinners and council tax... We are trying for a bigger house but because he is working the rent would be too much, there would be less money for other things and I am not sure we could manage (service user).*

Some families were experiencing a number of problems and finding it difficult to resettlement after being rehoused. The following family had been offered three alternative properties, none of which they found suitable. This woman was struggling to cope with three small children and felt isolated. As the family had not settled into their new home a year after having been rehoused *Homeless to Home* continued to support them.

*This is a two bedroom house but there is no heating, we all sleep downstairs because there are mice in the bedrooms, it is very draughty and the little ones broke the window so it is even worse now... it is a long way to walk to nursery with the children and the baby [three children aged under four] and I am on my own so it does get hard (service user).*

### Constraints on the service

As can be seen throughout the report the vast majority of families were very grateful for the help and support they had received from *Homeless to Home* and, in most cases, understood what the service could and could not provide and for how long and families generally appreciated that there were many other homeless families in need of support. The vast majority of interviewees said they liked the support staff, 85 per cent of respondents to the postal survey said that project staff were respectful and 74 per cent said that the 'workers care'. In general, families were unwilling to criticise and tended to explain that workers were very busy and the service was under pressure, the following comment was typical.

*The only bad thing is that sometimes you can't get an answer – you can't get through to the person you want to speak to – they are busy working (service user).*

It was clear, however, that some families had very high expectations of the service while

others did not fully understand what the service could provide. Some families made criticisms of the service and expressed some dissatisfaction, however most balanced any criticism with positive comments, for example about the support workers. Complaints about the service tended to cluster around two main issues, these were:

- being unable to access the service and/or being unaware of all services offered
- failure of the service to deliver what service users expected.

### Inability to access the service

A number of families complained that they had not been told about the full range of services offered by *Homeless to Home* and/or that they were unable to participate in activities and events because of problems with transport and child care. As noted in Chapter 3, the service should have been explained to families at the initial meeting with *Homeless to Home* but families often appeared not to understand, in others, service users felt that they were not told about services which they would have found useful.

*I think if they have anything to give people who need help they should make it clear and tell them what is going on – because no-one is going to go to that place, it is too far, and see the leaflets there, if there is help they should write to us about it. I've never seen the handyman (service user).*

The projects tried to provide crèche facilities but it was very difficult to arrange affordable childcare in Bristol and some families were therefore unable to attend events. Many families would also have appreciated transport to the projects.

*They write and invite me to the project saying there will be food and things but I can't really get there, it is too far and too difficult with the children and the baby... They should have a bus. I would like to socialise with them as it is the closest I would ever get to socialising but I can't get there... (service user).*

*We have been to the office, we have been a few times, but we couldn't get anything done as we had [a toddler] with us and there were no crèche facilities... We did a tiling and wallpapering course with them too. I'd love to do more if they had crèche facilities – it would be a break – we could get on with other stuff – be creative – we would love to do it (family).*

There was some, although very little, dissatisfaction with project staff, however it was clear that service users did not want or know how to make complaints.

*I don't know if [the support worker] feels as though she has helped as much as she can. I felt that she just saw it as a bit of a job, not went into it deeply, I really wanted to change the caseworker, but I didn't want to do it by disturbing her, don't get me wrong, she did a good job, but I think she thinks, 'well we did a bit with her, let's go onto the next person now', that's how I felt, whether I'm right or wrong I don't know. I felt like having a different caseworker but I did not want to step on anyone's toes and I didn't know how to go about it... when I spoke to the other caseworker, I wanted to tell her, but then I thought, well maybe she is in close connection with the other one (service user).*

However, not all families wanted to tell *Homeless to Home* about their difficulties which in the following case looked likely to lead to serious problems for the family.

*They told us they were there to help with anything... I am no good with bills and things... but I don't tell Homeless to Home about my bills. You go down there for a chat and a laugh and to talk about the kids so I don't tell them about my bills... I keep getting gas bills with someone else's name on and I haven't paid a gas bill in the time*

*I've lived here [nearly two years]. I don't get money for weeks from the social and now the council says I'm in rent arrears – but I am on Social Security – but I can't read very well so I don't read letters I just throw them in the bin – especially if they look like bills (service user).*

By the time of the second interview, this family had decided to seek help and advice from *Homeless to Home*. A support worker put the family in touch with a debt counselling service and an arrangement had been made to pay utility bills using a prepayment card.

### **Failure of the service to deliver what service users expected**

Most families understood what the service could and could not help them with and most appreciated that *Homeless to Home* aimed to help them get back on their feet. They also appreciated the fact that there were a lot of other families who needed the help of *Homeless to Home* and that it would be 'selfish' to expect *Homeless to Home* to do everything for them. The projects did experience some problems in delivering services and it was clear that staff were under pressure, especially in one project which experienced staff shortages almost throughout the period of the evaluation. There were areas for concern, however, as, in some cases, *Homeless to Home* failed to deliver the service that users reasonably expected.

*The leaflet said they could help us move but when we moved... they made it quite clear that they didn't actually get involved in the physical moving side of things – they couldn't come and help with the curtain poles and no-one turned up to help wallpaper – but that was a volunteer so it wasn't really their fault (service user).*

*They sent a questionnaire, 'would you like any help with a few household things, a handyman' and I wrote in and said 'yes' so they didn't contact me, so I contacted them because I do need help – and when I contacted them back, they still haven't told me am I going to get somebody or not (service user).*

A small number of families actually expressed resentment because they felt that they had not received the help they had expected from *Homeless to Home* or because they felt that other families had received far more help and support than they had. In the following case the family believed this was because project workers thought they were coping well on their own. The services of the handy persons and volunteers were in great demand and it was impossible for these workers to meet all demands, the help they offered was limited but not all families understood this and felt that they had not received as good a service as others.

*The impression I got was that they [Homeless to Home] came here and saw the place and decided that I could get on with things by myself... I know one girl who has had her house decorated and everything done for her... They didn't really tell me what they could do to help, it would have been better if they had because I hate asking for help and when I did I didn't get any – they said 'we don't do that' (service user).*

### **Project workers' views of service limitations**

*Support workers, volunteers and the handy persons were very aware of the problems experienced by families over which they had no control, however, this did not mean that they found it easy to accept that families might continue to experience difficulties and become homeless again. Some families are very vulnerable, especially those referred to us by the local authority, I think the self-referrals have already taken a step but the very needy families – they are the ones we might meet once and then they never turn up again for appointments, they are the most vulnerable and they are the ones most likely to have problems and lose their tenancies – also some people don't keep in touch or reply to letters and calls and we worry that we are missing things – but you can't make someone take the service and that is something I have had to get used to (support worker).*

*There are families who have been homeless before who will become homeless again and there is not a lot we can do, their teenage children might be causing problems, anti-social behaviour, other deep rooted social problems, one family had been homeless seven times in a year – they had all these problems and we could not work with them anymore, child protection issues, learning difficulties, mental health and alcohol problems... . there is little Homeless to Home alone can do. We can do as much as we can but we would be foolish to think that things are going to change overnight (support worker).*

## Summary

Overall, respondents believed that the *Homeless to Home* initiative was an important innovation and a service which should be offered to all homeless families in need. The workers and volunteers were seen as sympathetic and approachable by service users who greatly appreciated the practical and emotional support of the service in helping them to resettle. There had been some problems in delivering the service but, for the most part, this appeared to be the result of operational difficulties and a shortage of resources rather than a lack of will on the part of the projects or individuals. The projects had, for the most part, developed close and successful working relationships with their partner agencies and other local providers, however there was some evidence of a need for improved communication between the various agencies and between service users and *Homeless to Home* staff. This chapter has demonstrated the need for clear communication and the importance of explaining the service fully to families and of ensuring that they understand this throughout their time with *Homeless to Home*.

## Case study

This family, a mother and four young children, had experienced homelessness on numerous occasions in the past mainly as a result of domestic violence but also on one occasion because the family had been threatened by neighbours. The family had been rehoused in the local area and *Homeless to Home* provided support; however, the violent ex-partner discovered the family's whereabouts and the family fled to another part of the country where they experienced neighbour harassment which led to their return to their home area. *Homeless to Home* reopened the case, helped apply for benefits and to find equipment and goods for the new home and assisted with removals. The house was in a very poor state of decoration and the project provided decorating vouchers, equipment, and cleaning materials, and loaned a wallpaper stripper. As the family had been homeless on many occasions and had received CCGs in the past it was difficult to secure the grant; however, *Homeless to Home* advocated on behalf of the family and were successful in securing the money. The handy man worked on the garden, fitted carbon monoxide detectors and smoke detectors and the project arranged for the cooker and washing machine to be plumbed in. *Homeless to Home* also provided a fridge-freezer from Powergen.

The children had been placed on a care order because of their father's violent behaviour and had spent some time being looked after by the local authority; when they returned home the support worker helped to find school places for the children. This took five weeks but eventually with the help of the *Homeless to Home* support worker, the children were able to start school. The support worker also accompanied the mother to care order meetings, providing emotional support and practical advice such as suggesting the family apply for an injunction against the violent ex-partner. The project also arranged to have panic alarms fitted, talked to the mother about domestic violence and put the family in touch with the police who were able to advise on other security precautions in case the children's father found the family. *Homeless to Home* helped the family in numerous ways: they provided a free bus pass, took the children on trips and outings and helped the mother find out about training courses. At the time of the interview the family were settling down well, the mother's partner had secured a job and the mother was thinking about becoming a volunteer with *Homeless to Home*, her eventual ambition was to become a support worker.

*I've never had so much help. I have been to refuge after refuge since I was 17... I've done that for nine years but I have never had help like this... I have never been in a house so long. I'm only still here because of Shelter.*

## 5 Moving on and living independently

### Introduction

Bringing a resettlement service to a close can be a difficult process to manage. Projects are concerned to ensure that the service is not withdrawn prematurely, putting a household's tenancy at risk, but also need to prevent a household from becoming dependent on support they no longer actually need. The first part of this chapter examines the duration of contact between homeless families and the three *Homeless to Home* projects. It goes on to discuss how the three projects managed the process of ending support to families.

The second part of the chapter examines tenancy sustainment among families after they had ceased to receive the *Homeless to Home* service. As the main aim of the service was to enable families to sustain their own tenancies, overall success can be measured by reporting on whether families were able to live independently following the end of their time with *Homeless to Home*. This section draws on data provided by social landlords to the projects. There is also a brief concluding discussion of the issues that arose for some families in sustaining their tenancies.

### Duration of contact with *Homeless to Home*

The research reviewed the project records of 271 families over a 30 month period ending in October 2001.<sup>7</sup> By October 2001, 173 of these 271 families (64 per cent) had ceased to receive the *Homeless to Home* service. Those families who had ceased to receive the service were usually referred to as 'closed cases'. Analysis of records of the 173 closed case families showed that the *Homeless to Home* projects had typically worked with them for a mean (average) period of eight and a half months (261 days).

However, because there were a small number of very long cases, the average was not wholly representative. When the median period of contact with closed cases was examined (the median is the middle value when all values are ranked) this was found to be 224 days, suggesting a shorter typical period of just over seven months. These findings showed that the three *Homeless to Home* projects were, overall, well within their targets to work with families for a year or less.

**TABLE 5.1** Typical period of contact with families, by project (closed case families)

Duration	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield
Months (average)	7.1	10.2	8.6
Months (median)	6.1	10.1	8.2

**Source:** *Homeless to Home* case work records, base 173 families (173 of the 271 families whose records were examined had ceased to receive the *Homeless to Home* service by October 2001, the remaining 98 families were still receiving the service).

Some of the 173 closed case families were found to have only been in contact with *Homeless to Home* for one or two weeks. Sometimes this was because families had lost contact with the

7. See Chapter Three.



project almost immediately, in other cases the family had only needed very short term low-intensity support. At the other end of the scale, there were also a handful of families with whom *Homeless to Home* had been engaged for well over a year. Among the 173 'closed case' records examined, it was found that Birmingham had been working with one family for 21 months, Bristol with one family for 28 months and Sheffield with one family for 24 months. However, these were exceptional cases. Table 5.1 shows the typical period of contact with families for the three *Homeless to Home* projects.

Bristol tended to have had longer periods of contact with families, this probably reflected the project's working pattern as it often engaged with homeless families while they were still in temporary accommodation. However, Bristol was still well within the intended operational limit of one year. In practice, there were more similarities than differences between the projects when it came to the duration of contact they had typically had with families.

Among the 271 families whose records were examined, 98 were still receiving the *Homeless to Home* service in October 2001. Among the 98 families with whom *Homeless to Home* was still working, the period for which they had been receiving the service was similar across all three projects. The average was higher for Bristol and Sheffield (9.2 months and 7.8 months) than it was for Birmingham (6.8 months), but the median period of contact was very similar for all three projects (6.2 months for Bristol and Birmingham and 6.6 for Sheffield). Again, these findings indicated that the projects had typically been engaged with 'open-case' families for periods that were well within the broad target of one year.

## Reasons for closing cases

Table 5.2 shows the reasons why the projects reported that they had closed cases. In many instances this was because the family had been judged by *Homeless to Home*, in consultation with the family itself, to have been satisfactorily resettled into a new home (41 per cent of all cases).

Overall, a third of the 173 families whose records were examined stopped responding to letters and other communication rather than formally breaking links with the project. This had usually occurred at the point at which a family had been satisfactorily resettled and the service had become less and less intense, project workers only communicating with the family occasionally and tending to only do so through letters. Families, because they faced many competing pressures, would quite often not get around to formally ending the relationship with *Homeless to Home*. Sometimes families also moved away from the area in which a project operated and did not inform the project.<sup>8</sup>

There were instances in which families disappeared or were known to have abandoned a property, but cases were more likely to be closed because families who were still housed had not formally ended their relationship with *Homeless to Home*.

Quite a high proportion of cases were closed for particular reasons (shown as 'Other' in Table 5.2) that were related to the circumstances and experiences of specific families. In some instances, a family reached a point at which they no longer needed the support of *Homeless to Home*, but there was still a need for other forms of support, such as help from specialist services, health or social services. In this instance the 'case' was referred to the relevant agency or agencies by *Homeless to Home*. In a few other cases, *Homeless to Home* withdrew the service because it was felt that the family were not making significant progress.

8. i.e. a planned move into other accommodation, as distinct from abandoning a property or returning to homelessness.



**TABLE 5.2: Reasons for closing cases**

Reason	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	All
Settled	48%	35%	30%	38%
No response to communication	25%	22%	43%	30%
Moved away from city/area	14%	4%	9%	9%
Family requested end to service	2%	-	6%	2%
Other*	11%	21%	13%	21%
Base	64	55	54	173

Source: *Homeless to Home* case work records, base 173 families (173 of the 271 families whose records were examined had ceased to receive the *Homeless to Home* service by October 2001, the remaining 98 families were still receiving the service).

## Views on bringing service delivery to a close

Workers explained at the first meeting with a family that the aim of *Homeless to Home* was to enable families and that support would taper off once users become more able to cope alone. Families were also told that *Homeless to Home* would provide support for up to a year after a family took on a tenancy, depending on their needs, although this timetable was approximate, it being accepted that families would sometimes require both greater and shorter periods of support.

The original policy of *Homeless to Home* was to send closing letters to service users to formalise the ending of support. This was usually done only after a period of negotiation between the family and the support worker. Both parties had agreed that there was no longer a need for support at the point at which support was brought to an end.

If the project had not had contact with a family for some time then a letter was sent asking the family if they required further support and, if so, asked them to contact the project. This closing letter also advised service users that they could get in touch with the service again if they experienced housing problems. This letter also contained contact details for a range of relevant agencies which could provide advice and support to families.

Most families seemed to understand the closure policy and accepted that *Homeless to Home* could not continue to work with them indefinitely. Although some families would have liked ongoing support, they did appreciate that they would be able to contact *Homeless to Home* if they experienced problems in the future.

*Closing cases works OK, we do lose contact with people but then that might be that they have decided that they do not need any more help from us but sometimes they have other things going on, it is usually OK when we negotiate closure but obviously there are some people who don't ever want support to end – not necessarily because they need us but because they like having someone there – we try to show them that they are able to cope and they say well, yes, I can do such and such myself and everything is fine (project manager).*

*I think we are quite good at closing cases, when people do come back it is usually only a one off, so the project can manage to deal with ex-users, we also make it clear that the problem has to do with housing and we will refer them to a more appropriate agency if need be (support workers).*

*It's not like 'you've been here, that's it', but obviously you don't want to fail... because they've helped you out you don't want to go back, you want to go forward... I think it's given us the confidence to do that... (family).*

Service users also appreciated that there were many other homeless families that needed the support of *Homeless to Home*.

*I'll be lost without them, I've only got them for a few more months... but I feel as though even when the year is finished that I think I will still be able to be in touch... I don't think that they will say 'now then, that's it, goodbye, ... I'd like to have it a lot longer, for a lifetime! But at the end of the day there are other people out there that need them so I think a year is long enough... (family).*

However, not all families understood that the service was time limited nor did they appear to have been fully prepared for the closure of their case. This sometimes caused distress when families received letters informing them that their contract was coming to an end.

*What I don't like is that you sign a year's contract with them and they think that their job is done after a year, they haven't even found out whether I have any ongoing problems they can help me with. You just get a standard letter saying that there is nothing more they can do because they have kept their contract. I think it is fair enough to end things after 12 months but they ought to find out if you are OK first... (family).*

*I got a letter today, I can't have help anymore and I don't know what to do... I've 'phoned them and they are coming to see me tomorrow... (family).*

In the above case the service user was still experiencing problems and *Homeless to Home* took the decision to continue to work with the family. As two of the projects had experienced some problems closing cases they were in the process of changing their procedure when the evaluation came to a close. One project had introduced a system of closure interviews with families, reviewing their needs with them to ascertain whether or not the service should be withdrawn. This system allowed families to meet with project workers and discuss any concerns about the withdrawal of the service and it also gave the project a chance to review their work with the family and how far the project had been able to achieve the aims set out in the service agreement.

*We are in the process of rethinking this, it works OK with families we have had a lot of contact with, we work to a clear planned way... What we'll try to do is a home visit and talk about possible options to keep in touch with us, through volunteering. That works OK with families we have worked with a lot. I think it is the families who we work with in a piecemeal fashion – that comes back to referrals again, it is hard to get to see families and contact them so we think we haven't had contact with them so we'll look at closing the case and then they come back to us and ask 'why are you closing the case?' I suppose it is about people not having a clear understanding about what amount of work, I suppose we are partly responsible for that, about the amount of input (project manager).*

*Eight out of ten it's fine. The support workers tend to warn people, because we've quite clearly got what we agreed with people and then we'll add to that if there's*

*things that people ask for. But support workers will say 'we're coming to the end and when we get a decision back from this trust, then that's probably going to be us finished', sort of thing. And then we'll write to them and now all cases get a visit and a closure interview... so any outstanding things we'll do then. Usually following case closure we might do another two weeks' work, after the case closure... sorting out a little bit that comes at the end (project manager).*

In most cases service users understood that support would taper off as they became more able to cope alone. However, most also felt that they could contact the project at any time in the future and this was very important to them. They did understand that *Homeless to Home* would probably not be able to help them directly but that the workers would be willing to lend a sympathetic ear, to advise them or give them details of an appropriate agency which could help.

*I think we could get in touch with Homeless to Home any time but if it was a council problem then we would contact the council but we could contact Homeless to Home and they could give us advice... (family).*

*Although not an active case they can still give us advice over the 'phone and if you 'phone up all upset they will still talk to you... (focus group).*

*I've got things sorted now and I wouldn't feel right going there for nothing. They still write to me and I could still ask them if I had a problem. I think it would be nice to know that they are always there because you never know what is going to happen. It would have been very difficult without them (family).*

## Tenancy Sustainment

As the objective of *Homeless to Home* was to enable independent living for these families, its success could only really be judged by looking at how the families had managed once they were coping on their own, following the withdrawal of *Homeless to Home*'s support.

### About the tenancy sustainment data

The *Homeless to Home* projects were already monitoring what the housing status of closed case families was through their contacts with local social landlords. The research team asked the projects to continue this practice but to use a simple standardised set of questions that would allow comparisons across the three areas. The results of this data collection on tenancy sustainment are examined in this section of the chapter.

The collection of information on tenancy sustainment was a separate exercise from the review of project records. During September and October 2001, the three projects provided the research team with information recording the housing status of 299 families on 30 September 2001. This included slightly more families than the research team had reviewed the project records for, reflecting the new cases that had been taken on following the conclusion of that part of the research. Of these 299 families, 218 were closed cases. Of the 218 closed case families, 94 were in Birmingham, 60 in Bristol and 64 in Sheffield.

A few families, such as those with whom projects had simply had one contact, were not included as they could not be described as having actually received a full resettlement service from *Homeless to Home*.<sup>9</sup> The Bristol project also reported a quite high number of inappropriate referrals, who were not provided with a service, and who were therefore excluded from the evaluation of tenancy sustainment.<sup>10</sup> Finally, it should be noted that the data, although they were largely complete, were not available for a few families with whom *Homeless to Home* had worked.

9. *Although they may have received advice and information and perhaps some support that may have assisted towards their resettlement, these families had not really had any sustained contact with the service and their ability or inability to sustain a tenancy could not realistically be linked to their contact with Homeless to Home. Most of these cases were in Bristol (7 families).*

10. *Thirteen cases were described as 'inappropriate referral, immediate signposting or referral to another agency' by the Bristol project.*

### Levels of tenancy sustainment across the three projects

Table 5.3 shows the broad success of the three *Homeless to Home* projects in having enabled families to successfully manage in their own tenancies. Most of the 218 closed case families were living independently in permanent accommodation.

**TABLE 5.3: Broad housing situation of closed case families (as at 30 September 2001)**

Situation	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	All
Housed <sup>(1)</sup>	94 (100%)	50 (83%)	48 (75%)	192 (88%)
Situation unknown or not resident	0 (0%)	10 (17%)	16 (25%)	26 (12%)
Base	94 (100%)	60 (100%)	64 (100%)	218 (100%)

Source: Returns on tenancy sustainment collected from social landlords by the three projects, base: 218 families.

(1) for the purposes of this table 'Housed' is defined as the family, on the best information available, being known to be in some form of housing, this total includes known planned moves out of the area, see Tables 5.6 and 5.7.

In Birmingham, the available data indicated that all the closed case families were still housed. In Bristol and Sheffield, most of the families who were no longer receiving the service were also still housed. Overall, the available data suggested that 88 per cent of families with whom *Homeless to Home* had worked were still housed.

As families would still be housed straight after *Homeless to Home* ceased to support them, it was important to assess how they were managing some time after they stopped receiving the *Homeless to Home* service. Table 5.4 provides information on tenancy sustainment among families who had been out of contact with *Homeless to Home* for 30 days or more and nine months or more.

**TABLE 5.4: Housing status of closed case families by time since last contact (as at 30 September 2001)**

Situation	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	All
Housed 30 days or more after contact with HTH ended	100% (77 out of 77 families)	85% (50 out of 59 families)	69% (36 out of 52 families)	87% (163 out of 188 families)
Housed nine months or more after contact with HTH ended	100% (54 out of 54 families)	80% (31 out of 39 families)	57% (21 out of 37 families)	82% (106 out of 130 families)

Source: Returns on tenancy sustainment collected from social landlords by the three projects, bases 188 and 130 families (188 families from the 218 closed case families had been living independently for 30 days or more, 130 families from the 218 closed case families had been living independently for nine months or more).

Again, there was evidence of success. As Table 5.4 shows, among the 130 closed case families who had not received any support from *Homeless to Home* for nine months or more, a large majority (82 per cent) were still housed. There was some variation between the projects, Birmingham appearing to be particularly successful with regard to long term tenancy sustainment among the families with whom it had worked.

The acid test for any resettlement service is whether it is able to prevent households with a history of homelessness from becoming homeless again. As described in Chapter 3, the review of the project records found information on past homelessness for 103 families. More than half of these 103 families (56 per cent) had been homeless at least once before when they came into contact with *Homeless to Home*.

The research team were able to match the information on past homelessness with 60 of the closed case families on whom tenancy sustainment information was available. Of these 60 families, 67 per cent of those who had been homeless before were still housed. This again suggested *Homeless to Home* was a success, allowing families with more than one experience of homelessness to sustain tenancies following their contact with the service. There were limited indications that tenancy sustainment was perhaps less successful when families with repeated experiences of homelessness had been out of contact with *Homeless to Home* for several months, but the numbers of families on whom data were available were too small to be certain of this.

Tables 5.5 and 5.6 provide more detail on tenancy sustainment. Table 5.5 covers all closed case families, and 5.6 presents the housing status of the closed case families who had been out of contact with *Homeless to Home* for nine months or more.

**TABLE 5.5: Housing status of closed case families (as at 30 September 2001)**

Situation	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	All
Housed (original tenancy)	65 (69%)	44 (73%)	30 (47%)	139 (64%)
Planned move*	27 (29%)	2 (3%)	7 (11%)	36 (17%)
Rehoused (permanent tenancy)	1 (1%)	-	10 (16%)	11 (5%)
Temporary housing	1 (1%)	4 (7%)	1 (2%)	6 (3%)
Not resident/abandoned	-	1 (2%)	2 (3%)	3 (1%)
Unknown	-	9 (15%)	14 (22%)	23 (11%)
Base	94 (100%)	60 (100%)	64 (100%)	218 (100%)

Source: Project returns on tenancy sustainment, base 218 families. Percentages are rounded.

\* including moves conducted with the assistance of *Homeless to Home*.

**TABLE 5.6: Housing status of closed case families who had been out of contact with *Homeless to Home* for nine months or more (as at 30 September 2001)**

Situation	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	All
Housed (original tenancy)	32 (59%)	27 (69%)	12 (32%)	71 (54%)
Planned move*	22 (41%)	2 (5%)	3 (8%)	27 (21%)
Rehoused (permanent tenancy)	-	-	6 (16%)	6 (5%)
Temporary housing	-	2 (5%)	-	2 (2%)
Not resident/abandoned	-	1 (3%)	2 (5%)	3 (2%)
Unknown	-	7 (18%)	14 (38%)	21 (16%)
Base	54 (100%)	39 (100%)	37 (100%)	130 (100%)

Source: Project returns on tenancy sustainment. Percentages are rounded. \* including moves conducted with the assistance of *Homeless to Home*.

In examining Tables 5.5 and 5.6, it is important to view tenancy sustainment in terms of families' capacity to successfully live independently. Rehousing and planned moves may be supportive of this process of sustaining a home as it could involve moving to better and more suitable environments, something which the fieldwork suggested was not uncommon in Sheffield (Tables 5.5 and 5.6). Families could also move for other reasons, such as to secure good school places for their children or as a result of securing work.

Among the families who had been out of contact with *Homeless to Home* for nine months or more as at 30 September 2001, the proportion of those who were still known to be housed did fall slightly (see also Table 5.4). This was less true for the Birmingham project than the Sheffield and Bristol projects. However, according to the best information available, the bulk of families with whom the three projects had not been in contact for nine months or more were still housed (summarised in Table 5.4).

Comparative data on the tenancy sustainment of homeless families who were not receiving a resettlement service, both within the three cities and elsewhere, were sought without success by the research team. The examination of the project records, which it must be noted had information on past experience of homelessness in only 103 out of 271 cases, suggested a widespread problem of repeat homelessness among families in the three cities (see Chapter 3). It is worth repeating that of the 103 families on whom information was available, 56 per cent had been homeless at least once before. Other information that the research gathered also needs to be borne in mind. The research documented a range of pressures and problems across all three cities, ranging from poor housing stock and areas characterised by crime and nuisance, through to severe financial hardship, which clearly represented threats to successful tenancy sustainment. It is not unreasonable to surmise that had the *Homeless to Home* service not been present, given what we know about the pressures many of these families faced, at least some would not have been able to sustain their tenancies and would have returned to homelessness.

The number of families who were known to have become homeless again was very low and even if most of those families whose status was unknown had returned to homelessness, a clear majority of the 218 families with whom *Homeless to Home* had worked were still housed.<sup>11</sup>

11. The figures on tenancy sustainment are simply records of families' broad housing status. These data are not, in themselves, indicators of either successful or unsatisfactory resettlement (i.e. where a family has sustained a tenancy, but conditions are not what they should be).

*I think the main success of the project is how many people we have supported, the quality of the work we do and the breadth of support we provide, the vast majority of people do stay in their properties and that is the main thing (project manager).*

Although other local agencies acknowledged that the *Homeless to Home* service had not been operating for long and were a little cautious, they were generally impressed with the service and one respondent also commented on the improved levels of tenancy sustainment.

*We have run stats on tenancy sustainment and Homeless to Home really makes a difference, OK it hasn't been going all that long but we compared all tenancies with Homeless to Home tenancies and the level of abandonment, people leaving without giving a vacation reason or proper notice across my stock is far, far lower for Homeless to Home tenancies (local authority representative).*

## **Families' views on managing without *Homeless to Home***

Interviews were conducted with families who were no longer supported by *Homeless to Home*. These interviews were repeats of earlier interviews with families who had subsequently ceased to receive support. Some of these families had been supported during early stages of *Homeless to Home*. A number of these families had experienced some problems since their case was closed but felt able to contact the project if necessary.

*I have been in touch with Homeless to Home once but I don't remember what it was for, we have been getting on OK. I would pop in sometimes but there is no time, I seem to be back and forth to hospital with the children and my partner... I would ring them if I had a problem... I don't remember when they closed the case but I remember they asked me if I felt ready to manage on my own, it was enough and for the right length of time (family).*

Other families obviously missed the project, especially being able to use the drop in. The following family did not want to become involved in the user group which continued to meet regularly but would have enjoyed informal meetings. However, she did feel able to contact the project if she needed help.

*If I got a letter inviting me down I'd go, the kids loved it there, lots of toys and people to mix with and they always ask about [project workers]... My disability forms will need filling in again next month so I will go and ask Shelter for help with that (family).*

Some of these families spoke about their feelings of increased self-confidence and the ability to handle challenges for themselves, sometimes openly making the link between this and their previous support from *Homeless to Home*. Most faced at least some ongoing problems, around managing on a tight budget or the area in which they were living, but the majority reported improvements in both their capacity to manage and their quality of life.

## **The difficulties families sometimes faced in sustaining tenancies**

Although the majority of families felt more able to cope and were settled in their new homes when contact with *Homeless to Home* ended, this was not always the case. In a few instances families made little or no progress after contact with the *Homeless to Home* service. This was sometimes because they faced overwhelming problems and sometimes because of factors the projects could not exercise direct control over, like having been rehoused in a location with many social problems.

The review of the project records and interviews with project workers indicated that problems could arise in sustaining tenancies because of families encountering racial harassment, domestic violence (usually the reappearance of a violent male ex-partner from whom the family had escaped), poor housing conditions or the problems of living in an environment characterised by high levels of crime and nuisance.

*There are people who, we don't necessarily think they are fine but no matter how many times we try to explain, how many times you go through things nothing changes but we don't feel that we can do anymore – that is difficult but you have to otherwise you could have a caseload of people who would never change and we would not be able to take anyone else on. We'd just have a case load of people with really acute problems. There are masses of reasons why they can't move on and we just can't do anything – but they are the minority, there are only a handful who are like that (project manager).*

*But there's some that... the case that I referred to before, that's one I am struggling on closing, that's more than twelve months. Because I think it's difficult when you look and you don't feel there's been any difference from our involvement, I think, you struggle on those ones (project manager).*

When these sorts of problems occurred some families had sought the help of *Homeless to Home* and moved from an unacceptable living situation into alternative accommodation. The projects were willing to work with families again when they faced difficulties that put their tenancies at risk. In a handful of cases it was sometimes necessary to take the decision that a family's problems were so overwhelming or difficult for the project to manage that working with them would not be productive.

*... a few people come back, if another problem crops up and we do try to help – we tell them in the closing letter to come back if it is a housing problem – we have to try to keep it to housing otherwise it would be open-ended. We do get back in touch with people if we discover that they are having problems with their rent (project manager).*

*We have worked with two or three families for a second time. We refused to take one on again. The one we are working with again at the moment left the city and abandoned her house and then came back to us... (project manager).*

## Summary

While there were sometimes difficulties, the three *Homeless to Home* projects were generally successful at bring service delivery to a close and managing the process in a sensitive way. There was evidence of significant success in sustaining tenancies: almost nine out of ten families with whom *Homeless to Home* had worked were still in housing after their contact with the projects ceased.





## 6 Conclusions

### Introduction

This final chapter begins with an examination of the overall success of *Homeless to Home*, before moving on to discuss the effect of external factors on the performance of the three projects. The chapter ends with a discussion of the possible future role of *Homeless to Home* services in the context of Supporting People and the requirement that local authorities produce a homelessness strategy for their area.

### The success of *Homeless to Home*

The three projects demonstrated considerable success in helping formerly homeless families to sustain their tenancies. The majority of families were still in permanent housing, albeit that some of them had moved to alternative accommodation or left the area, some months after their contact with *Homeless to Home* had ceased. There were also successes in other respects, with the projects building self-confidence and teaching new skills to many of the families that they worked with.

These successes rested on three features of the *Homeless to Home* service:

- flexibility
- successful joint working and assistance with access to other services
- providing a comprehensive response (involving other agencies as necessary).

### Flexibility

Early experiments in resettlement, which tended to be focussed on former rough sleepers and single homeless people, sometimes met with mixed success because they focussed on one or two aspects of a person's potential needs, such as 'life skills' training or arranging access to health and community care services, while neglecting others. In contrast, *Homeless to Home* met with success with many of the families it worked with because it was a highly flexible service. As the previous chapters have shown, families could present project workers with anything from a need for saucepans through to requiring help dealing with a violent ex-partner and expect a response. Sometimes this response would be directly from the worker, providing what was needed and sometimes it would involve the worker assisting families with their access to other services or acting as an advocate on the family's behalf (for example representing a family in rent arrears or in appealing a Benefit Agency decision).

This flexibility meant that there were few areas in which the projects could not provide the families with assistance, even if that assistance was confined to approaching or involving other agencies on their behalf. This kind of service response is necessitated by the diverse needs and experiences of homeless families and by the often complex and varied nature of their needs, which was illustrated earlier on in this report.

### Successful joint working

Success in providing a flexible service also meant successful joint working. There were many areas of need, ranging from the practical and financial through to more complex and difficult-

to-manage needs, which *Homeless to Home*, as a housing related support service, was not designed to deal with. These needs, if they go unmet, may often mean that the capacity of a family to sustain a tenancy is undermined, sometimes to the point where they abandon it and return to homelessness.

It is therefore vital that services like *Homeless to Home* engage with the Benefits Agency, the local Primary Care Trust and social services on behalf of families when it is necessary to do so. The three projects did this with a considerable degree of success. Equally, strong links with other voluntary sector projects working in the same or related fields, for example those providing specialist or more intensive support, can be of great importance. Again the projects were successful in this regard. For example, the Birmingham project had a number of links of this sort and was particularly successful in its relationship with a range of grant-making trusts that could provide families with extra income or fund relatively expensive items like washing machines or fridges. The other two projects had similar links. All the projects also had a role in helping families access education for their children and sometimes in working with police or the Probation Service around problems like the reappearance of a violent ex-partner.

## A comprehensive response

The flexibility of the *Homeless to Home* service was in turn enhanced by successful joint working which often allowed the service to provide families with a fairly comprehensive response to their needs. In using the term ‘comprehensive’ it is important to bear in mind that in the context in which *Homeless to Home* was working this meant a service response that was as wide ranging as possible, rather than one that necessarily solved the many problems that individual families faced. Nevertheless, the projects aimed to address those areas of need that undermined the chances of a family sustaining a tenancy through providing services directly and through working with other agencies.

This role extended into areas that have not often been given the same attention by some resettlement services. The three projects worked actively towards developing user involvement and participation and also ran social events focussed on the whole family or on children. Christmas parties, day trips, user groups and a range of other social activities, coupled with social and emotional support from project workers, meant that the psychosocial wellbeing of families was also something that the projects concerned themselves with. Of course, the projects did not represent a form of counselling service, but there was some recognition that isolation, loneliness and sometimes general alienation could result from homelessness, affecting both children and adults. This element of service delivery, which studies of resettlement services for single homeless people have shown to be important (and as an area that was until relatively recently quite neglected), was important in giving families a positive view of the service as caring and supportive. The social and emotional side of activity provided an important support in itself, because the project workers were someone for parents and children to talk to about how they felt during periods of particular difficulty.

Success was also evident in the way in which the service was managed. Relationships between families and workers were clear and controlled and there was very good record keeping in two of the projects. All the projects used clear criteria, based around the service agreements, in explaining what the service did and what was expected of families.

Operational problems with the projects, particularly given the fact that they were pilots of a new kind of service, were surprisingly minor. New services commonly take many months or even periods of a year or more to settle down and become effective. However, *Homeless to Home* avoided many of these problems and generally operated effectively across the three cities in which projects were based.

One project had less well developed administration, particularly in relation to record keeping, than was the case for the other two. However, its record keeping systems improved as the evaluation drew to an end. Although the three projects were all planned along similar lines, the role of this project also became less clear during its initial operation. Work was underway to tighten focus of the project as the evaluation drew to a close. These operational problems were, however, within a project that still showed considerable evidence of success.

In another project a self-referral system had become unbalanced to some degree at around the time the evaluation stopped. This had to some degree changed the function of the service away from what had originally been intended. This had led to a decision to review the referral system for the project, modifying the operation of what was nevertheless a successful service.

With hindsight, it is arguable that two of the projects kept client records that were rather more detailed than was necessary. While the information held by both projects was excellent in quality and detail, the staff time spent completing the very extensive records must have been considerable and on balance, the management information the projects needed could probably have been maintained using a smaller dataset. However, this was a fairly minor point.

## The limitations of resettlement services

*Homeless to Home* ran into difficulties in supporting some families and experienced some families either disappearing or, although only in a very few cases, returning to homelessness. No service is ever perfect, yet it was one of the central findings of the evaluation that when resettlement failed, it was generally difficult to lay the blame for this at the feet of the three *Homeless to Home* services.

*Homeless to Home* ran into difficulties with resettling families largely because of external factors. Families who had problems with sustaining their tenancy were often living in areas with a very high level of crime and nuisance, and it was difficult to see how anyone could live wholly successfully within environments in which they felt it was unsafe to allow their children out to play during the day. Of course, *Homeless to Home* could have a role in finding alternative accommodation for families in this sort of situation, something that it routinely did, but shortages of high quality social rented stock in better areas was an issue in all three areas. If families had problems like a history of rent arrears, it would also sometimes be difficult for *Homeless to Home* to help rehouse them.

The effects of relative poverty on some of the families were also important. Families experienced considerable difficulty in living off benefits, which are still set at levels that assume periods of unemployment will be short term. It was often very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to meet competing needs for money with only a highly restricted income coming into the household. Project workers would sometimes be involved for weeks or months in seeking to provide families with carpeting, or basic white goods like a washing machine or fridge, and were routinely involved in appealing community care grant decisions. It would be an exaggeration to say that the lack of income actually caused families to cease to be able to manage in their tenancies, but it created a context in which the capacity of a family to respond to fresh pressures and its general sense of wellbeing were under considerable strain.

More generally, a service like *Homeless to Home* could only go so far in addressing the needs of the homeless families. This is not to say that the service could not sometimes improve their situation substantially, because it could, but this was not the same thing as being able to fully address the social and economic marginalisation that these families experienced. A successfully resettled homeless family was still a family that was unlikely to be part of the formal economy, a family in which the children were not going to have the same life chances as those in a middle

class family and a family that was quite likely to be living in an area that many people would not be very happy being in. Of course, these were issues that are outside the capacity of three small housing related support services, being matters of public policy at a local authority, regional and national level within the UK nations. Nevertheless, the scale of the disadvantage and the exclusion faced by homeless families was important in understanding how far a project like *Homeless to Home* can succeed, not only in helping homeless families sustain their tenancies, but also in helping them reintegrate into social and economic life.

## ***Homeless to Home*, supporting people and local authority homelessness strategies**

All local authorities that are housing authorities are now required to produce a homelessness strategy. These strategies must cover all forms of homelessness including family homelessness. Preventative, resettlement and low intensity support services are to be developed for all homeless people and households, with the new requirement representing a shift towards a comprehensive approach, rather than a focus on particular aspects of homelessness such as rough sleeping (Randall and Brown, 2002). The development of homelessness strategies provides an opportunity for a new focus on the needs of homeless families.

The potentially important role of a resettlement service like *Homeless to Home* within homelessness strategies is self-evident. Although careful consideration will have to be given to the detailed design of projects to allow for the situation they will be facing in specific areas, resettlement services like *Homeless to Home* clearly have a role in addressing the problem of family homelessness. For any service to be successful, it would have to demonstrate the flexibility associated with an attempt to provide a comprehensive service through effective joint working. In other words, to be effective, *Homeless to Home* or a similar service will need to be set firmly in a context of cooperation with other voluntary and statutory sector services. A project designed to provide resettlement for homeless families that operates in isolation is likely to be a failure.

Clearly, *Homeless to Home* is a service that can be funded from the Supporting People pot on an authority by authority, or cross-authority, basis (DETR, 2001). It provides a service that meets many of the criteria of the Supporting People programme, in that it:

- targets vulnerable people who are unable to sustain tenancies without support;
- provides housing related floating support designed to help people sustain tenancies and live successfully in their own homes;
- uses a service agreement between the service users and the service provider.

The only respect in which *Homeless to Home*, as a floating housing related support service, does not fully meet the criteria of the Supporting People programme is in relation to its current focus on the social rented sector. There may be scope in future service development to consider the formal extension of the service to cover families in the private rented sector. In addition, the service might be used in a preventative way, targeting families at risk of homelessness who are living in the owner occupied sector. Such preventative services, focussed on tenancy sustainment and prevention of homelessness, might also be developed as part of the role of *Homeless to Home* or as specialist services covering families at risk of homelessness in the social rented sector.

It is important that the strengths of the *Homeless to Home* pilot projects are not lost in any attempt to reduce the operational costs of the service. While the overall cost of services is of course of central concern in Supporting People strategies at a local authority level, it equally has to be recognised that a service like *Homeless to Home* has to retain the flexibility of the

three pilot projects. Any attempt to reduce costs by narrowing the scope of future services, \for example by downplaying the importance of the social support/social events role while emphasizing what might seem to be the less nebulous concept of 'practical support', is likely to lead to reduced effectiveness. Equally, an attempt to contain cost by restricting availability to three or six months is similarly likely to undermine the effectiveness of the services. While the projects worked to a one-year programme with families, they were able to do so on a flexible basis, extending and reducing this period as appropriate to the families' needs. Such an approach is preferable to ending or continuing support according to an arbitrary time limit. The strengths of the three pilot projects must therefore be held in mind when considering any further commissioning of *Homeless to Home* projects under Supporting People.

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12. The families had all signed a waiver allowing their address details to be passed to CHP. This was the same waiver that allowed the research team access to the monitoring records held on each family by the three Homeless to Home team, as well as families' addresses for approach for interview.



# Appendix 1

## Research methods

This appendix outlines the main research methods utilised in the evaluation of the *Homeless to Home* service. The following key methods were used in the research:

- A postal survey of homeless families
- Analysis of *Homeless to Home* case work records
- Interviews with homeless families
- Focus groups with user groups
- Interviews with staff, volunteers and other key players
- Qualitative contextual interviews with other homeless families.

## A postal survey of homeless families

Families who had used or who were currently using the *Homeless to Home* services in the three cities were asked to participate in a postal survey in October 2000. It was anticipated that securing a reasonable response rate to a postal survey from families might be problematic given the difficult circumstances families were attempting to cope with, as well as possible barriers around literacy, English as a first language and a distrust of officialdom. The survey therefore had to be short, non-threatening and easily comprehensible; it also had to be available in more than one language for the minority of families whose first language was not English.

In order to try to maximise the response rate a short colour leaflet was sent to all the families that explained the research and what would be happening in a concise and straightforward way. The postal survey itself was sent after these leaflets had been distributed, although the process was almost simultaneous in Bristol for logistical reasons. The leaflet was translated into five different languages (Urdu, Somali, Farsi, Arabic and French), the key languages used by the majority of families whose first language was not English. The survey itself was translated into the two languages (Urdu and Somali) where it was known that non-English speakers were using the service; unfortunately cost prohibited translation of the survey into all languages. The families were sent a £5 gift voucher with the survey, that could be used at a number of high street stores, as further encouragement to complete it. In addition, the Sheffield *Homeless to Home* project user group very kindly assisted the research team by reading through the draft of the questionnaire and providing comments on the accessibility and appropriateness of the questions.

140 households were sent a survey,<sup>12</sup> although subsequently six families were found to no longer be living at their last known address, which reduced the number actually receiving a survey to 134. Of these 134 households, 34 were in Birmingham, 57 in Bristol and 43 in Sheffield. The overall response rate was 40 per cent, a total of 53 households. The response rates in each area were 41 per cent (14 households) for Birmingham; 35 per cent in Bristol (20 households) and 44 per cent (19 households) in Sheffield.

Almost all the families who responded to the survey had been permanently rehoused. The 53 households contained 196 people of whom 131 (67 per cent) were children, the average household size being just under four people. Most of the households (32 families, 62 per cent) contained a lone mother who was bringing up one or more children on her own, however

the responses from families in Birmingham came disproportionately from couples with children (when compared to overall monitoring information). A further 18 families (34 per cent) were couples with one or more children. Just under half the children (48 per cent) were under school age. Families headed by a White European person represented 62 per cent of the 53 households who responded to the survey (33 families). The response rate was sufficiently high to enable a reasonable degree of confidence that the results of the survey were broadly representative of the views of the families as a whole, however it should be remembered that these results are from a minority of between 35–44 per cent of the families in each city. In consequence, findings from the postal survey should be treated as *indicators* of what the families felt about their situations and the *Homeless to Home* service.

## Analysis of *Homeless to Home* case work records

All three Shelter *Homeless to Home* projects collected comprehensive information for their own management and operational requirements. Projects collected basic household information at the time of referral as well as details on the re-housing process. In addition, all projects completed a service plan with each family, and detailed notes on ongoing contact with families were recorded in case notes.

As the *Homeless to Home* recording systems were fairly consistent across projects, it was not necessary for the research team to undertake a separate monitoring exercise. Rather the research team undertook a number of visits to the projects to transfer anonymised information onto summary research forms for analysis. All families had signed a consent form giving access to their case notes for the purpose of this evaluation. Quantitative baseline information was collected on the characteristics of the families and the process of referral and rehousing. The rich qualitative information found in the case notes was summarised into a written narrative.

### Number of records

During *Homeless to Home*'s operation from inception until October 2001, the three *Homeless to Home* projects opened files for 378 homeless families. Table A1 also shows that 271 records were examined by the research team, representing 71 per cent of families who received a service from *Homeless to Home*. This provides a near complete picture of provision, particularly as a proportion of those files not examined were cases where a referral had been accepted but no direct work with the families had been undertaken.

**TABLE A1** *Homeless to Home* records, by project

Project	Records examined	Total no. cases (Oct 2001)
Birmingham	92 (34%)	132
Bristol	95 (35%)	137
Sheffield	84 (31%)	109
Total	271 (100%)	378

Percentages are rounded.

## Interviews with homeless families

One of the main methods used to explore the effectiveness of *Homeless to Home* was in-depth interviews with homeless families. Table A2 shows that 24 families participated in individual interviews (a total of 26 adults), including ten families in Birmingham, and seven in Bristol and Sheffield respectively. As the research was interested in exploring changes over time, five families were re-interviewed after they had been settled for at least nine months. A total of 29 interviews were conducted with adult members of *Homeless to Home* households.

**TABLE A2** Number of adult interviews with *Homeless to Home* users, by project

	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	Total
Number families	10	7	7	24
Number of repeat interviews	1	2	2	5
Number of adult interviews	11	9	9	29

In addition, and very importantly, it was also an intention of the research to explore children's perspectives of the service. Five separate interviews were conducted with children (three in Sheffield and one each in Birmingham and Bristol). These interviews included a total of fifteen children between the ages of 7 and 16.

### Selecting families

The *Homeless to Home* project teams all provided the research teams with a full list of potential interviewees for each of the three areas; as noted earlier, families had signed a waiver allowing this information to be passed onto the researchers. Project managers indicated where there may be any problems contacting families (particularly, due to language), and if there were any families who were presently in particular crisis (these families were left out of sampling at this point). In selecting families for potential interview, the research team also examined the monitoring records to ensure that families were selected who would reflect the overall characteristics of the user group and represent the full range of issues that were encountered by the projects in the three cities.

### Approaching families

In the first round of interviews conducted in late 2000/ early 2001, the families were sent letters briefly explaining the nature and purpose of the interview and were asked to complete and return a short form only if they wanted to participate in the evaluation. The letter also explained that families participating would receive £10 per interview. A stamped addressed envelope was provided.

The recruitment of interviewees was not straightforward. Only a few families responded to the first letter. Reminder letters were then sent out to the remaining three families who had not replied. The second letter was a simple reminder but this time families were asked to let the team know whether or not they wanted to take part in the evaluation (by returning a tear off slip in a prepaid addressed envelope). The letter explained that this was important as another family could be invited to participate instead. A few families responded to the second letter, in some cases a number of weeks later.

Once the team had received responses from the families then contact was made with the family by telephone or by letter to arrange a date for the interview and to discuss the possibility of interviewing the children. Some further problems were experienced as some families who had connected telephones did not respond to messages and those who did not

have telephones often failed to reply to letters. In many cases it took a number of letters or telephone calls, often over several weeks, before an appointment could be arranged. Once a date and time had been arranged the team telephoned or wrote to the family close to the appointed time to confirm the appointment and to check whether this was still convenient. In a couple of cases, potential interviewees were not available when the researcher called to conduct the interview.

Due to the problems experienced in the first round of interviews, it was decided to approach families more directly about the possibility of interview in the second round of interviews conducted in Summer 2001. The research team wrote a letter to selected families explaining they would be in the area on certain dates interviewing families and that they would very much like to interview them at a specified time in their home. The voluntary nature of participating was stressed, as was encouragement of changing the appointment to a more convenient day or time. Researchers then called around to families' houses at the time suggested and if the family was in, once again stressed the voluntary nature of the interview. This approach to interviewing proved much more successful and in about half of cases families were in and very happy to participate in the research.

### **Interviewing children**

Guidelines for interviewing children were prepared by the research team and approved by the Shelter Project Steering Group. The guidelines included procedures on gaining the consent of children to be interviewed as well as procedures for ensuring confidentiality. Importantly, however, the guidelines also specified exceptions whereby if any child was at risk of or disclosed that they were being abused, or threatening to commit suicide, this information would be passed onto a third party.

All researchers were police checked and interviews were only conducted when two adults were present. Children were usually interviewed with their siblings. A consent form was signed by both the parents and the children before the interview commenced. It was made clear to children that they could stop the interview at any time, and that they did not have to answer any of the questions. In effect, however, as the topic guide was very broad and focussed on the *Homeless to Home* service and their views on their house, area and school, it appeared that children found the process quite straightforward and easy. As with their parents, each child participating in the research was given £10 to thank them for their time.

### **Focus groups with user groups**

Three focus groups involving *Homeless to Home* user groups were conducted during the course of the research to explore the success of these forums from the perspectives of active users. Two groups were held in Birmingham where there was a particularly active user group, Just for Laughs. This group was interviewed once in 2000 and once in 2001. In addition, a focus group was held with a user group that had been set up by a small group of Somali families in Sheffield. Focus group members were all given £10 to thank them for their participation in the research.

### **Interviews with staff, volunteers and other key players**

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with project managers and support workers in all three areas. The handy persons in Sheffield and Bristol were also interviewed, as was the Family Support Worker in Birmingham. Staff members were interviewed separately to preserve confidentiality. Project managers were interviewed twice, at the start and the end of the project, to ensure that the development process of the service over time was fully documented.

Volunteers were also interviewed in all three areas, including a group of four volunteers in Bristol, the main volunteer in Birmingham and interviews with both volunteers providing practical support as well as the befriending volunteer, in Sheffield.

In addition, two Shelter policy staff members were interviewed at the project's outset to investigate the setting up of the service. The line manager of all the three projects was also interviewed at the start and end of the project.

Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with partner agency representatives in all three areas and local authority representatives in two study areas where the local authority was not the partner agency.

## **Qualitative contextual interviews with other homeless families**

A small number of in-depth interviews with homeless families who had been rehoused in the same local authority areas, but had not received resettlement support, were also undertaken to gain insight into the process of rehousing without support. It was originally envisaged that 15 families would be interviewed, five families in each *Homeless to Home* area. However, only four families were interviewed, as the research team encountered difficulties in recruiting interviewees. Local authority staff in each area were approached and kindly agreed to sample twenty families who had recently been rehoused in the same area as *Homeless to Home* families but were known not to have been referred to the project. For confidentiality reasons, the local authority agreed to send out a letter, leaflet and SAE on behalf of the research team. Again, to preserve confidentiality, families were asked to respond directly to the University if they were interested in being interviewed for the research. As with *Homeless to Home* interviewees, families were offered £10 for taking part. Unfortunately, only four families out of the possible sixty replied to the University. This was perhaps not surprising given the fact that families had just experienced homelessness, were likely never to have heard about *Homeless to Home* and might also have had literacy and languages barriers. Nonetheless, the low response rate was disappointing; time-scales precluded the investigation of alternative methods of contacting families but important research lessons were learnt from the process.

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