

Contact Field Lane:
The Field Lane Foundation, 16 Vine Hill, London, EC1R 5EA

website: www.fieldlane.org.uk
telephone: 020 7837 0412
fax: 020 7278 4312
e mail: info@fieldlane.org.uk



The Field Lane Foundation



Putting Families First

*Supporting families who are homeless
in temporary accommodation*

A MODEL OF CARE



PREFACE

Putting Families First is more than a title; it is how good services for families and children are planned and delivered by Field Lane.

Our plans for supported temporary accommodation, which are highlighted in this report, are based on the experience we have had in providing day services for families since 1984. These projects are based on joint arrangements with other voluntary organisations, especially the Poor Servants of the Mother of God and Shelter, as well as the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate and local authorities. These exemplify a modern, integrated approach to service provision and we are very pleased to be working so closely with them. I would especially like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate since its inception.



Since our founding in 1841, when the needs of the ragged children in the Hatton Garden area drove Field Lane's committee to establish new initiatives in education, health and housing, we have always aimed to support people at times of great personal need. This report documents our continuing commitment to develop modern initiatives, new models and new partnerships that directly benefit the families and children. Please use the freepost feedback form you will find in the back of Putting Families First.

If you would like to know more about Field Lane or to work with us please see our website; www.fieldlane.org.uk.

Jeremy Lamb
Chief Executive
Field Lane

"A MODEL OF CARE"



*Supporting families who are homeless
in temporary accommodation*

CONTENTS

PREFACE – Jeremy Lamb, Chief Executive, Field Lane	p2
FOREWORD - Terrie Alafat, Director of the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate	p5



CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

The policy context	p6
The continuing need for support	p6

CHAPTER TWO – A NEW APPROACH TO SUPPORTING FAMILIES WHO ARE HOMELESS

Temporary accommodation with integrated support	p8
The Field Lane Foundation – Putting Families First	p8
An invitation to readers	p8



CHAPTER THREE – LESSONS FROM WORKING WITH FAMILIES WHO ARE HOMELESS

Who are the families?	p9
What the families ask for	p9

CHAPTER 4 – THE MODEL OF CARE

Reaching out: introducing the Families' Centre	p10
Arriving at the Families' Centre	p11
Meeting families' immediate needs	p12
Introducing the supported temporary accommodation	p12
Planning for the future	p13
Moving on to better things	p14
Health care	p15
Meeting children's needs	p16
Restoring self-esteem	p18
Improving family relationships	p19
Handling difficulties	p20
Developing parents' skills	p21
Practical support	p22
Supporting resettlement	p22
Conclusion	p23
The Model of Care diagram	p23



Feedback and order form

Acknowledgments and thanks

Parents and children from the Field Lane Families' Centres.

The Field Lane Families' Services Committee and the Special Interest Group whose commitment ensured the research was undertaken and published.

Georgina Anderson, Field Lane's Children's and Families' Services Manager, whose personal vision and energy has given the Families' Centre its reputation.

The Families' Centres staff and volunteers, past and

present, on whom the families rely.

The Barings Foundation whose generosity has made this report possible.

Terrie Alafat, and the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate, who continue to give strong support to Field Lane's work.

Janet Williams and Mike Williams from Partnership at Work, who conducted this research.

Helen Stone, photographer.

FORWARD TO PUTTING FAMILIES FIRST

On 1 April 2004 the Government's Bed and Breakfast (B&B) target will be incorporated into legislation through the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order. This legislation will help to ensure homeless families with children are provided with the most appropriate temporary housing solution.

I was therefore delighted when Field Lane invited me to write the foreword to *Putting Families First*, because I believe this research will be an invaluable tool for voluntary and statutory service providers to promote best practice and new ways of working.

The ODPM's Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate, which now incorporates the Supporting People Programme, first became aware of Field Lane's special approach to its work with families when the Homelessness Directorate was established in 2002. The innovative and holistic work of Field Lane outlined in *Putting Families First* shows what works in preventing the 'revolving door' of homelessness that some families suffer and also the importance of providing these services in a welcoming and non-judgmental environment.



Putting Families First presents the responses of the families themselves, which eloquently describe how relieved the parents felt when they found an experienced staff team, who were able to provide the vital support and help they needed. I would encourage all local authorities and agencies providing services for homeless families to read this report and assess their own services in light of this research, so that all families living in temporary accommodation benefit.

The ODPM's Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate is pleased to be supporting Field Lane's innovative plans to establish two residential units providing supported accommodation for homeless families. We will be watching with great interest to see the difference in-house support makes to long term tenancy sustainment.

I thank Field Lane for its work and wish them every success in the future.

Terrie Alafat
Director
Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The policy context

Before the Homelessness Act 2002 was passed, London boroughs usually placed families accepted as homeless in cheap bed and breakfast hotels. Families tended to find themselves in areas including Bayswater, Earls Court, Finsbury Park, Kings Cross and Shepherds Bush, living in one room in accommodation shared with other families and individuals in similarly uncertain circumstances.

Over the past 20 years, voluntary bodies have set up day centre-based services to support adults and children. Field Lane was one, opening its first premises in a church basement in Kings Cross in 1984. In 2002 the Homelessness Act was finally passed, making local authorities responsible for preventing families from experiencing the worst disadvantages of bed and breakfast life. But what support will there be during transition between becoming homeless and finally settling in a permanent home? What help will there be for those children and parents who have suffered the damaging consequences of the cycle of homelessness?

Since the Government announced in June 2002 that families who are homeless would not be placed in bed and breakfast hotels after March 2004, except when no other accommodation is available and for no longer than 6 weeks, local authorities have been obliged to develop alternatives. In one London borough, for example, this means providing alternative accommodation for about 150 families a year or 20% of those accepted as homeless at any one time. Other authorities anticipate a much larger task.

In addition to providing accommodation, the 2002 Act requires local authorities to assess the support needs of families who approach the authority as homeless. The DETR Good Practice Guide expects them to ensure that "there is satisfactory support for people who are...homeless".¹ While many families placed in temporary accommodation, such as short term housing association properties, private renting or hostels, may be able to manage adequately on their own, the need for support on becoming homeless has been abundantly demonstrated over many years. Supporting families who are homeless can no longer be regarded as just a housing matter.

One advantage of placing families in temporary accommodation in certain relatively small areas of the capital was that it enabled the voluntary sector to

organise support within easy reach of many households. As local authority strategies for avoiding the use of bed and breakfast accommodation are implemented, families will find themselves in hostels and other temporary housing spread across a much wider area. New ways must be found to provide support and help for families who are homeless, either in residential settings or by going out to families as they try to settle in stable homes.

The continuing need for support

In the past, the trauma of homelessness for many families was exacerbated by the very unsuitable temporary accommodation in which they were often placed. Ceasing to use bed and breakfast hotels should help to avoid or reduce some of the difficulties, but many families who are homeless have complex needs which will continue to require a range of skilled support.



" There is often little room for children to play and run around in temporary accommodation, and limited storage for toys. Space for the children to play was one of the main attractions to parents of the Field Lane Families' Centre."

- Domestic violence continues to be a major cause of homelessness. The most frequent causes appear to be relationship breakdown and domestic violence, followed by debt and rent arrears, anti-social behaviour especially on the part of children and poor housing conditions. In the seven years to 2002 local authorities re-housed more than 130,000 homeless households because of domestic violence.²
- Levels of repeat homelessness may be as high as 20-30%. The 'revolving door' of homelessness undermines family stability. Figures from several recent studies indicate that as many as half of families who are homeless have already experienced homelessness at least once; some many times. The frequent moves tend in their turn to exacerbate family problems.³
- Black and ethnic minority families are over-represented amongst families who are homeless: estimated in 2002 to make up 22% of all families who are homeless as opposed to 8% of the population as a whole.⁴
- Refugee families may have suffered severe trauma from torture, rape, prison, and the death of family members; they have to adjust to living in a new culture where their race, culture and religion is often not understood or respected; family members may have become separated; gender relationships and roles are under strain; reunion with later arrivals may be difficult.⁵
- Children's health and development may be delayed as a result of living in sub-standard accommodation. They may be "more prone to poorer educational attainment, and injuries in the home".⁶ They are twice as likely as others to be admitted to hospital, and rates of admission as a result of accidents are particularly high. "The long-term health effects on children growing up in bed and breakfast accommodation will not be known for years".⁷
- Children may suffer developmental delay or have mental health problems. "Homeless children are significantly more likely than the general population...to have delayed development, learning difficulties, and higher rates of mental health problems (behavioural problems such as sleep disturbance, eating problems, aggression and over-activity, and emotional problems such as anxiety, depression and self-harm)."⁸
- Homeless parents, especially mothers, are more likely than others to suffer from depression as a result of their experience of violence, abuse and social disruption. This may continue for a significant period after re-housing to permanent accommodation.⁹
- There is often little room for children to play and run around in temporary accommodation, and limited storage for toys.¹⁰ Space for the children to play was one of the main attractions to parents of the Field Lane Families' Centre.
- Families may suffer the results of poor diet as a consequence of having to use a kitchen at a distance and on a different floor from their room, and sharing with other families.¹¹
- Shared accommodation may bring other risks from drugs, prostitution, or unhygienic communal bathrooms, all of which cause parents to restrict children's freedom of movement,¹² as interviews with families at the Field Lane Families Centre, 2003, also illustrated.
- Children's education is disrupted by frequent changes of accommodation. For example, a study in Birmingham found that only 29% of homeless children were attending mainstream school, whereas 73% of them had done so before becoming homeless. Homelessness affects speech and language development: life in poor housing conditions makes it hard for school children to study.¹³
- Parents' efforts to provide routine and stability for their children can be undermined by the noise and constant movement of other children and adults in multiple occupation buildings and bed and breakfast hotels.
- Children may be embarrassed to tell others where they live, and their social support and development is affected by being unable to bring friends home for visits or overnight stays.¹⁴

² ODPM, *Homelessness Statistics: September 2002, Domestic Violence Policy Briefing, December 2002.* ³ ODPM, *Repeat Homelessness and Homelessness Statistics, December 2003.*
⁴ ODPM, *Homelessness Statistics: June 2002.* ⁵ E Penabi, unpublished paper, 2002. ⁶ BMA Board of Science and Education, *Housing and Health: Building for the Future, 2003.*
⁷ Lisauer and others, *Influence of Homelessness on Acute Admission to Hospital, Archives of Disease in Childhood, volume 89, 1993* (quoted on page 191 by S Jones, in *Housing: The Missing Solution to Child Poverty, Childright, 2002*).
⁸ P Vostanis, E Grattan and S Camella, *Mental Health Problems Of Homeless Children And Families: A Longitudinal Study, BMJ Volume 316, 21.3.98.* ⁹ Vostanis and others, 1998.
¹⁰ ODPM, *Homelessness Statistics: September 2002, Domestic Violence Policy Briefing, December 2002.* ¹¹ ODPM, *Homelessness Statistics: June 2002.* ¹² ODPM, *Homelessness Statistics: June 2002.* ¹³ ODPM, *Homelessness Statistics: June 2002.* ¹⁴ ODPM, *Homelessness Statistics: June 2002.*

CHAPTER TWO – A NEW APPROACH TO SUPPORTING FAMILIES WHO ARE HOMELESS

This document is about an approach to supporting families with the greatest needs when they are homeless. It is based on the experience Field Lane has acquired since 1984 of providing support in a day centre setting, and shows how this experience could be translated into practice in supported temporary accommodation.

Temporary accommodation with integrated support

Between 2004 – 2006, Field Lane plans to open and pilot two temporary accommodation units with integrated support for families who are homeless, in collaboration with the Poor Servants of the Mother of God. The units will be established under the Supporting People arrangements, as a contribution towards achieving the Government's intention that families who are homeless should no longer be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Support must be holistically planned to address the wide variety of need experienced by families who are homeless. The support will follow through into the rehousing, with families being linked into a tenancy sustainment programme.

The Field Lane Foundation – Putting Families First

Field Lane was founded in 1841 to meet the educational needs of poor children and support for their families in Clerkenwell, London. It is a Christian organisation whose mission is to provide care and opportunity for people in need, enabling them to live in dignity and fulfilment.

Field Lane first offered support to homeless people living in bed and breakfast hotels in the Kings Cross area when it opened a centre in a church basement in 1984. It was quickly recognised that the service could not effectively meet the needs of single homeless people and families at the same time, and the decision was made to focus on families.

In response to this realisation the Families' Centre joined other services for children and families on what is now known as the Coram Community Campus in 1988. This multi-agency network operates in partnership to provide "comprehensive, open access and flexible services to meet the needs of parents, carers and young children in the local community".¹⁵ The Families' Centre works particularly closely with the Kings Cross Homelessness Project next door, which provides a range of services, including advice and assistance with welfare benefits.

The centre has its own management committee which is accountable to Field Lane's trustee board. There is a centre manager, reporting to the children and families' services manager, and six staff: an outreach worker, two family support workers, a health development worker and two childcare workers.

An invitation to readers

Putting Families First is offered to other agencies as an approach for them to consider when planning supported temporary accommodation for families. It describes the Model of Care developed at the Field Lane Families' Centre since 1984 and includes the views of families who have used the centre recently. This knowledge is combined with experience derived from Field Lane's other work; the residential care of older people and people with severe learning and physical disabilities, to produce an intended model for practice in the new residential support units.

Field Lane will seek to learn actively from this new endeavour. We positively welcome any comments or suggestions you may have based on your own experience of using our approach or any aspects of it.

A tear-out feedback form can be found at the end of Putting Families First. Please use it!

CHAPTER THREE - LESSONS FROM WORKING WITH FAMILIES WHO ARE HOMELESS

Who are the families?

A high proportion of the families using the centre have been fleeing failed relationships and domestic violence. Many have been refugees or asylum seekers, unfamiliar with English, and very fearful of the people and the surroundings in which they found themselves.

Amongst families who are homeless, refugees and asylum seekers suffer from particular anguish and distress, and need special encouragement and support to test out what the Families' Centre has to offer. As refugee and asylum seeker numbers may decline following proposed changes in immigration policy, the profile of families who are homeless is expected to alter. Most of the lessons learned from enabling asylum seeker and refugee families to use supportive services will continue to be relevant.

What the families ask for

Families who are homeless using the Field Lane Families' Centre say that what they most need and appreciate is to –

- feel welcomed and supported
- have space for their children to enjoy stimulating play
- be in the company of others in the same situation

Have staff who -

- treat everyone equally
- do what they say
- are warm and friendly but firm when necessary
- encourage parents to use the service "as if it was your own place"
- provide access to confidential help such as counselling
- offer opportunities for learning and personal development

Over the years Field Lane has seen parents who have initially been wary and nervous, fearful of each other and lacking in confidence; learn to trust, to help and support each other, to risk trying new things and to develop more confident relationships with other support agencies. They have seen children whose behaviour has shown the effects of the disruption and instability in their lives become calmer and more responsive.

If these effects can be achieved on the basis of often infrequent use of a day facility, which offers warmth, acceptance, reliability and respect, Field Lane believes a similar approach in a residential setting will also effectively address the needs of families who are homeless.

They expect that it will benefit those who have been several times through the 'revolving door' of homelessness, and successfully enable families to settle permanently in the medium to long-term.



CHAPTER 4 – THE MODEL OF CARE

To address family homelessness effectively, an approach is needed that relates to the experience of both adults and children. It is this grounding in a real appreciation of their experience that makes Field Lane's approach distinctive. This ethos has informed Field Lane's work with some of those in greatest need for over 160 years, and is as relevant today as it ever was.

"Some think that homeless people are the parasites of the earth, but homeless people have feelings too, and to most of us that hurts". Parent, Field Lane Families' Centre.

Based on the experience gained through day provision at the Families' Centre, the philosophy for the pilot temporary accommodation with integrated support will be to provide independent accommodation that offers high levels of support with training opportunities on the premises, and to –

- help families live as normal a life as possible, and prepare actively for their move to permanent accommodation and a settled future
- help families to see their stay as an opportunity to address the reasons for their homelessness and the effects it has on them
- enable the families to move into permanent accommodation and, in collaboration with local services, provide continuing support.

While the work undertaken in the Families' Centre has shown that families can surmount great difficulties,¹⁶ the temporary accommodation with integrated support pilots will be extensively evaluated to fully understand its effectiveness. Like most of Field Lane's endeavours over the past 160 years, the new developments require an act of faith on behalf of all the parties involved.

The sections that follow each have two parts. First they describe the elements of the Model of Care developed at the Families' Centre. Then they show, in the light purple boxes, how the model is expected to inform practice in the residential units. We start with the care

required to introduce families to the service and enable them to start using the resources. We then follow through the processes of supporting families to gain access to relevant local agencies' services, to plan for their future and move on to better things, while receiving continuing support during the resettlement process.

"To address family homelessness effectively, an approach is needed that relates to the experience of both adults and children."

Reaching out: introducing the Families' Centre

The first challenge for the Families' Centre is to win families' trust and nurture confidence in its capacity to help and support them. Field Lane, along with other voluntary organisations, has sought to be particularly out-going.

The approach adopted by the outreach worker with the bed and breakfast hotels has been to negotiate a way to make direct contact with families; knocking on their doors, presenting written information translated into the languages most frequently represented amongst families at the time; accompanying them to the Centre as necessary, and offering a warm welcome and assistance with immediate problems.

The outreach workers have learnt that many families, especially those least familiar with the experience of homelessness, need repeated offers of assistance before they feel able to respond. Some families have had such bad experiences that they find it very hard to trust others. However, gentle persistence has persuaded most families of the trustworthiness of the Families' Centre and its staff. The voluntary sector is particularly experienced in doing this.

People's independence and right to refuse are respected. Field Lane, along with other organisations, recognised that their circumstances can change and that other factors in their lives can become more important than taking advantage of the Centre's offers of help. Families' capacity to cope with depression and to manage the experience of negotiating inner London streets is also taken into account.

Introduction to the Families' Centre is therefore informed by –

- an awareness of the anxiety experienced by both adults and children when obliged to move from a familiar setting; surroundings, belongings, animals and toys; to a strange situation
- an appreciation of people's need to feel safe, enabling them to move at a pace which they can handle
- an awareness of the need to gain a sense of familiarity with the premises; showing parents and children round, making introductions, providing initial explanations but realising that it may be necessary to go over things again later, when families are better able to take in information
- by recognising the benefits of peer support, for both adults and children, while allowing people to take their time to move into social situations with other service users
- an appreciation of the value of providing a staff member to take initial responsibility for ensuring that families have the information and support they need
- knowledge of the importance of staff listening and observation to understand what

a families' immediate needs may be

- recognition of the need to give information in a form people can understand and use; in plain English, in translation if necessary, using a variety of formats (leaflets, posters, words and images), avoiding overwhelming families with too much information too soon
- an appreciation of the importance of fostering parents' sense of competence and control over their situation by offering choice wherever possible and facilitating decision making

Arriving at the Families' Centre

Visitors arriving at the Families' Centre's large glass doors can see some of the activities that take place inside. Beyond the welcome area there is a kitchen, a play room, a laundry, an office and interview room, and storage for toys, clothes and household items of the kind families need when they move into a new home with few belongings. There is also space, which has been developed in response to families' needs, for health advice and alternative treatments, and for classes for parents.

At the heart of the Families' Centre is the hall with various seating areas for parents, and the kitchen. Most days everyone sits down for lunch cooked by parents and staff. The meal served reflects the origins and culture of those who offer to prepare it. Next door is the fully equipped child care room, and its outside area with plants and space to ride tricycles and drive toy cars.

Premises used by multitudes of people quickly begin to show signs of wear and tear. Field Lane makes it a priority that the Families' Centre is maintained to a standard which values the people who use it. The centre is kept bright and clean, with paintwork, furniture and flooring being renewed at regular intervals.

Meeting families' immediate needs

"If we need it and they have it, they give it to us" Muslim parent, Families' Centre

The Model of Care recognises the essential importance to adults and children of feeling safe. Field Lane is a faith-based organisation, open to and accepting of all. This is welcomed by the families, many of whom take their own faith seriously and appreciate the respect they get at the centre. The Families' Centre provides a safe place where different faiths, cultures and races can come together, sometimes from opposing sides in a civil war. This helps to promote a sense of safety in a secular or often hostile society.

Over time, the need for a swift and appropriate response has led to staff roles becoming differentiated to cater effectively with immediate problems. Families usually first meet the outreach worker who encourages them to come to the Families' Centre.

Once there, they meet the general family support worker whose role it is to introduce families to the centre, to help them to feel at home and offer continuing general support. Either of these staff members might help with immediate difficulties such as lack of money or food, or access to health care, often by directing families to another agency.

"I can always get something to eat if I have no money."

Parent, Families' Centre.

Introducing the supported temporary accommodation

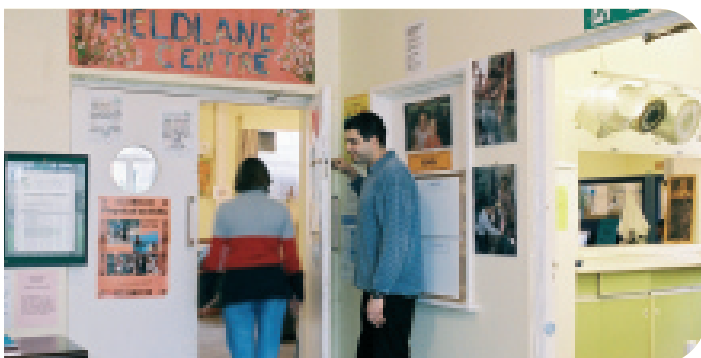
The principle on which Field Lane's introduction to the Families' Centre was developed will, as far as possible, be applied to the first contact with families who come to the supported temporary accommodation. The local authority's homelessness team will act as intermediaries, referring families according to agreed criteria.

- families must have been accepted by the local authority as statutorily homeless in order to be eligible
- a family will usually be regarded as one or more parents and their children up to the age of 12 or a lone pregnant women

The Families' Handbook describes what families can expect by way of services responsive to their needs and circumstances, acknowledging, for example, the particular circumstances of young, single parents and refugees.

It will illustrate how families' culture and traditions will be respected. It will also make clear how all families and staff are expected to respect each other's race, religion and privacy.

The Families' Handbook will be attractively produced in plain English and the community languages most likely to be used by families in need of supported accommodation. It will be made as accessible as possible to adults and children, including symbols, diagrams and pictures to illustrate what they can expect.



An appointment is made for the family to be seen as soon as possible by the family support assessment worker, who is responsible for making a thorough assessment of need. This involves a systematic review of likely needs, including health care or advice, income support, school or nursery placement, legal or immigration advice, opportunity for personal development for adults and practical needs for clothes or laundry. The assessment takes account of both children's and parents needs, and is undertaken with the assistance of an interpreter when necessary.

Planning for the future – action planning

An action plan is then agreed with the family. The family are referred to the agencies best placed to help, whether this is the Kings Cross Homelessness Project for help with welfare benefits or immigration advice, local authority departments responsible for housing applications or school placements, or legal advice. Information is sought on parents' behalf by telephone, appointments are made, and help offered with finding other agencies. Dates are fixed for following up developments at six weeks and three months.

The Model of Care aims to enable families to feel as much in charge of their situation as possible. Staff are aware of the need to achieve a balance between the person being helped and the helper. They seek to build a participatory relationship so that family members and staff are both involved in decisions about who will do what, who will contact whom and by when. As a result family members retain as much control as possible over their own affairs.

Planning with families for their future is informed by principles of –

- empowerment, informing choice by providing information
- enabling understanding, by using simple language, avoiding jargon, working with interpreters
- assuring confidentiality, gaining written agreement to record information and to pass it on when it is in the family's best interests
- respect for rights and responsibilities
- encouraging a sense of hope for the future

When families move in to a supported housing setting, the welcome they receive will also build on these principles. The unit will be staffed 24 hours a day. Staff will consist of a manager, three family support workers, an independent living worker, children's workers and part time gardening, maintenance and cleaning staff.

There will be a warm personal welcome and more detailed written information about what supported temporary accommodation can offer to parents and children. The written information will cover families' rights and responsibilities, staff roles and the services offered - such as initial help with home care - and those not offered, such as childcare on a regular basis. It will seek to convey a sense of a warm, family setting in which families have a part to play in supporting and encouraging each other.

The supported temporary accommodation and the individual flats within them are designed to provide comfortable, independent accommodation of a high standard. Like the Families' Centre, the flats and common areas will be well maintained. Families will be encouraged to make their flat as homely as possible.



The personal approach

The staffing of the Families' Centre is intended to provide sufficient personal attention to enable parents and children to feel safe and cared for, and to ensure that families' immediate and continuing needs are met.

These quotations come from families using the centre.

"I value greatly being able to talk about myself confidentially."

"I can always get something to eat if I have no money."

The families generally appreciate the balance the staff manage to achieve between a relaxed approach and the professional working practice which makes boundaries clear enough when it matters.

"The staff help me, they enable me to be free to use the facilities as if they were my own place. They don't interfere too much."

"The staff don't show 'separateness', except when necessary for safety, like keeping the children out of the kitchen".

"Boundaries are important. Staff have to be firm about safety from the beginning. Some people don't respect them."

"An argument was handled well."

"The staff help me, they enable me to be free to use the facilities as if they were my own place. They don't interfere too much."

Parent, Families' Centre.

Although it is not intended to operate a key worker arrangement in the supported temporary accommodation, a staff member will take special responsibility for each family, without assuming an exclusive relationship. During the first few days and weeks this worker will help families to appreciate their own role and those of others who live and work in the unit in giving and receiving respect. This 'induction phase' will enable families to understand what they can and cannot expect during their stay. The worker will also ensure that the families practical and social needs are met, and that they are supported in exploring the neighbourhood to find parks, playgrounds and other leisure opportunities.

Research undertaken into the support needs of families who are homeless "pointed out that placement of families in temporary accommodation offers the opportunity to assess support needs and to begin to meet them, (with many agencies seeing advantages in this process).....rather than placing them straight into settled housing".¹⁷ Building on experience at the Families' Centre, the family support worker in the supported temporary accommodation will arrange for any necessary assessment in conjunction with the referrer, and any other agencies concerned, to ensure that the resulting plan is pursued. The plan for families' time in the supported temporary accommodation unit will aim to help them settle in, make use of the support provided, and prepare them to move on and settle in a permanent home.

Moving on to better things Implementing plans

The assessment and planning process developed at the Families' Centre was intended to meet families' needs, both while using the Centre and into the early stages of their next move. The process is concerned with children's and parents' health, educational and developmental needs, child care, relationships, practical and social support needs and resettlement in a permanent home.

Families often need someone to speak up for them on matters which can make an enormous difference to their daily experience of temporary accommodation.

"I needed an advocate to help me get the right room in the B&B hotel".

"I could have done with someone for support dealing with the minicab driver. He did not help me with my things when we moved. I hurt my back".

The staff in the supported temporary accommodation will pursue the plan drawn up with each family so that –

- families move through the phase of settling in, and gain access to services
- families use services; their effectiveness is assessed and the need for additional or alternative approaches is considered
- families start to anticipate the future, considering the choices available to them, and starting to prepare for the next move

The plans will be reviewed with parents, and children, whenever possible. Where appropriate, this will involve the multi-disciplinary group that may be concerned with wider assessments of the children's needs and the family's housing needs. These reviews will often link into those services targeted at children and families with identified needs. In these circumstances, staff may be involved in the multi-disciplinary teams described in *Every Child Matters*,¹⁸ the children's green paper. Plans will contribute to both housing and social services needs assessments, feeding into and drawing from the children's information hub, as well as the client record system for Supporting People.

Partnership with other agencies

At the Families' Centre, Field Lane has worked closely with health, social services and other agencies operating nationally¹⁹ and in the Kings Cross area. Field Lane aims to work with relevant agencies in the areas where it is offering temporary accommodation with integrated support. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, housing and social services are expected to co-ordinate their work. Local strategies have to be developed and working protocols agreed; some local authorities have started to introduce joint induction, staff secondment and joint training days. Multi-disciplinary teams are beginning to provide co-ordinated support to particularly vulnerable people who are homeless. Field Lane welcomes opportunities to play a part in supporting these arrangements and re-settling families who are homeless.

Ensuring high standards

Field Lane has worked consistently to develop the quality of provision at the Families' Centre; through always involving families in monitoring and evaluation of the centre's work, by appointing suitable staff, providing training and maintaining the centre in good condition. Field Lane has been an Investor in People since 1998.

The management of supported temporary accommodation will be informed by experience of running Field Lane's other residential establishments. It will draw on standards relevant to housing, the care of older and disabled people, and on those for the provision for families who are homeless.

Health care

The standards for supported temporary accommodation require that the health, social and educational needs of families who are homeless with children be met. There is abundant evidence of the impact of homelessness on the health of children and adults.²⁰ At the Families' Centre, the health of children and parents is regarded as one of the most important considerations.

The Families' Centre has always maintained close links with the local health centre and health visitors have always been invited to see families at the Families' Centre. In recognition of the significance of families' health needs, a consultation room was created and a specialist health development post established to promote health education and facilitate families' use of local health services.

Children's and adults' health will be accorded high priority in the supported temporary accommodation. Since the families who use Field Lane's supported temporary accommodation will ultimately be offered permanent homes in the borough that refers them, the policy will again be to encourage use of local facilities and resources. Health professionals will be welcomed in the units so that they can meet families and assist them in engaging with local health services.

¹⁸ *Every Child Matters*, Cm 5860, DfES 2003.

¹⁹ For example, *Shelter's Homeless to Home* service.

²⁰ TH Holmes and EM David, *Life Change, Life Events and Illness*; Praeger, selected papers, 1989; Lissauer and others, 2001; London HVA and GM Services Committee, 1998.

Meeting children's needs

The Families' Centre is designed to cater for pre-school children and to help parents get their older children into school.

The Centre has two childcare workers, and is registered for play activities that take place with parents on the premises assuming primary responsibility for their own children.

"When a baby cries you try to soothe the baby, but when you're in B&B your child can sense the feeling of depression or sadness quite quickly, which makes the baby more upset...my child is now moving around, but being in one room she can't go anywhere, so the result is that she is getting depressed because she is unable to express herself..."

Parent, Families' Centre.

For families living in temporary accommodation, the Families' Centre has provided essential space, indoors and out, for self-expression and active play. Children have a place that has a structure where they can meet, play, and eat. Organised interaction includes stimulating activities such as sitting at a table to eat, listening to others, or looking forward to a holiday. Promised events actually take place, on time, providing experience of reliability and helping to engender trust.

Working with parents, the childcare staff focus on the children's development. They involve parents in playing with their children, while recognising that they also need a break every now and then. Many of the children have not been able to realise their developmental potential. Staff enable parents to understand and respond constructively and to build on their existing parenting skills. The positive attention enables children whose development has been arrested due to trauma to 'unfreeze'. Parents are encouraged to monitor and understand the changes in their own children. Child development records are kept by centre staff and the children's progress is reviewed.

"My son is happy, I am happy."

Parent, Families' Centre.

The families offered supported temporary accommodation will have children of both genders up to the age of 12, or will, in some circumstances, consist initially of a pregnant woman who does not have other children. In this setting the adults will be supported in fulfilling their role as parents, as well as being recognised as individuals with their own needs and wishes.

The children's needs for play, early and subsequent education, and stimulating opportunities will be addressed immediately on arrival.

Education and play

When a family moves into temporary accommodation, one of the first tasks is to help the parents to get their children into school or nursery. The family support workers at the centre advocate on behalf of parents looking for nursery and school places. Sustained support may be needed if a child has special needs or the family moves before a place has been found.

Supported temporary accommodation staff will aim to develop positive relationships with the head teachers and other staff in nearby schools so that their activities complement the schools' educational and supportive work.

Consideration could be given to setting up a home work club on the premises to help school-age children and their parents appreciate the benefits of quiet, comfortable conditions that enable children to concentrate on their work. Alternatively, this may be part of the introduction to facilities which already exist in local schools.



Pre-school play and learning

The Families' Centre has been registered for child care for many years with parents taking responsibility for their own children. Many of the children have been affected by behavioural problems arising from their experience of homelessness. Use of the child care room has also allowed parents to take a break, and helped to support adult learning by supplying a crèche during classes.

The children's workers in the supported temporary accommodation will make toys and games available to families in their own accommodation when they first arrive, but they will be encouraged to get their own, good quality toys and to play with their children. It will be part of the role of the children's workers to encourage reading and facilitate constructive play within families.

Families will be able to take advantage of local pre-school provision for their children, including nursery places. If vacancies are not available the units may provide some early learning opportunities to basic OFSTED standards, but it is not intended to run a registered pre-school.

Out of school and holiday activities

Holiday times are particularly difficult for families living in temporary accommodation. With older children not at school the confined space becomes an even greater burden to parents and children. Although the Families' Centre is not equipped to provide for school age children, holiday activities are arranged for older and younger children using other premises and outdoor sites.

Each supported temporary accommodation unit will have indoor and outdoor play areas with toys and equipment suitable for 0 -12 year olds. Multicultural toys and books will be provided. Activities similar to those offered at the Families' Centre will be developed. There will be even greater scope in the temporary supported accommodation for children and parents to help plan and arrange activities.

Qualified, specialist children's workers will be employed. Out of school activities may be provided during the early evenings and during the day in holiday times. Children will be actively involved in deciding on and planning activities. Parents will be able to participate and to explore the play schemes and other activities available in the neighbourhood. A crèche will be provided to support adult training activities and to support house meetings.

In general, parents will retain full responsibility for their child. Rules for the use of the crèche will be agreed and regularly reviewed with parents. Depending on staffing ratios, it may be possible for parents occasionally to pass responsibility for their children to staff, so that they can keep appointments off the premises, attend further education courses or go shopping.



Restoring self-esteem

"The personal and social problems that cause and perpetuate homelessness need to be addressed as much as the need to address housing".²¹

The experience of homelessness typically saps adults' self confidence. For women in particular, the failure of relationships and the experience of violence within the family from which they have fled tends to cause considerable emotional damage. Their role in their family and their belief in their capacity to behave in a way that is culturally appropriate may be severely undermined, causing loss of self-esteem and a great sense of shame.

Access to a resource such as the Families' Centre offers opportunities for adults who have become homeless with their children, to understand and address the effect of the experience on them and to bolster their capacity to cope. The Model of Care recognises the important part that stability zones can play at times of stress. A stability zone is someone, somewhere or something to fall back on.²²

Some of the features of the Families' Centre most appreciated by the families are:

"Feeling at home, relaxed."

"I like the staff as friends. They don't just work here, they are easy to talk to. They make no distinction".

"I don't feel like a stranger here."

"When I came first I was depressed, I had no energy. My family and friends were far away. What I like most is the company. I am glad to be able to speak Arabic."

"Being able to speak French with other parents is important as a kind of therapy."

Diane Mix²³ interviewed parents families that used the centre and found that "the value of support systems or 'stability zones' to my six interviewees was very evident...it is an extended family, almost literally, with some staff members being referred to as 'mum' and 'auntie' ".

She suggests that the Families' Centre "functions as an extremely effective, non-judgmental container for many of its clients' anxieties".

The centre provides scope for the families to support each other.²⁴ It creates opportunities such as parties, outings and holidays for families to enjoy the pleasures that many take for granted, such as playing with their children and seeing them enjoy new experiences. Other nurturing experiences for parents themselves include free access to acupuncture, aromatherapy and Indian head massage.

The value for families of being among others in a similar situation will inform the approach adopted in the supported accommodation. A culture of mutual support will be fostered. It is likely that the practice of celebrating religious festivals, birthdays and other special occasions and organising outings, trips and residential holidays will be continued. It is hoped that these events will not only be opportunities for fun and pleasure, but also help to develop and sustain positive relationships between families living close to each other, and smooth the tensions which will inevitably develop from time to time. Families with a member known to misuse drugs or alcohol will not be admitted so that all residents can feel safe.

Improving family relationships

"If you can't feel good about yourself, how can you feel good about your children?" ²⁵

A high proportion of families who become homeless have experienced domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Many women have endured years of damaging relationships which often leave them feeling depressed, suffering from low self confidence and inadequate to the task of being an effective parent. Refugee families may suffer the trauma and anxiety of having to leave members of their family behind, with no contact and no idea if they are dead or alive.

Families' Centre staff have looked for ways to support parents so they can recover from these experiences. Acupuncture is available and people are referred for counselling. The centre crèche allows parents to take full advantage of such help.

"The staff don't show 'separateness', except when necessary for safety, like keeping the children out of the kitchen".

Parent, Families' Centre.

The supported temporary accommodation will provide even greater scope than the Families' Centre for nurturing parents' self-esteem and promoting their personal development. For example, there will be more opportunities for staff to help parents to understand the factors that have contributed to their homelessness, as well as the impact it is having on them and their children. This may be particularly important for those who have experienced domestic violence or homelessness on several occasions.

Opportunities for mutual support, which are so appreciated by the families who use the centre, are likely to be developed in the supported temporary accommodation. Staff will remember the value the women place on being *"part of a group...supporting each other, giving and receiving....separate from the staff role."* Parent, Families' Centre.

Staff may need to be trained to understand and supported in responding more actively to families' emotional needs. Where an individual or family's emotional needs are so great or complex that the support of staff and other families is not sufficient, assistance will be provided to access counselling or other professional help.





Handling difficulties

Problems between families occur rarely at the Families' Centre. Clearly stated expectations that centre on mutual respect, and the availability of staff who are able to read the signs of impending difficulty, have usually served to avoid serious problems.

As indicated by their earlier remarks, parents have usually recognised the difference between a personal approach that is informal, warm and friendly, and the need for staff to maintain a certain distance, to set boundaries in the interests of safety, and to be firm when these limits are encroached upon. On the rare occasions when tension has appeared to be building, increased staff presence has usually succeeded in reducing it. A quiet word with those involved has sometimes been necessary.

Clearly a residential setting where families live in close proximity to each other is very different to a day centre which people can leave at the end of the day and on which they are not dependent for their accommodation.

Field Lane believes that it will be constructive to build on its experience of openness and clarity with families. Staff understand that close proximity around the clock may lead to tensions between families of a kind that have not arisen in the day centre setting. Building on experience from the Families' Centre, Field Lane will help staff to develop the skills necessary to recognise and facilitate the resolution of any difficulties between families to avoid the risk of behaviour that could cause problems either within the unit, or between parents and children and local neighbours.

Discriminatory behaviour

The same approach will be taken to the risk of discriminatory behaviour, between families, between staff, or between families and staff. At the Families' Centre such problems have generally been managed and avoided by having the standards of behaviour that everyone expects clear to all from the outset. The equal opportunities and complaints policies are displayed in communal areas and explained to all centre users.

Developing parents' skills

Parents at the Families' Centre are enabled and supported to think about ways in which they can develop their potential and find appropriate training courses. The subjects pursued at the centre depend on the interests of the people using it at the time. Adults may be looking for opportunities to fill gaps in their education, to build on existing skills or to follow an entirely new interest. Some courses, such as English as a second language are delivered by tutors from the nearby college of further education in a specially designed area at the Centre.

A crèche is provided for parents to take advantage of the classes. A separate space where children can play and parents are relieved briefly of much of the responsibility for caring for their children is essential for the adults to concentrate properly.

The most popular classes at the Field Lane Families' Centre, ranked according to frequency of attendance, are -

- English, especially for refugees and asylum seekers
- sewing, especially amongst women accustomed to making clothes for their own families
- arts and crafts
- introduction to computers

In the supported temporary accommodation, the assessment and review process will encourage parents to think about the skills they would like to develop. The views of staff in agencies who know the families may also be invited so that with consent, these can be discussed with parents.

Field Lane will help parents to tackle the skills deficits that put them at a disadvantage in the job market. The unit will develop relationships with local adult learning providers to ensure that parents' training needs are met. This may involve contributing staff time to a crèche on college premises; negotiating courses to be run in the temporary accommodation and collaborating with other organisations such as SureStart to support classes which only attract low numbers.

A wide range of skill development could be offered, including problem solving and personal development, as well as skills suitable for employment. The skill development strategy may call for some introductory classes (like numeracy and literacy) to take place in the residential units, with parents moving on to college-based qualifying or vocational courses in preparation for future employment. The unit staff may also be able to provide informal assistance with developing life skills; such as home care, budgeting and cooking.

Both supported temporary accommodation projects will have dedicated space for training and personal development. Discussions undertaken with local training providers will focus on helping parents develop marketable skills during their stay. For instance, one unit has the scope to provide practical catering experience.

Field Lane - Putting Families First

FEEDBACK and ORDER FORM

Please use this form to order further copies of Putting Families First.

Please make cheques payable to the Field Lane Foundation.

You can also download a version of Putting Families First from www.fieldlane.org.uk.

Voluntary sector organisations price £5 a copy, all other organisations £7.50 a copy.

Prices include postage and packing.

Please send me _____ (insert quantity) copies of Putting Families First.

Total amount enclosed

£

Please send me more information about Field Lane (please tick)

Please add my details to the Field Lane mailing list and keep me in touch with Field Lane's work and progress (please tick)

Did you find Putting Families First easy to understand and clearly presented? Please state

Yes No

Please add your comments or feedback about presentation here

How have you used, or plan to use, Putting Families First? (please tick relevant answers)

As a training resource

As a reference document for self/staff

As a resource to inform policy and practice

Would you be interested in training delivered by Field Lane based on the Putting Families First model? Yes No

Please add any other comments or feedback about Putting Families First here

NAME

JOB TITLE

ORGANISATION

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

TELEPHONE

EMAIL

Please return your order/feedback form to:

Field Lane, FREEPOST
London 13029, London EC1B 1LF – *thank you.*

Practical support

*"One of the things I liked best was the really cheap washing."
Parent, Families' Centre.*

The Families' Centre provides a range of practical support. The Model of Care recognises the great importance of cleanliness to self-respect. Families staying in bed and breakfast may have great difficulty in getting laundry done and clothes dried. Washing and drying machines are provided at the Centre. The rota for their use is a vital system for ensuring smooth running.

Families often have little money for replacing out-grown children's clothes, or buying basic household goods when they finally move into more permanent accommodation. As a well-known and long-established charity, Field Lane is the focus of much charitable giving and a wide range of items are donated.

The centre also does many things that come about as a result of its main task. The centre is a community focus for local volunteers. It provides training to professionals such as doctors, nurses and social workers, including students from overseas, who use the Centre for practice placements. It also offers team building opportunities for commercial and other organisations, whose staff gain an insight into the families' needs and problems whilst undertaking practical tasks like painting at the Centre.

The emphasis in the supported temporary accommodation will be different, although based on the same principles as the practical support offered at the Families' Centre. Here too families' needs on arrival will be met immediately. As part of the planned approach to resettlement, families will then be expected and encouraged to look after their own flat, developing home care skills where necessary.

Whatever their circumstances, parents are invariably keen to keep themselves and their children clean and well dressed. The residential units will have subsidised laundry facilities for the families' use. Systems for the use of the laundry facilities will be set up. Experience at the Families' Centre has shown that this is one aspect of communal life where organisation is essential to avoid strife!

The temporary accommodation with integrated support pilot projects will develop their own relationships with local churches, voluntary and community organisations and will hope to attract, collect and pass on donations of good quality children's and adults' clothes and other items, to support the families in emergencies. It is intended that the units will develop positive relationships with their neighbours; offering opportunities for practical volunteering, or service on the management group, and operating a policy of transparency with a view to avoiding difficulties and addressing openly any problems that do arise.

Supporting resettlement

Most of the people who are homeless that were interviewed in the course of preparing the *Homelessness Code of Guidance* said that they would have liked help before moving into settled housing.²⁶ Of these, the majority wanted or had help with finding furniture and claiming benefits, followed by help with managing money and bills. The Field Lane Families' Centre offers support to families when they move, liaising with housing providers, assisting with transfers to a new school or GP, and ensuring that parents are aware of their rights to other services. Centre staff often deal with practical matters such as the provision of utilities, offering basic equipment from the store of donated household items, or organising an appointment to apply for a loan. Continuing contact with the centre is important for parents anticipating rehousing. The sense of the 'stability zone' is something many of them need to carry with them.

"I want to be in touch, with friends and staff, even just know how they are, and to know I can get advice and help."

"I want to meet friends, ask questions and ask staff to make referrals."

*"I like to come still to see people I know".
Mother of family now living a 1½ hours journey away.*

An offer of medium-term, but still temporary, accommodation usually means that families using the centre move back to the borough that accepted them as homeless. The Field Lane Model of Care sees parents as responsible for choosing for themselves whether or not to maintain contact once they move on. Many parents wish to do so initially, by telephone or occasional visits. They are welcome to visit the centre, and requests for help with dealing with other agencies, for example, are acted on whenever possible. Invitations to summer holidays, play schemes and centre events are not, however, usually made.

The families who use the centre expect a gradual reduction in support as they settle into their new accommodation. Although the move may not take a family more than a few miles away, the distance in travel time and cost is often more than most families can manage or afford.

Letting go is not always easy for either families or staff.

The ODPM study into the support needs of families who have experienced repeat homelessness concluded that the new approach to tackling homelessness should be based on prevention by assessing and meeting the support needs of homeless people and those at risk of future homelessness.²⁷ Field Lane's supported temporary accommodation provides the opportunity to intervene in some families' experience of the 'revolving door' of homelessness at a point after they have become homeless and before they may possibly do so again.

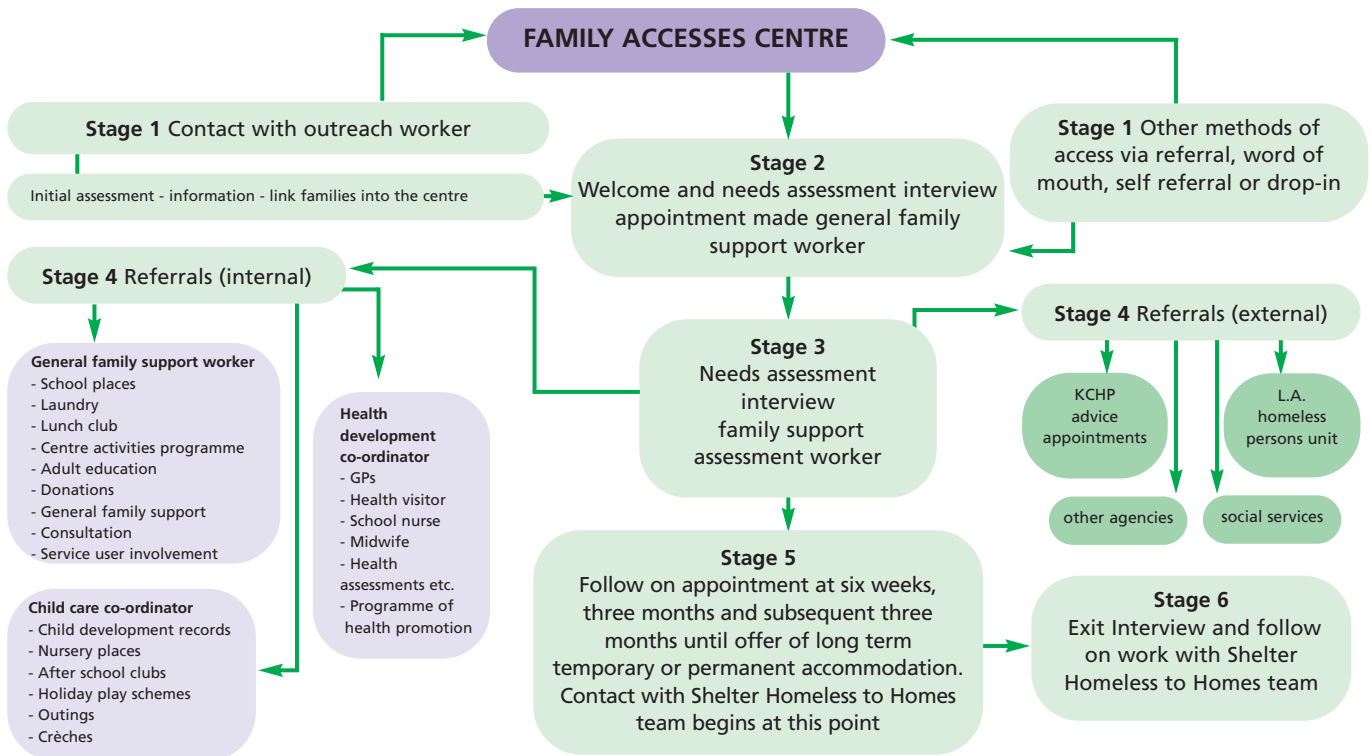
The supported temporary accommodation unit staff will be able to build on the practice already developed in the Families' Centre, which itself reflects most of the elements of effective practice identified by the ODPM and found to be beginning to show positive outcomes. Field Lane expects to develop active work with families anticipating a move to permanent housing. This could include help to develop practical, home care and money management skills, as well enabling parents to become familiar with local support agencies and community resources.

Some parents may wish to retain contact in a supportive role after they have settled in into their new home. As Field Lane has found at the Families' Centre, some parents wish to volunteer to support other families during the time that they are homeless.

Conclusion

Putting Families First is the title of this report and it is also the strategy needed to deliver good services. By keeping the families and their own needs firmly in focus, Field Lane will ensure that the families themselves shape the type and level of the services they use. The new supported temporary accommodation projects will be continuously monitored and evaluated.

MODEL OF CARE DIAGRAM



- Family access services
- Internal referrals and areas covered
- Pathway stages 1 – 6
- External referrals note: KCHP – Kings Cross Homelessness Project

²⁷ Repeat Homelessness and Homelessness Statistics, ODPM, December, 2003.