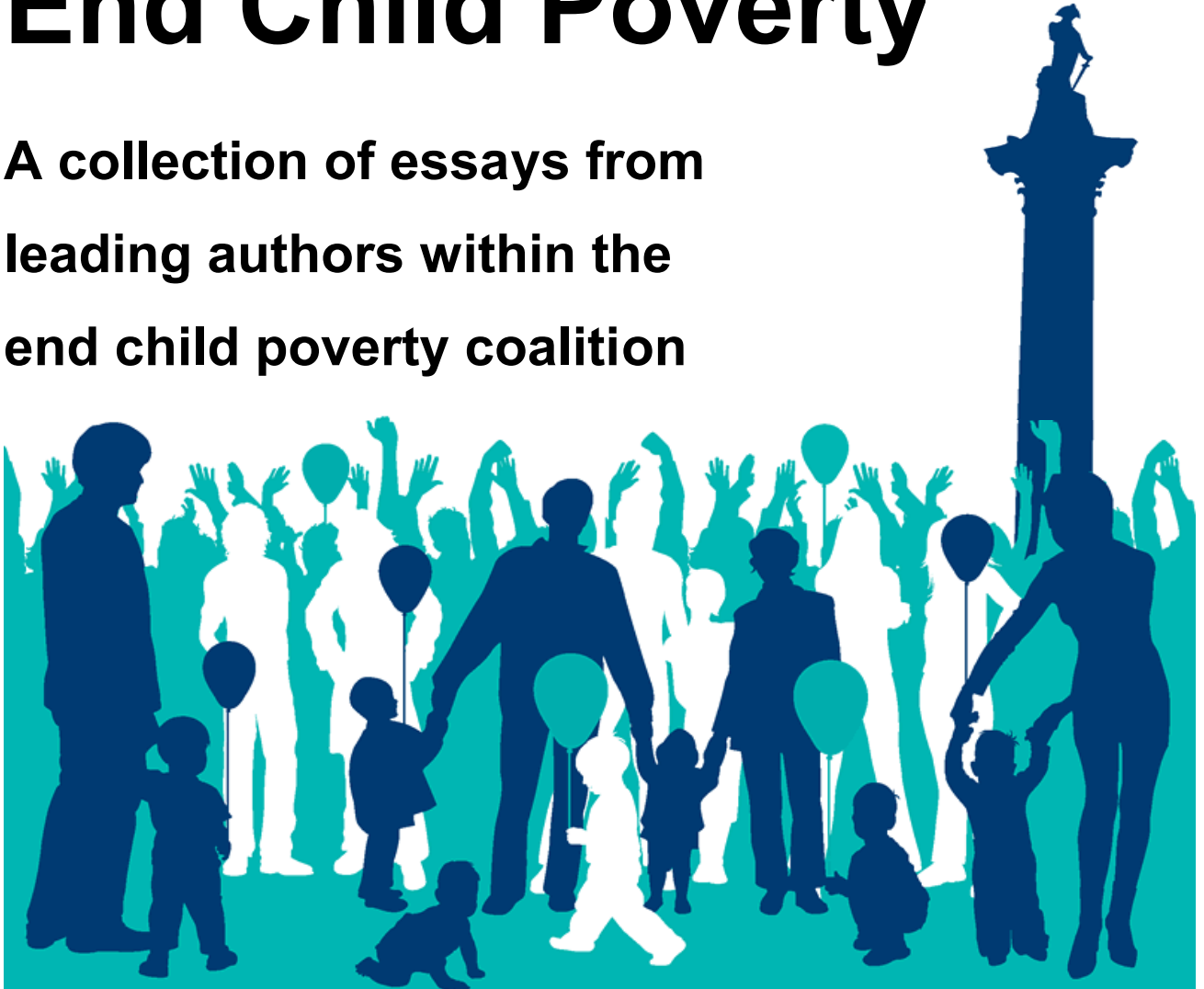




Keep the Promise: End Child Poverty

A collection of essays from
leading authors within the
end child poverty coalition



The GOVERNMENT have made the PROMISE OF a GENERATION - Let's HOLD THEM TO it!

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If not now, when?

Donald Hirsch, Independent consultant and writer on social policy

Perhaps the most impressive social achievement of the present Labour administration has been to cut relative poverty among children during a decade of economic growth. This means that many families on the lowest incomes have, for a change, seen their living standards rise faster than the average, rather than falling further behind. But can this progress be maintained, now that the economy is shrinking? Meeting the government's stated targets will be far from easy, yet the case for investing the money needed to do so has never been greater.

On present projections¹, by next year child poverty will have fallen by about a third

¹ See Donald Hirsch, *Ending child poverty in a changing economy*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2009

since 1999, when Tony Blair pledged to eradicate it within a generation. This is well short of the target of a 50 per cent cut by 2010, and leaves 600,000 more children in poverty than planned. The recession will help some working families to escape relative poverty, assuming that the government continues to uprate child benefit and the child tax credits at least with inflation at a time when most people's earnings are falling in real terms. On the other hand, many families will fall into poverty when they lose their jobs. The net effect on the poverty figures will balance out, but the scale of losses felt by people put out of work will greatly exceed the small relative gains among those who keep them. This means that the amount of redistribution needed to hit the 2010 target is growing. We know that it will cost at

least £3 billion a year in extra spending on tax credits, but recession could raise this to over £4 billion.

In these difficult times, is it possible to justify such a substantial increase in public spending? Yes, for three reasons.

First, it is a simple matter of seeing through a commitment which the government has repeatedly identified as a key priority. The 2010 target has already helped concentrate the minds of Treasury ministers, who in the past two Budgets have found extra money despite overall resources being tight. But if such efforts fall short of halving child poverty by 2010, the prospect of "eradicating" it by 2020 will be badly damaged. In particular, if we wait until a return to a period of economic growth to re-

engage with this strategy, the cost of getting back on track will be extremely high, requiring people on low incomes both to keep up with that growth and to improve their incomes further to make good the poverty gap.

Second, it would be as short-sighted to ignore the interests of the poorest children over the next few years as it would be to allow the banking system to fail. In both cases, by saying “we cannot afford this” we would be creating much bigger problems for the future. Recent research has shown that the long-term cost to the Exchequer and the economy of allowing child poverty to continue at its present levels is at least about £25 billion a year². Part of this is extra spending required to help pick up the pieces when families are damaged by poverty – whether on social services, health services, education or youth justice. Part of it is the cost of lost economic potential in the next generation. If we delay the eradication of child poverty, such consequences will be with us for many years to come.

And thirdly, even in the short term, of all the things that government could spend its money on, giving more to people on low incomes is likely to be the

most helpful to the economy. This is not the doctrine of radicals but one being acknowledged by mainstream economic gurus: “Cash transfers to the poor are indeed among the best ways of stimulating the economy as the recipients are more likely to spend them than the rich or the middle class”, wrote Financial Times columnist Samuel Brittan recently³. This is another way in which what is good for social justice is good for the country.

Nor is this just a technical point of macroeconomics. We are at a time of profound re-evaluation of some of our economic values. As we freshly ask “what is it that makes our economy tick”, we see that the answer “a thriving financial services industry selling clever products to the world’s millionaires” has become less alluring. Ordinary people, their spending and their savings are the ultimate bedrock of a strong economy. Keeping the incomes of one section of the population below the level that allows them to participate in society creates serious economic dysfunction, in terms of lost potential as well as material hardship. It also creates huge pressures for people on low incomes to over-extend themselves simply to reach an acceptable living standard; the role of

subprime mortgages in the credit crunch has reminded us of how this can damage the whole economy.

Let us remind ourselves that this is not a plea for massive redistribution or the overturning of the economic order. Three or four billion pounds represents between a quarter and a third of one percent of GDP. Committing this amount now, to complete the historically unprecedented feat of halving child poverty in a decade, would create the foundation for the next phase of full eradication. This needs to entail a much wider strategy that redistributes not just cash but opportunity, by supporting the families of the future in creating their own routes out of poverty. Better basic education and skills, improved childcare and more opportunities to work flexibly for reasonable pay all need to be part of this mix.

But without more direct redistribution as well, millions of children will continue to suffer, and society will reap the damage. Budget 2009 is the Judgement Day for a government that has said it will not abandon its commitment to meeting next year’s target. With courage and wisdom, it can yet succeed.

² Donald Hirsch, *Estimating the costs of child poverty*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008

³ *Where the bishops have gone wrong*, Financial Times, 16 January 2009.

Child Poverty and Childcare

Preparing them for school... it's good for them to be around other children. Because a lot of time you can't afford to take them places where they will meet other children so you're stuck in the house. - From Listening to lone parents about childcare, Daycare Trust, July 2007

Essay by Alison Garnham, Joint Chief Executive, Daycare Trust

Eliminating child poverty cannot realistically be achieved without the development of national, high quality, affordable, early childhood education and care services. This is true for a two main reasons.

First, parents, in particular mothers, cannot engage in paid work and help improve family incomes without comprehensive, accessible and affordable childcare services. And while many families state a preference for informal care, this is not available to all, so cannot be the basis of a national employment activation policy. In short, government efforts to increase the proportion of mothers in work, whether lone parents or partners of unemployed men, cannot take place without the necessary national service infrastructure in place, along with the reassurance that their children are well cared for in high quality settings.

Second, there is now substantial evidence that children benefit from high-quality early education and care and that it is the most disadvantaged children who benefit the most. For them,

the effects are the most long lasting. This process of evening out inequalities and helping more children to start school on a level playing field has enormous implications for future generations, and means ambition to end child poverty can reach into the future as well as helping families today.

If the twin ambitions set out above are to be achieved, early childhood education and care services must be accessible and affordable and above all of high quality – it is only high quality childcare that delivers improved outcomes for children. At present we still have some way to go on all three of these areas.

Accessibility

From 1998 there were substantial increases in childcare availability, although since 2004 this increase appears to have stalled. However, there is still lower take-up amongst children from disadvantaged groups. Children from black and minority ethnic groups, low income families, lone parent families and especially those with disabilities and special educational needs, are much less likely to use

childcare or have facilities available. Without accessible childcare for these families – and outreach to encourage take-up – they will not benefit from high-quality early years' experiences.

Current gaps in availability include care during the school holidays and out-of-school care for secondary school-aged children. There is also a dearth of places for families working atypical hours. Daycare Trust's own childcare costs survey recently found that 59 per cent of Family Information Services said that there was not currently sufficient childcare for children aged 12 and over. More detailed evidence on sufficiency is becoming available through local authorities' sufficiency assessments. A number of these have been published and 93 percent of authorities' report some gaps, including childcare before and after school, holiday care, provision for children with disabilities and special educational needs, and care for under twos.

Affordability

There are a number of subsidies and initiatives aimed at reducing the cost of childcare for parents, but

childcare in the UK still remains very expensive, with costs increasing year on year. Daycare Trust's 2009 cost survey found average costs for a full time nursery place for child under two was £167 per week, and substantially higher – £226 a week – in inner London.

Without a concerted effort to reduce the cost of childcare for parents, it is difficult to see how they will be able to take up work and give their children the early learning experiences that will give them the positive outcomes we all strive for. Parents do have access to 12.5 funded nursery hours per week once their child is three (or two in some areas), as well as childcare support through tax credits and childcare vouchers, but this is not enough for them to take on meaningful employment.

Clearly, we need a more holistic approach to childcare funding if we are to see real progress in tackling child poverty, so that both children and their parents can be sure of the consistency of funding and of childcare provision.

Quality

In order to see improved outcomes for children, the childcare they attend must be of high quality. On this, there is still a long way to go. According to Ofsted, the proportion of daycare providers inspected with good or outstanding

childcare had risen from 53 per cent in 2005–06 to 64 per cent in 2007–08, though the proportion of childminders judged good or outstanding has fallen from 65 per cent to 59. Both of these statistics still leave around 40 per cent of providers who are only satisfactory, or in very few cases (three per cent), inadequate.

As quality is also shown to be higher in maintained settings⁴, integrated centres and settings with highly qualified staff and low child:staff ratios, we need to enable all settings to be of this quality.

Given that the workforce is so key in achieving high quality provision, it is disappointing that the childcare workforce is not more highly regarded. Qualification levels are improving, but there are still only 54 per cent qualified to Level 3 (A Levels). In its 'Next steps for early learning and childcare' strategy document, the Government suggests that qualification requirements may be raised to Level 3 for the entire childcare workforce, which would be extremely welcome. Of course, there needs to be improved pay and status to match these higher qualifications and nurseries may still only be able to

⁴ Maintained provision is likely to be of higher quality because of the terms and conditions offered to staff, access to other resources and lower staff turnover.

offer modest salaries, meaning staff turnover will remain high.

Further investment is needed if childcare is to make the difference to child poverty that we know it is capable of. In England (as well as the USA) parental income is a big determinant of the educational success of their children. However, in Sweden and Denmark, there is little correlation between parents' educational attainment, and therefore income, and that of their children. In Denmark, the odds that a child of low-educated parents will complete secondary school are 1:2 compared to 1:5 in the UK.

This success in breaking the link between parental income and children's outcomes is at least partly due to well-subsidised care and good quality provision.

If the government holds to its promise to end child poverty, and continues to invest in childcare, the rewards for children, families and wider society will be even greater.

Because my son has been in nursery since eight months it's helped him a lot. He can communicate with friends well, he's not like shy, not attached to me, so I'm glad in a way I did it from young and he's really like good at speaking and playing and interacting. –

From Listening to black and minority ethnic parents about childcare, Daycare Trust, July 2007

Child Poverty and Disabled Children

Essay by Brian Lamb, Chair, Special Educational Needs Consortium

The Government's commitment to halve child poverty from 1997 levels by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020 was a genuinely historic and ambitious promise. As that goal is now in danger of being missed, the response should not be to shrug our shoulders and see it go the way of many other government commitments not quite achieved. That's because the aim represented not just a way out of poverty for those it was designed to reach but a platform from which to build new lives for generations of children to come by breaking a cycle of dependency and deprivation.

Nowhere was this more welcome and true than for disabled children. Not by design, but often by default, disabled children and their families have missed out on measures to ensure a better future for all our children. With families of disabled children disproportionately affected by poverty we cannot afford to let this happen. For many families the situation was getting worse, even before the recession.

The numbers are not small. There are 770,000 disabled children in the UK. Disabled children aged 0–16 are the fastest-growing group amongst the population of disabled people.

Yet on present policies, by 2010 there are projected to be nearly 30,000 more disabled

children living in poverty than there were in 2004/05.⁵

All the research demonstrates a strong relationship between low income, social exclusion and disability among families who have a disabled child.⁶ Families with disabled children remain disproportionately likely to be in poverty. They are also more than twice as likely as other families to be unable to afford five or more everyday items.⁷ They are at more risk of being in poverty than the average household, facing a 30 per cent risk of poverty, compared with a 27 per cent risk across all households.⁸

If we used a different measure of child poverty that took account of the additional costs that are associated with bringing up disabled children this would show much higher rates of severe child poverty amongst these families.⁹

Childhood disability is frequently a 'trigger event' for poverty, as a result of additional costs, family break-

⁵ Sharma, N. (2007), It doesn't happen here – The reality of child poverty in the UK, Essex: Barnardo's

⁶ See for example IPPR (2007), *DISABILITY 2020: Opportunities for the full and equal citizenship of disabled people in Britain in 2020*, London: IPPR

⁷ Emerson, E. & Hatton, C. (2005), *The Socio-Economic Circumstances of Families Supporting a Child at Risk of Disability in Britain in 2002*, Lancaster: Lancaster University.

⁸ Department for Work and Pensions (2006), *Households Below Average Income: An Analysis of the Income Distribution 1994/95–2005/05*

⁹ Magadi, M. & Middleton, S. (2007), *Severe Child Poverty in the UK*, London: Save the Children

up and unemployment that can follow the birth or diagnosis of a disabled child. Indeed, disability across the life cycle has a close association with poverty. Those families where one or both parents are disabled have additional needs. Disabled children in these families face a risk of over 37 per cent of living in poverty.

Families with disabled children face two specific challenges in addition to those faced by all families, which taken together increase their risk of living in poverty. Care for their disabled child costs more while income is often reduced as a consequence of more expensive childcare and lost employment opportunities.

Families with disabled children face considerable additional expenditure on heating, housing, clothing, equipment and other items compared with other families. It costs three times as much to bring up a disabled child as it does a non-disabled child. These extra costs associated with disability drive high levels of poverty among disabled children and their families. Families also struggle to adapt their homes to meet their children's needs with as many as three-quarters of families with disabled children living in unsuitable housing.

The tax and benefits system does acknowledge that disabled children and their families incur additional costs, particularly through Disability Living Allowance and premiums to relevant tax credits. However the system

fails to recognise the true cost to these families. In a recent Carers UK survey, half of all carers end up subsidising the costs of the disability of the person they care for because of inadequate disability benefits.¹⁰

But that is only half the problem as families also face an income penalty. Disabled children are also at a high risk of poverty as a result of low household incomes. Many parents of disabled children are unable to work because of care responsibilities and the lack of, or the cost of, appropriate childcare.

Income figures do not give a full picture of poverty levels because they do not take into account additional expenditure. However, they do shed some light on the earning capacity of households with disabled children. Recent DWP figures show that there are almost three times as many families with disabled children in the lowest income quintile as in the top quintile.¹¹

The government views work as the prime guarantor of a reasonable level of household income. Yet, in 2003, families supporting a disabled child were 2.5 times more likely than other families to have no parent working for more than 16 hours per week.¹² Just 16 per cent of mothers with disabled children work, compared with 61 per cent of

mothers with non-disabled children.¹³ This is confirmed by analysis of Family Fund data from 2002.¹⁴ Parents of disabled children find childcare costs prohibitive in trying to find work and balance childcare. What chance then for families to dig their way out of poverty through employment?

The impact on families with disabled children can be crushing as they are both 50 per cent more likely to be in debt and 50 per cent less likely to be able to afford holidays, new clothes, school outings or 'treats' for their children than other families.¹⁵ In the Carers UK survey, more than one in five families said they had to cut back on food as a result of the costs of bringing up their disabled child.

Poverty and poor educational attainment are more mutually reinforcing for disabled children than the rest of the population. Disabled children and those with SEN are not well served by the school system. Children with SEN perform far worse than their able bodied counterparts at every level of the education system and then suffer high rates of unemployment and social isolation.

In 2006/07, less than ten per cent of children with SEN achieved five GCSEs at A*-C including English and mathematics compared to 54 per cent of their peers without

SEN. This unsurprisingly leads to poor job outcomes for disabled children in adulthood. At age 26, disabled people were nearly four times as likely to be unemployed or involuntarily out of work than non-disabled people. Thanks to discrimination, even in employment the problems do not end. Among those who were in employment, earnings were 11 per cent lower than for their non-disabled counterpart with the same level of educational qualifications.

Families of disabled children face enough problems without the blight of poverty. Poverty eats at the heart of families already coping with myriad challenges. It creates a cycle of disadvantage that combines with discrimination to create a toxic mixture that contributes to the poorer life chances of disabled children when they grow up. The Government's brave ambition to end child poverty has been a crucial plank in a broader strategy to address the issues families face through its Aiming High for Disabled Children programme. Any failure on the child poverty target will undermine progress in other areas.

This is why it is crucial that the Government sticks to its promise to half and then end child poverty.

Only with this in place will the foundations for other areas of Government policy towards disabled children and their families be secure.

¹⁰ Carers UK (2007), *Real change, not short change – time to deliver for carers*, London: Carers UK

¹¹ Department for Work and Pensions (2004) *Households Below Average Income 2002/3*

¹² Emerson, E. & Hatton, C. (2005), *The Socio-Economic Circumstances of Families Supporting a Child at Risk of Disability in Britain in 2002*, Lancaster: Lancaster University

¹³ Langerman, C. & Worrall, E. (2005), *Ordinary Lives – Disabled children and their families*, London: New Philanthropy Capital

¹⁴ Woolley, M. (2004), *How do They Manage? Income and Expenditure of Families With a Severely Disabled Child*, York: Family Fund

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Emerson, E. & Hatton, C. (2005)

Child Poverty and Education

I don't think Emily will achieve what the other kids will because I can't afford college or university. - From parents on low incomes in *Unequal Choices*, published by ECP 2006.

Essay by Christine Blower, Acting General Secretary, National Union of Teachers

The Government's commitment to enshrine the child poverty targets in legislation presents us with a major opportunity to shape and drive policy to tackle poverty. Likewise a forthcoming Equality Bill, which one hopes will include a requirement for public bodies to 'poverty-proof' all policy, can focus our efforts on both the affects of child poverty and eradicating it over the next decade.

For teachers, who see the effects of child poverty every day in the classroom, it is encouraging to see an emerging consensus across the three main political parties that we need to close the education gap. In the run up to a general election, different solutions will be put forward. Already we have heard proposals to reduce class sizes for early years' pupils and to target funding on children in the most deprived areas. But why is it so important that we break down the barriers of educational advance and how can we go about it?

Teachers are only too aware that poverty can engender a sense of powerlessness amongst parents, who despite having aspirations for their children

feel that they can make little or no contribution themselves to advancing their children's learning or to helping their own learning.

Children from low-income families, by definition, are more likely to live in a poor environment, in poor quality housing and in greater proximity to crime and drugs. Such children we know tend to be physically weaker and have less energy for learning, and may have a range of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. They are less likely to have opportunities for study or educational help at home. The cumulative effect of these disadvantages works against children's educational development.

Children and young people living in poverty regularly arrive at school without having had anything to eat or drink. Teachers will testify this leads to poor levels of concentration and can also affect pupil behaviour. The introduction of breakfast clubs for such pupils can have a huge impact on the ability of pupils to better access learning within the school environment. Teachers report marked changes in

pupil behaviour for many pupils when they attend the breakfast club compared to when they do not.

Children and young people living in poverty generally have greater absence from school due to illness which leads them to fall behind with school work and can also make it difficult for them to create and maintain friendships within school.

These children are re-housed more often than other pupils. Being moved around regularly is extremely disruptive for children. Teachers work hard to settle such pupils in school as quickly as possible but often a child will just be settling and making friends when they are moved again. This is frustrating and detrimental to the child's ability to learn effectively and access the social aspects of school life.

There are also social pressures for children and young people living in poverty if they do not have the 'right' clothes to wear or a reasonable level of quality school uniform. Not 'fitting in' is one of the key factors associated with bullying and low self-esteem. This was borne out in the survey we conducted of young people

to inform our Charter on the commercialisation of childhood 'Growing up in a Material World'. One boy, aged eight, commented:

"Some families can't afford these items and this causes problems.

Clothes you end up buying [are] imitation and people call you names for it."

So these are the problems. What policies should follow to tackle them? Some are obvious. Some are simple.

Schools need to be made more aware of the damage that can be caused by demanding children wear very expensive uniforms, for example those with unusual coloured blazers and braiding, with prices beyond

the reach of many. Schools should not use uniforms as a form of selection.

New entitlements should be introduced to ensure all children get a good educational start in life.

Children should experience through their school visits to concerts, theatre, art galleries, museums and sports events. They should be entitled to receive free music tuition, residential activities and visits to other countries. Such activities are part of the normal life for many children, but not for children living in poverty.

There remain strong arguments for retaining the 50 per cent target set by the

Government for young people attending universities. OECD international evidence points unequivocally to a graduate dividend across countries. Now we need to focus on encouraging young people from poorer backgrounds to study and receive support for entry to Higher Education.

All this should be part of the educational offer to bring the down the barriers and eradicate child poverty.

In the economic downturn, it is ever more important to remember that poverty damages us all. Keep the promise to end child poverty.



Picture of 10,000 people at the Keep the Promise Rally held by Campaign to End Child Poverty, 4 October 2008

Child Poverty and Child Health

A couple of months ago Shekira was ill, and because we all sleep together we all became ill...It is very stressful. – The Overcrowding Diaries, Shelter, 2006

Essay by Nick Spencer, Professor Emeritus of Child Health, School of Health and Social Studies, University of Warwick.

The promise of this Labour Government to eradicate child poverty in a generation and halve it by 2010 could mean real changes for children's health. Poverty has profound effects on the health of children, effects which continue to blight their lives into adulthood. As people's lives unfold, the poor health associated with poverty limits their potential and has knock-on effects for their children. The longer children live in poverty, the worse the effects on their health. We all know that in the poor countries of the world, millions of children die as a direct result of poverty and millions of others suffer from malnutrition and diseases of poverty. But in rich nations too, poverty also blights the lives of children. It is one of our society's greatest inequalities that poor health is so dramatically linked to poverty.

The poverty-ill health cycle starts with poor maternal health which increases the risk to newborn babies. This in turn increases the risk of poor health in these babies as they grow into children and adults and transmits the risk across generations.

Among babies born in the UK in 2000, those born to mothers in the lowest income group had an average birth weight 200g lighter than those living in the most privileged households. This reduction in

mean birth weight is associated with increased still births and deaths in the first week of life. Part of the reason for this difference in birth weight was that mothers on low incomes were, on average, significantly shorter than those in better off groups. Other studies show that poorer mothers are also likely to suffer more physical and mental health problems in pregnancy and their unborn babies also more likely to be exposed to cigarette smoke.

Poor infants surviving beyond the first week continue to be at greater risk of death throughout infancy and childhood. Deaths among infants less than 1 year old are also much higher among poorer families – about twice as high in the low income families than in well-off families. Sudden unexpected death in infancy has decreased in recent years. However, babies who die unexpectedly in infancy are now more concentrated than ever in families on low incomes, who have ten times the rate of sudden infant death than families on relatively high incomes. Deaths from injury and poisoning have fallen in all social groups except the poorest and these children are 13 times more likely to die from injury than the most privileged children.

Children born in 2000 were already showing large

differences in health status at the age of three, according to their family conditions. Among 3 year old children in families with incomes below about £10,000 a year, 4.2% suffered from chronic illnesses that limited activities normal for their age, compared to just 1.7% among well-off families on over £52,000. About one in six of the poorer group suffered from asthma, compared to just one in 16 in the richer group.

Children growing up in poverty are more likely to suffer a wide range of behavioural and emotional problems. A Department of Health survey of the mental health of children and young people showed that overall, one in six children in families with low incomes suffered from mental health disorders, compared to only just over one in twenty in better-off households. Other conditions that are more likely to affect poor children include bedwetting and self-harming behaviour. For children in poverty, self-harm can emerge at an alarmingly early age, with one in 40 children from low income families aged 5 - 10 engaging in such behaviour, compared to fewer than one in 100 of those with high socio-economic status. Disadvantaged children are also more prone to sudden illness, such as acute infections including pneumonia and other respiratory illnesses and more likely to experience hospital

admission. Chronic illnesses, such as asthma and diabetes, appear to be more severe among poor children.

Childhood poverty also impacts on adults' health. Adults who faced financial hardship during childhood are more likely to suffer from a variety of illnesses including high blood pressure and heart disease and symptoms of mental ill-health. An important

factor in the link between poverty and adult ill health is low educational attainment. Those without qualifications find it harder to get good jobs, and thus face recurring poverty and other disadvantages harmful to their health.

This evidence has important implications for public policy. It suggests that effective action to tackle child poverty would

make an important long-term contribution to many health-related policy objectives, including reducing obesity, reducing heart disease, increasing breast feeding and improving mental health.

Ending child poverty is the most practical expression of the old adage

– An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

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Child poverty and housing

For four months we didn't go to school, we went to six houses, no seven houses and six new schools. I don't like moving, because every time I make new friends and then I have to move again and again and again. – From Shelter's Million Children Campaign, June 2006

Adam Sampson, Chief Executive, Shelter

Addressing Britain's housing problems must be at the very heart of tackling child poverty. Children in deprived communities and from low-income households are more likely to be living in overcrowded and sub-standard accommodation, or to be at risk of homelessness. There are currently 1.6 million children living in bad housing¹⁶ in Britain, and extensive studies have shown the profound impact that bad housing has on children's life chances.

Poor housing conditions have a long-term impact on health. Research has found that children living in overcrowded and unfit accommodation are almost a third more likely to suffer respiratory problems such as chest problems, breathing difficulties, asthma and bronchitis than other children¹⁷. Housing

¹⁶ 'Bad housing' as Shelter currently describes it, covers a wide range of issues, including homelessness, overcrowding, insecurity, housing in poor physical conditions and living in deprived neighbourhoods.

¹⁷ Rice, B. *Against the odds: An investigation comparing the lives of children on either side of Britain's housing divide*, Shelter, November 2006.

also has a significant impact on children's safety; almost half of all accidents involving children are related to physical conditions in and around the home¹⁸. Homelessness, poor housing conditions and overcrowding all have significant negative impacts on a child's development. A survey of families living in temporary accommodation found that, due to their housing situation, children miss on average 55 days of school per year, which is usually due to disruption caused by moves to, and between, temporary accommodation¹⁹.

There are also serious implications for children later on in life. The risks to a child's educational achievement have a long-term effect on their economic well-being, and disrupted schooling is more likely to result in unemployment or working in insecure or low-paid jobs

¹⁸ Harker, L., *Chance of a Lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children's lives*, Shelter, September 2006.

¹⁹ Mitchell, F., Neuburger, J., Radebe, D. and Rayne, A., *Living in limbo: Survey of homeless households living in temporary accommodation*, Shelter, June 2004.

during adulthood²⁰. Moreover, increased duration of living in accommodation in a poor state of repair is significantly associated with getting into trouble with the police²¹.

Given the vital connection between housing, the wider neighbourhood and children's well-being, Shelter believes that there are a number of opportunities to address the very real poverty faced by families every day through tackling the housing crisis. As outlined above, there is a need for significantly more affordable homes, particularly in the social rented sector; the total backlog of those requiring social rented housing is more than 500,000²², and it

²⁰ Harker, L., *Chance of a Lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children's lives*, Shelter, September 2006.

²¹ Barnes, M., Butt, S. and Tomaszewski, W. *The dynamics of bad housing: The impact of bad housing on the living standards of children*, Natcen, September 2008, sponsored by Eaga Partnership Charitable Trust and Shelter.

²² Holmans, A., Monk, S., Whitehead, C. Research: report, *Homes for the future: A new analysis of housing need and demand in England*, Cambridge

is essential that the Government redoubles its efforts - and increases its investment – to deliver new social housing.

Greater financial support for housing must also be given to families. The Government's vision for tackling child poverty seeks to increase employment and raise incomes, but there are number of barriers within the housing benefit system which can act as a deterrent to entering work or increasing pay. For many claimants, the complex interaction of benefits and tax credits, alongside childcare and travel costs, means that households can find themselves worse off going into work or increasing their hours. The effects become more intensified for families paying high rents, particularly those in private rented or temporary accommodation, who become trapped in a cycle of poverty and/or unemployment.

The Government must ensure that the measures used to evaluate progress on child poverty have a greater focus on housing. Currently, the Every Child Matters outcomes framework has very few specific targets and indicators on housing and homelessness. The Government currently

Centre for Housing and Planning Research, University of Cambridge, Shelter, November 2008.

measures child poverty on the basis of income *before* housing costs. However, this does not represent a complete picture as many families have to pay disproportionately high housing costs due to location or type of accommodation. A survey commissioned by Shelter found that 2.2 million households (nine per cent) spent more than half their income on housing costs, and among those on low incomes²³ this proportion rose to 38 per cent²⁴.

In practice there needs to be more effective partnership working on the ground between housing and children's services to address the needs of those children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. More often than not a lack of understanding of procedures and good practice on both sides can result in vulnerable children slipping through the safety net.

There must also be much greater recognition of the impact of the wider neighbourhood and environment on child poverty in its broadest sense. Children need not only a decent, secure home, but a safe and

²³ Shelter's definition of income in the survey was net (after tax and NI) household income and low income was defined as below £10,000.

²⁴ Reynolds, L., Parsons, H., Baxendale, A. and Dennison, A., *Breaking point: How unaffordable housing is pushing us to the limit*, Shelter, June 2008.

positive neighbourhood in which to play and develop. The delivery of new social housing within vibrant mixed communities will be a positive way of achieving this, but we must also ensure that existing communities are regenerated and renewed with the needs of children at their very heart.

By working together we must ensure that all agencies can create effective long-term improvements for children and meet the commitment to eradicate child poverty. In the face of the current economic challenges it is more important than ever that the Government strengthens its commitment to the supply of affordable housing and the creation of prosperous and cohesive communities so that future generations of children have the opportunity to live in safe, secure environments.



Young demonstrator at the Keep the Promise Rally

Child Poverty, inequality and child rights

If I were in charge for a day I would build more houses and help the adults to get a job and give lots of education to the children and even give education to the adults, and also make the children happy. – Child’s voice at the ECP: London Children Speak Out Event, 2007

Essay by David Bull, UK Executive Director, UNICEF

It is instinct to assume that a nation with a GDP of \$1 per capita per day is going to have higher rates of infant mortality, a lower rate of educational attendance, lower life expectancy and greater preventable disease prevalence than a richer country. When we look at wealth or income in this way what we are really doing is evidencing the impact that poverty has on rights, child rights – to health, to education, to protection and to development as an individual. Poverty is a barrier to the realization of rights.

This is true for relative as it is for absolute poverty. The life expectancy of a child born in Calton in Glasgow, Scotland is 28 years less than that of a child born a few miles away in Lenzie²⁵. The 2007 UNICEF report on child wellbeing ranked the UK bottom out of 21 OECD²⁶ countries. The UK has one of the worst rates of Child Poverty in the industrialised world; 30 per cent of children in the UK live in poverty²⁷ – that is 3.9

million. Looking at the percentage of children growing up in relative poverty across 24 OECD countries the UK ranked 23 out of 24, with only the USA having a higher rate of relative poverty. Given how comparatively wealthy the UK is as a country, our child poverty rate is unacceptably high.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is 20 years old this year, it was written after it was decided that there was a specific need for a convention to protect the rights of children, as people under 18 years old often need special care and protection that adults do not. The UNCRC is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty²⁸ and it is the only one to include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It sets out in detail what every child needs to have for a safe, happy and fulfilled childhood. Crucially the rights outlined in the UNCRC are interdependent

and indivisible; we cannot ensure some rights without—or at the expense of—other rights. This concept is obviously particularly pertinent when looking at the issue of poverty, whether relative or absolute, and rights.

Article 4 of the convention sets out that: ‘States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.’

As this article stipulates, by agreeing to undertake the obligations of the Convention national governments, including the UK²⁹, have committed themselves to protecting and ensuring children’s rights by all means

²⁵ World Health Organisation

²⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

²⁷ Defining relative poverty: Households with income below

60% median income of the country

²⁸ All UN member states except for the United States and Somalia have ratified the convention.

²⁹ The UK signed the Convention on 19 April 1990, ratified it on 16 December 1991, and it came into force in the UK on 15 January 1992.

available to them, and they have agreed to hold themselves accountable for this commitment before the international community. States that are party to the UNCRC, are therefore required to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child³⁰, with each country having to submit a comprehensive report on its implementation every five years.

In September 2008, the UK Government's most recent report was examined in a face-to-face meeting between the Committee in Geneva and a UK delegation. In October, the Committee issued 'concluding observations and recommendations', in which it offered assessment of the UK Government's implementation of the UNCRC.

The Committee stated that it appreciated efforts that have been made to meet the objectives set out in the Convention.

However, concerns were also expressed; specifically that significant inequalities persist which have serious implications for children's life chances: 'The Committee notes with appreciation the increase in expenditures on children in recent years. Nevertheless,

the Committee is concerned that the increases are not sufficient to eradicate poverty and tackle inequalities and that the lack of consistent budgetary analysis and child rights impact assessment makes it difficult to identify how much expenditure is allocated to children across the State party and whether this serves to effectively implement policies and legislation affecting them.'³¹

As this excerpt shows the Committee feel that the Government could be doing more, through targeted financial investment, to further the rights of children in the UK, they went on to recommend: 'that the State party, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention, allocate the maximum extent of available resources for the implementation of children's rights, with a special focus on eradicating poverty and that it reduce inequalities across all jurisdictions.' This is a call to action for the UK Government - the duty to bestow that 'maximum extent of available resources'.

The Convention acknowledges that each nation finds itself at a different starting point, which is why it encourages an attitude of progressive realisation – the UK as a

relatively rich nation could be paving the way, trailblazing. Despite the UK's potential, as the Committee stresses, poverty remains a key barrier to child rights' realisation in the UK.

There are many other compelling reasons to work to eradicate child poverty in the UK – not least the calculative case that can be made, of removing the significant cost burden that child poverty levies on the economy.³²

If UK Government is committed to meeting its obligation to deliver the UNCRC for children in Britain it needs to act now, in this 20th anniversary year of the UNCRC, by lifting children out of poverty.



Young demonstrator at the Keep the Promise Rally

³⁰ The Committee is a UN treaty monitoring body which assesses how well states are implementing the convention, reports on progress and makes recommendations.

³¹ Paragraph 18 Concluding Observations and Recommendations, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2008.

³² £25bn per year –Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008