

“It didn’t feel like a  
child’s bedroom,  
more like an empty  
box”

***Housed but not homed:*** addressing the  
critical impact of furniture poverty and poor  
home conditions

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# About

## The Childhood Trust

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The Childhood Trust is London's child poverty charity, working to improve the lives of children and young people living in poverty across the capital. We amplify children's voices, fund frontline charities, and conduct research that combines data with lived experience to inform policy and practice.

Through our community outreach programme, *Transforming Spaces*, we create safe, inspiring environments for children living in poverty, providing every child a space where they can sleep peacefully, play freely, learn confidently and grow.

Our impact focuses on improving outcomes for children living in poverty, creating longer term positive impacts, and raising awareness of the issues affecting families across London.

# In collaboration

This mixed-methods study draws on research with nine charities in England, including interviews with staff, families and professional referrers, alongside analysis of existing impact data. It explores how furniture provision and home or bedroom transformations affect children and families, what enables effective delivery, and where systemic barriers persist.

Our charity partners on this research included organisations providing direct family support and those focused on research, advocacy and campaigning on furniture poverty and housing conditions:



*Healing Homes West, Dora Brown, Furnishing Futures, Zarach, Little Village, Barnardo's, The Magpie Project, End Furniture Poverty*

# Executive summary

## Furniture poverty, housing conditions and implications for UK policy

At **The Childhood Trust**, we believe in cultivating physical safe spaces for children. *Transforming Spaces*, our community outreach programme, transforms bedrooms for children living in poverty to a space they depend on for safety, support, and comfort. We provide essential bedroom furniture to help children rest, play and learn while also decorating their room to their bespoke needs and interests so they feel a sense of belonging.

Through this work, we have seen the incredible impact that transforming a child's space can have while also observing the serious challenges families face due to inadequate housing and furniture poverty. This research aims to raise awareness of these issues and examine existing interventions similar to *Transforming Spaces*, exploring how they operate and the impact they have on children and families.

This report uses the term '**transforming spaces**' to generally refer to interventions and projects that decorate and organise a space (including a room or whole home) and provide furniture.

We examine how furniture poverty and inadequate housing conditions undermine children's outcomes in the UK, and outline key recommendations for housing, policy, and public services for wider systemic changes to ensure children and families are supported going forward.

This research is aimed at policy-makers and the housing sector to present the current issues families face around furniture poverty and housing conditions, the impact of these interventions and provide a list of recommendations to improve conditions for families at a systemic level.

# Executive summary cont.

## Context

Only 2% of social housing is furnished, despite tenants being on disproportionately low-incomes (Bond & Donovan, 2023). Many families are placed into accommodation with no beds, flooring, curtains or basic furniture.

**Furniture poverty**, defined as the inability to afford essential furniture and white goods, affects millions of households in the UK and is particularly concentrated among families in social housing, private rented accommodation, and emergency or temporary housing (Bond & Donovan, 2023).

While housing policy typically focuses on structural safety, heating and sanitation, this research shows that the absence of basic furniture and décor has direct and serious consequences for children, including poor sleep, stress, developmental delays, reduced educational engagement and social exclusion.

Bed poverty, in particular, has become increasingly prevalent as families prioritise food, energy and rent during the cost-of-living crisis (Cooper & Mullen, 2023).

This issue is growing, with requests for help with children's beds and bedding having more than quadrupled between 2018-19 and 2022-23 (rising from 4,000 to 18,000) in England (Cooper & Mullen, 2024).

Despite its scale and impact, furniture poverty is not consistently recognised as an essential housing or child-welfare issue within current policy frameworks.

# Key findings

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1. Furniture poverty has immediate and harmful effects on children's wellbeing, including sleep deprivation, emotional distress, reduced concentration at school and a lack of safe, personal space.
2. Parents experience significant stress, shame and financial pressure when placed into empty or poorly furnished homes, often after fleeing unsafe situations.
3. Home and bedroom transformation projects deliver immediate, measurable benefits, improving children's sleep, emotional wellbeing, educational engagement and family relationships.
4. Parents consistently described these interventions as life-changing, enabling them to move beyond crisis management and engage more positively with employment, education and support services.
5. Charities demonstrate effective models of delivery, but face systemic constraints that limit scale and sustainability.

# Systemic issues

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The research highlights that furniture poverty is driven by systemic failures, including:



Housing systems that routinely place families into unfurnished emergency, temporary or social accommodation



Short-term and uncertain crisis funding, limiting planning and delivery by local authorities and support services



Inconsistent housing standards and lack of clarity on what constitutes “adequate” provision for families with children



Uneven access to Local Welfare Assistance across England



Limited policy recognition of furniture as essential to children’s health and development



Charities cannot resolve these issues alone. Without policy reform, voluntary organisations are left managing the consequences of structural housing and welfare failures.

**Executive summary cont.**

# Implications for the policy and housing sector

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The charities involved in this research provided their insights and expertise on key recommendations for policy makers, social support services and the housing sector. The key themes from conversations were around the need to:

**Firstly**, improve housing conditions and standards. There needs to be a better standard around the basic conditions of housing, including emergency, temporary and social housing. A family may already be going through financial challenges, as well as other complex situations, and need peace of mind that basic and essential furniture and décor is available.

**Secondly**, ensuring there is sustainable and reliable support towards costs for families in need. For families that are struggling with essential costs, moving into an empty home is a financial and emotional burden that can be incredibly challenging to overcome without support. This can impact meeting their basic needs and wellbeing.

The evidence shows that furniture poverty should be treated as a **core housing and child wellbeing issue**, not a discretionary or charitable concern.

Addressing **furniture poverty** would support wider government objectives, including:

- Improving child health and development
- Reducing educational inequalities
- Preventing family crisis and homelessness
- Supporting tenancy sustainment
- Reducing long-term costs to health, education and social service systems

# Key policy directions

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The research supports the need for:

- Recognition of beds, basic furniture and floor coverings as essential elements of child-appropriate housing
- Stronger housing standards for emergency, temporary and social accommodation
- Sustainable, long-term funding for essential household support, beyond short-term crisis schemes
- Universal access to Local Welfare Assistance across all local authorities
- Greater promotion of furnished tenancies and furniture reuse schemes
- Stronger income protection to ensure families can meet essential costs
- Improved data, accountability and cross-sector collaboration

## Conclusion

Furniture poverty is a predictable outcome of current housing and welfare systems, not a failure of families. Children cannot thrive in homes that lack beds, basic furniture and dignity. While charities demonstrate what works at an individual level, lasting change requires coordinated policy action across housing, welfare and local government.

Addressing furniture poverty represents an opportunity to improve children's lives, strengthen housing outcomes and reduce long-term public service costs.

# Full report

A photograph of a child's bedroom. On the left is a white metal bed with a quilted blanket and a pillow. In the center is a white table with a blue globe. To the right is a white toy chest filled with colorful stuffed animals. A pink and white striped rug is on the floor.

In this report we explore current transforming spaces interventions, presenting how direct support to families operates (what works and what challenges there are) and how a transformed space impacts children and families.

We then outline key policy and housing recommendations to drive sustainable systemic change.

# Transforming spaces interventions - Successes

## **01. Capacity and infrastructure enable impact**

Effective furniture provisions and home transformations rely on strong operational infrastructure. Partnerships with manufacturers, reuse organisations, delivery firms and corporate organisations reduce costs and solve storage and transport challenges. Well established systems for referrals, planning, quality control and volunteer management improve safety, efficiency and consistency.

## **02. Trust and dignity drive engagement**

Furniture poverty is hidden and highly stigmatised. Interventions succeed when families engage through trusted referrers, experience non-judgemental, culturally aware support, and feel respected. Involving children and families in decisions increases engagement and impact, while safeguarding-led timing is essential in high-risk contexts (e.g. domestic abuse).

## **03. Whole-system working improves outcomes**

For urgent family support provisions, charities found that they could respond faster than social support services and advocate for families independently and affectively. However, for wider and more sustainable impact, multi-agency collaboration (housing, social services, education, health, police, domestic abuse services) enables holistic support and resource pooling.

# Transforming spaces interventions- Challenges

## 01. Housing conditions

### constrain delivery

Unfurnished emergency, temporary and social housing, overcrowding, poor property conditions and frequent moves limits what charities can deliver and sustain. Inconsistent standards (e.g. flooring, furnished tenancies) create uncertainty for providers and families.

## 02. Funding instability limits

### scale and sustainability

Short-term, uncertain funding restricts stock, staffing, follow-up and evidence collection. Skills shortages (e.g. decorators, floor fitters) and volunteer availability further constrain delivery.

## 03. Policy gaps perpetuate

### furniture poverty

Furniture is not consistently recognised as essential for children's health, safety and development. Crisis funds are inconsistent and often unsuitable for furniture needs. Recognising furniture as essential, standardising support, and investing in shared evidence would address root causes rather than symptoms.

### Takeaway for policy makers and housing providers

Transforming spaces interventions are high-impact and consistently valued, but scale is constrained by logistics capacity, housing conditions, funding instability and policy gaps. Stronger housing standards (including essential furnishing\*), simplified and consistent crisis support, and cross-sector coordination would reduce demand pressure and enable more sustainable, preventative responses.

*\*Essential Furnishing includes items like beds and flooring, as defined by End Furniture Poverty.*

# The impact of **transforming spaces** **interventions**

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## **Before interventions, families experience empty and inadequate homes, which negatively impact their health and wellbeing**

The families referred to charities are often living on low incomes and in emergency, temporary, social or private rented housing that was poorly furnished or unfurnished.

These families are often facing other challenging issues - many have fled domestic abuse, are managing child health needs, or have insecure immigration status. Being placed into accommodation without beds, furniture or warmth often creates a new crisis, compounding trauma rather than resolving it.

**Policy relevance:** Housing provision that meets structural standards but lacks basic furniture and dignity undermines child and family wellbeing.

## **The interventions by charities have led to immediate improvements in children's health and development**

Furniture provision and home or bedroom transformations led to **rapid** and **measurable** gains in children's physical health:

- Improved sleep from new and good quality beds and bedding, linked to better concentration, school engagement and attendance
- Removal of developmental barriers (e.g. flooring enabling infant floor play)
- Safer homes through decluttering, organisation and basic repairs

**Policy relevance:** Beds, flooring and basic furniture are preventative health interventions, and should not be discretionary extras.

## **Strong improvements in children's emotional wellbeing and safety**

Children experienced reduced stress, increased calm, confidence and a stronger sense of safety and belonging, especially when involved in designing their own space.

Transformed rooms became safe, personal spaces for play, rest and study, with visible improvements in mood and self-esteem.

**Policy relevance:** Home environments directly affect children's emotional recovery, particularly following trauma (e.g. domestic abuse).

## **Improved relationships, routines and social inclusion for children**

Transformations supported:

- Clear daily routines (sleeping, studying, eating together)
- Reduced sibling conflict through increased privacy and ending bed sharing
- Increased willingness to invite friends over, reducing shame and social isolation

**Policy relevance:** Adequate home environments support social development and peer inclusion, with knock-on effects for education and wellbeing.

## **Education outcomes improve when home conditions improve**

Schools and referrers reported improvements in behaviour, engagement and attitude to learning, primarily linked to better sleep and access to study space (e.g. desks).

**Policy relevance:** Housing and furniture conditions are upstream determinants of educational outcomes.

## **Improved family relationships and social networks**

More functional homes enabled families to spend time together, eat together, and reconnect with friends and relatives. Parents reported stronger relationships with children and increased confidence as carers.

**Policy relevance:** Housing conditions influence family cohesion and informal support networks.

## **Tailored provision is critical for children with additional needs**

Children with special or additional needs benefited from bespoke, sensory-informed designs, specialised furniture and equipment, improving safety, regulation and comfort.

**Policy relevance:** Flexible, needs-led provision is essential to inclusive housing and child support systems.

## **Parents experience major reductions in stress, shame and financial pressure**

Parents consistently described the support as “life-changing” and impacts included:

- Reduced anxiety, guilt and shame associated with poor housing
- Relief from impossible financial trade-offs (food, bills vs. furniture)
- Increased confidence and emotional wellbeing

**Policy relevance:** Empty or poorly furnished housing creates further emotional and financial strain on parents, undermining family stability.

## **Multi-agency collaboration amplifies impact**

Charities worked closely with housing providers, schools, health services, social services, police and community organisations, enabling coordinated, holistic support and faster responses.

**Policy relevance:** Joined-up local systems are more effective than siloed crisis responses.

## **Increased engagement with services and longer-term resilience**

Positive experiences with charities rebuilt trust in services for families who previously felt unheard. Parents reported improved outlooks, motivation to pursue education or employment, and commitment to maintaining their homes.

**Policy relevance:** Respectful, practical interventions can re-engage families with wider systems, supporting longer-term resilience.

## **In conclusion**

Transforming spaces or furniture provision interventions delivered immediate, wide-ranging benefits for children and families, improving health, wellbeing, education, relationships and stability.

The evidence from this report shows the essential role of furniture and home conditions in children's development and wellbeing.

This must be considered on a wider, long term scale to ensure that every child has the right to a home that meets their needs, provides a sense of comfort and belonging and enables them to thrive.

# Recommendations

## 1. Create a long term essentials support fund

A sustainable and long-term fund that supports vulnerable households in England with **essential household costs**. Short-term and repeatedly extended funds have helped households meet basic needs, but their temporary nature limits effectiveness and planning. A **long-term, ring-fenced national fund** is needed from the government to support essential costs, including furniture and white goods, and to enable local authorities to plan and deliver support sustainably.

The Household Support Fund (HSF) demonstrated clear value and aligned well with local welfare systems, but uncertainty and last-minute extensions constrained local delivery (Department for Work and Pensions, 2025). The planned Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) from April 2026 is a positive step, but remains time-limited.

**Permanent funding** is required to ensure reliable support and effective local planning.

Additionally, Local Authorities should be encouraged and supported in using the CRF for furniture provision.

## 2. Tackling the two-child benefit cap

At the time of data collection and initial discussions with the charities involved in this research, there was a unanimous agreement for the recommendation of scrapping the two-child benefit cap to lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty.

In a positive turn, the announcement of scrapping the two-child benefit cap was announced in November 2025 and to be actioned from April 2026 (CYPNow, 2025) (CYPNow, 2025).

This will need to be monitored and further understood as this action is progressed over the next few months.

Some families will see little or no financial gain from scrapping the two-child limit as they simply hit the household benefit cap instead. Further consideration is required, especially in London where the cost of living is higher.

### 3. Guarantee local crisis support in every area

**Part a)** Make Local Welfare Assistance a standard support mechanism across all Local Authorities in England

**Part b)** Local Authorities need to ensure they maintain core funding for local welfare assistance/ support schemes.

Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) provides crisis support through cash, vouchers, furniture and appliances, yet provision remains inconsistent across England. Evidence shows LWA delivers strong benefits for households, councils and the wider public purse (End Furniture Poverty, 2024).

Local authorities should be required to provide LWA as a standard service, supported by protected core funding that is not dependent on temporary central government schemes. Funding levels should reflect local need and deprivation to ensure equitable access.

### 4. Implement an Essentials Guarantee into Universal Credit

Evidence shows that most low-income households on Universal Credit are unable to afford essentials, with a significant gap between income and costs (Trussell Trust & Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025).

An Essentials Guarantee, setting a protected minimum level of support, would help households meet basic needs, protect against financial shocks, and reduce pressure on crisis and local welfare schemes (Cooper & Mullen, 2023; Preston, Peake & Donovan, 2025).

### 5. Improve social housing standards in England to ensure basic furniture and décor is provided or available

Families should not be moved into emergency, temporary or social housing without access to basic furniture. Currently, only **2% of social housing is furnished**, leaving families—often with little notice—unable to meet children’s basic needs (Bond & Donovan, 2023).

We hoped that floor coverings were to be included in the updated Decent Homes Standard (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2025), however, this was recently rejected (Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2026) which is disappointing. However, we hope methods ‘to rapidly identify cost-effective ways in which landlords can better support tenants in need’ are identified and actioned quickly, as proposed (UK Parliament, 2026).

Floor covering and furniture provision must be addressed. Additionally, housing standards should ensure that beds and basic furnishings are provided or readily accessible for families with children.

## 6. Landlords to take part in furniture tenancy schemes and promotion of furniture reuse schemes

Social landlords should be encouraged to participate in furniture tenancy schemes, which provide essential furniture and white goods, support tenancy sustainment and reduce tenancy churn (End Furniture Poverty, 2022).

Furniture reuse schemes should also be scaled to address furniture poverty while reducing waste. Strong partnerships between local authorities, housing providers, charities and reuse organisations (e.g. the Reuse Network) can deliver both social and environmental benefits (Reuse Network, 2024).

## 7. Further considerations

A few points were made in discussion with charities with no specific policy or intervention in mind, but related to general considerations around practice and processes. For any agencies or departments working with vulnerable families (including social services, charities, Local Authorities, and housing), the following points need to be considered:

- **Implement trauma-informed thinking and practice** - Charities recognise that many families face intense challenges that result in trauma and impact multiple areas of their lives. It is important to be considerate and well informed on how to work with people in a sensitive and caring way that provides holistic support. Ensuring people are treated with dignity and without judgement can improve relationships that encourage better engagement with other services.
- **Improve processes and ownership** - Charities explained that the complicated and burden some processes involved in accessing support for families are unacceptable and should be designed in a simpler way with these families' needs in mind. There is also a lack of clarity and ownership over who is responsible for safe and liveable housing conditions for vulnerable families. A more centralised and accountable system is required.

- **Raise public awareness** - Greater awareness of the realities of child poverty and housing precarity is needed to drive long-term policy change.
- **Conduct further and longitudinal research in this area** - We have seen the immediate difference made to children following home transformations. However, it is also important to understand the longer term effects of these interventions, as well as the impact of living with furniture poverty and poor home conditions on children. We therefore recommend more research to be conducted in this subject area to understand how the physical environment affects children's wellbeing and development and the long term impact of this. This will help us to explore further solutions, including both direct interventions and tackling the wider systemic issues involved.

Taken together, these recommendations move furniture and home conditions from the **margins of policy into the core of housing, welfare and child wellbeing systems**. This can shift responses from crisis mitigation to prevention and long-term resilience.

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