



Change for Children

A study of local families
in Kensington and Chelsea



REPORT



Acknowledgements

Kensington & Chelsea Social Council would like to thank all the participating organisations that signed up to the project and to those that contributed to these findings. The participating organisations were:

- Al Manaar Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre
- Al-Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre
- Azza Supplementary School
- Baraka Youth Association
- Chelsea Theatre
- Colville Nursery Centre
- Dadihiye Somali Development Organisation
- Dalgarno Neighbourhood Trust
- Earl's Court Health & Wellbeing Centre
- Earl's Court Nursery
- Earl's Court YMCA
- Family Friends
- Greca School
- Harrow Club
- Healthier Life 4U
- Hornimans Adventure Playground
- K&C Link (now Healthwatch)
- Lancaster West Children's Community Network
- Latymer Christian Centre
- Making Communities Work and Grow
- Meanwhile Gardens
- Midaye Somali Development Network

- Moroccan Supplementary School
- NOVA New Opportunities
- Nucleus Advice Centre
- Pimento Community Project
- Solidarity Sports
- Somali Women's Association
- The Catholic Children's Society
- The ClementJames Centre
- Venture Community Association
- West London Action for Children
- Westway Development Trust
- Westway Education Trust
- Woman's Trust
- World's End Under 5s Nursery Centre

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Social Council's Change for Children project which began in September 2012 and was funded by Trust for London. The project supported local voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) to collect information from service users through surveys, focus groups and interviews, and to then analyse the results. This report details the findings and presents recommendations based on this research.

Kensington & Chelsea Social Council is the local infrastructure body for voluntary and community organisations. We are a strong advocate for local voice and through work such as Change for Children we seek to influence local decision makers to improve the lives of local residents.

This report aims to inform the reader about the lives of local families living in the borough and to raise awareness of the challenges families face in today's tough economic climate. It also seeks to inspire those that support local families through creating greater opportunities for both the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the statutory sector to continue to work together to address local issues and to build on what works.

The report concludes with recommendations which we will use to develop a future strategy to continue the good work established by the Change for Children project into 2014/15.

Key Findings

- Almost a quarter of parents reported they were living in overcrowded conditions.
- Financial insecurity was the major concern for parents, twice as likely to cause concern as rising bills.
- Half of the parents surveyed said they had struggled financially during the past 12 months and had to juggle budgets to pay utility bills.
- The happiness of their children is the greatest cause of happiness amongst parents. This reason was cited as the primary reason by more than a third of survey respondents.
- Parents admitted that their children had gone without some of the essentials they need, including food and clothes.
- The cost of school uniforms puts extra financial pressure on parents.
- Affordable childcare was cited as the main barrier to out-of-work parents seeking employment.
- Parents do seek help and are supported by local organisations, family and friends in times of need.

Moving forward

Heading into 2014 we believe that it is imperative that the VCS works closely with the statutory sector to seek solutions to many of the issues raised in this report. Closer joint working between the sectors to devise local strategies that reflect and can respond to local need will benefit local families and children.

We welcome the work that has already begun with the development of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) Child Poverty Strategy and other local initiatives such as looking into issues around food poverty in the borough. A joint effort is needed to find solutions which must be adequately resourced in order to make the difference that is so badly needed.



© Dad's House

Introduction to Change for Children

The Change for Children project was launched in September 2012. It supported local voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in Kensington and Chelsea to gather evidence on the experiences and needs of local children and families.

The project was led by the Social Council which supported organisations with carrying out surveys, focus groups and interviews with service users and then analysing the findings. This report details the results and presents recommendations based on this research.

Why the need for this project?

In 2011, the Social Council launched Poverty Watch – a local observatory bringing together voluntary and statutory sector colleagues from across Kensington and Chelsea. The aim was to share information and look at solutions to improve the lives of residents living in deprived areas of the borough. Anecdotal evidence soon emerged of the challenges facing families, such as the rising cost of basic necessities and the impact of changes to housing benefits.

Poverty Watch felt that it would be beneficial for voluntary and community organisations to gather further data of the needs of local children and families. The data would help paint a more detailed picture of the issues faced by families. It would highlight how they dealt with those issues and the support they required to help them through difficult economic times.

This evidence would be useful to help agencies (both voluntary sector and statutory) to understand and work collaboratively to address the needs of local families.

How evidence was collected

The project involved 36 voluntary and community organisations that deliver children and family services in Kensington and Chelsea. They were invited to attend training on how to carry out research and were provided with an accompanying research guide. Organisations that required extra support were given additional one-to-one advice.

Data on the project was collected in several ways:

- A pilot survey at World's End Under 5s Centre, attended by 33 parents
- A focus group with parents at World's End Under 5s Centre
- A standard survey of 113 parents carried out by participating organisations
- 12 door to door surveys carried out as part of a wider survey conducted by the Dalgarno Trust.



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Results from the pilot survey

World's End Under 5s Centre, World's End Estate, Chelsea

A pilot survey was conducted with World's End Under 5s Centre in Chelsea amongst 33 parents who use their drop-in and crèche service. The Under 5s Centre is situated in the south of the borough in the Cremorne Ward. The affluent Kings Road is just a stone's throw away and the disparities between rich and poor are apparent. The area is home to some of the richest and poorest households in the country.

The World's End estate is home to 2,500 residents. It is one of the largest social housing hubs in Kensington and Chelsea with 42% of the estate categorised as social housing.

Nearly a third of the parents surveyed by Change for Children lived in social housing with more than one in five living in overcrowded accommodation.

The participants came from diverse backgrounds, with just over half not speaking English as their first language.

Nearly four out of five said they were in receipt of some benefits with child benefit and child tax credits being the most common payments (see Chart 1).

Benefits received

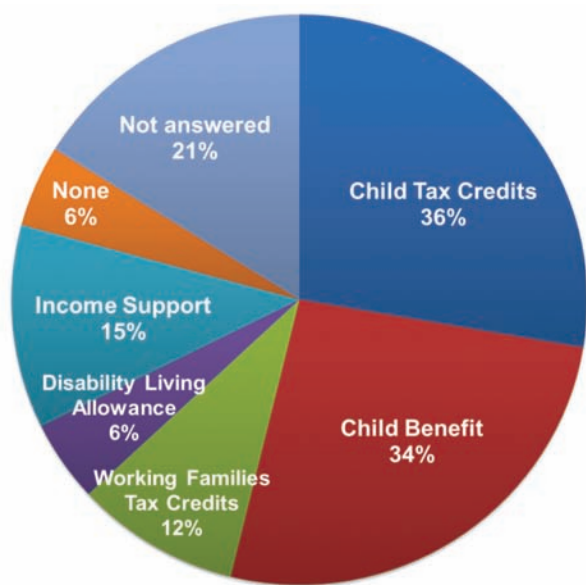


Chart 1

Of the 33 participants, nine described themselves as lone parents with the rest being part of a two parent household.

In terms of employment, our findings show that the father was far more likely to be in work in a two parent household than the mother. This was particularly the case if only one parent was working. In single income households, the father was more than twice as likely to be employed as the mother (see Chart 2).

Who works in your household?

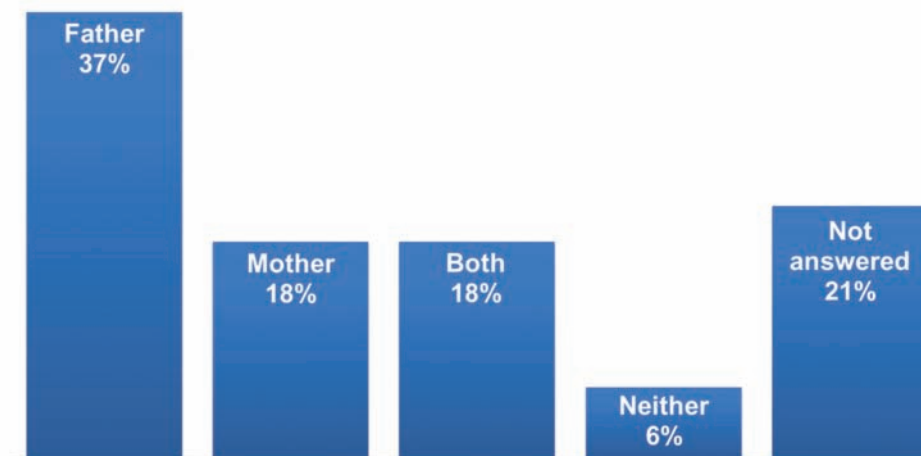


Chart 2

When parents were asked if there was any other support or services World's End Under 5s could provide, the majority said they were happy with the service they received. However, some parents would like to see longer opening hours and a regular drop-in crèche, which as of yet has not been provided due to a lack of funding.¹

Alongside the pilot survey, the World's End Under 5s Centre was also keen to learn about the aspirations and goals of some of their service users. Facilitated by Social Council staff, the centre organised a focus group of eight parents that engaged in an exercise which examined their wishes and the barriers that were stopping them from achieving these.

¹ The World's End Under 5s has a leave-in crèche for parents which runs four times a week. Parents can only leave their children there once a week.

The goals that parents wanted to achieve include:

- Improved skills and education to enable them to get back into work
- Improved general health
- Consistent childcare
- Improved housing situation
- Their child having more developed language skills
- Some free time on their own

Barriers to achieving these included:

- Lack of affordable childcare
- Time restraints
- Lack of money

When asked what support they needed to overcome barriers, responses were:

- More funding towards day trips and skill development classes
- The criteria for free childcare should be widened to be more accommodating for single mothers with health issues
- More crèche hours
- More information about courses and free activities
- More support to develop employment skills

Dalgarno residents

The Dalgarno Trust is the local community centre located on the Dalgarno estate in North Kensington. It provides a wide range of activities and support services for local residents.

The Change for Children project took the opportunity to speak to residents whilst supporting the community centre in conducting a door-to-door survey about the development of a community café within the centre. A total of 12 residents who had children were surveyed for Change for Children.

The residents said they would like to see:

- More local shops
- More information provided on what is available locally
- A local swimming pool

Additional help or support that they would like to see includes:

- Financial advice (debt and budgeting)
- Support getting back into work
- Help with getting food
- More street parties
- More neighbourliness



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Results from the main survey

A total of 113 people completed the standard survey that was developed by the project. 88% of those surveyed had children under 18 years of age. 75% of those who took part in the research lived in the borough, with a further 7% travelling in and using services in the borough.

Accommodation

The survey began by looking at the type of housing that people were living in. The table below shows the results:

Property owned outright	6%
Property rented from Local Authority	25%
Property rented from a private landlord	16%
In the process of buying a property	5%
Property rented from a Housing Association	34%
Other	7%
Not answered	7%

From the results it can be seen that three quarters of those surveyed live in rented accommodation, with a majority living in social housing.

When asked further questions about their accommodation almost a quarter described their homes as overcrowded. The cost of moving was a key issue that was raised, as was concern about being moved out of the borough. Some of the comments we captured are shown here on the right.



Benefits and financial support

Participants were asked what benefits they received. The results in the table below show that Child Tax Credit had the largest number of claimants, followed by Housing Benefit. The research also highlighted that many families were in receipt of multiple benefits.

Child Tax Credit	46%
Housing Benefit	40%
Council Tax	27%
Income Support	22%
Disability Living Allowance	9%
Job Seekers Allowance	8%
Other	9%

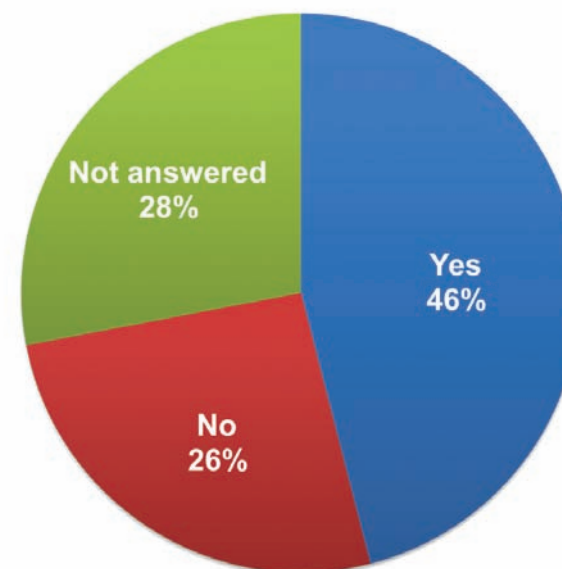
Participants said that they were aware of the impending changes to the benefits system (see Chart 3), however when questioned (prior to April 2013) only 21 respondents were aware of the housing benefit cap that were set to be introduced.



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Are you aware of the current changes being made to the benefit system?

Chart 3



Some of the comments from participants included:

"I have some awareness of the limit to child benefit. I learned a lot about it from the Daily Mail Website"

Local parent aged 43,
with one child

"I know about the housing benefit cap from the media, but do not know nothing [sic] about Universal Credit"

Local parent

"I don't know what it is about and I hope it won't affect me"

Anon

Of those who were aware of the welfare changes, almost half also said that they were aware of how the changes would affect them. Nearly one in five said they did not know if or how they would be affected. Some participants also expressed concern that a reduction in housing benefit would push them further into financial difficulty.

When asked if they had sought advice regarding the changes, it was found that that only 16% had approached local organisations, the Job Centre or their housing officers for information and support.

Employment

When asked about employment, almost a third of the people we surveyed had been in work for the entire previous five years. Of those respondents who had spent some of the previous five years out of work more than a fifth had spent 3-5 years out of paid employment (see Chart 4).

Employment status over the last five years

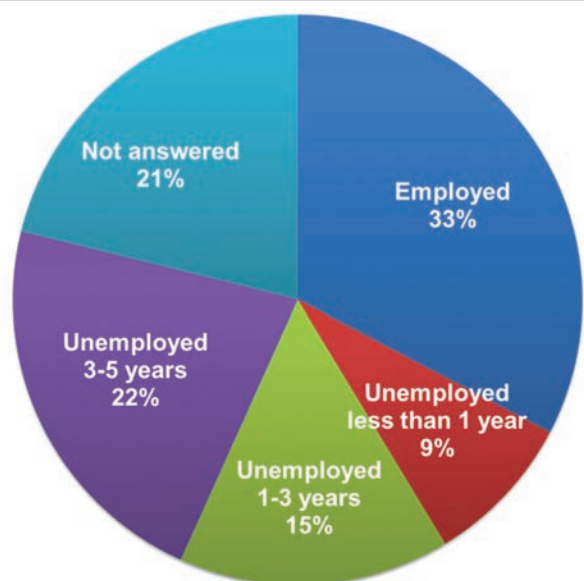


Chart 4

We asked those who were not currently in employment about the barriers they faced that stopped them finding work. We received a variety of responses with affordable childcare and language being mentioned as the biggest barriers to employment (see Chart 5).

What are the barriers to seeking employment?

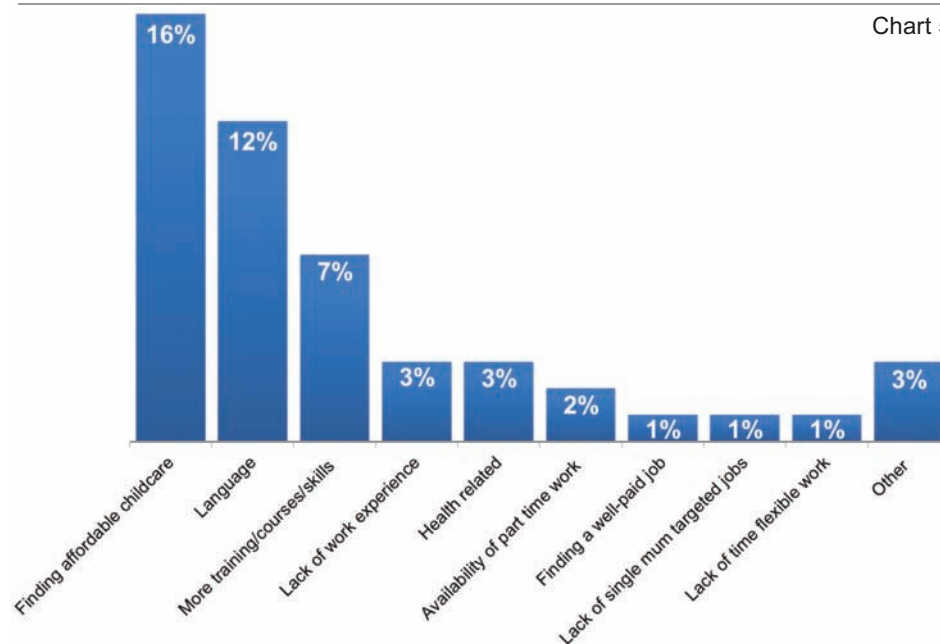


Chart 5

When talking to parents who were unemployed we found no evidence to suggest that those we surveyed did not want to work. However for those with young children, the barriers that were identified hindered their progress in finding work that was suitable and flexible enough to suite their situation.

"I need a job that will pay all bills and still be able to buy necessities for myself and my kids"

Local parent aged 38 with two children under the age of 11

"The course I am doing (ESOL) will help me find my suitable job"

Mum aged 37 with two children under three

"Working part-time messed up my council tax, within three months I had a bailiff letter. I had to go to Citizens Advice who helped me"

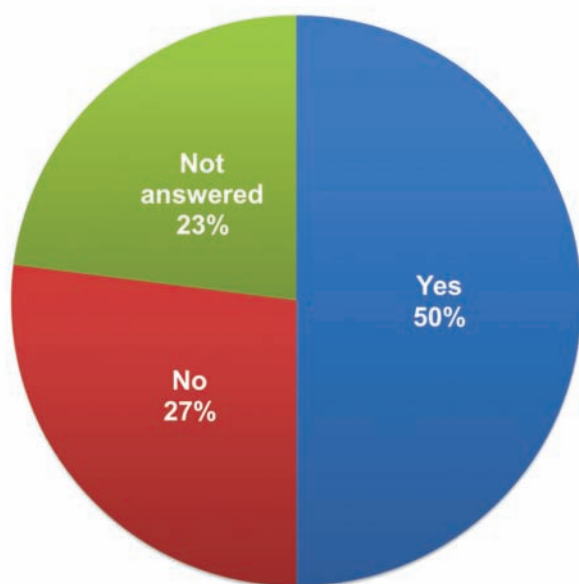
Local parent

Health and Wellbeing

Change for Children wanted to find out more about the daily pressures which parents face. When we asked parents if they had suffered financially over the past year, half of those surveyed said they had (see Chart 6).

Have you struggled financially over the last 12 months?

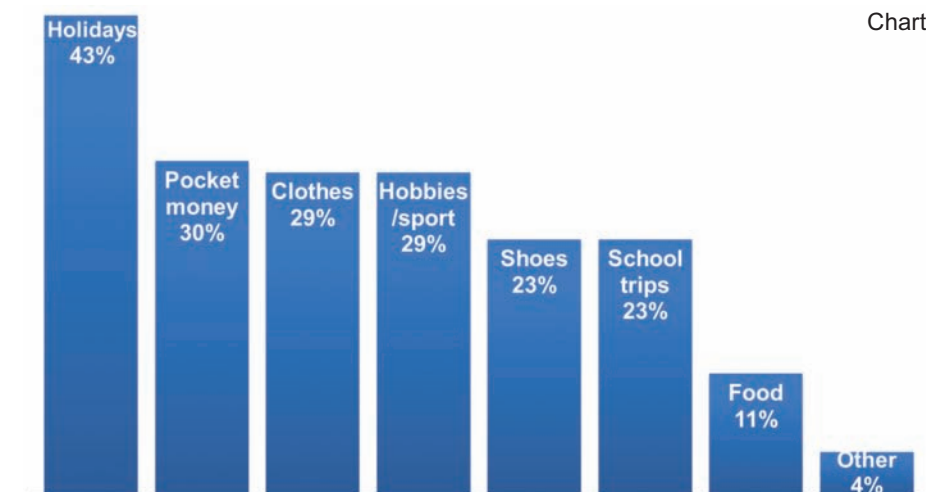
Chart 6



We wanted to know how the financial hardship was impacting on families. We asked parents if their children had missed out on anything over the past three years. Holidays and pocket money were the top answers but nearly three in ten said their children had gone without new clothes and 11% of those surveyed also admitted that their children had gone without food (see Chart 7).

If you have children, how often have they had to go without the following in the last three years?

Chart 7

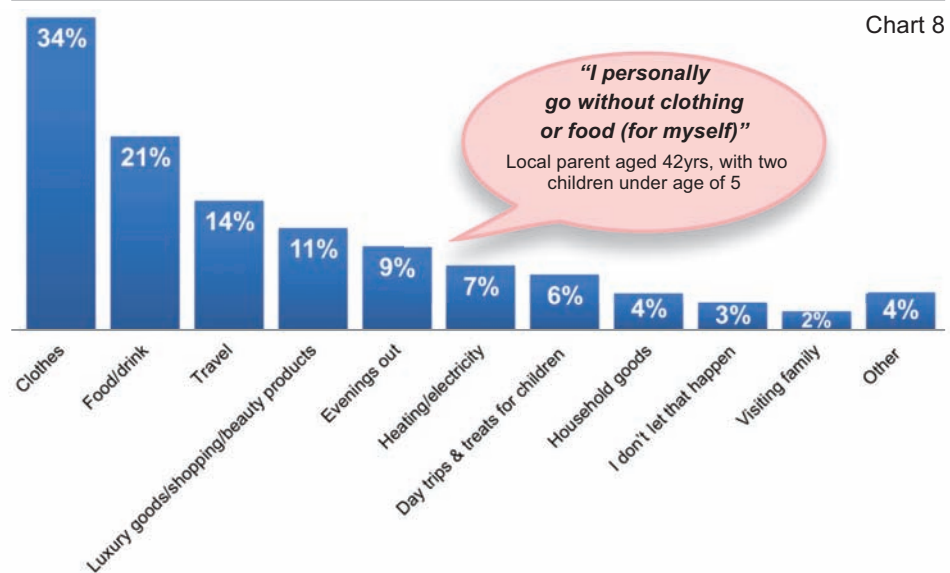


We asked parents about the sacrifices they themselves made when necessary due to financial pressures. Clothing was the top answer with over a third saying they had gone without but worryingly over one in five had also gone without food or drink (see Chart 8).



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What is the first thing you go without when times are tough?

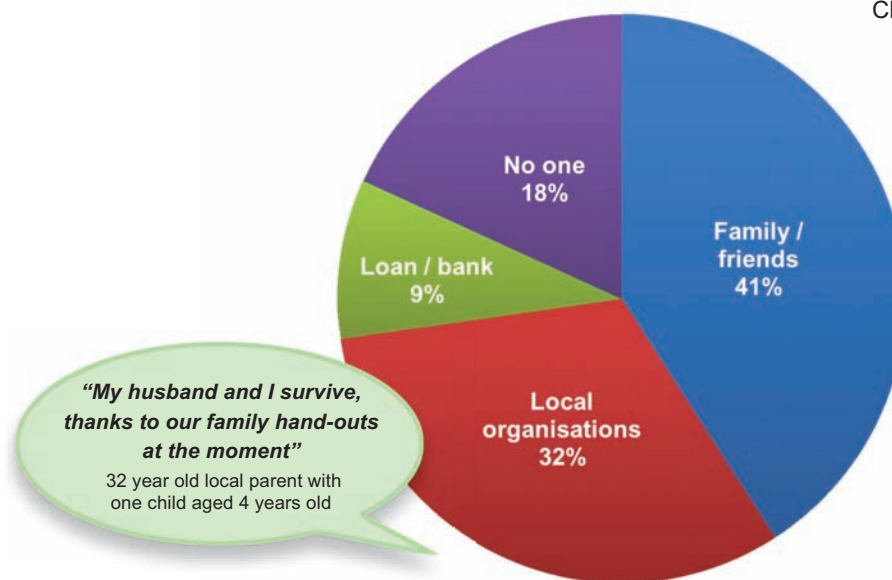


When asked who they turn to for help when struggling financially, most (41%) survey respondents said family and friends although nearly a third (32%) had also sought advice from local voluntary organisations which include the advice agencies.

18% of participants said they did not ask anyone for help outside of their immediate family (see Chart 9).

If you struggled, who did you seek help from?

Chart 9



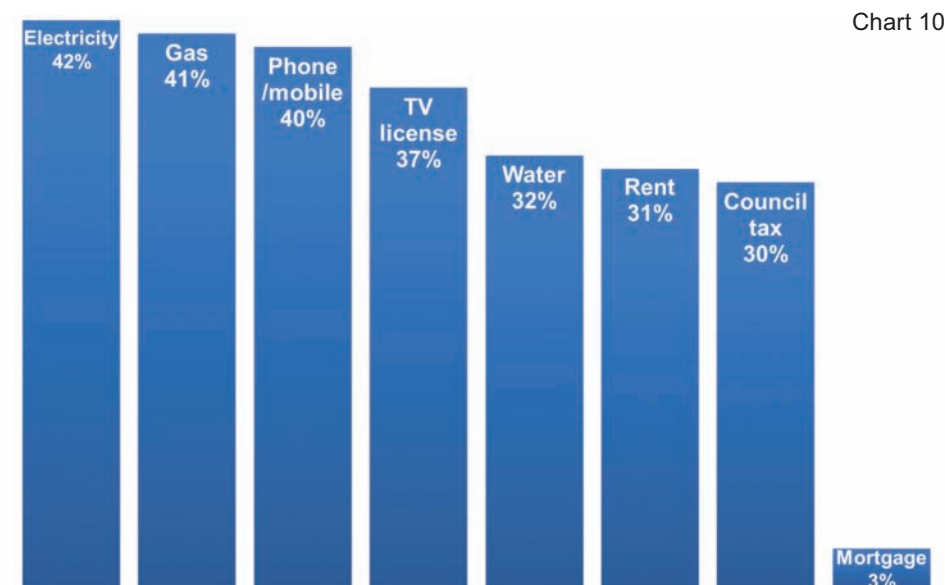
Although many respondents have been struggling financially, they are still ensuring that their children are not going without fresh fruit. 41% of parents said that they still ensure that their children are having fruit more than 5 times a week.

Parents are also ensuring that they have a sit-down family meal together more than twice a week. When asked what types of food parents were cooking they ranged from pastas and soups, to traditional meat and chicken dishes. The evidence suggests that the majority of children are getting at least one nutritious hot meal a day.

We asked survey respondents if they had tried to make savings on household bills. Nearly all had tried to reduce the usage of at least one main utility to save money. Three in ten had tried to cut their expenditure on telephone and mobile bills.

We then asked if they had struggled to make bill payments on time. Many survey respondents had difficulties paying bills in several areas (see Chart 10).

Which bills have you struggled to pay on time?



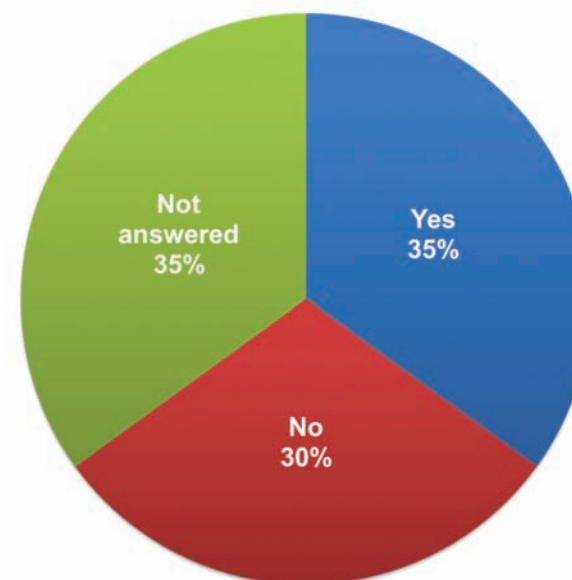
School uniforms

The increasing cost of school uniforms and the financial pressures it places on parents has been a strong area of focus for Poverty Watch so questions on this were incorporated into the survey.

The feedback we received shows that an overwhelming majority of parents whose children are required to wear school uniforms felt that these costs put extra pressure on family finances (see Charts 11 & 12).

Does your child/children have to wear a school uniform?

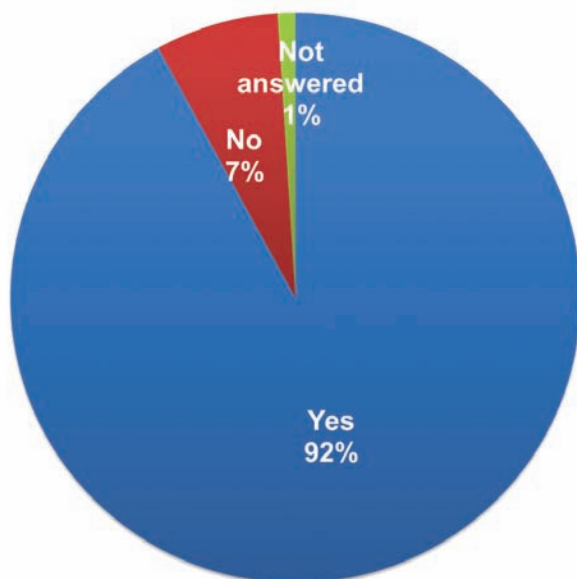
Chart 11



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If your children wear school uniforms, does the cost put extra pressure on your finances?

Chart 12



When asked specifically about costs these were some of the responses:

"I am a single parent, bills are rising, new school uniform is now costing me £250"

38 year local parent with children aged 11 and 3 years old

"My child's school forced us to purchase a new design school uniform; the basic without a compulsory school coat was £170.00. The design logo had changed. His old uniform fitted perfectly well but it was compulsory and we had to purchase new school uniform with the new logo. The total for the new school uniform was £250"

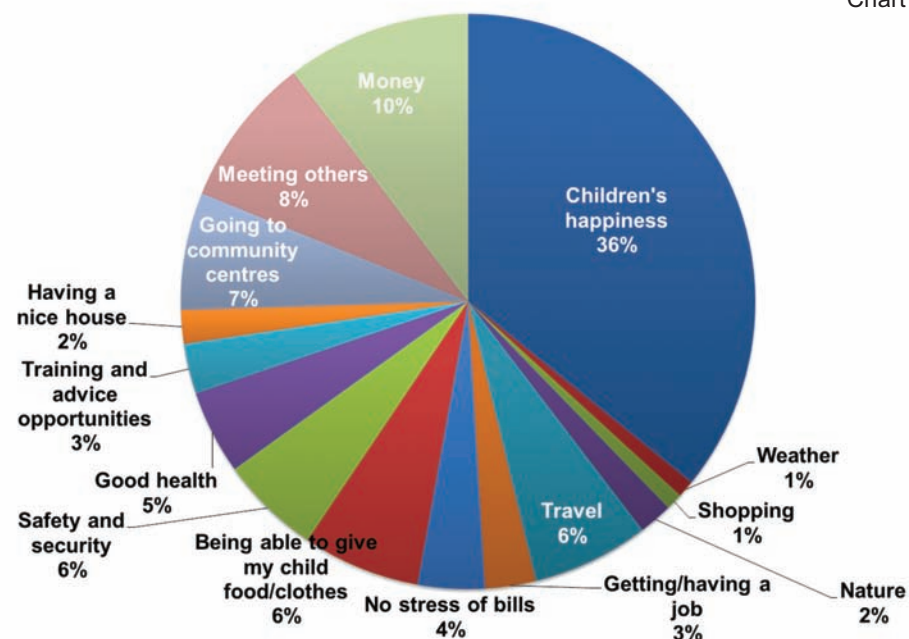
Mum aged 48 with children aged 15 and 13 years old

Happiness

The final part of the survey focused on the needs of participants, firstly asking them what made them happy. Our findings showed a strong link between a parent's happiness and that of their children. Over a third of our respondents stated this as their primary source of happiness (see Chart 13).

What makes you happy?

Chart 13



Here are some of the comments:

"Using Venture Centre for socialising, going to the gym for exercise. Activities at the centre help me to get out of the house"

Mum aged 41 years old
with five children

"Leisure activities, parent drop-ins as they provide a social space to meet other mums etc"

Mum aged 32 years old with
2 children under the age of 2

"Lack of money and not knowing whether I will be able to pay my bills. It is a constant worry"

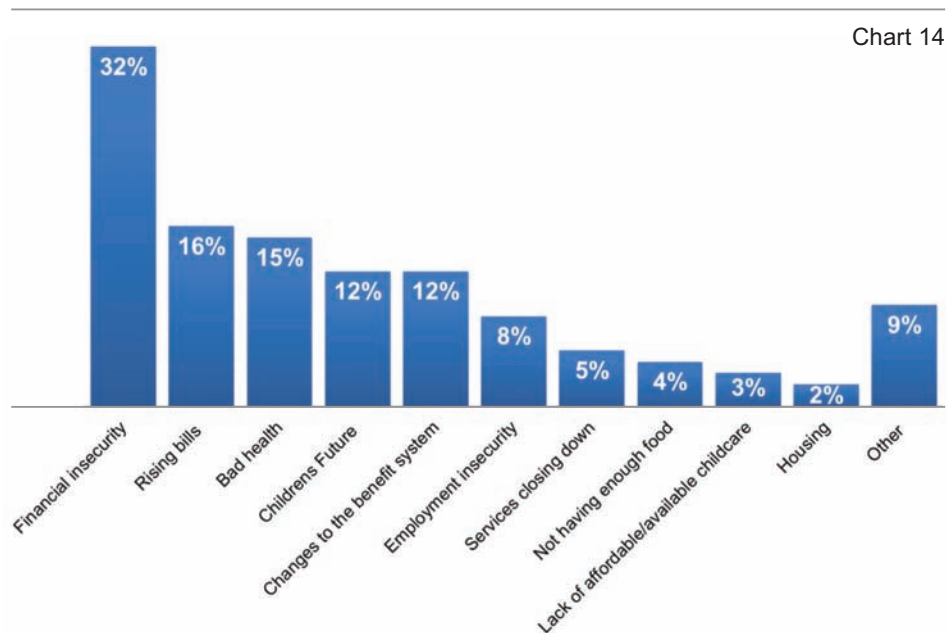
Mum aged 49 with two
teenage daughters

"To find a good job and at the same time be able to take care of my children when they aren't in school or nursery and I will be in the work"

Local mum

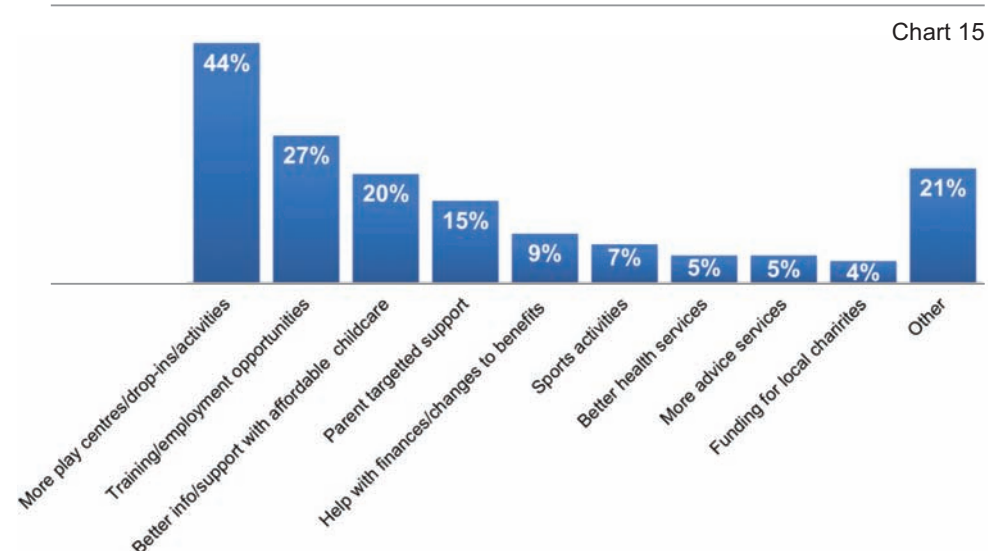
When asked what made parents worried or anxious, the most common issue raised was financial insecurity, which was cited twice as often as the next most popular reasons, rising bills and bad health (see Chart 14).

What makes you worried or anxious?



To conclude the survey we asked parents what additional services they would like to see in the borough. The most popular response given by nearly half of respondents was more play centres, drop-ins and activities for children. Training and better employment opportunities were requested by over a quarter of people and affordable childcare by one in five (see Chart 15).

What other services would you like to see in the borough?



Analysis

Overcrowding

From the research it was apparent that some parents were living in overcrowded conditions and were unable to move, either because the right size property was not available or for fear of having to leave the borough.

The issue of overcrowding is widely recognised within Kensington and Chelsea and the bedroom tax has since been introduced to try and alleviate this. However, with the lack of appropriately sized homes to enable people to downsize in the borough, overcrowding will continue. There is also the fact that some parents whose children go to school in the borough would rather remain in overcrowded conditions than risk being moved outside of the borough.

Cost of childcare

Parents also spoke about the cost of childcare and the reality of finding work that would pay enough to cover childcare costs. The new Universal Credit benefit system has been designed to support households who are on a low income and according to the Coalition government – “make work pay”. However the evidence report published by Citizens Advice Bureau on Universal Credit in 2013 questions its viability, particularly for parents on a low income who wish to work more than 16 hours but can’t because of childcare costs. In London this is particularly pertinent as the cost of childcare is 25% higher compared to the rest of the UK.

In London, the average cost of a nursery place for a child under two is now £5.33 per hour. This means that a parent buying 50 hours of childcare per week for a child under two would face an average annual bill of nearly £14,000 per year².

Having enough money to pay the bills

Results showed that parents were worried about paying bills and that when money is tight utility bills drop down the priority list. Not having enough money is a big concern, primarily because of the impact it has on the children. Comments from some parents revealed that in trying to maintain their standard of living they had taken up extra hours at work to ensure they could make ends meet. Some had also taken out loans and asked those closest to them to lend them money.



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² Findings taken from the Childcare Cost Survey 2013 by the Daycare Trust and Family and Parenting Institute

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has done some extensive research into Minimum Income Standards (MIS) which they state is 'based on the income that people need in order to reach a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in the UK' and 'to participate in society' (JRF, 2013). The research draws conclusions by adding up the costs of specific goods and services, including food, clothing, childcare and fuel as well as social and cultural participation. The research concludes that for a family of two adults and two children (one aged 1-6 years old and the other of primary school age) would need a weekly income of £471.15 before rent and childcare costs. A lone parent with a single child under the age of one would need an average weekly income of £284.58 before rent and child care.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation also argues that the MIS is being compounded by the welfare changes. The fact that salaries and welfare rates are not increasing at the same rate as inflation is resulting in individuals and families struggling to meet rising living costs.

Food Poverty

It is not easy to admit you have struggled to put food on the table, yet several parents involved in the project acknowledged that this had been the case for them on occasion. Food poverty is on the rise and it is increasingly evident in London. The London Assembly report *Zero Hungry City* states, "Many thousands of people both in work and out of work are living in, or at risk, of food poverty"³. The London Assembly argue that the scale of hunger amongst school children is a matter of great concern. This was evidenced by a survey they carried out which found that 95% of teachers witnessed children arriving at school hungry and that 60% of teachers had given children food at their own expense.

In 2012, Save the Children surveyed over 5000 parents nationwide, and reported that 61% had said that they have cut back on food, whilst 25% have skipped their own meals to feed their children.

Zero Hungry City reports a rapid increase in food banks across the UK, and London alone has 40 food banks run by the Trussell Trust. It states that there has been a large increase in people using food banks, rising from 400 in 2009 to 34,000 in 2012/13. Trussell Trust operate one food bank in Kensington and Chelsea and another is run informally by the Dalgarno Trust. Octavia Housing which operates a voucher scheme for Trussell Trust states in their annual report for 2012/13 that they provided support to 120 tenants through this scheme. It is recognised that some of these figures may well include returning families but that in itself highlights the growing demand and reliance on food banks.



© Baraka Youth Association

³ London Assembly, *Zero Hunger City*, Tackling food poverty in London, 2013 (p5)

The cost of school uniforms

The project found that the increasing cost of school uniforms was putting additional financial pressure on parents. Some parents are being made to buy uniforms from specialist independent retailers and costs can spiral, particularly when buying for more than one child. It is welcome news that the government recently announced schools were to take action to cut the cost of school uniforms. Something that in time will be implemented across Kensington and Chelsea. Until then many parents will continue to struggle to meet the high costs school uniforms command.



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Empowering parents

In running focus groups with parents, the Change for Children project was able to encourage them to talk about their goals and what they wanted to achieve for both themselves and their children. Parents said that in doing this they felt empowered, as they had the opportunity to reflect, look at ways to overcome barriers and begin taking ownership of their own lives. It is clear that giving parents more of an opportunity to focus on their goals and how to move forward is of value and doing this more often could benefit their mental health.

Keeping parents informed

Whilst the research found that some parents knew about the changes being made to the benefits system, many were unable to explain what those changes involved.

Although some parents seek advice from advice agencies there are families that do not do so at the right time. VCOs are well placed to keep parents informed of welfare changes and to refer them for advice or support. Keeping parents updated would help prepare them for what is to come and could also go some way to maintaining family stability and preventing crisis.

Some parents were uninformed about the many activities that take place in the borough and they wanted to see more on offer for their children at the weekends. Whilst information is produced by the council on children's services and activities it is clear this does not reach everyone. Information on what is available could be made more widely accessible and be better targeted.

The role of the voluntary and community sector

VCOs play a vital role in providing much needed services for parents and children. Centres such as World's End Under 5s, the Venture Centre and Dalgarno Trust all provide a space where parents and children can access free or low cost services. Parents who were interviewed praised the value of these services in helping them to cope with daily pressures. Some also expressed concerns that the reduction of such services would be of massive detriment to them and their children.

Voluntary and community organisations are feeling the pressure of the tough financial climate, yet they are continuing to provide services despite tighter budgets and with increased workloads. Part of the next stage of Change for Children will be to support organisations to work together and seek future funding, so that they can continue providing much needed services to families that need their support.



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Recommendations

Housing

- The needs of children living in overcrowded conditions needs to be considered and acted upon. The council and the voluntary sector need to work together to look at solutions.

Childcare

- Flexible childcare provision that supports parents who want to get back into work should be implemented locally.

Food poverty

- More in-depth research into food poverty needs to take place now, with the voluntary and statutory sector working together to look at solutions such as sustainable food programmes.

School uniform grant and free school meals

- Reduce the financial burden on parents by re-introducing a local school uniform grant.
- Remove the stigma of free school meals by introducing free school meals for all children regardless of income.

Supporting parents

- Develop and fund more local parent-focused mentoring and coaching programmes to support them to recognise and realise their goals.
- There needs to be a collated effort across the sectors to keep families informed of welfare changes prior to and as they happen. This should also be the case in providing information on activities and services for children.
- Develop more local wiser-shopping and money management projects with the aim of turning money worries into money plans.
- A greater collective effort across the voluntary and statutory sector to encourage parents to join Your CU, the local credit union.

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4in10

No Space at Home, 2013

<http://www.4in10.org.uk/no-space-at-home>



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