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# A Place to Play

**The impact of living in  
temporary accommodation  
on play for children-under-5**

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# Our Team

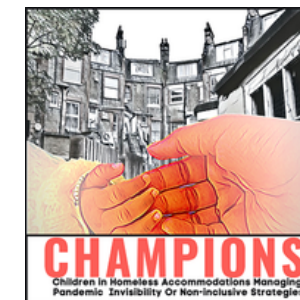
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# Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Context
2. About the Research
3. Findings
4. Recommendations



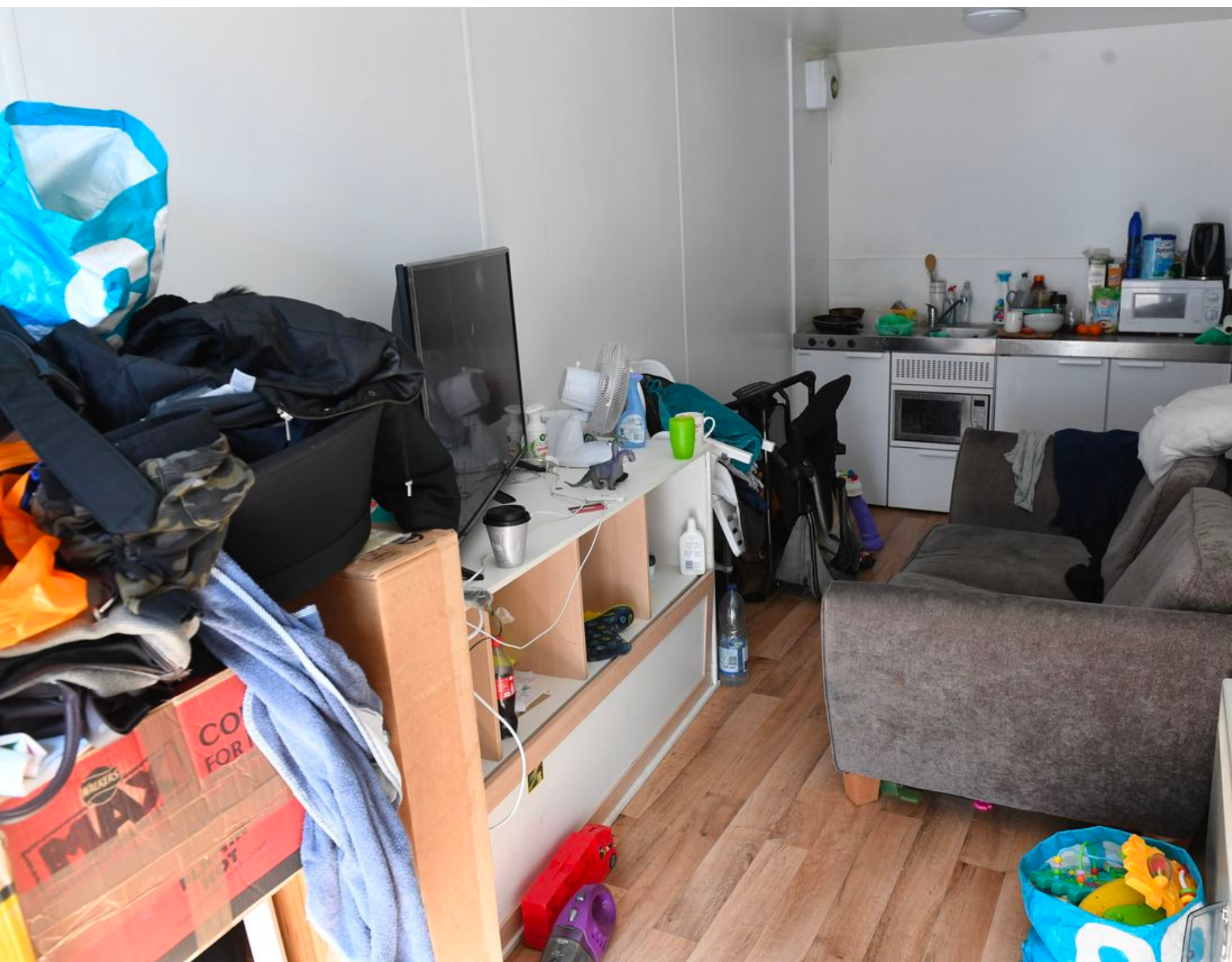
Introduction





Introduction





Introduction





## United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child

### Article 31

1959, 1989, present-day

*"Countries must recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child."*

Context



 The Guardian

## Revealed: homeless children spending entire lives in temporary housing in England

Thousands of families have not found permanent accommodation for more than a decade, according to alarming new research.


1 day ago

... BBC

## London councils spend £90m monthly on homeless temporary accommodation

Councils in London are spending £90m per month on temporary accommodation for homeless people - up by almost 40% last year, according to new...

1 week ago

 The Big Issue

## Homelessness in England reaches new heights amid cost of living crisis, government figures show

The highest number of people on record applied for homelessness support at the start of 2023 amid the housing and cost of living crises.

25 Jul 2023

 ITVX

## Exclusive: 55 homeless children have died in temporary accommodation since 2019 | ITV News

A record 142,490 children in England are currently living in temporary accommodation, Investigations Editor Dan Hewitt reports.

6 days ago



- Across the UK, there are over **140,000 children** living in TA  
*(Shelter, 2024)*
- 33% of English families with children experiencing homelessness, live in TA between two and five years  
*(Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022)*

Context



*"Two years is such a short time in policy, but in terms of a child's development, that's it. A lot of their brain chemistry is set by age two, and it's very difficult to undo trauma and adverse childhood experience.*

***Are we doing what we can to help these children now?"***

Third-Sector Housing Professional

Context





# About the Research

# Research Questions

*strengthening the evidence base*

1.

In the context of the cost of living crisis, what impact does life in temporary accommodation have on the ability of children under-5 to play?

2.

What can caregivers, service providers and policymakers do to ensure children's play needs are met?

*forming recommendations*

About the Research



# Qualitative Data

16 professional stakeholders:

*1 Academic Expert*

*3 Third Sector Health Professionals*

*1 Council Housing Officer*

*2 Psychologists*

*3 Early Years Educators*

*3 Third Sector Housing Professionals*

*2 Housing Policymakers*

*1 Health Policymaker*

3 families with lived experience:

**Family A**, a refugee parent and two-year-old child

**Family B**, a single parent and 18-month-old child

**Family C**, a single parent and seven-month-old child


About the Research






# Findings


# Core Themes



Play is important across various facets of child development



TA is harmful for children's play, physically and psychologically



Housing policy does not prioritise the needs of families

Findings



Physical - fine and gross motor skills: eye tracking, balance, strength and coordination

Cognitive - decision making, responsibility and independence

Social - personal agency, conflict resolution, communication, empathy and sharing





*"**Empowering children** to learn through the choices that they make – I very much see that as play."*

Early Years Educator

*"The play group has been very helpful because I learn a lot of things from my child. **When I see her play freely I can learn what she likes** – what she prefers. I take lessons from that."*

Family B



Physical - delays to development of fine and gross motor skills: eye tracking, balance, strength and coordination

Cognitive - poor mental health (feelings of unhappiness), poor decision making, parental co-dependence and unhealthy attachment, lacking self-awareness

Social - limited sense of agency, conflict-prone, minimal communication skills, diminished empathy and difficulty sharing



*"A lot of our mums are living in a room the size of a parking space with a bed which takes up all the floor space. **Children are doing everything on the bed, eating, sleeping, playing, trying to learn to walk, to crawl.**"*

Third-Sector Housing Professional

*"It [the temporary accomdation unit] is just **like a prison.**"*

Family A



*"There's no room. I don't have my own bedroom and neither does she... She hasn't crawled yet, but my worry is when she does crawl, **how do I baby-proof this?** Where should I put the playpen, on my head?"*

*I feel like she's missing out. You can only do your best. It's frustrating."*

Family C

Findings



Policy/strategy is siloed, inhibiting intersectional, nuanced provision that supports families needs.

Population health and wellbeing - lacks attention to children/leisure

Early\_years health frameworks - lack attention to play

Housing\_policy - lacks robust attention to health and families



*"Before this TA, I was living in a hotel in the city where I didn't know anyone. There were drug users, alcoholics, rats, and nowhere for me to cook. There was a microwave but nowhere to store food.*

***I was 30 weeks pregnant and couldn't eat properly.***

*They [the Council] told me that it was fine, that, "people come all the time with babies". Because I wasn't able to eat properly, when she was born, she was dead small: only 5.11 lbs."*

Family C

Findings



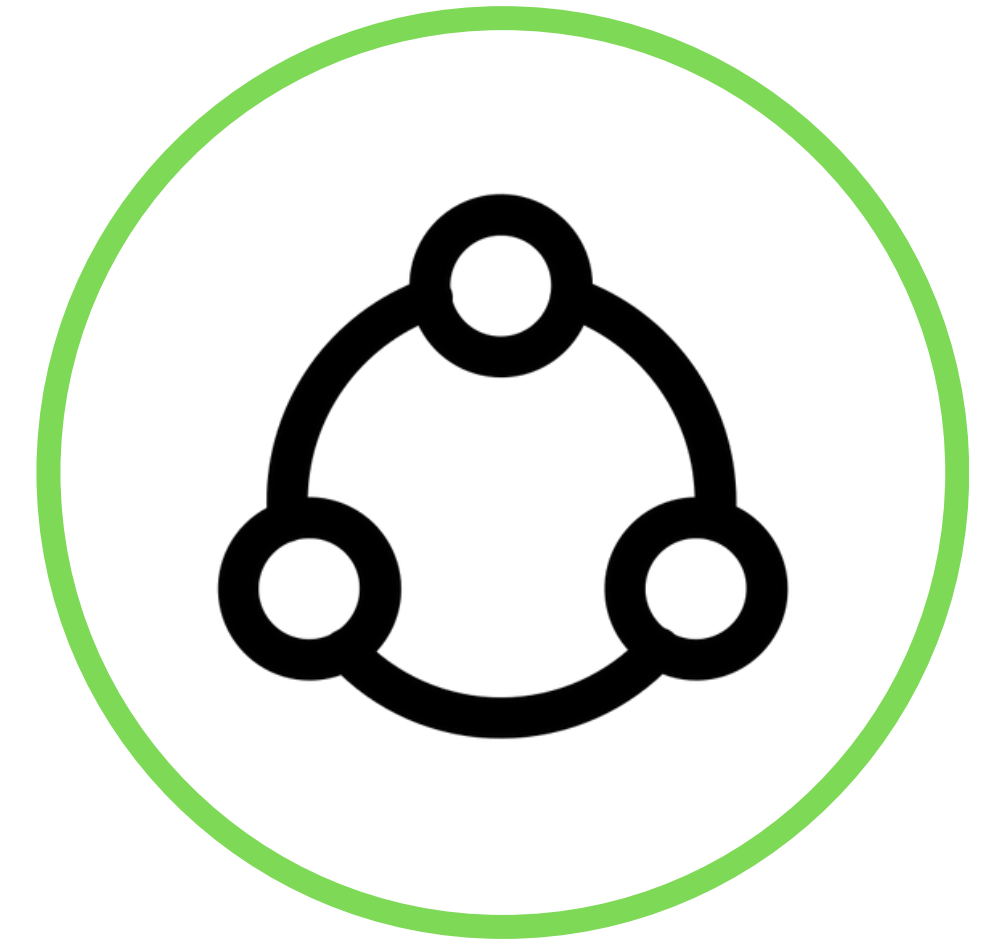


# Recommendations



**Align** housing policy with children's health insights

**Retrofit** TA and outside space for play




**Prioritise** relational, caring service provision

Recommendations







# Comparing Findings & Recommendations



Play is important across various facets of child development



TA is harmful for children's play, physically and psychologically



Housing policy does not prioritise the needs of families

**Align** housing policy with children's health insights

**Retrofit** TA and outside space for play

**Prioritise** relational, caring service provision

Recommendations



## Align housing policy with children's health insights



Play exists across themes and sectors: health, economic, social and housing.

Supporting play needs requires wider collaboration at the national and local levels, steered by street-level bureaucrats.



Recommendations



## Retrofit

### TA and outside space for play



#### Cost-effective interventions:

- Ensure policy affirms family access to safe, local, communal play spaces;
- Build referral pathways to play support;
- Provide free/low-cost access to leisure centers and privatised green space;
- Maintain stay-and-play groups;
- Offer storage space for prams and shared toys.



Recommendations



# Prioritise relational, caring service provision



## Interventions:

- Bring back face-to-face check ins with housing unit management;
- Develop an induction service pack for new family residents;
- Review visitor policies to support families.



Recommendations

