For families under pressure, strong support from family and friends is crucial. Barnardo’s recognises that to work effectively alongside such families, agencies need to understand not just the individual family but also the wider community of which they are a part. This report – based on intensive interviews with 62 mothers on a Bristol housing estate with high levels of poverty – aims to increase agencies’ understanding of the support systems available to families in such areas so that they can identify those in greatest need and work with them effectively.

Help at hand

The study asked the mothers about what contacts they had within and outside the local area, how often they saw family and friends, who they turned to for advice and practical help and what they thought of the area. The report includes quotes and case studies.

Encouragingly, the research found that for the majority of those interviewed, extended family members lived within easy reach and parents turned to them for help and advice. But it also found a small group of parents who lacked this support, mainly those who moved house frequently.

The way forward

The report looks at what can be learned from the research. Key lessons include:

- planners, architects and housing offices should take family support into account when making decisions that affect local neighbourhoods
- community workers need to recognise and build on the strengths of existing support systems
- more work is needed to explore the characteristics of families who move frequently, and to find ways to support them.
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