8. Conclusions and Recommendations

It is clear from the data contained within this report that children experiencing homelessness in Lanarkshire are potentially experiencing disadvantage in multiple ways. We do not know the full extent of the issues they may be facing due to not treating them as a client in their own right, and relying on others to identify potential issues. In not completing an assessment with each child, we are missing a key stage to be able to intervene, potentially averting additional trauma and preventing issues escalating to the point that they need more intensive intervention. There are also a lack of support services specifically for children if issues are identified, especially low level anxiety and stress. The experience of homelessness can be frightening and is punctuated by uncertainty and loss for the child – supports which enable the child to feel safe, secure and experience fun, whilst supporting and nurturing the family unit are need to be put in place. In some cases, homelessness is a one-off event for a family, but in many cases this is a repeated cycle driven by poverty and social issues. Solutions need to co-ordinated, long term and intensive in order to break the homelessness cycle. To prevent the cycle continuing into the next generation, children need to be at the centre of the support we provide.

1. Recognise that homelessness is an Adverse Childhood Event and that children experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of experiencing other ACEs, with the potential to have long term impacts on a child’s health, wellbeing and attainment.

2. Homelessness should be raised in priority to the same level as Child Protection, with the same obligation for multi-disciplinary engagement.

3. Agree a single assessment tool based on the SHANARRI indicators that is undertaken directly with every child experiencing homelessness, treating them as a client in their own right, with their own needs. This would allow early detection of potential issues, ensure more of a preventative approach and put early supports in place.

4. One agency should be responsible for the completion of the recommended assessment (point 3) and initiating and co-ordinating a multi-disciplinary group to review the needs, agree a care plan if required and monitor progress.
5. There should be an expansion of services which can offer intensive, longer term (when needed), outreach support through one point of contact for children and families experiencing homelessness. Support specifically for children, perhaps play therapy based, must be incorporated into these services. A holistic approach to family support should be adopted.

6. Develop and establish formal referral pathways, defining the roles and responsibilities of all services or agencies involved in supporting children and families experiencing homelessness. Use of the LOCATOR tools should be highlighted and useful improvements identified.

7. Bring together all staff and agencies involved in child and family homelessness to improve understanding of one another’s roles and responsibilities, improve networks and increase awareness of supports available.

8. The inequity in service provision between North and South Lanarkshire should be reviewed.

9. Funding should be increased to support these recommendations and not have an expectation that these developments should be incorporated into current workloads.

10. Review the support for children experiencing homelessness in a school setting, especially for mental health and wellbeing support.

11. A needs assessment should be undertaken of young people aged over 16 years who become homeless in their own right, as their needs are likely to be different from children and young people experiencing homelessness as part of a family.