

Bringing up children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Anne Power
LSE

Conference presentation: Parent Child 2008:
'Getting it right for families', London, UK
Friday 14 November 2008

Starting points

- Cities are difficult for families
 - unknown, unpredictable change
 - risks and pressures
- Cities offer opportunity and progress
 - jobs
 - education
 - social contact
 - change, openness

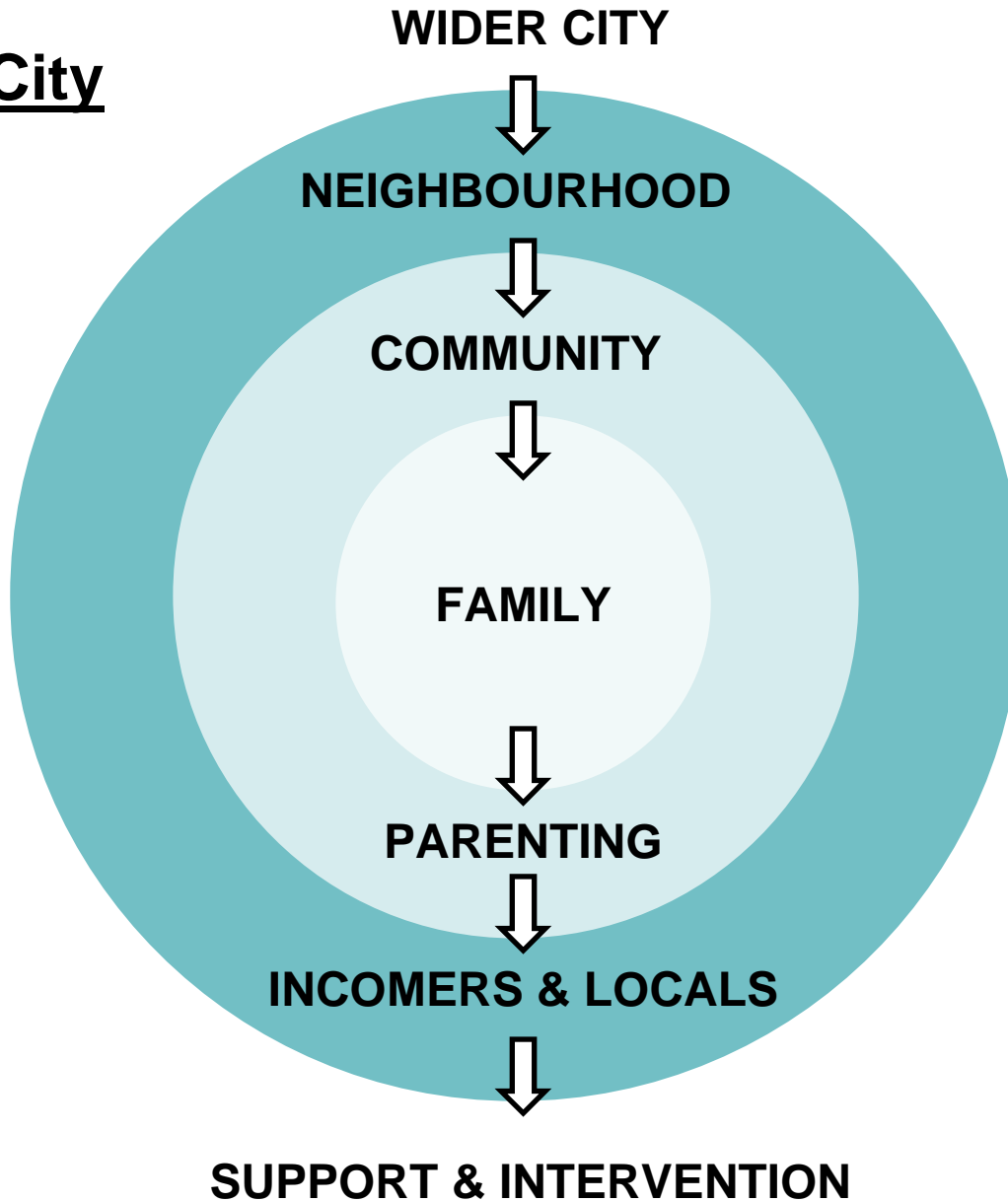
Families are neighbourhood based

- Children anchor parents
- Parents protect children
- Low incomes restrict choice
- Local services reflect social status
- Social and physical environment dominate
- Limited opportunities

Study of 200 families in 4 disadvantaged areas

- Part of tracking 12 areas over 10 years
- 2 areas in London, 2 in the North
- 7 visits over 9 years
- Tabulated evidence
- 24 life stories
 - 1 family from each area
 - illustrating 6 themes
 - representative sample
 - 50% lone parents
 - 50% minorities
 - 75% tenants
 - 75% minimal qualifications
- Integrated, grounded perspective
- Powerful neighbourhood antennae

**6 layers of City
Survivors**



1. Neighbourhoods are often hostile environments for parents and children

- Vast gaps with elsewhere
- Uncontrolled
- Disrepair
- Few facilities or space
- “Poor” , “strangers”, “bad behaviour”

BUT

- Friendly, familiar, some assets within

“Good place to live but not for children”

“I’d rather live in a shoe house in a nice area”

2. Community matters because of social contact and support

- Familiar faces and helping hands
- Sense of security and belonging
- Micro-actions count

“Just a smile or a hello helps”

“Just knowing they’re there”

“Everyone comes out to help”

“It made that old lady’s day”

“We’re on our own little island”

“Crime has brought people closer together”

3. Family needs dominate parents' efforts

- Care about children
- Reliant on extended family relations
- Struggle to pay for activities
- Afraid of wider world
- Choose local schools
- Often face internal conflicts

“I’m a confident parent”

“I tried to explain we are the poor”

“I fear for them, the things you hear”

“They’re our future”

“I don’t want them to be like me, a doley”

“I have control”

4. Parents help their children face “dangers”

- Lots want to move because of their kids
- Schools anchor parents
- Parental involvement hugely valued
- Struggle with homework, subs, peer pressure
- Far too few safe, cheap places to go e.g. fun events, outdoor space
- Parents need to be asked

“I worry for my daughter, she may join in”

“They do what they can” (teachers)

“The parenting group was brilliant, you go in all loaded up”

5. Transient population, too many “strangers” and “foreigners”

- All ethnic groups react against newcomers
- Competition for housing, schools is intense
- Incomer families are isolated and vulnerable
- Language is a huge barrier
- Integration is popular but elusive

“We need places where we can meet and chat”

“The school brings parents together”

“Too many Asians in school together isn’t good”

6. Big gap between city and community,
- national services and local needs,
- public structures and families

- Area programmes are well known
- Sure Start is particularly popular
- Schools are community anchors
- Demolition and large scale regeneration damage children – schools etc
- Very few parents feel they influence
- If directly involved very different
- Communication is everything

“The multi-cultural festival was great, all locals and very cheap”

“I wish I could organise things for young people”

“Why do they open a leisure centre and charge so much?”

“The community centre and credit union are great”

“They are trying to improve things”

“They’ve destroyed our community”.

Prospects

- Parents are hopeful for children's future
- But swamped by worries and pressures
- Training and part-time jobs very helpful
- Fun, family-oriented activities help
 - worth investing more
- Direct local continuous efforts help

Resilience

- Help and support – schools, doctors, training, Sure Start, parenting groups, churches, family
- Primary school helps (secondary very worrying).
- Cheap / free events and places
 - doing things with kids
- Knowing people locally
 - social networks, relations, stability
- Feeling part of the community – being involved

Barriers to progress – troubling issues

- Race relations and pace of change
- Youth transitions
- Big, physical regeneration schemes
- Not knowing how they will benefit
- No safe places for children
- No power or influence or voice
- Social turbulence – bad behaviour
- Constant, deflecting pressures
- Modest aspirations – happiness, secure job
- Secondary school part of the problem
- Few dream of higher education

Gaps

- Remedial help for boys
- Multi-ethnic understanding
- Direct mediation
- Intensive neighbourhood management
- More schools outreach
- Street policing
- Constant repair
- Supervised, protected open spaces
- Help with youth transition, intermediate education.
- Child-friendly and family-friendly environments

Improving community capacity and conditions

- On-going low cost solutions
- Ask mothers, adopt family perspective
- Preventive management, organisation
- Respecting social ties
- Building on successes
- Prioritise sustainability of urban environments
- Keep opening local doors
- Links to the wider city