

SNAPSHOT



PATHWAYS OUT OF POVERTY

for sanctuary-seeking children

Insights from families with
No Recourse to Public
Funds in Cardiff and
Swansea



Building a Wales
where every child can
feel **safe, included**
and hopeful about
their future.

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Introduction

Sanctuary-seeking children are among the children **most at risk of poverty** in Wales. Yet their experiences often remain absent from official data, policy discussions and public conversation. Despite facing multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences.

This matters because services and policymakers can only respond effectively when they understand where hardship exists and how families are being affected. When families fall through gaps in systems, the long-term impact is felt not only by individuals, but also by schools, communities and public services.

Wales has a strong tradition of fairness, community and looking out for one another. This research asks a simple question: **what does it take for children to feel safe, stable and able to participate fully in everyday life?**

Our new research was developed alongside Swansea Asylum Seeker Support, Glitter Cymru, Displaced People in Action and Mum's and Toddler's Foundation. It explores the experiences of asylum-seeking families living under No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions in Cardiff and Swansea.

Through trauma-informed interviews and focus groups, families shared what poverty really looks like in everyday life. They also shared what practical pathways out of poverty could look like in practice.

What families told us

We held 160 in-depth interviews, and our findings show that poverty for sanctuary-seeking families goes far beyond low income alone.

Families described lives shaped by immigration insecurity, unstable housing and barriers to everyday opportunities. Many also spoke about the constant pressure of trying to create stability for their children with extremely limited resources.

People seeking asylum currently receive **£49.18 per person per week** through an ASPEN card to cover food, clothing, toiletries, transport and other daily costs. Where accommodation includes meals, this falls to just **£9.95 per week.**

Parents repeatedly spoke about:

- skipping meals so children could eat
- rationing nappies and toiletries
- avoiding travel because of bus fares
- struggling to afford school activities and internet access
- relying heavily on foodbanks and charity support

Many described the emotional strain of trying to protect children from stress while managing constant uncertainty themselves.

One mother explained simply: *'It hurts sometimes when you can't provide for them. Sometimes I suffer so he can enjoy life. I let my children eat first and then, if there are leftovers, I will eat.'*

Another reflected: *"The most important thing to me is that my children are comfortable and that they think everything is fine. I don't want them to know we are facing hardships."*

Families were not asking for luxury. They were trying to provide stability, safety and a sense of normality for their children.

Poverty is also exclusion

Families consistently described poverty as more than financial hardship. It also affected children's confidence, participation and ability to feel connected within their communities.

Children missed out on:

- school trips and sports clubs
- birthday celebrations and activities
- opportunities to socialise with friends
- stable schooling and routines
- internet access needed for homework and learning

Repeated housing moves disrupted children's confidence, education and wellbeing. One-third of the 160 families we spoke to described children's education being affected by repeated moves, dispersal, housing instability, or difficulties accessing and remaining in the same school. One mother described her child asking: *"Why can't I go to school like the other children?"*

Another parent reflected: *"They lost their confidence."*

Children were not simply witnessing poverty around them. They were living it themselves.

The report highlights that helping children feel settled and included benefits everyone. Children who feel supported are more likely to engage positively in school, build healthy relationships and participate confidently in their communities over time.

Housing and transport are deepening hardship

Housing emerged as one of the clearest examples of pressures becoming deeper and more harmful over time.

Families described:

- overcrowded asylum accommodation
- damp and mould
- repeated relocations
- unsafe conditions for children
- lack of beds and basic household items

One mother explained she had been moved to **eight different addresses within three months.**

We were often told that families were afraid to complain about poor conditions because they worried it could **negatively affect their asylum claim.**

Transport costs also emerged as one of the biggest hidden barriers facing families. Parents described services and opportunities that existed in theory, but were unreachable in practice because buses, taxis and travel costs were unaffordable.

Families spoke about:

- walking long distances with children and prams
- struggling to access healthcare appointments
- being unable to reach affordable halal food shops
- missing activities and community opportunities because of travel costs

Support is not truly accessible if families cannot physically reach it.

The research highlights how small practical barriers can quickly grow into larger and more costly problems for families, schools and public services.

Some families face even deeper hardship

Families with disabled or neurodivergent children often described additional pressures on top of those experienced by other families. Higher living costs associated with specialist equipment, transport, sensory items and everyday care needs placed further strain on already limited household budgets. At the same time, parents were often navigating complex and fragmented systems that did not reflect the realities of their lives.

As one mother explained:

“Everything costs more when your child has extra needs... but our money does not increase.”

Families also reported difficulties accessing appropriate support, including delays in securing interpreters, challenges arranging appointments, and feeling unheard within healthcare and support services. These barriers often compounded existing financial pressures and made it harder to access the help they needed.

While additional financial support may be available in some circumstances through the asylum support system for people with specific care or health-related needs, families were generally unaware of this provision. Parents described a lack of clear information about eligibility and how to apply, reflecting wider concerns about the accessibility and transparency of support. As a result, many families felt they were managing significant additional costs without adequate assistance.

Disability, poverty and immigration insecurity often overlapped to create deeper hardship and additional barriers to support.

What makes a difference

Despite the scale of hardship, families were also clear about what helps. Small acts of support often made a significant difference.

Families repeatedly described the impact of:

- bus tickets for appointments
- Wi-Fi and SIM cards for homework
- nappies and school uniforms
- trusted community spaces
- practical support delivered with dignity

Schools, charities, neighbours and local organisations were often described as lifelines.

One parent reflected: *"They played a big role in our wellbeing."*

Small practical interventions often prevented much deeper crisis.

Families consistently valued support that was flexible, respectful and easy to access early, before problems escalated further.

What can be done to help sanctuary seeking children

The report calls for a more **practical, joined up and preventative approach** to supporting children and families facing severe hardship in Wales.

Children who feel **safe, stable and connected** are more likely to attend school consistently, build positive relationships and participate confidently within their communities.

Our 9 actions:

1. **embedding the experiences** of sanctuary-seeking children and families within national child poverty and anti-poverty planning, helping ensure support reaches children facing the greatest barriers
2. **improving local understanding** of housing instability, transport barriers and hidden poverty affecting families, so services can identify pressures earlier and respond more effectively
3. **ensure families only need to tell their stories once by improving coordination** between schools, healthcare providers, home office, housing services and community organisations to reduce duplication and help families navigate support more easily
4. **make support easier to understand and accessible by ensuring interpreters and translated information** are consistently available across services so families can access support safely and confidently
5. **reducing unnecessary school disruption** caused by repeated housing moves, helping children maintain stability, friendships and consistent learning

6. **improving digital access** via social tariff broadband being available to those in asylum system, so children are not excluded from homework, school communication and learning opportunities
7. providing **small targeted early support** for essentials such as transport, school uniforms and phone data before problems escalate into deeper crisis
8. supporting **trusted local community spaces and activities** that help children build confidence, friendships and positive connections within their local communities.
9. The Home Office is **more transparent in additional needs payments**, and this is advised to the family at screening interview.

The report highlights that many of these actions are **small, practical and preventative.**

Helping children access the same opportunities needed to learn, stay healthy and participate positively in everyday life benefits not only individual families, but also schools, communities and public services across Wales.