Sustainability:
The changing and challenging funding context has undoubtedly affected the future of the programme. The group did establish a consortium, led by SPAN and Shelter, so that they could respond to council commissioning opportunities. However, the plans to out-source the council’s Family Intervention Programmes never materialised and it is likely that the Troubled Families initiative will be too tightly focused for partner agencies to benefit.
That said, the outcomes of the work with families, especially its intergenerational approach, have provided opportunities for tackling the practical problems facing parents, whilst providing skills that potentially prevent children repeating the cycle. Key to this has been the significant progress made by families in the programme in relation to their ability to manage relationships and to develop stronger community links.

Agencies in the programme have collaborated to better signpost families to other services and to educate other agencies about working with whole families. This work bodes well for the future support of homeless and vulnerable families in the city.

RECOMMENDATIONS
To promote stronger family relationships and parenting skills in homeless families
• Aim to set up holistic provision: promote parenting skills within a context where families’ priority needs are also addressed.
• Recognise the value of a patchwork of smaller providers: small organisations will often bring the innovative approaches.
• Build preventive work onto crisis interventions – through skills-sharing and sign-posting, to reduce the burden on reactive services later on.

To promote partnership working, practical working links and sign-posting between agencies
• Include partnership-building activities in early stages of the programme, especially staff exchanges between organisations.
• Establish a Steering Group with representatives from key stakeholders including the statutory sector, and coordinate approaches to supporting vulnerable families.
• Flexibility of programming and funding is helpful to respond to opportunities.
• Identify as early as possible opportunities for bidding for joint funding, to give focus to partnership meetings.
• Advertise services as widely as possible, especially amongst council departments.
• Councils explore ways to work more effectively with their voluntary sectors.

Build a portfolio of evidence for preventive work and whole family approaches
• Establish clear monitoring and evaluation system at the start, drawing on a baseline study, and ensure staff are trained and up-to-speed.
• Service providers need to continue to find creative ways to demonstrate that a coordinated approach prevents homelessness.

Copies of the full report can be downloaded from the ACT website www.andrewscharitabletrust.org.uk
Executive Summary
In 2009, the Andrews Charitable Trust (ACT) invited voluntary organisations in Bristol to apply to them for funding to 'Tackle Homelessness across the Generations', each through their own specialist intervention. The five selected organisations (SPAN, Survive, Community Resolve, Shelter and Orbit) were expected to work together, and with the City Council, to provide more holistic support for their clients. The funded services included:

- Whole family key workers (two specialisms: homelessness and domestic violence)
- A group parenting programme - Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC)
- Intra-family conflict mediation (using both adult and youth peer mediators)
- A key worker to support fathers

The desired outcomes were: increased stability of housing; improved outcomes for children and parents; increased community links. The evaluation also considered the experience and outcomes of partnership working, between the 5 ACT ‘partners’, and with the City Council and other agencies. A distance travelled methodology was employed which asked families to rank their situation before and after the programme, using a scale of 1-5.

Outcomes
The programme worked with a total of 401 families – 150 with intensive or key worker support and 251 through group programmes. Of these, the progress of 313 families was measured (those receiving intensive support, and those on the SFSC parenting course). The full range of outcomes are complex and vary from service to service, but across the board, significant numbers of families made positive improvements to their lives, especially in their housing stability (228 of the 313 measured, or 73%) and in community integration (191, or 61%).

The majority of parents (225, or 72%) became more confident in their parenting ability and an important factor contributing to this success was that parenting support was provided within a context where families’ more practical issues were also addressed (such as mental health, finances, domestic violence and relationships).

In terms of outcomes for the 562 children worked with, improvements in behaviour, school attendance and self-confidence were recorded. Improvements were reported in 216 families of an average of more than 30% (1 and 2 points’ increase on the 1-5 scale). The programme was not on the whole able to halt care proceedings where they had begun, but the evaluation found that, in some families, the child or young person’s departure remained the best option.

In terms of value for money, the average cost for intensive support was £2,155, and for group programmes, £971 per family. This compares very favourably to the published costs of Family Intervention Programmes, which average at ten thousand pounds.

The evaluation gave particular emphasis to the experience of partnership working, one of the explicit desired outcomes of the programme. Initially progress was slow and a focus on generating cross referrals was found to be unhelpful. But from the second year, participating agencies were demonstrating new ways of collaborating that improved their services through skills sharing and which even resulted in new services being offered.

The programme enjoyed excellent relationships with individuals in the City Council, but was not successful in engaging with the local authority at any strategic level. Statutory sector commissioning opportunities have not been forthcoming and future funding for services is uncertain. That said, all agencies except Survive have been able to mainstream their new family service to some extent. Survive is currently fundraising for their Parenting Worker.

Key Learning Points

Key learning points coming out of this programme have been explored using ACT’s three central principles which it uses to assess and evaluate all the work that it supports: innovation, replication and sustainability.

Innovation:
In relation to practice on the ground, all the innovative services funded through the programme resulted in significant improvements to the lives of families. Major innovations included the Father Worker and Peer Mediators for intra-family crisis mediation (adult and youth mediators to work with young people and their parents). Collaboration between SPAN and Survive also led to development of the group parenting course to make it more effective for families who have suffered the trauma of domestic violence. Also notable was how collaboration between all the agencies resulted in the design and implementation of a sign-posting and information day for families on their waiting lists.

By emphasising collaboration between partner agencies, the programme was fighting against dominant silos created by existing funding streams, and against the competitive culture that exists between agencies. The evaluation found that smaller and local agencies were more willing to collaborate, whereas the national organisation was more likely to want to bring innovation in-house. That said, the smaller agencies have less capacity to collaborate and would have benefited from greater clarity about the why and how collaboration would happen. The evaluation drew attention to ACT’s innovative funding approach and the additional activities supported to encourage collaboration, including regular meetings, the development of a common outcome framework and flexible funding. Partners did feel, however, that outcomes for collaboration were not expressed clearly enough at the beginning, and could have been better supported by more team-building and skills sharing early on.

Replicability:
The programme has mostly been successful in enabling agencies to test new working approaches and then mainstreaming them into their work. By building up evidence for this work, it is hoped that the programme will influence the partners and others to replicate the work more widely.

The evaluation highlights the benefit of having workers that look at the whole family (including absent fathers) as enabling benefits, unsurprisingly, to reach all family members, parents and children. Key to this is the ability of workers to address the immediate needs of families before tackling longer term issues. The partnership-working element of the programme increased agencies’ capacity to provide this kind of holistic support through skills-sharing and improved sign-posting. However, as stated above, more could have been done at the beginning of the project to strengthen links and skills-sharing between agencies.

The evaluation also found that collaboration between agencies needed time, in order to build trust and establish ways of working together. It felt that more progress would have been made, especially in working with the Local Authority, if strategic leadership had been established locally at the beginning, including a steering group for engaging with the statutory sector and for agreeing outcomes.

The programme allowed support to be given to families over a longer time frame and with greater flexibility than other funding. This had benefits for more vulnerable and chaotic families that previously were more likely to drop out.