

Claire

Seeing the issue and over-coming barriers

Claire works part-time, is a single mum and lives in social housing. Money is tight and she struggles but it is like that for most people she knows.

People like Claire are just managing but live in fear of not being able to take care of their children's needs, cope with the escalating fuel bills and ensure their home is warm and dry. Social norms play a great part in driving behaviour and just managing to get by is how most people she knows live.

Claire cannot save any money and has to rely on friends and family at times. She has social connections and support through work colleagues, friends and her family. She is fearful of services and tends to keep contact with professionals to a minimum.

People like Claire need to 'juggle' or manage priorities against resources which often means they are pushed into what we have called a 'trade-off' zone. These trade-offs drive behaviour and, in conjunction with Claire's ability to take action when faced with a specific set of circumstances or challenges, will ultimately govern the level of vulnerability for her children.

About Claire and her Son

Claire is in her early 20s and lives with her 5 year old son in a housing association flat close to the town centre. This is convenient for her work; she works 16 hours a week and also gets some benefits.

When Claire receives her pay or her benefits she works out how much she has to spend and on what. She ensures she has money for the essentials like food, bus fares to work and to feed the pre-payment meter for the gas and electricity. There is never anything left but she always makes sure that there is enough for what her son needs and that the house is warm when he is at home. However, when he is at school she turns the heating off. The central heating system does not have a thermostat or timer it's either on or off. So if Claire and her son are going out first thing it's not worth getting out of bed to turn the heating on or heating the whole house for an hour, they just get up have a quick breakfast and go; it saves a bit of money too.

In very cold weather Claire's son gets a very bad chest and he struggles to breathe properly. This really worries her and even though he has not been diagnosed with asthma by his GP, he does have an inhaler to help him when his breathing becomes difficult. The lack of diagnosis is confusing Claire; she does not know whether to use the advice which she sees about asthma on leaflets and posters at the doctors and wonders if it would work for her son as he hasn't actually been diagnosed with asthma.

"They've not said its asthma; they've said that it's chronic lung disease, (they) are more at risk of chest infections and of problems in the future. So they've treat it quite similar to asthma, that he's got the inhaler."

Housing	Heating	Method of Payment	Ethnicity	Age	Employment Self	Employment Partner	Children	Income
Social Flat	Gas CH	Pre Payment Meter	White British	23	Yes - 16 hours per week	N/A	1 Child 5 years Old	Low Paid P/T Benefits

Some of Claire's friends have suggested that she looks online for more information, but she does not have a computer and only puts a small amount of credit on her phone each week. She texts most of her friends but doesn't use the internet as access over the phone would cost too much.

Claire has a good relationship with her mum and visits a lot now but it wasn't so good when she was growing up. Like Claire, her mum was a single parent, but she also had some mental health issues resulting in Claire being taken into care. This has left Claire with a mistrust of social services. Her anxiety is growing and she worries that social services will think that she is not a good mum and her son will be taken into care if they think she cannot look after him properly.

“Yeah, I go to my mum's, I don't know because I don't know if it's just different houses, I don't know. Because it does seem a lot warmer at my mum's than what it does here.”

About Claire's home

Claire's flat has 2 bedrooms and is on the ground floor. The flat is quite easy to heat as it is small but the radiators cannot be turned off individually and seem to eat fuel. The fuel costs keep rising and the pre-payment meter always seems to need more money.

On finding damp mould in the flat, along with condensation, Claire called the housing association. She was worried that it would be bad for her son's health; something which the doctor had mentioned to her. The housing association came to see her quickly and looked around the flat. They said that the mould was her responsibility and was caused by her drying clothes over the radiators. It was suggested to Claire that she should open the windows to air the flat and prevent the condensation and mould.

Claire feels she cannot afford to open the windows as this will let the heat out; she can only just afford to heat the flat as it is. It is also not the safest of areas and leaving the window open can seem like an invitation to burglars. Besides, the doctor said cold was bad for her son's health too. She does use the balcony to dry clothes in the good weather but as there is not a tumble dryer, the radiators seems the only way to dry the clothes.

A day in the life of Claire

Claire wakes up each day around 7am; she likes to ensure everything is organised for the day before her son wakes up.

At 7.30am, Claire wakes up her son, gets him dressed and they quickly eat their breakfast together. If he has been coughing a lot during the night it takes longer to get him dressed as he is still very sleepy. They leave the house around 8am to go to school. Her son is a bit early for school but he runs around in the playground with his friends before the classes start. She does worry about this a little though as if it is very cold or he runs about too much he may get an asthma attack. Claire also sees many of her friends at the school gates and enjoys the time with them exchanging news and updates on what is happening although they don't hang about too long on cold days.

On a day when Claire is working she walks to work in a local shop, when she has a 'free' day she will either spend it with her friends or go to her mums. She doesn't want to put the heating on in her flat so going to her mums is good as it is warm and she has food in the house. However, it is a bus fare away and she has to get back for the end of the school day.

Claire has to shop regularly as most of the larger supermarkets are out of the town centre and without a car or the money for a taxi it is hard work carrying shopping back to her flat. She and her friends help each other out when they get short of cash at the end of the week or when something has cost more than expected. Occasionally they babysit for each other so they can have a night out. Claire loves having a drink and a laugh with her mates but has felt a bit guilty though as she has been quite drunk sometimes and spent most of the house-keeping.

‘And I've got a friend who, she's like, she's a single mum. So what we do sometimes is I'll, when I've got the money I'll lend her it, so then when I'm skint she can give it me back. So that helps quite alright as well.’

She picks her son up from school at 3:45pm and they usually go home and eat about 5.30pm. Claire tries her best make sure he gets proper sleep and to feed him a healthy diet; she knows all about 5-a-day but her son doesn't really like fruit or vegetables and other things are cheaper.

Before bed she bathes her son, so he is nice and warm when he goes to bed. Also it should help him to breathe while he is sleeping. After he is in bed she reads him a story. When she has tucked her son in, Claire goes into the kitchen; she puts on any washing, tidies the kitchen and waits until the washing has finished before turning off the heating. That way she can take advantage of the hot radiators to dry the washing.

Each night, Claire checks how much money she has left for the week. If she has spent more than planned she works out how to reduce her spending during the rest of the week. She regularly checks on her son to make sure he is breathing ok and still asleep.

TV is Claire's relaxation but she is usually in bed by about 10pm. If it is really cold she may go earlier just to keep warm.

The impact on home heating behaviour for Claire

Cautious use of heating – Only uses when son gets up or comes home from school. House has condensation and mould.

Use of space within the home – They use all the flat
Children's development – Claire spends time with her son, he is her priority.

Health and wellbeing – The mould in the flat has been a problem and Claire worries about her son's health. She is anxious about the future and her ability to cope and make ends meet as her son grows up

See the graph for Claire that demonstrates the variation in temperatures that Claire's children would have in their bedroom.

The factors that drive Claire into the trade-off zone and influence her decisions and behaviour

Primary drivers of behaviour

- Household income
- Fear of services and losing her son
- Being a good parent – her sons health and well-being

Additional drivers of behaviour

- Social norms - social and family connections; she doesn't see people who live differently to her
- Confusion over conflicting information and advice

What are the best ways to identify people like Claire?

People like Claire want to do the best for their children but are influenced by social norms and a lack of ability to plan ahead due the need to make ends meet on a day to day basis. She makes many trade-offs and has to juggle resources against priorities. She mis-trusts services but does get information, help and advice from peers or family.

The Segment	Contextual factors	Emotional and psychological factors	What this means to behaviour	How this impacts on their children
Just living day to day	<p>Household income – only just managing to make ends meet – lives day to day</p> <p>Service exclusion – afraid of social services due to own childhood.</p> <p>Housing conditions and tenure – social flat but needs some maintenance</p>	<p>Fear of debt and large bills – manages money as best she can – lives day to day</p> <p>Social norms – feels that everyone just gets by, that is how life is.</p> <p>Anxiety – losing control of finances, making her sons illness worse</p> <p>Social connections and family support – turns to friends and family</p>	<p>She is not seeking help from services</p> <p>She is making trade-offs that might be affecting their health and wellbeing</p> <p>She is 'trapped' in this cycle of struggle</p> <p>She lives day to day – what will happen if they have a problem? Will it turn into a crisis?</p>	<p>Health and wellbeing May become affected over time</p>

How can we help Claire and her son?

What might the interventions be?	Where/how do we talk with them	What are the barriers	What are the key messages?
<p>A trusted contact to offer support and sign-posting</p> <p>A diagnosis of her son's medical condition</p> <p>Reliable and simple information accessible through appropriate channels of communication</p> <p>Means to access funds/ get the housing association to access funds to update heating system</p>	<p>Claire does not access the internet as cannot afford a computer or connection. She does however work and has a circle of friends and family she turns to for help and support.</p> <p>As Claire is fearful of social services and other professional groups, advice through peer support, local free media and the professionals she does have trust in would be ideal; for example practice/Asthma nurse.</p> <p>In addition, some clear, simple and targeted support from the housing association would be beneficial.</p> <p>As she works for a large organisation but in a routine and manual job, some advice on staff notice boards and newsletters might be a useful channel of communication.</p>	<p>Feeling of failure</p> <p>Fear of losing family/independence</p> <p>Mis-trust of social services</p>	<p>For professionals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold has a serious impact on health. Not just physically but it can also lead to depression and isolation for adults • Living in a cold home has a detrimental impact on child development and school readiness • Don't assume people are coping • Multiple factors can drive behaviour – not just lack of money or knowledge • There is help out there – get to know your local referral schemes • Don't underestimate the power of the psychological factors such as fear, blame and shame. <p>For Claire</p> <p>Base messages around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of cold on health • What she is entitled to without losing benefits • How she can access support and who can help – remember, not everyone can access things on line. Also that not everyone will want to approach services – different routes could be used.