



Look Out For Louise: Leading Family Charity Challenges MPs to Prevent Housing Crisis

Charity Family Action today warns that up to 13,000 families face an exodus from inner London as a result of housing benefit caps in April.* The charity is warning that adults and children across the capital could face upheaval and homelessness when the cuts to housing benefit come in – and are challenging all 73 Greater London MPs to find alternative housing for Family Action service user Louise and her family at the end of this month in time to beat both the housing caps and the secondary schools allocation deadline.

Family Action supports more than 11,000 families and children in the capital in their own homes to overcome multiple problems such as mental health issues and poverty. They are concerned that the impact of this housing exodus could make life much more difficult for these families and make it harder for charities and services to support them and protect children. Some figures suggest that up to 100,000* families could be forced to move when further changes are introduced next October.

Family Action are working with one service user, Louise, to highlight the problems facing vulnerable families and challenge London MPs to find her a home in their area within the new benefit caps. Louise lives in a modest privately rented, three bedroom, ex-council house in Islington, with her husband and two young children aged 10 and 8. Both Louise and her husband suffer from mental health difficulties which mean that they are unable to work at present. Under current rules the family receives £438 per week in local housing allowance. This will be slashed to £340 per week meaning Louise will have to find an extra £98 a week or face eviction.

Louise, and Family Action, are calling on MPs across London to look out for her and help her find an affordable home in their Borough, within the new cap of £340 per week, with access to good schools for her two children. With the deadline for secondary school applications fast approaching, Louise is asking MPs to find her a property in their Borough before this deadline on 31st October.

Louise said: "Family Action have really helped my family flourish after a difficult time recently. I'm really worried about being able to keep a roof over my kids head and about making sure they get a good education. We're really settled here. If we have to uproot it will be a real blow. Thousands of families are facing an exodus out of inner London. I don't know how we'll cope. I want MPs to see that it is real people who will

be affected, many of them in a vulnerable position because they're going through a difficult time. I hope they have the guts to get involved and look out for me and my family."

Family Action Chief Executive Helen Dent added: "We know for the thousands of families like Louise's that we work with safe, secure housing is the key to getting on and rebuilding your life. These changes will have a massive impact on families and make it even more difficult for people to build a stable home. MPs need to get real and understand the impact of these changes. The caps are simply too low to be affordable to many families in London and we're going to see poor families leaving inner London in droves. But it's not just that large swathes of London will be come inaccessible for the vulnerable. The impact on children will be hard felt. Home provides stability and one of the things adversely affecting outcomes for children is moving schools. It would be tragic if children have to leave long standing friends and family who do so much to support families who are struggling. The cost of moving home and schools cannot be underestimated for families struggling on low incomes. It's time for the government to look tat this again. It's time for MPs to Look Out for Louise. I want them to put themselves in her shoes and find her family a home."

Ends

Family Action has been a leading provider of services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families since 1869. We work with over 45,000 families and children a year by providing practical, emotional and financial support through over 100 community-based services across England.. Additionally in 2009-2010 we distributed 4,218 grants totalling over £1,104,883 to families and individuals in financial hardship throughout the UK. Family Action won the 2009 Charity Awards Foundation award for effectiveness and jointly with CAB, Gingerbread and our sponsors Barclaycard the 2010 Third Sector Award for best corporate partnership for Horizons, an integrated welfare advice, training and educational grants package for lone parents. Find Family Action on the Web at www.family-action.org.uk.

Notes to Editors

For further information please contact Anthony McCaul, Senior Media and Campaigns Officer at Family Action on 0207 241 7632 or 0781 309 2040 or email anthony.mccaul@family-action.org.uk

1) We've attached a copy of Louise's story – which she wants to share with MPs and journalists. She hopes to be available for interview in the near future but is presently coping with family illness.

In the meantime she has said she is keen for us to issue the challenge to MPs and has personally approved this press release and use of her details

2) The full details of the challenge are in the attached report.

3) The figures in this press release are derived from the DWP (2010) "Impacts of Housing Benefit Proposals: Changes to the Local Housing Allowance to be introduced in 2011-12."

4) Family Action is calling on Government to take a number of actions to mitigate the impact of housing benefit caps including:

- The new rules should only apply to new claimants, and when people move home;
- Discretionary Housing Payments should be substantially increased to help those households who are affected by the new rules;
- The introduction of the LHA caps and the removal of the 5th bedroom rate should be moved to October 2011;
- All LHA rates (including those affected by the LHA caps), should continue to be updated in line with rental prices rather than the CPI;
- The proposed welfare caps announced at the Conservative party conference need to be varied to reflect local rents for benefit recipients.

Family Action has produced a report on the recommendations for government. If you would like to see a full copy of this including the background please get in touch.