



## **Submission to the Munro Review of Child Protection January 2011**

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### **About Barnardo's**

Barnardo's works directly with over 100,000 children, young people and their families every year through over 400 projects across the UK. We use the knowledge gained from our work with children to campaign for better policy and to champion the rights of every child. With the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children can turn their lives around.

This response is based on the views of our practitioners and experience of delivering children's services. We work with vulnerable children who may be 'at risk' of harm, looked after children and children and young people who are in need of support across a wide range of services, including through 102 Children's Centres, substance misuse services and 22 sexual exploitation services which also work with missing children. We currently work with 1608 children subject to a child protection plans.

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### **Reducing bureaucracy**

**1. What prescribed procedures and forms do you feel are unnecessary, overly time consuming or cause you to duplicate work? (Please be as specific as possible – we need to know the name of precise forms and procedures and why they are unhelpful).**

1.1 Barnardo's is concerned about the design of some forms and procedures which are complex and overlapping, preventing timely and quality assessment. For example, initial and core assessment forms are not simple enough; referral forms could be clearer and different versions of CAF and E-CAF forms are confusing. Forms for Ofsted and Cafcass are repetitive, as well as reports for conferences and review decisions which duplicate the core assessment and lack space for adequate analysis. We believe that assessment tools and processes need to be simplified and streamlined so that they capture the assessment process rather than drive or prohibit it.

- 1.2 To facilitate good assessment it is vital that there is specific training to support social workers develop appropriate analytical and writing skills for completing assessment forms in a timely way and to a high standard. Barnardo's is aware that there is a lack of practical training on how to manage information and carry out assessment procedures alongside heavy workloads. Whilst we acknowledge recent developments in the social work degree we would like to see a strong emphasis on practical elements of the role and the skills that social workers will use in the field. Further training on assessment offered to newly qualified social workers and as part of ongoing professional development needs to be improved. Training should be facilitated through practice examples to underline the purpose of assessment, and guide practitioners on how it should be approached.
- 1.3 Problems with poor form design is sometimes exacerbated by the operation of electronic formats and deficient technology to transfer and archive data. Our practitioners report that as a result, it is not always possible to retrieve relevant or up to date data on a child.
- 1.4 It is our experience that localised systems for recording or processing information about children and families overlaps with Barnardo's outcomes and data recording system. Requirements by local authorities to record information results in ineffective and costly duplication of time and resources. We recommend that systems used by other agencies are taken into consideration in assessing how to reduce bureaucratic procedures.

## **2. What factors prevent you from forming relationships with children and families, hearing and understanding their problems and offering appropriate help or interventions?**

- 2.1 Working closely with local authorities, Barnardo's practitioners are aware that in some areas social work practice has become over systemised, target driven and prescriptive at the expense of developing relationships with children and families. Our experience is that in some authorities, practitioners are engaged in a relentless process of assessment and referral to other agencies, failing to manage relationships with families themselves or maintain consistent contact and support.
- 2.2 Demands made on frontline practice by heavy caseloads, associated assessment and administrative responsibilities, limit the scope for developing relationships with families and understanding their problems within realistic time frames.
- 2.3 In our experience, a lack of good training and ongoing professional support can result in poor practice. Barnardo's is concerned about the quality of frontline practice when there are inappropriate expectations on newly qualified social workers, and where practitioners are ill-equipped to deal with demanding and complex cases. We believe that high quality training is vital to equip social workers with the knowledge and confidence they need. Particular areas for improvement

include: how to deal with violent and aggressive behaviour, working with children and families with learning and physical disabilities and training in issues related to culture, ethnicity and race. It is also crucial that social workers are supported through supervision and ongoing professional development.

2.4 Barnardo's is aware that the needs of children and families cannot always be met within set or limited time frames prescribed by local authority contracts. We are concerned that the scope of working with families is not compromised by a lack of resources or inflexible contracting arrangements.

2.5 Barnardo's strongly supports the use of Sure Start Children's Centres as one of the most effective ways to provide high quality integrated and multi-agency services to families with children under five years old. Whilst significant developments have been made in partnership working, we believe that there is still room for improving collaboration between particular agencies and professionals, particularly with health. In addition, in order improve outreach and timely interventions with vulnerable children and families, local authorities should improve their understanding of their local population and bench marking of local needs.

### **Performance and accountability**

#### **3. What child protection data do local areas need to collect to enable them to compare their results, be publicly accountable and drive their own improvement?**

3.1 As one of the first National Implementation Partners, we found that ContactPoint facilitated contact and information sharing about children who move across areas, and who are yet to be identified as vulnerable or in need of protection. Whilst we understand the Government's decision to abolish ContactPoint, Barnardo's believes that careful consideration must be given to ensuring that there is adequate information sharing across professional and geographical boundaries to inform assessments of vulnerable children.

3.2 To drive improvement in child protection in local areas, we believe that robust outcomes measurement tools are necessary to understand 'what works' in child protection. More detailed data on what aspects of interventions make a difference would be valuable, for example, for keeping families together, or on what types of information and resources can be usefully shared between agencies.

3.3 In addition, Barnardo's practitioners identify the value of reflective practice and believe that to raise standards and hold local areas to account the quality of supervision, training and support for social workers and assessment should be reviewed.

3.4 Barnardo's is concerned that delaying what is often the inevitable decision to remove the child can have serious consequences. One study of 130 cases found that

in between social work referral and delayed action to remove the child just over two thirds experienced multiple forms of physical and emotional abuse.<sup>1</sup> To improve and monitor child protection practice, we would like to see consideration given to the value of collecting data on the time lapse between the first contact with the child, a child protection plan, and the start of care proceedings and removal from the family (if this is the ultimate outcome). Such data would not offer definitive solutions but would help Managers identify process issues and what had been missed in cases where action could have been taken earlier.

3.5 In the context of universal services, such as Children's Centres, there should be greater information sharing on what services encounter in relation to child protection issues and how to manage them, to help develop bench marks for best practice.

#### **4. How can we create a system for learning from practice which counteracts blame and allows for critical professional reflection? How can Government most effectively support this?**

4.1 Barnardo's practitioners would like to see forums for learning set up at a local level. These should be multi agency and practitioner led and would help capture local 'near misses'. Transparency from all agencies is vital and for a culture of openness to be fostered across a local area.

4.2 Barnardo's believes that there should be increased emphasis on 'learning' rather than process, including more qualitative assessment by Ofsted. Our practitioners would welcome greater use of the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) systems model and other systems approaches to case management. Barnardo's is currently considering supporting SCIE in their work on case reviews with Local Safeguarding Children's Boards.

4.3 Reviews of child protection cases frequently highlight that there are issues with multi-agency working, as a consequence defensive and siloed working becomes more not less entrenched. More formal training on the dynamics and value of multi-agency working could address this, particularly as part of ongoing professional development.

4.4 There are also opportunities in relation to existing reviewing processes, such as feeding back information collated by Independent Reviewing Officers. This could be via training and team meetings, presented in briefings or used to inform guidance.

4.5 Supervision systems need to be robust and accountable and complement other systems for review. Barnardo's believes that regular and good quality supervision is vital for constructive learning and reflection at an individual and organisational level.

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<sup>1</sup> Selwyn, J., Frazier, L and Quinton, D. (2006) 'Paved with Good Intentions: The Pathway to Adoption and the Cost of Delay', *British Journal of Social Work*, 36, 561-576.

4.6 In order to learn from practice and to reflect openly about what may have gone wrong, practitioners need to be in a supported environment where the focus is on learning, rather than holding individuals to account. A 'no blame investigation' requires separating out individual actions from process and system failure.

4.7 Greater understanding and public sympathy to a concept of 'conscientious error', and the prevalence of child maltreatment despite best practice, would help foster a culture of openness and reflection with and within social work practice.

**5. What are the main barriers to child protection professionals, particularly social workers, and those who represent them, working effectively with the media so that their work is better understood? How could these be overcome?**

5.1 It is our experience that social workers are actively discouraged from openly communicating with the media for fear of reprisal or negative press coverage. Social workers and Managers need to be supported (possibly with guidance) to have a better understanding of what activities and issues can be openly shared, and how to balance issues of confidentiality.

5.2 Practical steps could be taken to better inform journalists about the reality of social work practice; inviting them to work alongside social workers, promoting positive 'success' stories and the views of service users. This could also be done through soap story lines and other forms of popular and social media.

**Early help and support**

**6. What expertise is needed locally in universal services to identify children's needs and support their assessment? What would the practical impact of developing this expertise in universal services be?**

**Expertise**

6.1 Staff within universal services need to develop a good understanding of child development and children's needs, in relation to attachment, the importance of stability and positive relationships. Training on the evidence of the impact of neglect and abuse would help practitioners understand the long-term consequences of effective (or lack of) intervention, as part of wider safeguarding training on how to recognise and respond to low level concerns and develop confidence in child protection issues. This should complement basic skills training for working with children and families, including developing trust, listening skills and meaningful communication.

6.2 There is also scope for developing knowledge of the needs of older children and their vulnerability to particular issues, such as self harm, suicide, substance misuse and sexual exploitation.

6.3 To help develop needs assessment skills in universal services, there needs to be an improved understanding of children, young people and parent's experiences of receiving both universal and targeted services. Learning derived from service user feedback should feed into service development and address gaps in service provision.

### **Practical impact of expertise in universal services**

6.4 We believe that greater expectations must be placed on universal services, such as Children's Centres to undertake first stage assessments of vulnerable children and young people and identify appropriate means of interim support. Barnardo's Children's Centres have a strong track record for delivering accessible, inclusive services and successfully engaging 'hard to reach' groups.<sup>2</sup> Barnardo's South West, has developed a model of clustering Children's Centres under the supervision of Barnardo's expert Children's Services Managers which enables staff to quickly access advice and support and work in partnership across the area.

6.5 Developing expertise in universal services to identify children's needs will improve early identification and intervention and help share the burden of assessment of children at risk of harm. Community stigma is a major issue for families facing complex problems. Access to an integrated centre means it is not locally apparent whether that family has major difficulties or is coming to access universal provision. Through participating in inclusive universal services, families gain confidence and confide in workers at their own pace about other difficulties. Problems such as debt, isolation, mental health issues, childcare, domestic violence and family breakdown are then addressed through co-located targeted interventions or by referral to specialist services.

6.6 In addition, it is our experience that families trust voluntary agencies to support them, and that our services can provide useful links to statutory agencies. This is particularly true for disadvantaged families who may be resistant due to negative experiences or multiple interventions. Consideration should be given to the unique role voluntary agencies can play. Barnardo's recommends the development of partnerships with voluntary agencies to facilitate confidential safeguarding surgeries/drop-ins for children and young people, and other parenting and family support services within universal settings.

#### **Barnardo's and The Newcastle Teenage Pregnancy Support Team**

Barnardo's young dad's worker is co-located at a multi-disciplinary scan clinic, set up jointly by Barnardo's in consultation with young people in 2002. Barnardo's works as part of a team made up of a teenage pregnancy adviser and midwife, a Connexions worker, re-integration officer, midwife, sonographer and a receptionist. The team work in partnership with young parents, their carers and families as well as partner agencies. A holistic package of support is delivered to all young parents who attend

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<sup>2</sup> Key groups for whom targeted initiatives have been developed include: children in need, children with special needs and disabilities, parents abusing drugs or alcohol, families in squalid housing, BME communities, recent immigrants and asylum seekers, isolated families in rural areas and fathers.

their 12 and 20 week scan, so work with parents begins at the earliest stage. Child protection concerns can be picked up through assessment and a care plan is agreed collaboratively by the team.

Positive outcomes include: improved child-parent relationships, improved communication skills, reduced drug and alcohol abuse, increased access to help with health and emotional needs. Support for career pathways and employment and training is also offered and many young dads have re-engaged with education, and volunteered to offer peer-peer support.

**7. Would it be better if assessment was an ongoing activity rather than being defined by set points with set timescales? What would the practical implications of this be? (Assessment should be taken to include the common assessment and assessment that is undertaken as part of the statutory framework for children in need (initial and core assessments))**

7.1 Our view is that a balance needs to be struck between an assessment process that is flexible enough to capture the complexity and changing nature of working with families; and within appropriate timescales to produce an agreed plan for the child.

7.2 We are also concerned that careful consideration is given to which elements of existing assessment processes are working well, and which elements would benefit from wholesale reform. For example, the time taken to implement and develop the CAF into a working tool means that in some areas it is only just becoming effective.

**8. Some local areas have introduced social work-led, multi-agency locality teams to help inform best next steps in respect of a child or young person, including whether a formal child protection intervention is needed. Do you think this is useful? Do you have evidence of it working well? What are the practical implications of this approach?**

8.1 Barnardo's strongly supports multi-agency working and believes that there are a range of benefits to gain from multi-agency locality teams, particularly around sharing expertise and skills to better meet a child's needs. Collaborative working can also offer a framework for support and consultation between different agencies and offer different perspectives on thresholds.

8.2 We are aware of effective partnerships between the police and social workers, particularly in the area of domestic violence, and believe there is scope of developing partnership working when families are known to be violent or intimidating.