

**Barnardo's Scotland Briefing:
Scottish Government Debate on Permanence and Adoption**

Barnardo's Scotland Adoption Placement Service is celebrating its 1st anniversary during National Adoption Week. The launch of the service took place last year and was celebrated at an event at the Scottish Parliament one year ago.

Barnardo's Scotland believes that far too many children are waiting too long for a decision, enduring multiple short term placements, and developing complex needs as a result.

We would like to see the following developments in order to improve decisions regarding permanency and adoption:

A National Risk Assessment Framework for decision-making – this should be used by all local authorities for decision-making on removing a child from home to ensure consistent decisions across Scotland. Such a Framework should be supported by national guidelines and reviewed against regularly.

Clear evidence-based decisions made regarding the future of children – there is a great deal of inconsistency across Scotland in how and what evidence is gathered. Evidence is often subjective and not objective. We have also known of cases where all the evidence gathered has not been used in the decision-making process.

Data Collection – Local authorities and the Scottish Government must collect more robust data on the decision-making process, including time taken to place the child and reasons for delay. There is currently no nationally aggregated data or evidence routinely collected, which could help identify areas of good practice.

Proper resources – we believe that all too often that the issue of resource plays a significant part in the decision-making process. The approach taken by many local authorities in practice can see budgets and resources take precedent over the best interests of the child. Removal is often seen as the most expensive option, particularly removing a child and placing them into residential care, and so is often taken as a last resort.

Being left in chaotic and damaging home environments can lead to serious attachment issues, complex and challenging behaviour for the child, which requires intensive support. In the long run this costs the state more than if the child had been removed earlier. Local authorities and social work departments must be adequately resourced in order to empower them to put the needs of the child first.

Early Planning – We need a cultural shift towards early intervention and early planning with clear timescales, so that decisions are made quickly with permanence at the heart of it. We have noticed some movement in some areas towards this and Government must make steps to ensure that this continues. We hope that by enshrining of GIRFEC in law through the Children and Young People Bill will enable this.

The age of removal is crucial. The later they are accommodated, the worse the outcomes. The earlier the decision and the younger the child the more chance they have of achieving better outcomes in life.

Increase foster carers and adoptive parents – currently the number of foster carers is too small. We need to recruit more foster carers across Scotland and support them into these roles. The National Adoption Register is an important step forward.

Supporting families – where a decision is made not to remove a child from a family, support offered to that family must be significantly greater than it currently is. We believe that current provision is often inadequate. Many families are struggling to make progress. Support can not be limited to 9-5, Monday to Friday. Families often need help on weekends and evenings, which is rarely available to them. Children who are looked after at home often have the worse outcomes of all looked after children.

We also concerned that when a child is returned to their after a temporary removal they often receive limited or no additional support. Ongoing support must be provided to these families and the children's return must be effectively monitored.

Support for Social Workers – In our experience social workers are dedicated public servants. However, most social workers are overworked and have far too high case loads making it very difficult for them to respond to all the needs of the families they work with. Local and central Government must ensure that social workers are properly resourced to manage the families and children in their care.

About Barnardo's Scotland

Barnardo's Scotland is a national voluntary organisation and works directly with more than 10,000, children, young people and their families in over 98 specialised services in local communities across Scotland which cover fostering, parenting, substance misuse, offending, homelessness, and abuse.

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