

**Barnardo's Response to:
'Youth Matters'**

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Introduction and consultation for this response

Barnardo's works directly with more than 120,000 children, young people and their families in 370 services across the U.K. These services are located in some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods where child poverty and social exclusion are common features. We work with children affected by today's most urgent issues: poverty, homelessness, disability and abuse. Our projects work with children aged 0 to 18 (or 24 in the case of young care leavers) and a significant number provide services for young people aged 12 to 19, these include leaving care, young single homeless, young carers, sexual exploitation, training, youth inclusion and support programmes and young people support projects. To ensure that this response is fully informed by the views of young people we consulted with over 120 young people aged 12 to 22 and staff from all of the above services and their views have been incorporated in the main body of the response. The specific opinions of young people are included as an Appendix attached to the response.

General points

- The proposals in 'Youth Matters' apply to all young people but notwithstanding the proposals for targeted support, we remain concerned that they may not impact on very vulnerable and excluded young people, indeed there is a risk that some of the provisions could lead to even further exclusion.
- We would also wish to ensure that disabled children are included, as a matter of course, in the parameters for services and standards. They are too often left out, included as an afterthought or are seen as needing 'special' rather than mainstream services – attitudes which serve to further exclude and isolate them.
- We welcome the recognition that young people need 'things to do and places to go' and would be anxious to ensure that this includes real opportunities for them to just 'hang out' in safe places as well as be involved in activities. This unstructured peer socialising is vital for social development.
- We particularly welcome the emphasis on involving and consulting young people about the services they receive, but would urge Government to ensure that these proposals include the most vulnerable young people and those perceived as troublesome. These young people do not readily become involved and extra provision is vital to ensure they too have their say; it is true to say that many of the young people we spoke to were somewhat sceptical as to whether their views would really be listened to and taken seriously.
- We are concerned about the proposals for what are currently Connexions services to be commissioned from other providers in some circumstances. A number of our services have partnerships with Connexions, including attached dedicated Connexions workers; this has proved valuable in getting their particular expertise to vulnerable and excluded young people and we fear this could be lost under any new arrangements.
- We are disappointed not to see the proposals in 'Youth Matters' firmly rooted in the UNCRC, the lack of reference to the Convention seems to be a missed opportunity.

Specific issues – these are set out in the same order as in ‘Youth Matters’

1. Places to go

1.1. The last twenty years has seen a great decline in youth services and provision and it is good to see the start of a reversal of this. Young people frequently report the lack of facilities in their local areas and have clear ideas about what they wish to see (See Appendix). There are particular issues for the most run down and deprived areas and for rural communities that we would wish to see addressed. In deprived areas, young people are frequently very disillusioned about youth provision and see it as not for them – many of them will have been excluded from current mainstream provision and extra work is needed to ensure their views are sought about services they will use productively. In rural areas, access and transport are major issues and sparse populations may be unattractive to private service providers. One of the effects of the run down in youth services has been the lack of accessible services at times when young people need them – particularly evenings and weekends and extra provision in school holidays.

1.2. Young people were very clear that buildings alone are not enough. Access to safe, trustworthy and friendly adults who can give advice and support without being judgmental is also crucial in making sure that young people use services.

1.3. Many young people raised the issue of safety; bullying in schools is now taken seriously but there are concerns about bullying in other youth provision. In particular young people were concerned about sexual bullying (predominantly of young women by young men and of particular concern to young people who may be a risk of sexual exploitation) and also homophobic bullying. It is essential that the staff and culture in services is developed to minimise the risk of sexual or homophobic bullying if all young people are to access them safely.

2. Things to do

2.1. While we welcome the proposal for national standards to ensure local authorities make provision for sport and other activities, we are anxious that the value of ‘free’ play and association is not overlooked. In recent years the ability for children and young people to meet and play in public places has been eroded by issues of safety and the anti social behaviour agenda. Young people tell us that they want to be able to use public spaces in the same way as everyone else without being at risk or constantly assumed to be making trouble. We would like to see more emphasis on community spaces and better dialogue between adults and young people to enable both groups to associate in public spaces and community provisions in ways and places that are innovative and fitted to the locality. One such example is the Barnardo’s Hive Project in the North East, a community project on a very deprived estate where there were many complaints about young people hanging about and a high level of fear of their behaviour. The project consulted with both adults and young people with the result that a local allotment was rented solely for the use of young people, giving them a place to hang out, the opportunity to learn horticultural skills and the pleasure of growing their own food.

3. The opportunities card

3.1. There has been no systematic evaluation of the Connexions cards pilots but anecdotally these seem to have not been particularly effective or attractive to young people. Young people were keen to know how the opportunities card would differ and in particular whether the

administration would be more efficient. A number reported being unable to 'collect' their Connexions Card credits, making them pointless.

3.2. It is important that any benefits, discounts etc from the card are in line with what young people will value and not solely based on which agencies, services, traders etc. are willing to be included. In an answer to a parliamentary question on 14th October the Minister said: *'The Youth Opportunity Card pilot will test whether giving real influence and spending power to young people increases their likelihood of engaging in constructive activities'*. This can only be successful if the activities over which the young people have spending power are those which meet their needs.

3.3. There is a great degree of concern about the withdrawal of opportunities cards or the government 'top up' as a sanction for anti social behaviour or non school attendance. Firstly, withdrawal of the top up would be inequitable as young people receiving parental rather than Government top ups would be unaffected by this sanction and in effect 'get away' with bad behaviour that another young person would be penalised for. Young people were particularly concerned about the definition of 'bad' behaviour- the definitions in the anti social behaviour legislation are very broad; if sanctions are to be effective it is crucial that young people know what will trigger them. Sanctions for non school attendance could adversely effect young carers who often miss school because of their care responsibilities or fear that something will happen to the person they care for. Barnardo's would agree with the comments about sanctions that are made in the response to Youth Matters which has been submitted by the Interagency Group; the small minority of young people who are troublesome need a continuum of intervention including prevention, individual support and family and community interventions if they are not to become even more excluded.

4. The Youth Offer

4.1. We welcome the proposal for a 'mapping' of the local youth population and the involvement of parents and young people in decisions about services. However, the views of parents and young people may not necessarily be the same, it is important that all know who's views are to be given most weight and how any major differences will be resolved, this is of particular importance to disabled young people.

5. Volunteering opportunities

5.1. While we would support the widening of volunteering opportunities particular for marginalised young people, we have some concerns over the proposed financial support and in particular the link to housing benefits and Activities Allowance. It would be of grave concern if the implication of these proposals is that young people will be ineligible for benefits if they are not engaging in volunteering or other specified activities. In Barnardo's response to *'Supporting young people to achieve'* in 2004, we said: *'There are a number of concerns about financial support being conditional on engagement in 'approved activities'. As is acknowledged in the consultation, many young people, and certainly those who use Barnardo's services will have experienced a range of disadvantage and discrimination and will have had disrupted and chaotic lives. Engaging with them, providing the right support and assisting them to gain some degree of stability is a long process, and engagement in any activities other than those of day to day survival can be sometimes be too much to ask of them'*. This remains true and while we acknowledge that financial incentives can assist in getting young people into constructive activities we would vigorously oppose any system that could, in effect leave young people destitute if they do not engage.

6. Targeted support -

6.1. In addition to the proposal to merge funding streams, we would like to see arrangements for ensuring long term funding for targeted services. Effective and innovative work can be compromised by short term funding and the need to 'chase' funding.

6.2. We support the suggestion that young people should have a single point of contact and not have to undergo numerous assessments or tell their story to a plethora of different agencies and people, we already have services which operate in such a way – examples would include our North West Homeless service, which is co located with other services such as CAMHS, Housing etc and has delegated responsibility for initial assessments on all young people.

6.3. The lead professional – the paper does not specify which workers will take on this role but ensuring that such workers are properly trained and equipped with the necessary skills and have adequate support and management is vital. We would also suggest that the status of these workers is closely examined to ensure that they will have sufficient authority to make or implement decisions and access other relevant services.

7. The role of the voluntary sector

We are pleased to see that the Government values to role of the voluntary sector in youth service provision but it is important that this role is fully spelt out in any future legislation.

- Barnardo's would like to see a full recognition of the voluntary sector as part of the provider networks referred to in Youth Matters, with appropriate processes which acknowledge the true costs of services and have systems to ensure timely reimbursements.
- We would wish to see a formal requirement for children's trusts to take account of the voluntary sector when considering the provision of youth services.
- Notwithstanding the reservation outlined in point **5.1**, Barnardo's fully supports the need to engage more young people in volunteering opportunities and involvement in their communities. Whilst the new body is being established to implement the Russell Committee recommendations, it is vital that funding is available to voluntary organisations so that they can generate the volunteering opportunities that will be of interest to young people and help them to develop their skills and knowledge. In line with this, Barnardo's values its participation in the Opportunities for Volunteering Scheme, which has enabled us to offer significant volunteering opportunities to young people across England. We believe it would be possible to extend these opportunities with additional funding
- Barnardo's already has in place, Volunteer Development Managers in our regions/nations and a student programme supported by a team of four located across the country. We are keen to contribute to involving young people in volunteering which will help them become involved in their communities.

If you have any questions or need any further details, please contact:

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Appendix – young people's views

These views have been collected from 127 children and young people aged 12 to 22 from London, the North East, the North West and the Midlands. The young people are of both gender (88 young women and 39 young men) and from a variety of backgrounds including black, asian and dual heritage. They live in both urban and rural areas and use our community projects, leaving care services, homelessness services, training projects and sexual exploitation services.

1. Places to go, things to do

Young people had clear views about the sorts of places they would like to be available and what activities they should have access to. While many of them were pleased at the proposal for access to sporting activities others suggested a variety of other activities, both things they were already interested in and also ones which would give them opportunities to try new things.

They stressed the importance of the quality of the adults available in services – they need to be trustworthy, fair, non judgemental, able to offer advice without 'preaching' and be knowledgeable about other local services.

Many of the young people we spoke to were unable to access local facilities because of the cost and strongly felt that there needed to be free or low cost options for them.

A significant number of the young people felt that better places and activities that were geared to what they want would have an impact on anti social behaviour, use of drugs etc.

Almost all welcomed the idea of residential and the opportunity to go away somewhere; many of them do not have holidays or other chances to go away.

'Classes in computers and art, music and things like that should be free'

'There should be somewhere to go at night and on Sundays, somewhere to meet your mates and have a laugh without people getting on to you'

'Different things for different age groups – not just mixing us all up and expecting us to get on with each other'

'We should be able to meet outside without getting hassled and moved on – we're not all troublemakers'

'Young people should have a good say in running the place, otherwise we just won't go there'

'I got banned from our club 'cos I had a stroop and swore at the bloke. They should understand that sometimes I'm a pain in the bum 'cos I'm upset, or at least ask me'

'Staff should be open minded and non-authoritarian, not like teachers, definitely not'

'Someone who'll help me decide and choose, not give me a lecture. It needs to be somebody I trust to help me through the maze'

'There should be lots of things to have a go at – drama, music, cooking, art as well as snooker tables and computer games and things like that'

'A computer and internet we can use for free – I can't afford one and it's too expensive in the internet café'

'Somewhere quiet to do my homework, and some help if I need it'

'But we'd need free transport as well – the nearest youth centre to me costs £6.50 return to get there and there's nothing to do at all here'

'Somewhere I can go without my Mum and do things with other kids – and not just other disabled kids'

2. The opportunities card

There were differing views on this from the young people, some thought that discounts etc. would be good but only if they were for the sorts of activities and things that were of interest and relevance to them. Some young people lived in Connexion card pilot areas and had not had a positive experience with these, the discounts etc. were not for things that interested them and some had experienced problems with the administration of the cards.

There were concerns about the data that might be kept on the card, particularly if it would contain personal information such as being in care or having a criminal record.

Views also differed about whether the withdrawal of the card or the top up as a sanction would be effective. Most of the young people felt that withdrawal of the top ups would be unfair, as this sanction could only be used for young people getting the government top up. Almost without exception the young people were interested to know who would make the decision about sanctions and what would be defined as 'bad' behaviour and they stressed the importance of knowing clearly what would lead to sanctions. They were dubious as to whether removal of the card or top up would have an effect on behaviour and many felt that it could further penalise those most in need of support, help and access to services.

'It doesn't matter if it (bowling) costs £6.00 or £2.00, I still can't afford it'

'The Connexions card was useless, it only gave money off things that were too expensive anyway, and you had to wait ages to get the points'

'Some people are only just existing so activities and things aren't a priority for them – it would only be any good to them if they could use it for food or things like that'

'It could encourage even worse behaviour or crime, it should only be used (the sanction) for very serious things'

'It would be good to be rewarded for good things – we should be more included but people need to remember that we are kids and need to have fun and do our own thing too'

'Would it show that I've got a record? They probably won't let me in to places if it does'

'Will it show who the top up comes from? I don't want everybody thinking that I'm a charity case just 'cos I'm in care'

3. Involving young people

Some of the young people, particularly those who were out of school or who had been in trouble with the law, were very sceptical that they would have the opportunity to have say in decisions about services. Others, including some looked after young people had had good experiences of being consulted and were more positive. Almost all felt that extra effort needed to be made to ensure that all young people were given the opportunity to contribute and not just those in school or on local youth councils. There were strong representations that local councils should work with services such as their Barnardo's projects to ensure that 'hard to reach' young people had the same opportunities as those in schools etc.

'Youth councils should represent all organisations, and not just be young people who are capable of talking and writing well'

'We need to know that they will value what we say and not just 'consult' to say they've done it'

'People think we're difficult or will make trouble so they don't ask us – if they included us instead of ignoring us (except when we get into trouble of course then they come down like a ton of bricks) they might be surprised!'

'They could use texts or the internet or have competitions to find out what sorts of things we'd like'

4. Opportunities for volunteering

Some of the young people we spoke to were already involved in some form of formal or informal volunteering, and almost all of those found this a positive experience. Most

felt that they would volunteer if there were different things to do and if there were incentives – either financial or by way of formal accreditation.

They were concerned about the potential linking of housing benefit and activity allowances to volunteering or taking part in some form of approved activity.

Young carers and care leavers in particular felt that this could be problematic for them.