

Independent Care Review, September 2017 Response to Discovery Phase questions from Barnardo's Scotland staff



This response to the questions posed by the Independent Care Review Group during the Discovery Phase reflects the views of staff from across Barnardo's Scotland services supporting looked after children & young people and care leavers.

These views were gathered between November 2016 and August 2017 through meeting with staff teams and individuals; Barnardo's Scotland Care and Care Leavers Reference Group; and an internal 'discovery day'. Approximately 75 staff from across Scotland contributed to this response. Our staff have a range of knowledge, skills, expertise and qualifications and come from a range of backgrounds. These include community learning and development, education, social work, psychology, therapeutic work, trauma and bereavement, child development and many more.



This response complements a separate Barnardo's Scotland submission to the Discovery Phase reflecting the views of children and young people supported by our services across Scotland. We have chosen to keep these responses separate, as we realise that sometimes the views of children and young people may be different to those of staff, but we believe that both are equally valid. We will continue to work with staff and children & young people as the Review progresses, and hope to offer them the opportunity to engage more deeply with the issues (and the development of ideas) as the themes for the Review emerge.

Here's what our staff are asking

- Do the right children & young people come into the care system at the right time?
- Do children & young people who are looked after at home receive appropriate support?
- Do children & young people in and leaving care receive appropriate support in relation to mental health and wellbeing?
- How is continuing care being implemented across Scotland?
- Do care leavers have appropriate choices in relation to housing?
- Does the care system equip young people for a successful future?



What do we mean by a root and branch review? And that means being absolutely clear about what is part of the Review and what is not.

Barnardo's Scotland supports children & young people right across the care system: families and children on the edge of care; children & young people looked after at home; fostering support; children & young people in kinship care; residential care; adoption services; and support for care leavers. In addition, we support care experienced young people in many of our other services, such as substance misuse, criminal justice, housing support and employability. From this experience, we know that it is extremely difficult to look at any part of the system in isolation.

We therefore believe that a root and branch review should consider **all parts of the system that impact children and young people who are or are at risk of being looked after.**

This should include: the 'edges of care' and how we support 'just coping' families to avoid children and young people becoming looked after unnecessarily; how we ensure that those who need support get it at an appropriate time; the different supports offered within the care system; and the support available to care leavers to help them to interact with services including housing, social security, health and employability to help them reach positive destinations.



Staff identified the following outcomes from a successful care system – the breadth of these outcomes should be reflected in the breadth of the Review:



- Children & young people come into care at the right time
- Children & young people have stable and consistent living arrangements
- Children in care and young people leaving care have good mental health, are able to form stable attachments and recover from trauma
- Children in care and young people leaving care are more likely to gain sustainable employment
- Young people leaving care are able to transition successfully into independence in suitable accommodation

Within this broad conception of 'the care system', staff most often raised the following issues which they would like the Review to consider.



What support is available to children, young people and families on the edges of care?

Staff noted that in recent years the resources available to support '**just coping**' families seems to have decreased, despite increasing rhetorical focus on early intervention. The poor outcomes for children & young people **Looked After at Home** were raised particularly frequently, and staff had a sense that this group is not getting the support they need – many people raised the need to shine a light on this issue.



Is the most appropriate form of support available to each young person?

Some staff had queries about whether enough attention is always paid to ensuring that children & young people have the right type of support in place for them, noting that sometimes decisions appear to be based on availability of **financial resources** or **availability of placements**, rather than what is in that person's best interest. They also raised questions about decisions being made based on a young person's **chronological age**, rather than their stage of development or particular needs.



What support is available to young people preparing to leave or leaving care?

There was a sense that access to **throughcare and aftercare** support is not as prevalent now as it has been in the past, and this was felt to be a loss. Staff were particularly concerned about the issue of **continuing care**, which in their experience is not being implemented as intended across the country. A lack of access to appropriate **housing** options for care leavers was also felt to be an issue in some parts of Scotland.



How does the care system interact with other service provision?

Staff talked a lot about the lengths they go to, to support young people to access universal services including **housing, employability** and **benefits** support. In particular, the issue of mental health support was raised frequently, and we would strongly recommend that the **mental health and wellbeing** of care experienced children and young people is considered as a priority by the Review.





What does good care and protection look like for children and young people in care?

Based on the experiences of our staff, both of what is working well and where improvement could be helpful, we suggest that good care and protection should be underpinned by the following principles:

Good care and protection for children and young people in care:

Has higher aspirations for children and young people than simply keeping them safe, but recognises that being safe and feeling secure is a vital building block in enabling people to develop.



Barnardo's prioritises the unique value of every individual, and our organisational motto #BelieveInMe came to life through conversations with staff, who powerfully advocated that the purpose of the care system should be to enable young people to **recognise and fulfil their potential** throughout their lives.



Some staff noted, however, that before we can help young people to work towards these higher aspirations, we have to make sure that their basic needs are met; this was raised most frequently in relation to care leavers, where issues such as **unstable housing** have to be dealt with before young people can focus on their own development.



Is predictable and consistent across the country

Issues around decision making and availability of support came up frequently in discussions with staff. Many, many examples were given of decisions being made about support based on the **limited choices** in a local area; on **limited financial resources**; or on **preconceptions** about what is best for a particular group of children (those whose parents use drugs, those who are Looked After at Home etc.). Across Scotland, and within particular local areas, there are vast differences in the support that children, young people and families are able to access. This was felt by staff to be an equity issue, but also one which goes against the GIRFEC approach of considering the needs of each child or young person individually.



Staff also raised real concerns about policy and legislation which is not being implemented. In particular they raised the issue of continuing care, but as a general principle were concerned that children and young people in some parts of the country are not able to access support to which they have a legal right. We have strong legislation for children & young people in and leaving care in Scotland, not least the Children and Young People



(Scotland) Act, aspects of which are not being implemented. We would ask the review to consider the issue of **implementation**, with a view not to criticizing any of the bodies involved, but to unpicking why some well-intentioned policies and legislation are not being operationalized as planned, and ensuring that any changes the Review recommends do not fall foul of the same issues.



Gives children and young people an appropriate degree of choice in the kind of support they receive



While staff wanted to see consistency in terms of access to support across the country, they were also clear that they would like to see flexibility in the kind of support that is provided on a case by case basis. Many people noted that the children and young people have the best experiences, and the best outcomes are achieved, when they are **listened to** in terms of the kind of support that they would find most beneficial.

Examples were given of young people clearly articulating that they had developed strong supports and relationships in the area in which they were being supported, and would like to remain there, but being brought back to their funding authority for financial reasons, without the wishes of the young people being considered. While it is of course possible for young people to come back safely and happily to their home authority with appropriate supports in place, concerns were raised about instances where young people's views were not taken into account, or were overruled by a blanket decision.



Encourages children and young people to build trusting and enduring relationships with the people who support them, and during periods of transition these relationships are valued and maintained

Staff recognised that a whole range of relationships (for example with siblings and with friends) are vital for care experienced children & young people, but the relationship which was most often mentioned was that between children & young people and those who support them.



When talking about where support can make the most positive difference to children & young people, a number of staff talked about '**stickability**'; this included maintaining relationships, for example when a care leaver is starting to settle into their own tenancy, and maintaining that relationship to help them to 'manage the calm'. Staff recognised that contractual requirements and professional boundaries can sometimes make this difficult.

Supports children and young people in all aspects of their lives, and considers their needs holistically



The other aspect of successful care and support that staff identified was **flexibility** in supporting children and young people with the needs they present, not only those that result in them becoming looked after. Many staff talked about supporting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing, and the importance of taking a **holistic** approach to support. This included a recognition of experiences of **trauma**, and the possible impact of trauma and **Adverse Childhood Experiences** on children & young people. Staff felt that it was vital that the care system took this into consideration in the way that support is provided to care experienced children & young people.



Equips young people with the skills they need to thrive when they leave care

Many staff commented that young people leaving care do not always have the skills necessary to live independently. This included both **practical skills**, such as cooking and budgeting, and less tangible aspects such as **emotional resilience** and how to **manage relationships**. Staff expressed concerns that this can leave young people leaving care extremely vulnerable. It was suggested that how well young people do when they leave care (whether they find and stay in work; hold down a tenancy etc) could be seen as an indicator of the success or otherwise of the care system.



Conclusion

Our conversations with staff identified the following key questions:



- Do the right children & young people come into the care system at the right time?
- Do children & young people who are looked after at home receive appropriate support?
- Do children & young people in and leaving care receive appropriate support in relation to mental health and wellbeing?
- How is continuing care being implemented across Scotland?
- Do care leavers have appropriate choices in relation to housing?
- Does the care system equip young people for a successful future?

We will continue to explore these issues, and will be pleased to offer further insights to the Review team as these develop. We hope that these issues will be picked up in the next stage of the Review, and look forward to working collectively on them.

