

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities. We currently run more than 60 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with local authorities. Each year we regularly support more than 10,000 children, young people and families. We aim to secure better outcomes for more children by providing the support needed to ensure stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work to campaign to improve lives by promoting positive change in policy and practice. We believe that with the right help, committed support and belief all children can fulfil their potential.

Barnardo's Cymru predominantly works with families on issues such as mental health and emotional wellbeing, supporting care-experienced children and young people, and protecting children from harm and abuse, as well as supporting young people with these issues.

In every part of our work, we see the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. On a daily basis, practitioners report concerns about the impact of this crisis on the children, young people and families that they work with.

As well as supporting families and young people with the rising cost of living to the best of our ability, we are also a large workforce, and we see the impact of this crisis on our employees. In common with the rest of the social care workforce, our staff face challenges and so our response will focus on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis both on our service users and on our staff.

Our response is based on input provided by our practitioners working in a number of different services across Wales.

- **What are the likely economic impacts of the cost-of-living crunch?**

A recent Barnardo's Quarterly Practitioner Survey found that 59% of practitioners have given a child or young person that they work with food because they were worried that the child was hungry or had nothing to

eat. 43% have given a service user clothes because they thought that the young person was cold or did not have suitable clothing to wear.¹

In addition to the data we collect, our children's services staff have offered a number of insights into the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the children, young people and families that they support.

Headroom², Barnardo's First Episode Psychosis Support service works in partnership with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board to support young people experiencing psychosis for the first time or those at risk of developing psychosis. Support includes befriending, mentoring and building confidence. However, we see through this service examples of vulnerable young people further isolated due to cost-of-living pressures. For example, we encourage young people to take part in groups and activities that help integrate them further into society – however, many young people currently tell us that they are unable to pursue social activities that cost even small amounts of money, (swimming, joining local groups, shopping etc) a problem which has been exacerbated by the rising cost of living in recent months and therefore their lives become smaller, and so does their contribution to the economy. We know that this is happening across the board and will have significant consequences on people's lives at a critical moment, but also on those businesses that are relying on people playing a bigger part in the economy after the pandemic, not a smaller one.

Through this service and others, we have seen Barnardo's staff trying to find resources through their own means, because the young people they support cannot even afford to shop for essentials at charity shops. Barnardo's staff unofficially organise clothing drives amongst themselves to support service users. Barnardo's staff state that they have also seen an increase in service users relying on Barnardo's to provide vouchers for essential items such as bedding and underwear, as well as access to food banks.

To respond to this, Barnardo's staff have started to store food in some of our services in case service users arrive in immediate need of food.

We also see young people with concerns about how the cost-of-living crisis will impact upon their life chances, and their ability to pursue further education, or find opportunities for jobs and training.

Young carers in Newport³ told us that their only financial support is Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) paid through their higher

¹ Barnardo's Quarterly Practitioner Survey is a quarterly survey of staff working in Barnardo's Children's Services across the UK

² <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/headroom-first-episode-psychosis-service-feps>

³ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/newport-young-carers-service>

education provider and dependent on attendance. Students told us that they are regularly penalised due to missing school or college due to their caring responsibilities, and therefore missing out on the only financial support that they receive. At this time more than any other, those payments are increasingly vital for young carers.

Young carers also told us that although there is financial assistance available for university students, there is no equivalency in student loans for college. With the cost of living rising so sharply, young carers told us that they feel their life chances are limited because the cost of staying in college is prohibitive when they have such a significant role in caring for a loved one, and without further education, higher education remains out of reach.

Young carers told us that they are afraid that the pressures they feel due to the current cost of living crisis will follow them for the rest of their lives because of the opportunities that they may miss out on at this time.

Barnardo's Cymru runs a children's day nursery in Blaenau Ffestiniog, Caban Bach⁴. In this setting, nursery staff report that there are rising numbers of working families with childcare debts in the nursery, and that they struggle to feel able to ask for payment of these debts because they know that parents will only be able to pay for childcare at the expense of another essential outgoing, despite being in work.

Families tell nursery staff that their children rarely go out anymore because keeping them at home is cheaper. Nursery staff have noticed that whereas previously children came to nursery with full lunchboxes with plenty of food to last the day, lunchboxes are now much smaller and have just enough food for the day. Families are making huge compromises to try to maintain the bare essentials of their day-to-day lives.

A number of our services, such as Achieving Change Together in Blaenau Gwent⁵, support families with a disabled child, and these are families facing a particularly acute set of challenges. Increased fuel prices are having an impact. Disabled children and young people are often in specialised education provisions, leisure groups and respite provisions which means that parents/carers transport in adapted vehicles – this extends the miles travelled to access similar resources to their non-disabled peers. Above average medical appointments also contribute to the increased use of fuel.

Disabled children and young people often spend more time at home due to illness or challenging behaviour. This increases the use of heating, the

⁴ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/caban-bach-child-care-service>

⁵ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/blaenau-gwent-achieving-change-together-service-act>

cooker etc. Medical equipment such as hoists, pump feeds etc also increase the use of energy. Many families have increased washing due to medical needs / disabilities – again increasing the use of energy.

Many disabled children and young people, particularly those with autism, have rigid diets, making it difficult for parents/carers to substitute for cheaper options.

Through this and many other services, we have seen an increase in our referrals to Citizens Advice Cymru for support with debt and benefits advice.

- **How are cost of living pressures affecting the workforce, and how are different groups within the workforce being affected?**

Barnardo's Cymru is a large employer and employs social care professionals across a wide range of roles across the country. Like much of the social care sector, there are endemic issues facing our dedicated workforce. The Bevan Foundation has previously highlighted some of the concerns around pay across the social care sector.⁶

Firstly, social care pay is lower than we would like it to be. What we pay our staff is dictated by our commissioning arrangements with a local authority or the percentage of management overhead we can recover from Welsh Government programmes such as Families First. Whilst we understand that budgets are stretched everywhere, it is unavoidable to conclude that since the beginning of the pandemic our staff have been increasingly been asked to do more with less. We believe that there is a need for an uplift on all voluntary sector contracts, to help nurture and protect our social care workforce, not just enable us to maintain delivery. All Barnardo's contracts in Cymru have had no uplift per year for their lifespan, some being in place for between 5 and 7 years. If local authorities are giving increments and SAPA payments per year to their staff, this is not being transferred to voluntary sector providers through an uplift in our budget envelopes for delivery. We hope that this is a conversation that Welsh Government will take forward with the voluntary/community sector, so that we can ensure that the social care workforce – which has remained dedicated throughout the last two years – can continue to deliver for families without their own looming cost of living concerns hanging over them.

Staff also tell us that they are struggling with what they witness through the rising cost of living. Many families that Barnardo's Cymru supports are living on the verge of or are in poverty. Our practitioners report a huge increase in mental health challenges associated with financial worries

⁶ <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Fair-work-in-the-FE-social-care-final.pdf>

among service users – both adults who are trying to manage their budgets, and children who are aware that their parents/carers are stressed. This is having a significant impact on the wellbeing of staff as well as on the families that we support. Our team managers are now regularly checking in on, and providing support to, staff over the weekend because of the pressure they are facing during the week. The cost of living crisis is making this pressure more severe.

As an employer, Barnardo's provides a significant amount of mental health and wellbeing support to staff through our Employee Assistance Programme that provides therapeutic support on a range of mental health needs, as well as helping to manage challenges moving forwards through a Staff Wellness Action Plan. This same programme provides financial advice to our staff member and their immediate family.

- **How are rural communities being affected by the cost-of-living crunch, and to what extent are the pressures they face different to urban areas?**

Some of our staff that are based at various sites across a large local authority area have raised concerns that with the rising cost of petrol, they are beginning to struggle to afford to drive across the local authority and meet their obligations by doing so.

In North Wales, Barnardo's Cymru runs – amongst others – Caban Bach, a children's day nursery and family support outreach service and Golau⁷, a children and young people's mental health support service based on Anglesey.

Golau practitioners told us that they now face issues around inviting children and young people into their children's centre for support, because the cost of travelling for parents/carers is so high, and the distance is generally a long one in rural areas, with limited public transport. This has an impact on the support that can be offered and the ability of parents/carers to help a young person access this support.

Caban Bach Family Support Service raised a number of issues related to the cost of living in rural areas. Living in a rural area, many families tell support workers that they have to weigh up their ability to shop at cheaper supermarkets against the high travel costs associated with this. They do not have access to a range of supermarkets that would make budgeting more accessible. For many families, despite numerous attempts to budget, ensuring that they are claiming everything they are entitled to and exploring all other funding opportunities, they still face no choice but to resort to a food bank every month.

⁷ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/golau>

In Blaenau Ffestiniog, Barnardo's support workers have witnessed an increase in unacceptable living conditions in private rented accommodation. In several parts of Wales, Barnardo's Cymru staff have approached landlords in order to deal with damp, mould and other issues and have found that the landlords' response is to issue an eviction notice. This is an issue that is on the rise currently, after a prolonged period during the pandemic when such evictions were not possible.

- **How effective are the support measures that the Welsh and UK governments have put in place, and what further support might be needed over the coming months?**

AdviceLink Cymru

We are pleased to be in a partnership with Citizens Advice Cymru through AdviceLink Cymru and feel that this is an example of a Welsh Government support measure that is cutting down siloes and providing effective support to families facing financial pressures. It should be noted that our referrals to support have risen sharply in recent months.

Income maximisation and benefits take-up

Barnardo's Cymru staff make referrals to outside agencies for support and face extremely long delays before a family can be assisted – this includes in accessing benefits.

We have been pleased to work with Welsh Government on income maximisation work across Wales, but would encourage that the pace of this work should be increased so that more people can be brought under the umbrella of support. Every day, Barnardo's Cymru staff are aware that we support families who are not claiming the full extent of support and benefits that they are entitled to, despite efforts by many organisations (including Barnardo's) to raise awareness and remedy this.

Barnardo's Cymru welcomed the Winter Fuel Support Scheme from Welsh Government. However, there are concerns around the roll out of this and how effectively the scheme is reaching the people that it needs to. The scheme relies on local authorities to reach out to eligible individuals, but many are not reached via local authorities and need to contact local authorities directly to apply. We are concerned that many people did not know about the scheme early enough on in the application window to take full advantage of it.

We further welcomed the announcement in the Welsh Government 22/23 budget which extended the Winter Fuel Support Scheme into the winter of 22/23, but we would urge Welsh Government to rethink how we ensure this money reaches the people that it needs to in order to make the difference to their finances this winter. The rollout of the scheme for the

Winter should be planned and delivered well in advance, with significant thought given to how we can reach out to those individuals who are furthest from us. Staff in various children's services across Barnardo's Cymru reported that awareness of this scheme was very low, and that people did not realise they would be eligible, particularly if they were in work. Barnardo's Cymru would be happy to engage with Welsh Government to help further promote the scheme this coming winter.

Discretionary Housing Benefit has been accessed by many families supported by Barnardo's Cymru via their local authorities, often at our suggestion, and has been a huge help.

The role of the third sector

During the pandemic, our services were able to make use of emergency Covid funding to help support families. However, this funding has now come to an end and this is making it even more difficult for our services to support people and their families. We welcome the cost of living council tax rebate recently paid by Welsh Government, but we remain deeply concerned about the impact of the coming months, particularly the winter, on families across Wales and would urge Welsh Government to consider what further steps can be taken to ease the pressure on families in the coming autumn and winter when energy prices are likely to go up again⁸ and families will further struggle to heat their homes. Welsh Government's figures suggest that the proportion of households living in fuel poverty in Wales could increase from 14% (196,000) to 45% (614,000) due to the recent increase in prices.⁹ Consideration about whether interventions will have to go above and beyond the Winter Fuel Support Scheme should be taken.

Children's services colleagues in Barnardo's have noted that our role as a third sector organisation gives us the opportunity to support families with the cost of living in ways which go beyond purely financial by utilising our networks. For example, our partnership with IKEA has enabled us to provide families with bedding, cot bedding etc¹⁰. Deichmann have also provided us with shoes for children.

We welcome Welsh Government's announcement that primary school children will receive free school meals and look forward to seeing this begin to roll out in September. It will make a huge difference to families, although Caban Bach staff raised considerable concerns about the fact

⁸ <https://www.ft.com/content/207d744b-07d9-478b-a6d5-b40982c23bc7>

⁹ <https://gov.wales/fuel-poverty-modelled-estimates-wales-headline-results-october-2021-html#section-95641>

¹⁰ <https://www.ikea.com/gb/en/this-is-ikea/community-engagement/barnardos-partnership-pub64106da1#:~:text=The%20partnership%20combines%20IKEA's%20expertise,a%20healthy%20start%20in%20life.>

that for many families, there is still a long and expensive summer holiday to manage first.

In summary, Barnardo's Cymru staff are incredibly anxious about the families that they support and are struggling with how to support them – every avenue has been explored and yet people are still finding it difficult to manage. One member of staff said: 'This is not something families can budget their way out of, it has become a way of life. Even the smallest treats – such as a magazine for children – don't exist anymore. We are trying to help people stretch their money as far as possible, all to cover just the most basic of needs. It isn't good enough.'