

The public health approach to preventing gender-based violence

Consultation Response - Barnardo's



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 the lives of children, young people and families 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.

Q1. What works in preventing gender-based violence before it occurs, and intervening earlier to stop violence from escalating?

At Barnardo's Cymru we have expertise in supporting children and young people who have been affected by abuse including domestic abuse and harmful sexual behaviour, both as victims and perpetrators. Gender-based violence is a widespread and complex challenge. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimates that 6.9% of women aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022¹. There is growing evidence that children who live in families where there is domestic abuse can suffer serious long-term emotional effects².

Barnardo's continually works to promote the importance of education, early intervention, and prevention to reduce risks and prevent abuse. We believe that challenging a culture of misogyny and sexual harassment is key to tackling gender-based violence. This begins in childhood, and the need for well-funded, specialised services in schools, access to mental health support, dedicated children's domestic violence provision and whole family service provision that tackle and prevent the escalation of violence and abuse in the home.

We work to embed healthy relationship education in schools and promote children and young people's rights to healthy, consensual and safe

¹ [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

² [Domestic abuse | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://barnardos.org.uk)

relationships with peers, partner, their family and across their community³ taking a whole-family approach to domestic violence. We also focus on our Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) pathways work to prevent gender-based violence, either before it occurs or to prevent any further escalation of violence, and harmful attitudes through longer term therapeutic intervention for children with sexualised histories at our Better Futures Cymru service⁴.

It is essential that these specialist services for children and young people are properly funded and within the sector, there must be a commitment to sustainable funding.

Whole-family approach

We support children who witness, or experience domestic abuse via a whole family approach through our services. Our practitioners work with each individual in a family offering Integrated Women's Support, focusing on risk management, safety planning, identifying abuse, the impact abuse has on families and children, confidence and self-esteem building, parenting and developing support networks and the RESET Perpetrator Programme which covers topics such as defining domestic abuse and taking ownership, gender, power and equality, healthy relationships, their own experiences and positive parenting. Both programmes work alongside specialist intervention to help children and young people recover from the trauma, they had experienced⁵.

From 2019 – October 2022 our Opening Closed Doors service specialised in working with children and young people who had been victims or witnesses of domestic abuse at home⁶. This model is based on the premise that working with all family members meets their needs more comprehensively, addressing the causes as well as the consequences of domestic abuse and helps to bring about sustainable change.

Professionals interviewed for the evaluation specifically referred to the benefits of a holistic approach: *"The whole family offer is really important. There was support for women (and to a lesser extent men and children) already but it was not connected. It supports victims to know that the perpetrator is also trying to change."*⁷

We believe that addressing these issues with a whole-family approach is important for breaking down silos by helping families understand how they interact with each other, in a safe and appropriate way, which can prevent escalating violence. It has been our experience that the whole

³ [Homepage \(barnardosrealoverocks.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardosrealoverocks.org.uk)

⁴ [Better Futures Cymru | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk)

⁵ [Barnardo's Opening Closed Doors Programme Evaluation final report 130220.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk)

⁶ [Barnardo's Opening Closed Doors Programme Evaluation final report 130220.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk)

⁷ [Barnardo's Opening Closed Doors Programme Evaluation final report 130220.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk)

family approach is incredibly important and a big part of why the work with perpetrators has been successful, because it is done in the context of the whole family and emphasises the impact that their behaviour has had on their children, which can act as a huge motivator for change. An independent evaluation showed that 78% of families were showing signs of recovering from domestic abuse after involvement with the service⁸. Engagement with the Opening Closed Doors programme has resulted in healthier relationships and positive school improvement for children and young people. In addition, involvement with the service saw that 89% of children's legal protection statuses either reduced or did not escalate as a result of Opening Closed Doors support⁹.

Information sharing has been streamlined through the service, making the challenge of accessing information easier as all agencies have central access. This improves decision-making and ensures that children and young people are receiving the right support and safeguarding. Working with the perpetrator also enables the identification of the root cause of domestic violence, enabling the prevention of escalation through a solution focused model which addresses the causes and consequences of their actions¹⁰ This model has been described¹⁰ as *"good practice and, as such, could be recommended as a model that is worth investing in and that could be rolled out in other areas."*¹¹

Early intervention

We believe that early intervention through school programmes, delivered in an age-appropriate way, can support children and young people to understand their emotions, empathise with others and tackle stereotypical gender attitudes and beliefs⁹, a key preventative step in stopping gender-based violence. Developing and resourcing good healthy relationships education in schools is key to ensuring that gender-based violence is prevented before it occurs. We need to achieve societal change, and if we continue to only fund downstream services, resolving the causal issues that exist upstream will remain untackled. Tackling peer-on-peer harassment in Welsh Schools and working with young men and boys as early as possible support the VAWDASV strategic ambition to prevent gender-based violence. We believe in early education and support as a means to prevention and currently deliver to schools through our Real Love Rocks programme¹², a ground-breaking education and awareness

⁸ [Barnardo's Opening Closed Doors Programme Evaluation final report 130220.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

⁹ [Barnardo's Opening Closed Doors Programme Evaluation final report 130220.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [Barnardo's Opening Closed Doors Programme Evaluation final report 130220.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

¹¹ [Barnardo's Opening Closed Doors Programme Evaluation final report 130220.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

¹² [Homepage \(barnardosrealloverocks.org.uk\)](#)

raising programme developed by Barnardo's Safer Futures Trauma Services. Promoting children and young people's rights to healthy, consensual and safe relationships with peers, partner, their family and across their community is at the heart of this.

Better Futures Cymru provides assessment and longer-term therapeutic intervention services for children and young people with sexualised histories across Wales. Since 2021 Better Futures has also worked in partnership with a local authority¹³ to develop the Harmful Sexual Behaviours pathway for early support and to develop/support the workforce to provide early, appropriate, and proportionate responses to inappropriate/Problematic Sexual Behaviour and to highlight those in need of referral to Better Futures for abusive/violent sexual behaviour¹⁴. This early help model offers support to recognise and intervene in potentially harmful behaviour before it escalates. Those referred to this service have often experienced violence in their home life or their own personal relationships. Of those accessing the service, 68% had a prior history of emotional abuse/neglect, 61% had a prior history of physical abuse¹⁵.

Our practitioners believe that early identification of children who have seen and experienced abuse makes recovery possible and prevents the potential for harmful behaviour to arise as a trauma response in later life. The pathway offers two 'train the trainer' programmes, one for primary schools focused on lesson plans around puberty, healthy relationships and touch, the secondary level programme looks at peer-on-peer harassment, bullying and online harms. The focus of these interventions is to stop the cycle of harm before adulthood. We know that children who experience domestic abuse are at increased risk of poor mental health, school absence, a lack of health relationships as well as youth offending, criminality and addiction issues¹⁶.

Q3. What is the role of the public sector and specialist services (including the police, schools, the NHS, the third sector and other organisations that women and girls turn to for support) in identifying, tackling and preventing violence against women, and their role in supporting victims and survivors.

The role of the third sector is being able to reach out to families to build bridges where statutory services are or have been unable to build those

¹³ Info from Sharron Wareham – seeking reference

¹⁴ Sharron BCBC info

¹⁵ Info from BCBC info – Sharron Wareham

¹⁶ ['Not just collateral damage' Barnardo's Report 0.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

vital relationships because of past experiences. Building trust is key to effective service delivery particularly in addressing systematic gaps where needs of families are not otherwise identified or supported appropriately.

Funding specialist services

Despite these successful interventions, there is a general lack of provision for children and young people who experience gender-based violence, domestic abuse and CSA/CSE. For many services, unless a sustainable funding offer is developed soon, important interventions and expertise will be lost by services that cannot continue to fund their vital work. Without the continued support from specialised services, children and young people can go on to experience their own difficulties in creating healthy relationships in adolescence and adulthood¹⁷. One practitioner said about domestic abuse,

*"It is a contributory factor to the development of harmful sexual behaviour. It results in experiences of lasting childhood trauma"*¹⁸.

This continued loss of funding has left a huge gap for children and young people's specialist service provision across Wales¹⁹. Many service providers focus on adult victims of abuse, and whilst we support the need for these services, the high case numbers of the Opening Closed Doors service reflected the clear need for family intervention and support through a dedicated service to prevent further escalation. The ability to break down barriers and support each family member both individually and as a unit provided the right intervention and received positive evaluations from professionals, practitioners and the children and young people themselves. One young person told us that *"My worker let me talk openly about how I was feeling. She really helped me to understand and supported me to manage my emotions."*²⁰ Managing emotional wellbeing has positives both now and in the future for children and young people, as childhood adversity can contribute to poor resilience, lack of healthy relationships and other poor adult outcomes²¹. Our practitioners believe that the current provision doesn't always meet the needs of children and young people due to the restrictive and inflexible nature of adult-focused services. Barnardo's practitioners also highlighted that of those services that can offer support to children waiting lists are often long, contributing to increased risk of harm, lack of recovery and support and mental health impacts²².

¹⁷ ['Not just collateral damage' Barnardo's Report 0.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁸ ['Not just collateral damage' Barnardo's Report 0.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁹ anecdotal from practitioner

²⁰ Information from Opening Closed Doors Service - internal email

²¹ [Ending childhood adversity: A public health approach - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

²² ['Not just collateral damage' Barnardo's Report 0.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

Current commissioning practices fall short when considering the recruitment and retention of specialist practitioners needed to work with victims and perpetrators to create systematic change to gender-based violence. We know that developing specialisms within services depends on the recruitment and training of practitioners which can take many months, despite this specialist services are often only commissioned for periods of 12 months, and sometimes less. Practitioners have told us that this does not enable service managers to plan effectively, and despite delivering significant support to children and young people, cannot always offer assurances over long term support needs²³. Without this support to recover children and young people, who can be both victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence, can face stigmatisation and criminalisation which can have lasting impacts. We would support a move to longer term, more sustainable commissioning which can enable the delivery of specialist preventative models for children and young people alongside our continued support for victims and survivors.

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²³ Anecdotal from practitioner