

Supporting the hidden victims of COVID-19:

Lessons from the
first wave



Transforming the lives of the
UK's most vulnerable children

**Believe in
children**
 **Barnardo's**

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As the UK's largest children's charity, Barnardo's aim is to achieve **better outcomes for more children**.

To achieve this, we work with partners to **build stronger families, safer childhoods, and positive futures**.



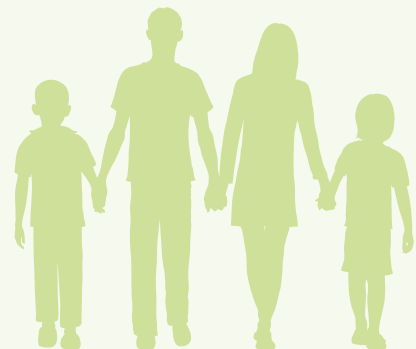
**During the first national lockdown of COVID-19,
from 1 April – 30 September 2020:**



We supported

174,900

children, young people, parents and carers through our services and vital partnerships with other agencies.



By the end of September we had worked with:



63,400

through
individual work



35,100

through our
children's centres and
family hubs provision



24,800

through our
school-based programmes

Compared with the same period in 2019, we have experienced a 17,000 decrease in the number of service users supported overall, but a 12,000 increase in our direct work with individuals.

This increase in individual work is due primarily to an additional 10,200 children and young people directly supported through the Department for Education-funded *See, Hear, Respond* programme, in response to COVID-19.

1. Why this report?

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing great change and disruption for everyone, presenting new challenges, and forcing us all to find new ways of living, working, and interacting. However, as the pandemic has taken hold, it has become evident that its impact on lives and livelihoods is not being equally felt by all.

At Barnardo's we are witnessing first-hand the acute impact the pandemic and associated restrictions are having on the most vulnerable children and families – many of whom were already facing significant challenges.

At the same time, charities like Barnardo's are facing unprecedented challenges – both financially, and in how we provide support. But despite this, we are continuing to harness our passion, knowledge and expertise; our innovation and learning; our partnerships with other agencies, supporters and donors; and the voices of children and families to deliver support at a time when children and families need us more than ever.

We are publishing this report in early 2021, which seems like the right moment to reflect on our learning from the first wave and first national lockdown – in the hope that this can inform where we go next.

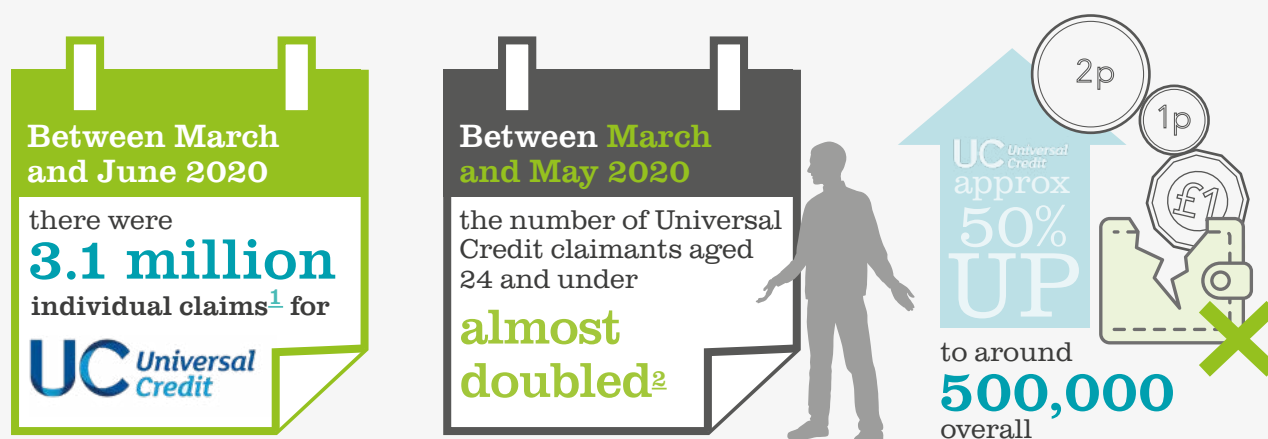
In this report, we have embraced the opportunity to **review** the evidence of the impact of the pandemic on children and families, and learn from our response, so that we can identify the steps required not just to **rebuild**, but to achieve a '**resurgence**' in support for vulnerable children going forward.



2. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, young people, and families

The impact of COVID-19 on poverty and inequality

COVID-19 has had a catastrophic impact on the finances of families and young people, exacerbating the pressure on those already experiencing financial or employment insecurity, while also pushing others into poverty. In the longer term, the economic fallout from the pandemic risks having a significant impact on many families' income – many who were 'just about managing' pre-pandemic could now find themselves struggling significantly.



Pre-pandemic,

30%
of UK
children

lived in poverty
in the UK³
(over 4.2 million)



46%
(over 1.1 million)

**for Black, Asian,
and ethnic minority
children**

compared to

26%

**of white British
children**

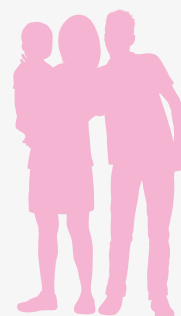
The surge in unemployment

caused by the pandemic could have resulted in around

200,000 more children⁴
falling below the

pre-COVID-19 relative poverty line by the end of

2020



Children in the lowest income families have **spent less time on educational activities during lockdown⁵** than children from the highest income families

Lockdown widened the learning gap⁶ between wealthier and poorer children by

46%

Young people were more likely than other age groups to need to use **foodbanks⁸** or food charities during the initial stages of the pandemic, and households with children were particularly likely to report having **reduced meal sizes, or skipping meals** altogether⁹

In October

77%
of Barnardo's
frontline
workers

were supporting young people or families experiencing **reduced earnings due to job losses or reduced hours**



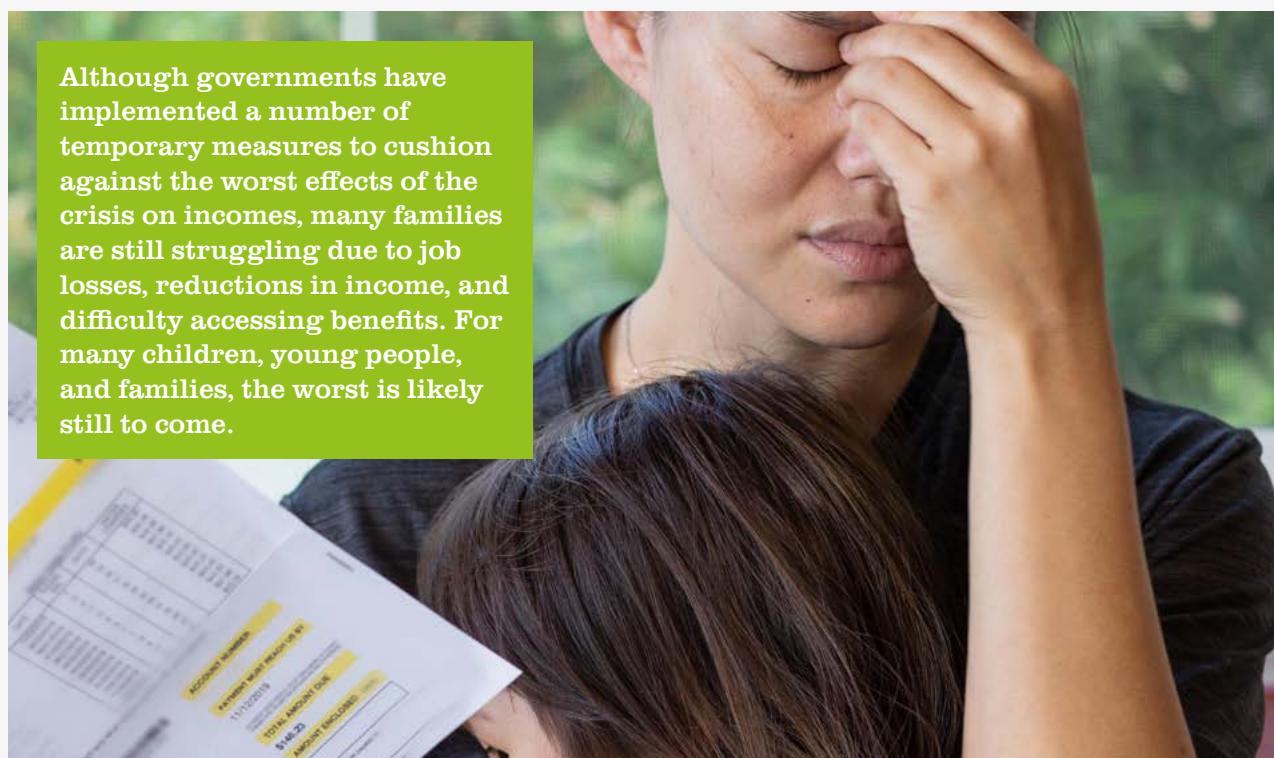
have sought **free school meals as a result of COVID-19**, on top of the 1.4 million who were already claiming⁷



The growing numbers of Barnardo's frontline workers who were **supporting someone in, or at risk of being in, poverty** in 2020.

Barnardo's frontline workers have highlighted substantial increases around need for **financial support or grants, families unable to pay bills (including rent), need for budgeting help, and families affected by waiting times for benefits**

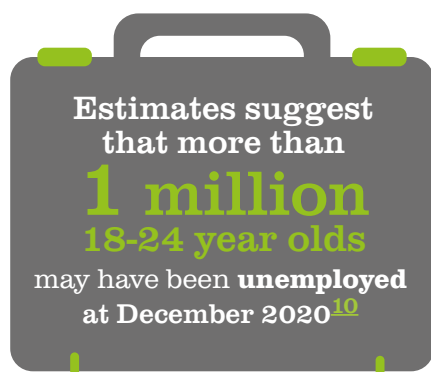
Although governments have implemented a number of temporary measures to cushion against the worst effects of the crisis on incomes, many families are still struggling due to job losses, reductions in income, and difficulty accessing benefits. For many children, young people, and families, the worst is likely still to come.



The impact of COVID-19 on youth employment

The COVID-19 crisis and the resulting recession have had far reaching effects on employment, leaving many people – especially the young – with limited prospects and hope.

Having already cost hundreds of thousands of jobs and livelihoods, the pandemic risks pushing more young people out of work, leaving more young people unemployed, with significant long term impacts on their employment opportunities, and at increased risk of poverty.



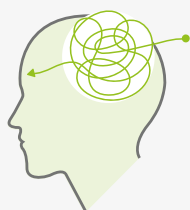
During the first wave of COVID-19, **young people** were more likely to work in the sectors **hardest hit** by lockdown measures¹¹, be among those most likely to have **lost their job** or to have been **furloughed**, and be among those most **at risk of redundancies**¹²




The impact of COVID-19 on mental health and emotional wellbeing


COVID-19 and the measures to contain it have negatively affected the mental health of many children and young people. During the first national lockdown, mental health and wellbeing was affected by a range of factors, including prolonged periods of isolation and staying at home, as well as concerns about employment, finances, and housing.

1 in 3 young people aged 8-24 in the UK reported experiencing an **increase in mental health and wellbeing issues** during the first national lockdown¹⁴





81% of young people aged 13-25 who were **experiencing mental health problems pre-lockdown** said **their mental health had worsened** during the first national lockdown¹⁵

 In April **48%** of Barnardo's frontline workers were supporting **children** reporting an **increase in mental health issues** due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

 By July this had increased to **64%** The most commonly cited issues increasing in children as a result of the pandemic related to **anxiety** and **sleep dysregulation**.

Child wellbeing and welfare can be influenced by parental mental health, and evidence suggests that adult mental health issues have also increased during the first national lockdown.

 In April **54%** of Barnardo's workers were supporting **parents or carers** reporting an **increase in mental health issues** due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

 By July this figure had risen to **62%** The most commonly cited issues increasing among parents as a result of the pandemic were **stress** and **anxiety**.

The impact of COVID-19 on education

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on every aspect of education, the effects of which have been particularly detrimental for the most vulnerable children and young people, likely increasing the educational inequalities between children from better-off and poorer households.

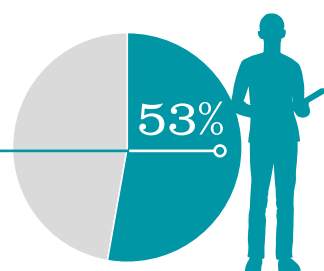
School provides so much more than education – especially for the most vulnerable children. It can keep them safe, provide a hot meal, and surround them with the routines, structure, and trusted adult role models that they may not have at home.

Although schools remained open for vulnerable children during the first national lockdown, uptake of places was very low, as parents and carers were encouraged to only take up these places if they were unable to meet their child's needs at home, and many schools were closed due to staff shortages. Caring for children's needs at home, while additionally supporting home learning placed additional pressure on families.



In July 2020

over half of Barnardo's frontline workers were supporting families **where children were eligible to attend school but were not currently attending**.



Workers cited these families' main concerns to be:



'fear around catching the virus in school'

80%

'following new rules around social distancing'

56%

'different school environment to before'

50%

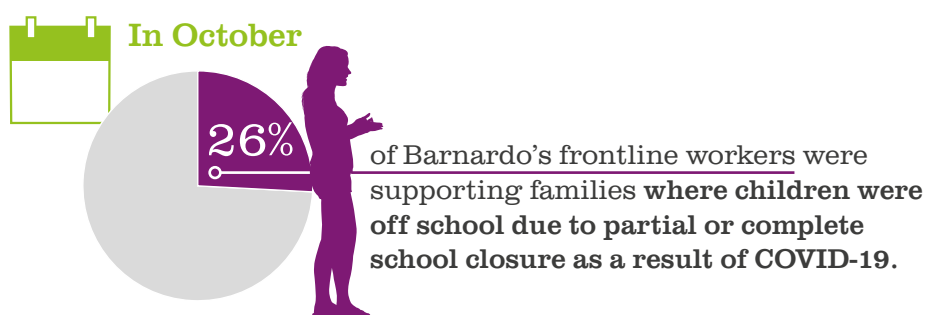


Interim measures to support education during the first national lockdown – such as remote learning – were heavily dependent upon factors such as: proficiency in English; a child’s home environment; access to digital technology and other educational resources; availability of a quiet space for learning; and, child or parental engagement in school. These factors have served to further **compound pre-existing inequalities in educational attainment**¹⁶.

Children and young people from lower income families are more likely to experience **digital poverty**¹⁷ (i.e. lack the equipment and data needed for home learning). In the course of our work, children and young people without the necessary access to devices and data described the negative impact this had on their school work during the pandemic.

While some families reported receiving remote support from their school during lockdown, others reported reduced, or no, support from schools.

As not all schools provided devices for children, many lower income families reported having to purchase resources such as laptops during lockdown, resulting in additional costs for families already experiencing financial strain¹⁸.



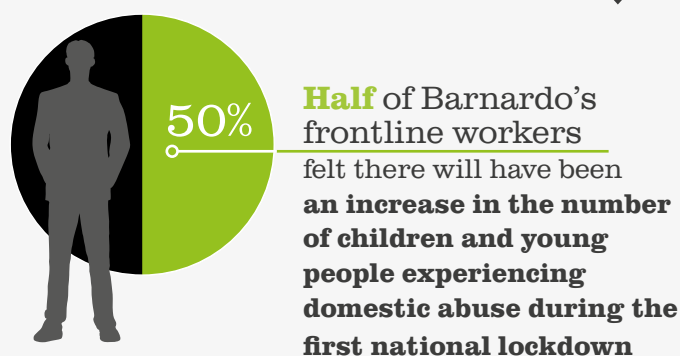
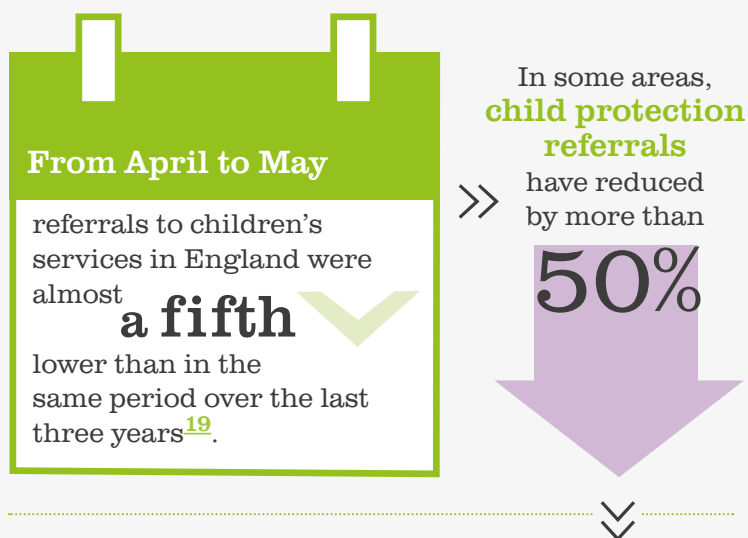
Among workers supporting these families, 53% felt that children, young people, and families had **not been provided with sufficient support to help children re-engage with learning while unable to attend school**



The hidden victims of the COVID-19 pandemic

Children not being in school, coupled with services and support being withdrawn, paused, or taking place remotely has resulted in reduced oversight of children during the first national lockdown.

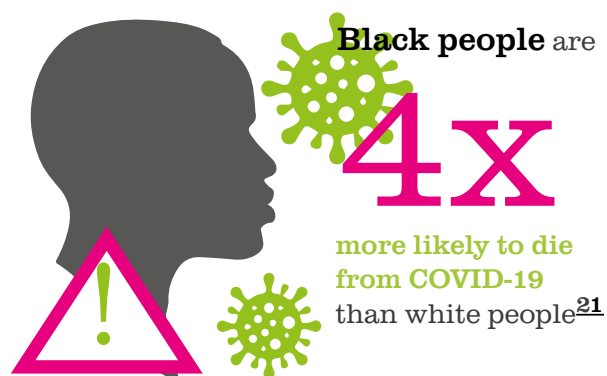
This has served to place many children at increased risk of harm, including neglect, abuse, and exploitation. Reduced social contact and lockdown restrictions meant that opportunities to escape unsafe home environments, and access to help and support were reduced. The full impacts of such harms are, as yet, unknown. These are likely to come to light as restrictions are lifted and face-to-face interactions outwith the home increase. We anticipate the level of need charities like Barnardo's are responding to will continue to rise steeply as a result of current circumstances.



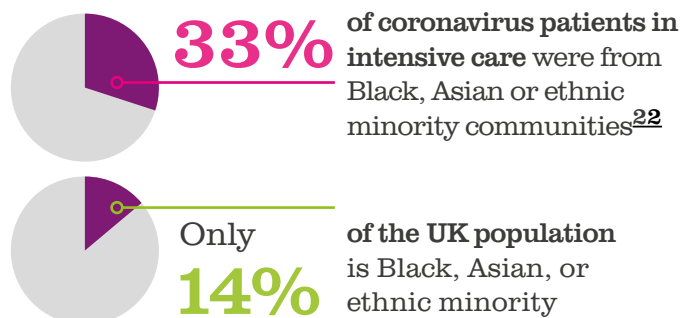
The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities

It has become evident during the course of the pandemic that **the impact of COVID-19 is not uniform**. Systemic racism, and subsequent inequalities experienced by Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups in the UK have been exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19, and challenges for Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities have manifested in a range of ways – across health, social, and economic domains. Already more likely to live in poverty²⁰, this has resulted in children and families from these backgrounds facing a range of additional, related, challenges, which threaten to compound pre-existing racial inequalities.

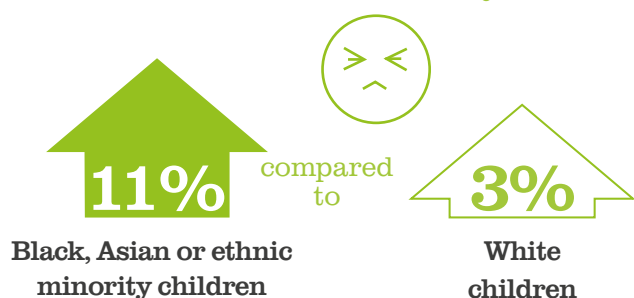
The impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and ethnic minority families takes a number of forms:



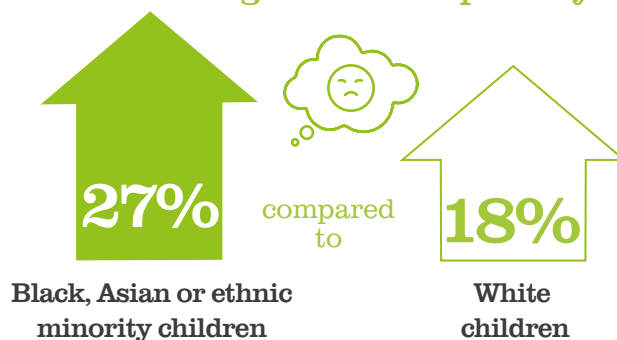
In September 2020



The number of children suffering anxiety or stress²³ in lockdown increased by:



Children seeking help for suicidal thoughts²⁴ went up nearly:



Adults from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds have experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness²⁵ than white adults during the pandemic



Concerns about **employment, finances, and housing** have been particularly prevalent for those from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds²⁶.

During the **first national lockdown**, Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities were:

- particularly likely to be impacted by sector shutdowns²⁷
- more likely to have had to cut back on essential items²⁸
- more likely to be behind on bills and to have encountered debt²⁹
- more likely to spend lockdown in homes with less space than other groups³⁰
- less likely than their white peers to have had access to a garden,³¹ bringing greater risks to their mental health and wellbeing



There has been a reported increase in racism and hate crime³², including ‘shaming’ of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority individuals online for going outside (in keeping with the lockdown guidelines). Additionally, in the course of our work, we have found that not all foodbanks and other sources of support have been able to provide culturally-appropriate food packages, and in smaller communities, families’ privacy can be compromised by having to disclose their needs.

Children from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority families are more likely to be living in ‘**digital poverty**’, affecting their ability to learn, socialise, and access support. Further, parents without English language skills have felt less able to support their children with home learning, meaning **Black, Asian, and ethnic minority children have been more likely to miss out on education** during this period. Social distancing restrictions have resulted in children and families missing contact with **community support networks**, there has been a **lack of information** about COVID-19 and measures to control the spread of the virus available in languages other than English, and some children from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities we have worked with have experienced **attacks on their home**, while others feel **extreme anxiety** about leaving their house or returning to school.



In October
14%

of Barnardo’s frontline workers reported having supported a **child or young person who has experienced a hate crime or incident/abuse due to their race**, over the last year

3. Barnardo's response: supporting vulnerable children, young people, and families during the crisis

As the COVID-19 crisis hit, we launched **Barnardo's Coronavirus Crisis Appeal**, which raised vital funds, as well as awareness of the needs of vulnerable children and families during the pandemic. In our services, our primary focus was on 'crisis management' and meeting the immediate safety, welfare, and wellbeing needs of children and families. This meant rethinking how we deliver services, focusing on supporting the most vulnerable children, and innovating to provide services differently. While more than 500 frontline colleagues continued to provide face-to-face support throughout the national lockdown, many of our services had to move to operate very differently, very quickly – providing support by phone, messaging apps, and video calls.

Redesigning Services

Throughout the pandemic, Barnardo's services across the UK have continued to adapt and innovate to fit the shifting landscape, and continue to remain available for the children and young people who need us most.

- We offered **phone 'check ins'** for children and families, allowing us to continue to assess their welfare and offer emotional support in the absence of face-to-face contact
- For families who don't have digital technology available and have needed some direct contact, **we visited them at home**, continuing contact, and maintaining appropriate social distancing measures
- We developed and distributed a range of **resources to help families support their own mental health and wellbeing** while at home, and keep children happy and entertained during lockdown
- We **repurposed buildings**, in many cases looking beyond our existing caseloads, and reaching out to extend our support to those in need who we weren't necessarily reaching before
- We continued to provide much needed **practical support**, such as assisting families to apply for benefits, supporting with shopping, and advocating with housing and utility providers on behalf of young people
- We took advantage of **online opportunities**, flexing our usual models of support, including:
 - using digital technologies to **deliver one-to-one therapeutic support**, group work, and online support groups, providing a vital way of maintaining routines, continuing to have contact with children and families, and continuing to support mental health and wellbeing in the absence of face-to-face support
 - establishing **'Barnardo's Family Space'**, an online family centre, allowing access to information, guidance and support about parenting issues for those unable to attend a Children's Centre or Family Hub in person.



Barnardo's Coronavirus Crisis Appeal

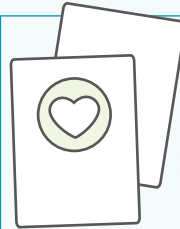
From late March to the end of July 2020, with the help of our generous supporters, including donations from members of the public, grant assistance, and in-kind contributions from our corporate partners, other organisations, and local businesses, we raised over £2million.

Barnardo's Coronavirus Crisis Appeal has allowed us to:

Provide
3,887
food packages

for children, young people and families,

providing access to food which they could otherwise not afford, and helping alleviate the impact of food insecurity and food poverty



Provide
4,760
mental health and wellbeing packs

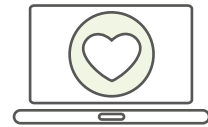
to children, young people and families we support, helping them to deal with the pressures presented by the crisis, and supporting them to cope in the absence of face-to-face support during lockdown



Make over
1,000
emergency fuel payments

for families and young people, courtesy of the Energy Savings Trust (with 1,000 more set to benefit from emergency fuel vouchers in due course, courtesy of a grant to Barnardo's from the Energy Redress Fund)

Distribute over
2,648
mobile phones, laptops, and tablets



to young people and families, thereby empowering them with digital tools to stay connected to friends and family, and access online learning and essential support

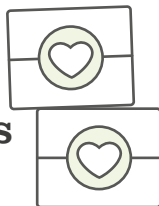
1,515 of these were new or refurbished mobile phones or tablets courtesy of our Great British Tech Appeal partnership with Vodafone.

Distribute over
7,500
Play at Home Packs

to children and

500
Life at Home Packs
for care leavers,

comprised of items kindly donated by our corporate partner IKEA.



Barnardo's Coronavirus Crisis Appeal

won a

Third Sector Digital Award for

Best online fundraising campaign

Judges noted the success of the agile working and iterative approach to delivery.

4. Working differently: Barnardo's approach to innovation and partnership

Working in partnership to support children and families

Partnership working has been more crucial than ever before. The challenges facing the most vulnerable children and young people during the crisis (and even before) are **too complex for any one agency or sector to solve alone**. As a result, we have used the pandemic as a catalyst to trial new ways of working with partners, in order to identify and support those who need us most.

In response to the pandemic, Barnardo's formed a new programme with funding from the Department for Education (DfE), and in partnership with over 80 national children's charities and community-based organisations (40% of which are Black, Asian, and minority ethnic-led).

See, Hear, Respond (which is currently funded until March 2021) is a new and innovative programme designed to find solutions to the challenges facing children and families, which may have been exacerbated by the unique circumstances of the pandemic. It focuses specifically on reaching children and young people 'hidden' from professionals during the crisis.

Through mobilising a sector response to supporting vulnerable children and young people who do not meet the threshold for statutory support and/or face additional barriers as a result of the impact of COVID-19, *See, Hear, Respond* bridges the gap between universal services (schools and healthcare professionals), and statutory safeguarding services (police and social care).

Through working alongside both grassroots and national partners in this way, *See, Hear, Respond* has allowed us to reach into communities and identify those families most disadvantaged, and cut off from other forms of support.

By working with a range of specialist service providers, including autism, early years, exploitation, disability, mental health, and education charities, *See, Hear, Respond* has provided for mobilisation of a national digital offer, as well as local face-to-face offers.

We also commissioned arts, sports, and youth work organisations who have been able to provide positive activities to improve connectivity to decrease social isolation and loneliness, and, alongside this, through working with core partners – the Association of Muslim Schools, Action for Children, and The Children's Society – *See, Hear, Respond* has provided comprehensive child and family support across all of England.

Recognising the unequal impact of the pandemic, *See, Hear, Respond* prioritises children who are experiencing, or most at risk of, harm and increased adversity, mobilising a sector response that identifies and meets the needs of children 'falling through the gaps'.



By 30 September, *See, Hear, Respond* had been live for 16 weeks and received a total of 13,157 referrals. These include:

2,844

children requiring support for mental health and emotional wellbeing

1,754

children with special educational needs

1,713

Black, Asian, ethnic minority and refugee children

587

children at risk of exploitation out of their home

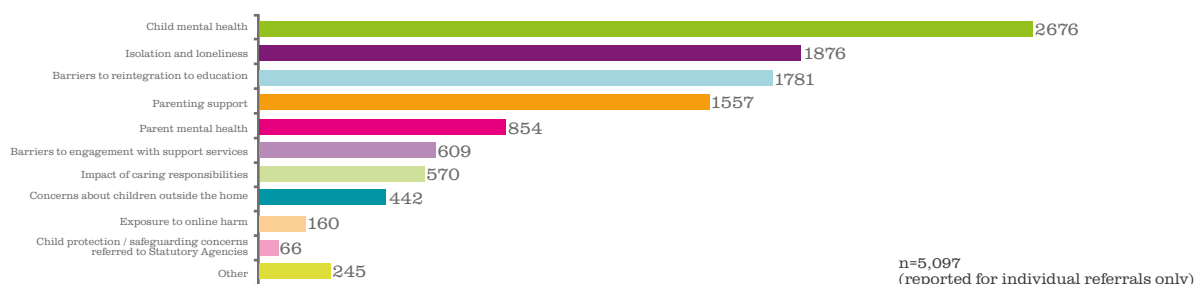
364

young carers

871

children under the age of five

Presenting needs identified at referral to *See, Hear, Respond*



Although the main reason for a child's referral to *See, Hear, Respond* is emotional and mental wellbeing, to date, the majority of families we have supported have been experiencing **complex, multiple, and interrelated needs, affecting various family members**. Many children referred to *See, Hear, Respond* fit into more than one of the above categories. The programme has responded to this by engaging with multiple agencies, and adopting a **flexible 'whole family' approach, focused on making systems work better for each individual child**.

Common examples of presenting issues include: children experiencing **extreme anxiety** regarding COVID-19; children experiencing **bereavement and loss** of friends and family members due to COVID-19; increasing **self-harm and suicidal ideation**; and, increased experience of **hate crime and racism** causing extreme distress.

Early findings have shown that the most effective interventions for families have been those grounded in **social models of mental health, supporting schools and other universal services, alongside families, to develop trauma responsive approaches to support children**. This approach also helps to prevent specialist resource-intensive services from being overwhelmed.

As part of this work, Barnardo's has also provided some 'capacity building' to help smaller organisations develop safeguarding policies and become contract-ready, which will not only benefit this project, but also enable these organisations to deliver similar work in the future.

See, Hear, Respond was operational within a short timeframe, evidencing the crucial role partnership working played in allowing us to quickly and successfully respond to new challenges, and continue to provide prompt and flexible support for children, young people, and families.

The *See, Hear, Respond* Support Hub³³ – our dedicated area on Barnardo's website offering a host of information, resources and tools from practical advice on how parents can talk to their children about the pandemic, to tips on managing anxiety and much more – had recorded **141,174** interactions by 30 September 2020.



141,174

Interactions with the
Support Hub
June 15 - September 30th

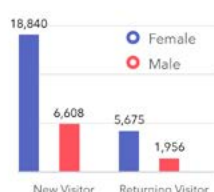
Most Viewed Sub-Hubs



Believe in
children
Barnardo's

Funded by
Department
for Education

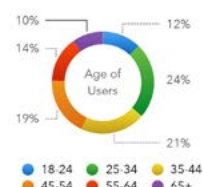
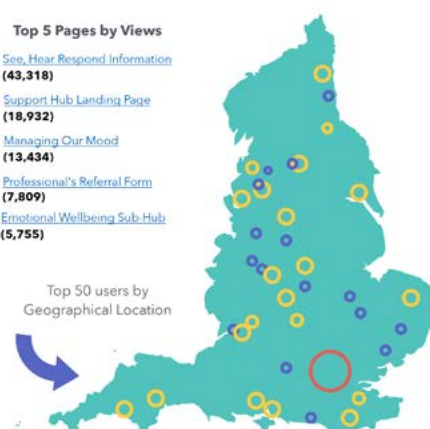
SEE, HEAR, RESPOND ANALYTICS



Top 5 Pages by Views

- 1. See, Hear Respond Information (43,318)
- 2. Support Hub Landing Page (18,932)
- 3. Managing Our Mood (13,434)
- 4. Professional's Referral Form (7,809)
- 5. Emotional Wellbeing Sub-Hub (5,755)

Top 50 users by Geographical Location



Age of Users

18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+



Recognising that these issues were not just England-specific, we secured funding from the National Emergencies Trust (NET) to extend some aspects of *See, Hear, Respond* to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to begin to bridge the identified gap in these countries.

See, Hear, Respond Celtic Nations offers therapeutic support through a helpline targeted at those assessed as having presenting issues (distress, trauma or mental health problems) that can be safely worked with digitally. Barnardo's support people to reflect and understand these issues, self-regulate, develop coping strategies, establish wider support networks, and manage feelings and behaviours during this period.

In addition to providing remote, online, and virtual therapeutic interventions to young people and families, *See, Hear, Respond Celtic Nations* refers children and families to relevant agencies and services, ensuring integration into wider forms of support.

Supporting Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities

Building a network of partners to address the factors leading to Black, Asian and ethnic minority children experiencing poorer outcomes

With the pandemic serving to both highlight and compound existing inequalities, combined with heightened global awareness of racial injustice, Barnardo's published its **Commitment to Tackling Racism**³⁴.

However, we know we cannot solve the issues facing Black, Asian and ethnic minority families alone. We have therefore brought together more than 100 people representing more than 60 Black, Asian, and minority ethnic-led charities and organisations for a series of webinars about supporting Black, Asian, and ethnic minority children and young people in the post-COVID era.

Going forward, we will continue to develop this network, to focus on issues affecting Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities specifically, in order to develop a broader understanding of issues affecting these families, and initiate more effective culturally sensitive responses.

***Boloh* – The first national telephone helpline supporting Black, Asian, and ethnic minority children and young people**

Barnardo's has been commissioned to provide *Boloh*, a UK-wide telephone helpline and web chat facility for Black, Asian, and ethnic minority children, and their families, who have been affected by COVID-19.

Alongside helpline support, where callers require further, specific, or more intensive support, Barnardo's provide therapeutic intervention.

The *Boloh* helpline supports the complexity of issues that children and families from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities face, and with many Black, Asian, and ethnic minority children likely to have suffered hardship, trauma, and in some cases abuse, during lockdown, it is needed now more than ever.

The need for this helpline is evidenced by our *See, Hear, Respond* work, where over 35% of referrals to date have been for children from Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee communities.

Commitment to investing in better outcomes for all children

As a result of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities, it is likely that children and young people from these communities will experience additional pressures going forward – including in terms of **increased caring responsibilities, bereavement, and reduced access to support**. This comes on top of pre-existing inequalities that drive poorer outcomes for these children in a whole range of areas.

In light of this, Barnardo's has set up a Race Equality Fund, which will be administered by the Barnardo's Foundation. The Fund will invest in innovative projects developed in collaboration with community organisations wishing to contribute to tackling systemic racism as well as mitigating its effects. Additionally, the Fund will support work by Barnardo's corporate university, to improve the cultural competence of Barnardo's staff.

We are also looking at forming partnerships with other like-minded organisations and working with grassroots organisations to set up a Centre of Expertise, to share existing knowledge, and work towards **our aim of a more equal society**.



5. Amplifying the voices of children and young people: Barnardo's Big Conversation

Throughout the pandemic, **children and young people have told us they didn't feel heard** – yet the decisions being made affect their futures most of all. We have tried to play a role in correcting this – by giving young people the opportunity to undertake research, co-produce reports, and make their views heard directly to decision makers.

The Big Conversation included:

- **A nationally representative online survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of Barnardo's,³⁵** exploring the views of 4,000 children and young people aged 8 to 24 across Great Britain, exploring how COVID-19 has affected their lives. Children and young people said they had experienced an increase in mental health and wellbeing issues including stress, loneliness and worry as a result of COVID-19 and associated lockdown measures.
- **In-depth interviews with 113 young people supported by Barnardo's across the UK.³⁶** Designed with input from Barnardo's Youth Colleagues, for young people aged 13-25, we explored experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and young people's visions for the future. This work provided in-depth insight into the views and experiences of young people who tend to have less opportunity to have their voices heard, and who often face complex and overlapping inequalities in their daily lives, including children in care, care leavers, children with disabilities, LGBT young people, young carers, young parents, children for whom English is not a first language, and children with refugee or asylum seeking status.
- **Mental Health and COVID-19: In Our Own Words,³⁷** which we worked with ten young people to co-produce. These ten youth researchers reached nearly 150 other children and young people. We have shared their findings about how children and young people want to access mental health services with a range of decision makers.



Using what we heard in our research with children and young people, we hosted a series of six **virtual conversations with senior politicians,³⁸** during which young people supported by Barnardo's shared their experiences of COVID-19 and the lockdown, and their views about what needs to change in the future.

We also held a webinar with the Mental Health Minister Nadine Dorries MP where young people we support talked directly to over 300 participants from across the country about their experiences and what needed to change.



6. Working to influence the systems around children and families

In addition to supporting children, young people and families directly during the pandemic, we've worked with our partners, governments, and other decision makers across the UK to **implement policy measures** to support vulnerable children and families.

Advocacy and campaigning for children's rights in Scotland

In Scotland, we worked alongside the Children and Young People's Commissioner to successfully campaign for an amendment to legislation to close a loophole which saw 16 and 17 year-olds being issued with Fixed Penalty Notices for breaches of lockdown restrictions.

We've also supported the development of guidance for Police Scotland in relation to engaging with children and young people during COVID-19 restrictions.

Working collaboratively to address issues faced by vulnerable children in England

In England, together with other children's charities, we supported a campaign to extend free school meals through the summer holidays, and a campaign calling for a rise in the rate of child benefit, as the most efficient way of reaching children in the most vulnerable families with the welfare support they need. We also participated in regular discussions hosted by the Department for Education, working collaboratively on solutions to issues facing vulnerable children and young people, and preparing for a new era of children's services beyond the pandemic.

Influencing the Domestic Abuse Bill in England

Working with partners in the sector, we successfully convinced the Westminster Government to include children in the new legal definition of domestic abuse. With lockdowns resulting in some children being trapped in unsafe homes as reports of domestic abuse skyrocketed, this issue is now even more important. As the Bill continues its passage through the UK Parliament we are continuing to make the case for a duty on public authorities to provide community-based specialist domestic abuse services for all children, whether they live in a refuge or a family home.

Influencing mental health and wellbeing policy and practice

Across all four nations of the UK we have shared what we have learned about the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of children, and worked with partners and governments to call for the impacts to be prioritised in school curriculums, alongside child-centred guidance, and increased funding for mental health support in schools.

7. Lessons for the future: Children's Services 2.0

There are a number of crucial lessons from the pandemic that should inform how we respond to the needs of vulnerable children and young people in the future. In many cases, the crisis has exacerbated existing challenges and inequalities that risk depriving children of a positive future.

At Barnardo's we don't just want to work towards 'recovery', we want to aim for 'resurgence' – for a better system that delivers better outcomes for the next generation.

To achieve this vision of 'children's services 2.0' we believe change must be driven by four key principles.

1. Innovation

In response to the unique challenges posed by COVID-19, Barnardo's and others have innovated at speed, in particular accelerating the development of digital-first solutions. Overall however, children's services (statutory and voluntary) lag behind in digital innovation. Similarly, the children and families accessing children's services often live in 'digital poverty', and lack key infrastructure such as devices and access to data. Embracing digital-first products and services as an integral part of the health and social care system could help to increase reach, deliver swift and easy access to support, manage demand and respond to children's changing needs.

In the current context of increased need and limited resource, we cannot afford not to do this alone.

We are therefore calling on the UK Government to establish an **Innovation Fund** for charities to develop digital-first innovation. This would be administered and funded by the Government. The proposed value would be **£50-£100m**, over the first 3 years. The intellectual property from products and services developed using this Fund would be owned by the Government and shared across the sector to avoid duplication of precious resources at this uniquely challenging time.

2. Working in Partnership

Another positive development from COVID-19 has been the flourishing of partnership working and a recognition that the scale of the challenges faced are too great for any one agency alone to address. Our *See, Hear, Respond* programme has demonstrated the possibility of moving past the traditional, transactional approach to commissioning to a new approach based on co-production (in this case between Barnardo's and the DfE). It has also demonstrated how the charity sector can work differently together by forming partnerships (in our case with more than 80 large and smaller charities). This approach has allowed us to identify and support thousands of vulnerable children at risk of being 'hidden' from services, including from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities.

We are therefore calling for a 'reset' in the relationship between Government, commissioners and charities. As with innovation, in the context of growing demand and depleted resource, we simply can't afford not to do things differently.



3. Long-term thinking and investment

Transforming outcomes for vulnerable children cannot be achieved through short-term interventions. It is widely believed that early intervention is most effective, but years of short term (and reduced) funding has driven local authorities to focus resource on children who are already experiencing harm. Local authority spending on early intervention services for children and young people fell 46% in the eight years to 2018/19. To have any hope of making progress in 'levelling up', we have to change this. Recognising the time and commitment required to tackle entrenched inequality and disadvantage, Barnardo's has a 10 year strategic partnership in Leicestershire, and seven year commitments with Plymouth and Essex.

We call on the Government to move towards **longer-term investment in vital services for children and specifically to fund earlier intervention** – with a clear commitment in the next multi-year spending review.

4. Co-production with children and young people

Too often decisions that profoundly affect children and young people are made without their voice or involvement. During the COVID-19 crisis we have called for under-18s to be permitted to ask questions at Government press briefings and to make their views known directly to Ministers. The disruption to exams and uncertainty about university places in the summer highlighted the impact of the pandemic on young people who often felt powerless in decisions directly affecting their future. Co-production with children and young people not only accords respect but, we believe, would also result in better decision making. It would also help those who are too young to vote to feel like empowered citizens. For vulnerable children, including those who do not have families who can advocate for them, there is an even stronger imperative to provide opportunities for co-production. The Government has an opportunity to put this into practice with the forthcoming review of the care system.

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barnardos.org.uk

Barnardo House Tanners Lane, Barkingside,
Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG. 020 8550 8822.

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