Stronger Families, Safer Childhoods, Positive Futures: Barnardo's Scotland's vision for the next Scottish Government

> Believe in children M Barnardo's Scotland

Introduction

Barnardo's is the UK's oldest and largest children's charity, operating in Scotland since 1892. Barnardo's Scotland's services support over 16,300 children, young people and families every year, in over 140 specialised community-based services across Scotland.

We use information and experience from our services across Scotland, and from the children and young people we work with, to develop our policy positions. We seek positive change in policy and practice based on what matters to the people who use our services and what we see working in communities. We work collaboratively across all sectors and political parties to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

Our policy calls ahead of the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections reflect our priority influencing areas set within our overarching strategic aims of Stronger Families, Safer Childhoods and Positive Futures.

Stronger families

We believe children and young people should thrive with the love and support of their families. But sometimes they come up against challenges that prevent this. We support them and work with them to overcome these challenges.

End Family Poverty

Barnardo's Scotland and NSPCC Scotland collaborated on important research Challenges from the Frontline Revisited published in 2020 (following up an original 2014 study) which revealed the ongoing impact of austerity on vulnerable families. The new report demonstrates how the financial situation for many families has worsened in the last few years, resulting in severe hardship and destitution. Covid-19 has inevitably worsened the situation. We have used the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund to provide crisis support to



many families in need, but this sort of support is short-term and sporadic in nature. We believe there needs to be a more fundamental, lasting, structural change to ensure families in Scotland have enough money to allow them to thrive – not just scrape by – and live with dignity.

OUR ASK:

That political parties commit to setting out a clear vision for family income in Scotland, and articulate how – within devolved powers – they plan to ensure all families have enough money to live with choice and dignity.

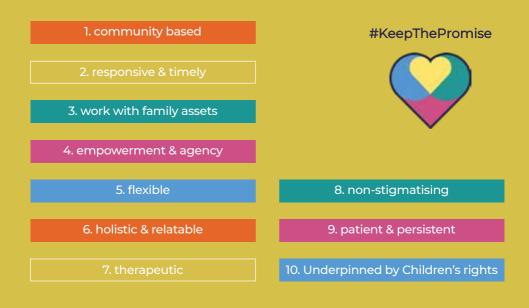
1 Source: Galloway, S (2020) Challenges from the Frontline – Revisited. Supporting families with multiple adversities in Scotland during a time of austerity. NSPCC Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland.

Improve and Enhance Family support

The Independent Care Review concluded in 2020 with the publication of **The Promise**. There was cross-party support for the principles and proposals outlined in **The Promise**, in particular the focus on strengthening Family Support services. From our extensive experience of providing family support we know that universal and specialist, nonstigmatising, holistic support can make a huge difference for a family in need.

OUR ASK:

Family support should be available as a right to all who need it, when they need it, in Scotland. We ask all parties to commit to, and set out a clear plan for, delivering intensive, proactive family support following the principles set out in The Promise.



Better mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people

Improving children's and young people's mental health and wellbeing is a priority. In many instances children and young people who experience adversities, including lookedafter children and care leavers. are disproportionately affected by poor mental health and are not receiving the services that they need. We recognise the benefit of ensuring that trauma-informed approaches are available across the broad spectrum of distress experienced by children and young people, but more especially those who also have experience of care and other adversities.

1,560

CHILDREN WAITING OVER 1 YEAR FOR SPECIALIST HELP WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS²

We want to see a system in which children and young people have their mental health needs acknowledged, recognised and responded to in the most effective, accessible and consistent way. Structural barriers to mental health support must be removed and the workforce better supported to meet the needs of all children and young people but especially those at greater risk, including looked-after children and care leavers.

OUR ASK:

We need clearly understood, consistent referral criteria and assessment processes for referrals to CAMHS, and clarification about the role, scope and remit of specialist CAMHS. Consideration should be given to the development of an alternative service to CAMHS for children experiencing distress. This service should be rooted in children's experiences and environment and take a trauma-informed approach.

2 Source: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Scotland: Waiting Times, Quarter Ending 31 December 2020

Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools: Supervision in Education

Teachers and other staff in schools are doing more now than they have ever done to support children and young people experiencing emotional distress. Education staff offer calm, consistent support and help children and young people manage their emotions. But this has an emotional impact upon staff, and it can be difficult for them to switch off.

It's essential therefore that those working in education have access to the same kinds of structured support for their mental health and wellbeing and professional development as other caring sectors, such as clinical practice, social work and the

95%

SUPPORT SUPERVISION IN **EDUCATION AS A CORE PRINCIPLE³**

third sector. We showcased the experiences of school-based staff in our report Supervision in **Education – Healthier Schools** For All in 2020. We explained that there is a growing body of research which positively correlates pupil health and educational outcomes with teacher wellbeing and competence. The better we support our school staff, the more they can do to help support and enhance children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

OUR ASK:

Building on recent commitments, local and national government and education bodies should consider the scaling up of wellbeing support, including supervision, as part of the wider commitment to improve teacher health and wellbeing.



Supervision in Education – Healthier Schools For All Barnardo's Scotland report on the use of Professional or Reflective Supervision in Education

ed schools - Paper #2

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3 Source: Lawrence, N (2020) Supervision in Education – Healthier Schools For All. Barnardo's Scotland report on the use of Professional or Reflective Supervision in Education

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Positive futures

We want young people to have the best chances in life – to achieve their full potential.

Sibling contact

Barnardo's Scotland supports many care-experienced young people in a variety of ways. We are working, individually and as part of the Stand Up for Siblings partnership, to improve experiences and outcomes for looked-after and care-experienced young people and welcome the vision of the Independent Care Review's **The Promise**.



70% OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CARE ARE SEPARATED⁴

OUR ASK:

We ask parties to commit to adequately resourcing a requirement on local authorities to accommodate siblings together or facilitate an ongoing relationship wherever possible. Siblings are among the longest and most important relationships a young person can have, and the system must not disrupt or separate siblings unnecessarily. There needs to be greater provision to nurture sibling relationships, regardless of the legal status or accommodation of children and young people.

4 Source: Ashley A, Braun D (2019) The highs and lows of kinship care: analysis of a comprehensive survey of kinship carers 2019. Family Rights Group

Continuing Care

The Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act 2014 introduced an entitlement for Continuing Care up to age 21. Having been involved in the development of this legislation, and as a provider of services to those transitioning out of care, we are aware of the challenges in implementation. These include the need for cultural change, the lack of available evidence, challenges in resourcing young people's rights, and the need to bring other areas of policy and practice in line with the new legislation.

OUR ASK:

as members of the Scottish **Care Leavers Covenant** Alliance, we are calling for <u>Scotland's corporate</u> parents to deliver the actions contained in the Alliance's 2020 Collaborative Voice briefing, spanning Digital Inclusion, Housing and Accommodation, Care-Experienced Students, Mental Health, and Relationship-**Based Practice**. This will help to close the gap between policy intentions and consistent practice.



Mental Health Assessments: care experienced children and young people

Our Care in Mind reports on Rejected Referrals to CAMHS, and **Health Assessments for Lookedafter Children** drew attention to the particular mental health needs of looked-after children and care leavers. Care experienced young people are more likely to have experienced early adversity including neglect, abuse and loss. A trauma-informed response is therefore necessary. The needs of care-experienced young people

+25%

DF CHILDRENS' MENTAL HEALTH REFERRALS ARE REJECETD⁵

must be considered in the design of all mental health provision, but our work also uncovered missed opportunities for mental health to be considered by Health Boards and in Child's Plans.

OUR ASK:

Implement our blueprint in Care In Mind: Health Assessments for Looked-after Children about improving mental health outcomes for care-experienced young people by carrying out health assessments more consistently, improving NHS and Scottish Government guidance and data collection.



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Care In Mind Paper 2 Health Assessments for Looked-after Children

5 Source: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Scotland: Waiting Times, Quarter Ending 31 December 2020

Safer childhoods

Barnardo's started working with children in Scotland affected by child sexual abuse (CSA) and child sexual exploitation (CSE; a form of CSA) in 1992. Through this work, we have developed an understanding of the impact these experiences have on children and young people affected by this.

CSE and the Children's Hearings system

Barnardo's Scotland and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) carried out joint research on CSE in 2020. This was the first national study of its kind in Scotland, and the first to consider the vulnerabilities to

WE IDENTIFIED CSE CASES IN
27/32
OF SCOTLAND'S LOCAL
AITHODITIES

sexual exploitation experienced by both girls and boys. The research was accompanied by a Barnardo's Scotland report **Sexual Exploitation of Children Involved in the Children's Hearings System** which proposes changes to policy and practice throughout the systems and services that children may come into contact with.

OUR ASK:

That Barnardo's Scotland's recommendations are taken forward as a priority, to deliver better protection and services for some of Scotland's most vulnerable children and young people.

6 Source: Kirkman, N (2020) Policy Report: Sexual exploitation of children involved in the Children's Hearings System. Barnardo's Scotland

CSE Scale and Nature Research

Effective local services must be built on good evidence of the scale and nature of the problem. As yet, there has been no Scotland-specific research into the prevalence of CSE or the type of abuse that children are experiencing, although the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse recently conducted such research in England and Wales. This is a key recommendation in our 2020 policy report.

OUR ASK:

That the new Scottish Government commits to funding Scotland-specific research into the scale and nature of CSE, and to support researchers by facilitating multi-agency co-operation in its delivery.

Next Steps

We look forward to engaging with all political parties on the issues outlined here and welcome further discussion on how the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament can play a role in securing stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures for all Scotland's children and young people.

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