

# It takes a village: investing in support for families

Parliamentary briefing



## Summary

- Children and families are often reaching **crisis point** before being able to access support.
- Barnardo's believes that effective family support services can achieve meaningful improvements in children and family's outcomes, as well as **reduce the need for more extreme interventions**, including the need for care proceedings, saving costs to the state in the longer term.
- A new [report](#) by Barnardo's found that **for every £1 invested** in our intensive family support service on the Isle of Wight, the **saving in costs to the state is approximately £2.60**.
- A key test for the Government's 'levelling-up' agenda must be whether it **improves to outcomes for children and families**.
- That is why Barnardo's is calling on the Government to **use the Comprehensive Spending Review to invest in family support** by ensuring a family hub, providing hybrid support in-person and online, is available in every community.

## 1. The false economy in children's services

A recent report by Pro Bono Economics, on behalf of the leading children's charities including Barnardo's, found that **spending on children's social care has reduced by £325 million annually** between 2010-11 and 2019-20.<sup>1</sup> Over the same period, spending on children who have already experienced harm (late intervention) increased by **34%**.<sup>2</sup> As a result, local authority children's services overspent by over £800m in 2019/20, just to keep children safe.

Between 2010-11 and 2019-20 **spending in early intervention**<sup>3</sup> such as children's centres and family hubs has decreased by almost half - **48%**, and families have been left to reach crisis point before being able to access support. This is a false economy and creates a vicious cycle for local authorities, incurring higher costs of intervention in the process.

The UK Government has committed to review the children's social care system in England. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England, led by Josh MacAlister, highlights in its *Case for Change* report that "*it is getting **harder to meet children's needs within the current system** and if we don't take urgent action to prevent this, costs will continue to rise and the situation for children will deteriorate*".<sup>4</sup> Whilst there is "*innovative practice by local areas...with family hubs being a notable example*" there is "**significant variation in what families are offered**".<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP's Early Years Healthy Development Review calls for family hubs to be championed as a place where parents and carers can access Start for Life services. It recommends the National Centre for Family Hubs works alongside Government departments and others to promote the inclusion of family hubs and identify practical steps to reduce the stigma some families feel asking for help.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Children and young people's services: Spending 2010-11 to 2019-20](#), pg 5.

<sup>2</sup> [Children and young people's services: Spending 2010-11 to 2019-20](#), pg 7.

<sup>3</sup> [Children and young people's services: Spending 2010-11 to 2019-20](#), pg 7.

<sup>4</sup> Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2021. [The Case for Change](#), Pg 10.

<sup>5</sup> Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2021. [The Case for Change](#), Pg 35.

<sup>6</sup> The Early Years Healthy Development Review, 2021. [The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days](#), Pages 63-80.

There is an urgent need to ensure families can access the right support at the right time – supporting babies and infants to get the best start in life and helping families whenever they are struggling. A growing number of children are entering the care system every year in England and evidence shows that entry into care is strongly associated with a range of underlying problems. We know from our programmes that good quality family support can achieve measurable improvements in outcomes in those problems most associated with entry into the care system, including domestic abuse and parental mental health. Helping families address these challenges early will likely reduce the number of children entering care.

## **2. The economic case for investing in family support to provide the right support at the right time**

Our experience of delivering family support through 62 children's centres and family hubs in communities across the country gives us valuable insight into how to work with vulnerable families effectively - find out if we have [services in your constituency](#). Barnardo's believes that effective family support services can achieve meaningful improvements in children and family's outcomes, as well as reduce the need for more extreme interventions, including the need for care proceedings, saving costs to the state in the longer term.

Analysis from our intensive family support service on the Isle of Wight, we have estimated that for **every £1 invested in the service, the saving in costs to the state is approximately £2.60**. Based on the number of families the service supported last year, the service has saved **approximately £1 million per annum to the state**. Through a dedicated key worker this service provides holistic, integrated, and often year-long interventions for families with multiple and complex issues to improve their outcomes, avoiding more costly later interventions.

### **Case study**

A mother called Anna reached out to a Barnardo's practitioner. She explained that she was having a challenging time following a recent break up and having trouble with her daughter's dad around arranging contact. Anna was finding living alone with her young child isolating and lonely. Anna was experiencing anxiety and not eating properly due to an eating disorder. It was identified that Anna needed support in several areas. Barnardo's family hub was able to support Anna through:

- A parental emotional well-being package of support.
- Signposting Anna to mediation enabling a place for contact between the child and their father.
- Referral to the wellbeing team enabling Anna to get support with anxiety and her eating disorder.
- Referral to the Salvation Army to access food parcels alongside nappies and wipes from the family centre as well as advice on budgeting.

### **Parliamentary questions:**

1. To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding a multi-year investment for family hubs in every community in the upcoming Spending Review?
2. To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps his Department has taken to introduce a national framework for delivering family hubs in every community?
3. To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his Department has made of the long-term cost-benefit of investing in early years intervention in children's services?

4. To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to Barnardo's *It Takes a Village* report, what assessment his Department has made regarding multi-year investment for family hubs in the upcoming spending review?
5. To ask the Prime Minister, with reference to Barnardo's *It Takes a Village* report, whether he supports multi-year funding for family hubs in every community in the upcoming Spending Review?

### **About Barnardo's**

Barnardo's is the UK largest national children's charity. In 2020/21, we supported 382,872 children, young people, parents, and carers through more than 791 services and partnerships. This includes supporting around 160,000 children, young people, parents and carers through 62 children's centres and family hubs which provide a range of universal and targeted support including nursery and childcare services, wrap around care, parenting programmes, and play services. During the pandemic, we launched [Barnardo's Family Space](#), a digital service for parents looking for information and advice from the importance of cuddles and playing together, to how parents can look after their own mental health.

For more information contact Ceri Finnegan, Policy and Public Affairs Lead,  
[ceri.finnegan@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:ceri.finnegan@barnardos.org.uk)