

**Health & Sport Committee inquiry
Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People**

Response from Barnardo's Scotland – December 2021

About Barnardo's Scotland

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity operating in Scotland since 1892. Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 16,300 children, young people and families in over 150 services. We deliver a wide range of services which includes providing family support and early intervention, supporting children, young people and families through fostering and adoption services, helping children affected by sexual abuse and exploitation, helping young people entering employment, education and training, and supporting young people and families affected by drug and alcohol use.

We use information and experience from our services across Scotland, and from the children and young people we work with, to 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.

What are the key issues around health and wellbeing for children and young people in Scotland

Barnardo's works in over 400 schools across Scotland. We surveyed our school-based staff to find out the challenges affecting young people to understand their emerging needs as they transitioned back into education. We found of the Barnardo's school-based staff who responded:

- **76% identified poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes as the greatest concern facing children and young people** who had returned to full-time education in August, following Covid-19 lockdowns.
- 94% agreed that children and young people have more worries now than compared with pre-pandemic.
- 77% agreed that children and young people were anxious about the need to 'catch up' on missed schooling.¹

The social isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be a source of concern to Barnardo's Scotland schools-based staff working with children and young people as they attempt to adjust to a 'new normal'.

We are also concerned about the impact of social media pressure and access to harmful online content. Barnardo's is calling on the UK Government to include additional protections for

¹ [Barnardo's Scotland: Snapshot report into issues facing children and young people returning to school after Covid-19 lockdowns](#)

children in the forthcoming Online Safety Bill². As the draft Bill currently stands, it does not go far enough to protect children from online harm. We believe it must also include age verification measures for all sites containing pornographic material. Viewing pornography – often extreme and violent – distorts children’s understanding of healthy relationships and can normalise abusive sexual behaviour and have a corrosive effect on what children view as healthy relationships.

What are the current challenges with improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next 5 years

Lack of access to early support is the key challenge to improving health and wellbeing of children and young people, based on experiences from Barnardo’s services.

Recent statistics revealed that pressure on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and the need for support after the pandemic, has never been greater, with 1,686 children waiting over a year for support in June 2021 – double the figure from the previous year.³

Barnardo’s believes in intervening early to prevent developmental trauma and childhood adversity, and the subsequent negative impacts, which are closely linked to the emergence of mental health and wellbeing needs later in life. Our work is underpinned by trauma-informed practice, supporting children and young people to process and recover from traumatic life experiences, reduce functional and behavioural difficulties, and build the skills and resilience needed to achieve their full potential.

Investment in CAMHS to reduce waiting lists must be supported with renewed focus on early intervention and adequate resources to provide wraparound support that promotes wellbeing at the earliest stages.

Barnardo’s Scotland has several services which support children in and leaving care, and we know from our experience that care experienced young people also experience the greatest challenges regarding positive health and wellbeing outcomes. Our ‘Care in Mind’ research papers published in 2019⁴ and 2020⁵ outlined the key issues faced by care experienced young people when trying to access healthcare – particularly mental health support. Progress has been interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and with such an increased pressure on CAMHS, this group of care-experienced young people are likely to continue to face significant challenges in accessing the appropriate support in future.

² <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/barnardos-survey-reveals-harm-done-children-harmful-pornography-culture-sec-must>

³ <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/homenews/19564883.child-mental-health-pandemic-concern-scotlands-waiting-lists-soar/>

⁴ [Barnardo’s Scotland Care in Mind report](#)

⁵ [Barnardo’s Scotland Care In Mind report 2](#)

What offers the best opportunity for improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next 5 years

In 2022 the Scottish Government has committed to refresh the Mental Health Strategy. It is essential that as part of this strategy the Scottish Government:

- Invests in family support services to encourage prevention and early identification of health and wellbeing issues children and their families are facing. Barnardo's Scotland believes that the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund must be used as a mechanism to provide equity of access to family support across Scotland, and that this is key to delivering The Promise.
- Prioritises vulnerable children, including better access to health services for children in and leaving care.
- Ensures that there is cross-departmental working between education and health to ensure wellbeing and healthy relationships is at the heart of the curriculum and that schools adopt a holistic, trauma-informed approaches to supporting children and families.⁶

How does addressing poverty lead to improved health and social care outcomes?

To highlight how addressing poverty leads to improved health and social care outcomes, we need to first understand the significant impact that poverty has on mental health.

Barnardo's Scotland 'Challenges from the Frontline Revisited'⁷ joint report with the NSPCC highlighted the impact of austerity on families in Scotland, with escalating need from an increasing number of families with complex challenges. The pandemic has only increased this level of need, with poverty being a core issue.

Even pre-pandemic, our services reported an increase in families experiencing destitution, which has a significant impact on parental mental health and family relationships, as well as leading to social isolation and exclusion.

Children's experiences of destitution were very apparent to Barnardo's Service Managers as part of our 2020 research. Below are just some of the comments they reported on the impact of poverty on families:

"...children not having enough food to eat. A lot of children talking about being hungry and on a regular basis. So, particular concerns around school holidays. We have families who often won't open the door to us at school holidays and I think that's because they don't want us to have access to children so we find out what is going on..."

"So, head lice, scabies, that's significant. And some of that is about children picking it up in school but it's also about you know, maybe the headlice will have been treated but the bedding won't have been washed. Maybe they've not got a washing machine, or they can't afford to go down to the launderette, or they've not got spare bedding. So that's significant, we have that on a regular basis."

"Mental health difficulties seem entrenched within the lives of a lot of young people [parents] that we're working with...the number of young people we're working with"

⁶ [Barnardo's Scotland approach to closing the attainment gap](#)

⁷ Barnardo's & NSPCC, 2020. [Challenges from the Frontline Revisited](#).

who are taking medication for mental health issues, I don't like to say all of them, I'd say 90-95% of young men that we have coming through the service have significant mental health issues. I don't remember it, certainly, 15 years ago here, 10 years ago. Don't remember it being as significant. Maybe it is we're talking about it more, but the numbers are worryingly high. And there is something there about the whole external environment and its impact on individuals. Not seeing the chance of anything getting better."

"I just think the whole 'wearing folk down' business, I think that's all underestimated, that gap between the have and have nots is getting bigger, and this perception of having an underclass, two different groups, and we're not helping people get to a place where there's hope."

Our research clearly shows the effect of poverty on creating poor health and wellbeing outcomes. Barnardo's Scotland welcome the Government's announcement to increase the Scottish Child Payment to £20 from April 2022. Reducing poverty and increasing family incomes will help improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people by removing the pressure that lack of income puts on family relationships.