

Debate – Cost of living crisis – the effect on schools and children

MS Briefing – March 2022



Key messages

- Increased stress and tension around family finances has significant consequences for children and young people, who are facing more mental health challenges as a result.
- The cost-of-living crisis is having a significant impact upon families across Wales, with more and more families that Barnardo's Cymru supports facing hardship, being on the edge of, or living in poverty.
- In the most recent UK-wide Barnardo's Practitioner Survey, published in March 2022, 68% of respondents said that the top issue that they were concerned about was lack of support and resources, 59% cited mental health and wellbeing issues.
- 59% of practitioners have given a child or young person that they work with food because they were worried that the child was hungry or had nothing to eat. 43% have given a service user clothes because they thought that the young person was cold or did not have suitable clothing to wear.

How is Barnardo's Cymru supporting families in Wales?

[Anglesey-based Golau](#) is a mental health service for children and young people aged 8–18 which supports young people with issues related to mental health or emotional distress. The service is community-based and operates in a trauma-informed, child-centred way.

[Cardiff Family Wellbeing Service](#) offers a range of interventions to a child or young person, but also to their whole family where this is appropriate. This can involve working with the family in a group or offering tailored interventions to different family members. This helps tackle both the

challenges facing the young person, whilst also addressing the environment that the young person lives in.

[Beyond the Blue, Neath Port Talbot](#), provides a range of therapeutic interventions and counselling to children; young people aged 5 to 25 years as well as their parents on an individual, group and family basis.

The service will also provide support specific to loss, as in bereavement, parental separation, or parental imprisonment. The aim of the service is to improve the emotional health, wellbeing and resilience of individuals and enable them to better cope with the stresses and difficulties they may face.

Barnardo's Cymru priorities for Welsh Government:

1. Invest in mental health support for the whole family

The cost-of-living crisis is having a demonstrable impact on the whole family – with children and young people facing significant consequences.

Parents/carers who are facing financial challenges and uncertainty are parenting whilst carrying a huge burden, and children can pick up on this – whether parents/carers discuss these issues in front of children or not.

Providing a range of evidence-based, therapeutic support options to the whole family, we can tackle issues more holistically, and help the whole family recover and make changes that can prevent recurrence.

2. Expand free school meals to universal provision

Welsh Government recently took the welcome step of committing to free school meals for all primary-aged pupils, as part of the Cooperation Agreement with Plaid Cymru. Whilst this will be an important move for many Welsh families, that are still thousands of young people attending secondary schools who will be ineligible. Barnardo's Cymru calls on Welsh Government to further extend provision and ensure that all school-aged children can benefit from a free, guaranteed meal.

3. Reduce the costs of school travel for vulnerable young people

For certain groups of young people, travelling to school or college is more of a barrier than others. A group of young carers told Barnardo's that the only financial support they receive as young carers is their Educational Maintenance Allowance for attending college, but that £21 out of the £30 allowance is taken up by travel to college. Furthermore, when a young carer misses time in college due to their caring responsibilities, they are still penalised through their EMA. Barnardo's calls on Welsh Government to investigate free public transport for young people heading to and from education, and to remove penalisations that currently exist for young carers through the EMA scheme.

4. Introduce a specific fund aimed at providing training on evidence-based approaches to dealing with inter-parental conflict for children's sector social care staff and the voluntary sector, including approaches to support children and parents.

5. Continue to prioritise early intervention

For many children and young people, early intervention is key. This means ensuring that services providing mental and emotional wellbeing support are widely available, work within the community and offer a range of evidence-based interventions. Our services above are examples of how these operate in tackling mental health issues at the earliest possible point.

6. The Educational Inequalities Review and subsequent strategy must take a holistic approach to the challenges facing children and young people, including their mental health, family situation, and whether they are growing up in deprivation.

About Barnardo's Cymru

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 working in the country. We provide more than 60 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with local authorities. Last year we worked with over 10,000 children, young people, and family members.

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