

Key Points

- We welcome the opportunity that this debate provides to ensure that mental health and wellbeing of children and young people remains top of the agenda for the current Scottish Parliament.
- Barnardo's Scotland provided [written](#) and oral evidence to the committee's inquiry and a group of young people from Barnardo's family support service in Inverclyde gave their views directly to MSPs.
- We are pleased to see many of our points relating to early intervention, care experienced young people, whole family support and poverty reflected in the committee's [wide-ranging report](#) and urge the Scottish Government to set out how and when it plans to respond to the committee's recommendations.

Early intervention and CAMHS waiting lists

Barnardo's Scotland is concerned about the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the wellbeing of Scotland's young people, not only because of lost learning and social development due to isolation but also due to the ongoing impact which lockdowns have had on the NHS and on CAMHS waiting times.

74 per cent of Barnardo's Scotland school-based staff reported that poor mental health outcomes are the biggest concern facing Scotland's young people today¹.

Long waiting times for CAMHS was a problem long before Covid-19 first emerged in 2020, and Barnardo's Scotland has been campaigning for years for better investment in early intervention.

Progress has remained too slow, with the most recent figures showing an increase in referrals to CAMHS of 22 per cent in the last year.

The increasing pressure on CAMHS only strengthens the case for making early intervention a top priority. We know that not all children and young people with mental health difficulties will need a specialist CAMHS service. If the right support and joined-up referral pathways are in place for these children, then the dedicated staff within CAMHS will have more capacity to work with those children who really need, and are able to benefit from, specialist support.

That's why Barnardo's wants to see increased access to early intervention and provision of support services. We also want young people who have already been referred to CAMHS and are awaiting treatment to have access to ongoing support.

We hope that the committee's inquiry can lead to renewed effort to bring about the cross-sectoral action needed to improve mental health and wellbeing for Scotland's young people.

¹ [Barnardo's Scotland – A new normal: snapshot report on the needs of children and young people since full-time return to education in August 2021](#)

Care experienced young people

We are pleased to see recognition of the needs of care-experienced young people in the committee's report.

Barnardo's Scotland gave evidence to the committee's inquiry on our 'Care in Mind' research papers published in 2019² and 2020³ which outlined the key issues faced by care experienced young people when trying to access healthcare – particularly mental health support.

We urge the Scottish Government to pay particular attention to the recommendations of the committee's report in relation to improving mental health support for care-experienced young people, especially on 'its work to improve data gathering related to the health and wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people to support improved measurement and evaluation of the impact of The Promise'.

Whole family support

Barnardo's Scotland view is that the provision of holistic family support through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund is crucial to the overall improvement of wellbeing of Scotland's children and young people.

We therefore particularly welcome the recommendations on page 61 of the committee's report which *'calls on the Scottish Government to accelerate progress towards developing and delivering an action plan to use the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to prioritise making whole family support services more widely and sustainably available across the country'* and *'to set out what it plans to do to properly evaluate the impact of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and to measure the success of specific interventions'*.

Impact of poverty

It is welcome that the report recognises the impact which poverty has on poor mental health outcomes.

As part of Barnardo's Scotland evidence to the inquiry, we highlighted lessons learned from our joint report with the NSPCC, 'Challenges from the Frontline: Revisited'⁴. The report demonstrates the impact of austerity on families in Scotland, with escalating need from an increasing number of families with complex challenges.

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.

The pandemic has only increased this level of need, with poverty being a core issue.

² [Care in Mind 1](#)

³ [Care in Mind 2](#)

⁴ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/challenges-frontline-revisited-report-reveals-impact-years-austerity-vulnerable-families>

Role of schools

Schools are the key universal service for children and young people and have a crucial role to play in improving mental health and wellbeing – we welcome the recognition of this important role within the committee’s report.

Barnardo’s Scotland collaboration with Public Health Scotland [*‘It’s All About Relationships: Embedding relational, trauma sensitive approaches in education settings’*](#) highlights practical examples and tips that education staff can build into their everyday practice to support positive relationships with young people.

[Barnardo’s Education Community](#) also provides access to online trauma informed resources for professionals in education settings - these resources focus on loss, grief and bereavement to support children and young people.

About Barnardo’s

Barnardo’s is the UK’s largest national children’s charity. Barnardo’s Scotland works with thousands of children, young people and families in over 100 specialised community-based services. Our work includes supporting children, young people and families through fostering and adoption services, child sexual abuse and exploitation services, support for young carers, young people entering employment, education and training, and families living in poverty.

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.

For more information contact Kirsty-Louise Hunt, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Lead on 07842634357 or at kirstylouise.hunt@barnardos.org.uk