

Response from Barnardo's Scotland to the Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services: call for evidence

Submitted 1 August 2022

Barnardo's is the UK's leading national children's charity. Barnardo's Scotland works with thousands of children, young people and families every year, delivering a wide range of support across over 100 services. 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.

We have answered only the specific questions where we have relevant expertise and where we believe we can add value to the consideration of the Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services call for evidence from the perspective of Barnardo's Scotland.

Question 1

What do you consider to be the main function or purpose of services challenging violence against women^[1] and girls (VAWG)^[2]?

Comment

Question 2

What services^[3] should be available for women experiencing any form of VAWG? Please provide any examples of good practice you may have.

Comment

Question 3

What services^[4] should be available for children and young people^[5] experiencing any form of VAWG? Please provide any examples of good practice you may have.

Comment

Children and young people experiencing any form of VAWG should have access to specialist support. Barnardo's Scotland supports children and families across a range of different areas, and we have a select number of services which are specifically focused on tackling gender-based violence and domestic abuse.

Some examples of work include our involvement in 'Equally Safe Falkirk' which is a partnership between Barnardo's, Aberlour and Falkirk Council. Together we provide early intervention and preventative support to reduce instances and the impact of domestic abuse within families. We do this by partnering with survivors and, where relevant, working with those who have caused harm to improve family functioning; supporting families to develop a plan and strategies to stay safe, and

together, if appropriate; supporting changes in attitude and practice around domestic abuse through provision of Safe and Together training for professionals and partner agencies.

Barnardo's Scotland also operates a child and family support service in Dundee which works with women and children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse. The service works in partnership with Police Scotland and operates out of Police premises within each Police Scotland division within Tayside: Dundee (Central), Angus (Eastern), Perth (Western). The work includes providing information, empowerment, and support to victims of domestic abuse and their children, information to assist planning for children who have experienced domestic abuse and consultation and training to other professionals around domestic abuse issues.

In addition to access to specialist or therapeutic support, it is our view that high quality prevention services should also be available to young people who have experienced domestic abuse. Peer support projects such as [Mentors in Violence Prevention](#) and other services which work with children and young people who might be at risk or who have experienced domestic abuse in their own intimate partner relationships can help ensure young people understand what an abusive relationship looks like.

Barnardo's is currently engaging with the Scottish Government across a range of issues, including on its policy proposals for a Children's Care and Justice Bill. We therefore believe there is also an opportunity for the strategic review to consider how this call for evidence fits with the wider aims of the Scottish Government to move towards preventative spend.

Question 4.1

What role should third sector organisations play in the provision of specialist services to women, children and young people experiencing VAWG?

Third sector organisations can play a partner role to statutory services by providing support to women, children and young people who are experiencing or have experienced violence, but we also have a significant role to play in early intervention and prevention.

In Barnardo's we do this through our provision of holistic family support services and supporting children and young people.

As the leading children's charity in the UK, Barnardo's aims to improve the lives of children and young people experiencing violence by campaigning for action to improve early intervention and prevention. For example, Barnardo's Scotland works in 400 schools across Scotland, working with education to provide holistic support. The third sector has a huge contribution to make regarding engaging children and young people and shaping positive attitudes about relationships.

Schools must be supported to improve their understanding of peer-on-peer abuse, how to change the culture of misogyny in schools and better support both victims and those exhibiting harmful behaviours.

Barnardo's has also been taking a leading role in campaigning to improve the Online Safety Bill by ensuring the UK Government swiftly introduces age verification for online pornography and introduces regulation of online pornographic content to ensure it meets the same criteria as pornography sold offline on DVD and BluRay.

Question 4.2

What role should local authorities play in the provision of services to women, children and young people experiencing VAWG?

Question 4.3

What role should the Scottish Government play in the provision of services to women, children and young people experiencing VAWG?

Annual funding cycles and lack of longer-term certainty provides challenges for supporting children and families who need consistent help. The Scottish Government can help improve services for women, children and young people affected by violence by taking action in partnership with local authorities and other funders to ensure that third sector partners are given more secure, multi-year and long-term funding to ensure those who need our services are guaranteed consistent support.

Question 4.4

What role should the NHS play in the provision of services to women, children and young people experiencing VAWG?

Question 4.5

What role should Police Scotland play in the provision of services for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG?

Question 4.6

Are there any other organisations that should provide services for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Question 4.7

If yes, which organisations? Please explain your answer.

Question 5.1

Should access to services for those experiencing VAWG be a right in law for any woman who needs them e.g. like child/adult protection?

Yes
No
Don't know

Question 5.2

Please give reasons for your answer

Question 6.1

Should access to services for those experiencing VAWG be a right in law for any child or young person who needs them e.g. like child/adult protection?

Yes
No
Don't know X

As a UK-wide organisation, Barnardo's also carries out campaigning activity aimed at the UK Government. Our recent activity on the proposed Victims' Bill may be of useful consideration to the strategic review in Scotland regarding providing legal rights to access services.

Barnardo's has been calling for changes to the UK Parliament Victims' Bill as a unique opportunity to bring the commissioning landscape together under a statutory duty on public bodies to provide specialist support for all victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse.

Children are too often 'hidden victims' of domestic abuse, which has devastating effects on their wellbeing (mental and physical), social, and educational outcomes. There is evidence from research into children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, including domestic abuse, that shows they are more likely to become a victim of abuse in adulthood. While not every child will grow up adversely affected by their experiences, a significant number will be conditioned by the behaviours they have seen within adult relationships which can make it difficult for them to recognise abusive behaviour.

Barnardo's welcomed the UK Government's amendment to the Domestic Abuse Act in July 2020 to recognise children under the age of 18 as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. It is an important step forward in ensuring that children are seen as victims and the impact it has on their lives is recognised by professionals. However, our view is that without a duty on local areas to provide community-based support, only a limited number of child victims of domestic abuse will be able to access the support they need.

With regards to question 6.1 in this call for evidence, the review may want to consider how a legal requirement on statutory bodies to provide services might provide a better alternative to ensure services are consistently available rather than conferring rights on individuals to access services.

Question 6.2

Please give reasons for your answer.

Question 7

How can barriers^[6] to services for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG be removed across Scotland?

Comment

A lack of awareness of the issues around violence against women and girls can often be a huge barrier in accessing support services.

Barnardo's Scotland provides a range of services aimed at tackling and preventing child sexual exploitation and trafficking, but lack of awareness of these issues can lead to a lack of identification.

Whilst we have strong legislation in Scotland on a range of issues from trafficking offences to recognising coercive control as an offence in the Domestic Abuse Act, which is hugely positive, improvement can still be made on raising national awareness, as well as ensuring that all multi-agency partners receive specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence cultural change trainingsuch as DA Matters: :[https://safelives.org.uk/DA Matters Scotland](https://safelives.org.uk/DA_Matters_Scotland)

Question 8

How can a consistent quality of services for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG be ensured across Scotland? Please include examples/ideas/minimum standards you are aware of.

Comment

Question 9.1

Should services and providers for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG be based on need in their local area?

Yes

No

Don't know

Question 9.2

Please give reasons for your answer.

Question 10.1

Should services and providers for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG be the same in every local area?

Yes

No

Don't know

Question 10.2

Please give reasons for your answer.

Question 11

What action should be taken to ensure unmet need is met and regional disparities are addressed?

Comment

Question 12

How can women, children and young people who have experienced VAWG be meaningfully included in the co-design/evaluation of services? Please provide examples of good practice.

Comment

Improving how we listen to children and young people and act upon what they tell us about the services we provide is a key focus for Barnardo's Scotland.

We believe that the foundations established by The Promise and the focus on 'Voice' could and should be critical here for considering how we better design public services for children and young people in Scotland - including services for children and young people who have experienced violence.

Question 13.1

For services receiving funding, what would be the optimum length of funding period to ensure they are able to continue to provide services effectively for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG?

Response options (choose one):

- 3 years
- 5 years x
- 10 years

Other [write in box]

Question 13.2

Please give reasons for your answer.

In order to provide effective services, long-term funding is crucial and well documented. This is also closely linked to the premise of co-design in question 12 – appropriate co-design can only be successful where there is certainty about the permanency of the services being provided as co-design of a service which may lose funding and cease to exist within 12 months despite ongoing demand is no use to women and children in need of support.

Question 14

Should funding application processes remain 'lighter touch' as was the case at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, or revert to a higher level of scrutiny as previously?

Comment

We support efforts to make funding application processes as accessible as possible. Whilst we understand the need for scrutiny of public funds, we must work to find a better balance for meeting public need and providing stability for vital third sector services which can often be victim to short-term and resource intensive funding cycles.

Question 15

What is the single most important thing that can be done to reduce/mitigate the impact of VAWG?

Comment

We need to see a focus on perpetrators and prevention, by enabling specialist programmes to support them to change their behaviour.

We also need a much wider focus on prevention to ensure children and young people understand the signs of an unhealthy relationship and have services they can reach out to if they are affected by domestic violence.

Question 16

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Comment