



# BARNARDO'S GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO

A guide to how the next UK  
Government can change  
childhoods and change lives

March 2024



Changing childhoods.  
Changing lives.

# Foreword

The next Government must focus on changing childhoods and changing lives, particularly in the wake of unprecedented challenges that the UK has grappled with in recent years, where the impact has been especially acute for children and young people. The disruption from Covid meant that children missed months of school, and many worried about their families' health and financial security.



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The lingering repercussions are evident in the alarmingly high rates of persistent school absence – with a staggering 1.8 million children, or one in five regularly missing from the classroom.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis has left thousands of families facing agonising choices between paying essential bills to heat their homes or buying basic necessities like food. Adding to the complexity, research suggests some one in five children and young people are likely to have a diagnosable mental health condition.<sup>2</sup>

**As a society, we can and must do so much better for our children and young people. We all have a part to play – together with the Government of the day – to ensure that all children growing up in the UK are safe, happy, healthy and hopeful.**

**As we approach the General Election, which is likely to take place in 2024, this is a very real opportunity for political parties to seize the moment and commit to pioneering a step-change for the nation's children and young people.**

**At Barnardo's we have set out our own manifesto with commitments we would urge all political parties to adopt. Our proposals set out the practical action needed to:**

- End child poverty
- Support families to give their children the best possible life chances
- Keep children safe from harm
- Support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing
- Transform the support and opportunities for children in and leaving care
- Ensure all unaccompanied children have access to support, services and protection

Behind each of these policy ideas, we have set out what the evidence tells us.

Time and again we see how taking action at the earliest possible stage can mitigate the need for future, much more costly acute interventions. Waiting for children to reach crisis point is costly, not only to children, families and our society, but also for the state.

Our solutions are based on the views and experiences of children and young people, and reflections from the frontline workers who support them.

And underpinning our manifesto 'asks' is a vital and fundamental principle that children and young people need to be at the very heart of the next Government. All too often the needs of children and young people have been overlooked or considered only as an after-thought by policy makers.

**Now is the time to change that, so that decisions made today reflect the views, concerns, and needs of the citizens and voters of tomorrow.**

Barnardo's is proud to also be joining forces with Action for Children, the National Children's Bureau, NSPCC and The Children's Society as the *Children's Charities Coalition*<sup>3</sup> to urge the political parties and the next Government to commit to prioritising children and young people. To transform children's lives we must transform the policy and decision-making that can bring this about.

Let this election campaign be a turning point, a commitment to safeguarding, supporting, and empowering future generations. The time is now, and the challenge is clear – let us rise to it together with the full commitment from political parties to ensuring that every child in the UK is granted the safety, happiness, health, and hope they rightfully deserve.

**Lynn Perry MBE**  
CEO, Barnardo's

## 1 Put children and young people at the heart of the next Government by:



- Committing to an ambitious cross-Government strategy and outcomes framework to drive improvements for babies, children and young people.
- Introducing a new approach to decision-making that places children's needs, wishes and outcomes at its heart, involving children and young people every step of the way.
- Investing more of our national wealth in improving the lives of babies, children and young people and spending strategically on early intervention and prevention.

[www.childrenatthetable.org.uk](http://www.childrenatthetable.org.uk)

Children  
at the Table

## 2 End child poverty by:



- Making free school meals available to all primary school children.
- Ending the two-child limit, or 'sibling penalty' on benefits.
- Introducing an Essentials Guarantee in Universal Credit.

## 3 Support families to give their children the best possible life chances by:



- Creating a family centre in every community.

## 4 Keep children safe from harm by:



- Giving child victims the right to access support services and introducing a statutory definition of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE).
- Tackling existing and emerging online harms including through regulating online pornography in the same way as it is offline.

## 5 Support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing by:



- Ensuring access to mental health and wellbeing support in every school and college.
- Establishing a national strategy for social prescribing for children and young people.

## 6 Transform support and opportunities for children in and leaving care by:



- Improving children's social care by committing to a fully-funded, legislative reform programme with a particular focus on ensuring families can access the support they need earlier.
- Creating a statutory offer of support for care leavers including access to free bus travel and rent guarantor and deposit schemes in every local authority.

## 7 Ensure all unaccompanied children seeking sanctuary have access to support, services and protections by:



- Developing a strategic plan for welcoming all displaced children.
- Making specialist foster care available to all unaccompanied children seeking sanctuary in the UK.

To find out more, read our full manifesto available at [www.barnardos.org.uk/manifesto](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/manifesto) or contact Barnardo's Policy and Public Affairs Team [public.affairs@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:public.affairs@barnardos.org.uk)



# Putting children and young people at the heart of the next Government

It is unacceptable that right now, across the UK, too many children are not safe, healthy, happy and do not have equal access to opportunities.

Whatever the outcome of the upcoming General Election, a Government with a new mandate presents a vital opportunity to prioritise babies, children and young people.

That is why Action for Children, Barnardo's, the National Children's Bureau, NSPCC and The Children's Society have come together as five of the leading children's charities, to call for children to be 'at the table'.

We are urging the next UK Government to put babies, children and young people at the heart of Government policy making, backed by a step-change in investment to transform childhoods across the UK.

We must reverse the unacceptable trends we see in increasing child poverty, poor health and mental health and more children requiring support from children's social care. With the right policy interventions, investment and prioritisation, many more children can have the chance to thrive. We are therefore calling for political parties and the next Government to:

- Commit to an **ambitious cross-Government strategy** and outcomes framework to drive improvements for babies, children and young people.
- Pioneer a **new approach to decision-making that places children's needs, wishes and outcomes at its heart**, involving children and young people every step of the way.
- **Invest more of our national wealth in improving the lives of babies, children and young people** and spending strategically on early intervention and prevention.

With coordinated prioritisation across Government, a commitment to listen to the voices of children, and the right policy interventions and investment, all children can have the chance to thrive.

More information can be found by visiting:  
[www.childrenatthetable.org.uk](http://www.childrenatthetable.org.uk)



Children  
at the Table

# Make free school meals available to all primary school children



We are calling for **free school meals (FSMs) for all primary aged children in England**. This would mean that every child would get at least one nutritious, healthy, filling meal a day, whatever they are facing at home.

**900,000 children**

There are around 900,000 children living in poverty eligible for free school meals.

All children in England up to Year 3 receive a free school meal. Beyond Year 3, children in England<sup>4</sup> are only eligible for FSMs if their families have net earnings below £7,400 per year. This means that there are around 900,000 children living in poverty who are not eligible for FSMs.<sup>5</sup>

As a first step we are calling for FSMs to be extended to all children in families in receipt of Universal Credit. Creating universal access to free school meals will help the poorest families overcome administrative barriers and reduce stigma, whilst boosting educational attainment and attendance; and it can also improve children's health.<sup>6</sup> FSMs have been proven to reduce obesity and also to improve attendance and attainment rates at school.<sup>7</sup> It would relieve stress and anxiety for children at mealtimes and relieve pressure for families living in poverty.

## What does the evidence tell us?

A report commissioned by Impact on Urban Health with research from PwC found evidence of a positive return on investment (ROI) for the extension of free school meals to those families in receipt of Universal Credit – every £1 invested was estimated to generate £1.38 in core benefits, while an expansion to universal free school meals gave a higher positive ROI – every £1 invested was estimated to generate £1.71 in return.<sup>8</sup>

The vast majority of parents support extending free school meals: 76% of parents polled by YouGov for Barnardo's in March 2023 think all primary school children should be eligible for free school meals,<sup>9</sup> while 32,000 people signed our petition calling for free school meals which we handed in to Downing Street with actress Michelle Collins in 2023.<sup>10</sup>

Research into the impact of Universal Infant FSM (UIFSM) has found a saving on food expenditure among non-FSM-registered households, of approximately £20 per month in total for households with two adults and two children.<sup>11</sup> The same research found reductions in children's bodyweight throughout the first year of school, reducing the proportion of those classed as obese (by 0.7 percentage points from a base of just under 10%) and bringing more children into the healthy range (by 1.1 percentage points from a base of 76%).

Furthermore, UIFSM improved absence rates for FSM-registered infants. The effect size is equivalent to missing 1.2 fewer whole days at

school over the academic year in total.<sup>12</sup> About 60% of this effect is accounted for by reduced absences for illness or medical appointments. In 2023, the Mayor of London announced a one-year programme of funding for FSM entitlement for all primary school pupils in London.<sup>13</sup> Early analysis of the pilot has found that where the universal primary FSM entitlement is in place, it is having a beneficial impact on children's experience of education, with children better able to engage in learning and families being better able to afford enriching activities like afterschool clubs and school trips.<sup>14</sup>

*"Extending free school meals would absolutely make a big difference to the families we work with. A lot of families who are in employment can be classed as the 'working poor' due to having little or no disposable income. These families don't always qualify for provisions such as free school meals and school clothing grants – it's an additional cost for families to provide their children with a substantial lunch to keep them going for the full school day."*<sup>16</sup>

Barnardo's practitioner at Inverclyde Nurture Service

*"Primary school kids especially – they shouldn't be worrying about money. They shouldn't be worrying about putting debt on their parents just because they wanted to eat lunch. It's horrible. The only thing they should be worrying about is what homework they need to do."*<sup>15</sup>

Helen, 22, member of Barnardo's 'Be Amplified' network

**76% of parents**

polled by YouGov for Barnardo's in March 2023 think all primary school children should be eligible for free school meals.

## End the two-child limit, or 'sibling penalty' on benefits

Growing up in poverty harms young people long into their future, as they face worse life chances, poorer health and fewer opportunities.<sup>17</sup>

**The two-child limit is the single biggest policy driver of child poverty in the UK** and we, alongside many other children's charities in the End Child Poverty Coalition, support an end to the policy.<sup>18</sup>

The two-child limit effectively operates as a 'sibling penalty', affecting families entitled to benefits who have had a new baby since 2017. These **parents are denied £3,235 per year per child**, if they already had two children and have any more.<sup>19</sup> We know from our frontline work that this policy unfairly penalises children who happen to have more than one brother or sister, despite the fact that poverty is already highest in families with more than two children.<sup>20</sup>

The two-child limit was introduced in 2017 and **an estimated 1.5 million children will be affected by it in 2023.**<sup>21</sup> **Unless it is abolished, the number of children affected will reach 3 million by the mid-2030s**, as more children are born under the policy. The policy has pushed many families into deep poverty and has exacerbated child poverty during the cost-of-living crisis.

**1 million+ families**

We found that there are 1 million+ families in the UK in the last 12 months with parents who have given up their own bed so that their child had somewhere to sleep.

### What does the evidence tell us?

We have published three reports looking at how the cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating child poverty.<sup>22</sup> Our most recent research looked at bed poverty and found that families are struggling to prioritise essentials such as food, heating and electricity over things like replacing mouldy bedding or fixing a broken bed.<sup>23</sup>

We found that **there are over 1 million families in the UK with parents who have given up their own bed** so that their child had somewhere to sleep in the last 12 months. While bed poverty is only one aspect of child poverty it illustrates how difficult it can be for families on low incomes to afford the essential items needed to raise happy and healthy children.

**Ending the two-child limit would lift 250,000 children out of poverty and mean 850,000 children are in less deep poverty, at a cost of only £1.3 billion.**<sup>24</sup> Analysis by Child Poverty Action Group and others highlight how this makes **ending the two-child limit one of the most cost-effective means of tackling child poverty.**<sup>25</sup>

When the policy was announced in 2015, the Government stated its intention was "to ensure that families in receipt of benefits faced the same financial choices about having children as those supporting themselves solely in work."<sup>26</sup> This set an implicit assumption that the policy was designed both to encourage parents into work and reduce their fertility choices. However, 58% of families affected by the two-child limit are already working<sup>27</sup> and research in 2022 by academics at the universities of York, Oxford, LSE and Child Poverty Action Group found that the policy has had only a slight impact on fertility rates.<sup>28</sup>



**250,000 children**

Ending the two-child limit would lift 250,000 children out of poverty.

*"I have four children and at the moment, I only get help for the first two. It means that I have less money to buy my children things like clothing, things for their room, days out and things like that. I think [the two-child limit] is completely unfair. I literally feel like the Government don't care about my other two children."*

Danielle, mum of four, London

*"On my daily visits I see the poverty so many children are living in. Good beds and bedding are always lacking and I also often see families sharing mattresses on the floor with no sheets on or badly soiled duvets. These items come very low on the list of items to purchase when families are struggling to make ends meet, especially since the rise in food bills and heating bills."*<sup>29</sup>

Chloe (name changed), Barnardo's worker who supports parents struggling financially

# Introduce an Essentials Guarantee in Universal Credit



We support the Essentials Guarantee proposed by Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Trussell Trust.<sup>30</sup> **Introducing the Essentials Guarantee would ensure that, at a minimum, Universal Credit protects people from going without essential items.**

**72%** of the public support the Essentials Guarantee and only 8% oppose it.

**The would mean implementing legislation to:**

- Create an independent process to regularly determine the Essentials Guarantee level. This process should be modelled on the Low Pay Commission's function advising on the minimum wage. This independent process would determine what is needed to afford essential items, based on their cost, evidence and input from people who have experienced poverty.
- The legislation should ensure that Universal Credit's standard allowance must at least meet the Essentials Guarantee level and never pull support below this threshold, such as with deductions or because of the benefit cap.

Under the proposal the UK Government would be required to set the level of the Essentials Guarantee at least annually, based on the recommendation of the independent process. This is estimated at £120 a week for single adults – this is £35 short of the current level standard allowance for adults over 25 and £53 short for those under 25.<sup>31</sup>

**What does the evidence tell us?**

Our research indicates that the cost-of-living crisis has made it harder for children and young people to afford essentials. Our survey of 316 children and young people we support we found that:<sup>32</sup>

- 52% worry about whether they or their family have enough money to spend on essentials
- 53% say it has become harder to afford essentials in the last year
- 22% felt embarrassed because they or their family/carers couldn't afford something other people they knew had.

We also conducted polling of a representative group of parents with YouGov in February 2023.<sup>33</sup> We found that:

- 1 in 7 parents (15%) said they had fallen into arrears with payments or gone into their bank overdrafts in the previous 4 months
- 1 in 4 parents (23%) said they struggled to provide sufficient food for their child in the previous 4 months
- 41% of parents said they struggled to replace or purchase an essential item (e.g. a washing machine, cooker or furniture such as beds).

According to analysis from the Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:<sup>34</sup>

- **72% of the public support the Essentials Guarantee and only 8% oppose it**
- **82% of 2019 Labour voters, 83% of 2019 Liberal Democrat voters, and 62% of 2019 Conservative voters support the policy**
- **8.8 million low-income families would benefit, including 3.9 million families with children.**

*"Jack (name changed) came to us as he needed some clothes and beds and mattresses for his children as one of them was sleeping on the floor with cushions and one on the bed with their father. Jack was unable to work because of physical health issues and was feeling very stressed. He had applied for Child Benefit and Universal Credit but was struggling financially. We were able to support the family to get bunk beds and mattresses for the children, so they could sleep in their own beds."*

*Barnardo's Service in, 'A Crisis on Our Doorstep: the deepening impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children and young people in the UK'<sup>35</sup>*

*"I get paid £128 every fortnight in Universal Credit. Where I live the rent is too high for what they will pay so I have to put a lot of that money towards the rent. So I'm left with pennies. Trying to figure out how to make it work is difficult. In terms of Universal Credit for us, we're under 25. A lot of us are still in school, university, college. We shouldn't have to worry about money so much when we're still trying to sort out everything else in our lives. Kids shouldn't be worrying about money."<sup>36</sup>*

*Helen, 22, member of Barnardo's 'Be Amplified' network*

**8.8 million** low-income families would benefit from the Essentials Guarantee, including 3.9 million families with children.

## Create a family centre in every community

Most children enter the care system because difficulties in the family environment have put the child's safety at risk, and these children's parents are often experiencing challenges like domestic abuse and poor mental health.<sup>37</sup>

Providing families with effective support for these problems early can therefore be key in reducing risks to children and the need for care proceedings later.

Barnardo's believes family support works best when it is accessible, wide-ranging, and embedded in communities. This should include universal 'help groups' for families with young children as well as more specific support to address the range of issues that can make it harder for parents to give their children the best possible start in life, such as support with benefits and employment advice. This family centre model, which should help families with children from pre-birth to 18, has become known as a 'family hub'. At its best, it provides a 'local nerve centre' for all family support within a community, bringing together everything from stay and play groups, to breastfeeding support, to help with issues such as finding a job or applying for benefits.

Barnardo's is calling on the next Government to commit to providing a welcoming family centre in every community.

### What does the evidence tell us?

The family hub model includes a 'universal front door' giving families somewhere they know they can go to whenever they need help or advice. As centres are non-stigmatising and open to all, families build trust with workers, who can also refer them for more intensive support if they need it.

Evidence shows that there has been a significant reduction in spend on early intervention services such as family hubs in recent years. This is because, **despite evidence showing there was a £800 million increase in spending on children's social care by local authorities for 2021-22,<sup>38</sup> the majority was directed to late intervention, such as residential care placements for children with the most complex needs.** This means there is little resource left to invest in early intervention services including local family hubs and youth work – only £1 in every £5 of the recent increase in spending went on this type of service.

However, we know that family hubs can be effective in providing support for families and can save money in the long-term. A recent evaluation<sup>39</sup> by the Department for Education which looked at five local authorities across England, found the following benefits:

- Statistically significant, positive differences were found in the percentage of 3-4 year old children benefiting from funded early year education, and on the percentage of Key Stage 4 children going to or remaining in education or employment.
- Positive signs that other indicators were moving in the right direction or maintaining good levels. For example, in one local authority, the rate of first-time entrants to the youth justice system has been decreasing, which corresponds with partnership working across education and prevention services to reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

Only **£1**  
in every **£5**



of the recent increase in spending went on early intervention services including local family hubs and youth work.



## Give child victims the right to access support services and introduce a statutory definition of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

The same study found that value for money analysis estimated savings of between approximately £37 million and £68 million across the family hubs. Barnardo's own analysis that looked at the outcomes from our intensive family support service offered through our Isle of Wight family hubs also demonstrated the benefits. This showed that as a result of the intensive support delivered to families through the family hub, the average outcome score for families we work with improved by 1.6 points on the five-point scale during the intervention.<sup>40</sup> This means we estimate that for every £1 invested in the service, the saving in costs to the state is approximately £2.60.<sup>41</sup>

**£37-£68 million**

Value for money analysis has estimated savings of between approximately £37-£68 million across the family hubs.

### Case study

Anna reached out to a Barnardo's practitioner when asking for vitamins. She explained that she was having a challenging time following a recent break up. She was finding living alone with her young child isolating and lonely and was experiencing anxiety and low mood and not eating properly due to an eating disorder. The family hub worked with Anna to offer support in a number of areas including:

- Completing the parental emotional well-being package of support enabling Anna to build her independence and giving her the confidence to get out and about with her daughter, including going on walks or trips to the park;
- Providing Anna with an activity pack with ideas of activities to do with her daughter which reduced the time spent in front of a screen;
- Signposting Anna to mediation enabling a place for contact between the child and their father;

- Referral to the well-being 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.

Anna appreciated the comprehensive offer of support and commented:

*"Just talking with you about things that can be so little, make me feel a weight has been lifted and I can overcome it. Doing the little tasks you suggest such as writing things down helps me visualise my obstacles and helps me overcome them. It is building my confidence which I lack greatly."*



Too many children experience abuse, including sexual abuse and exploitation, criminal exploitation, domestic abuse, and other serious harms – whilst many more are at risk.

Data from local authorities' Child in Need assessments show that in England, in the year to March 2023:

- 48,780 risk assessments identified concerns regarding child sexual abuse, including child sexual exploitation and child on child sexual abuse<sup>42</sup>
- 14,420 risk assessments identified concerns regarding child criminal exploitation, and 11,110 identified concerns related to 'gangs'<sup>43</sup>

- 160,140 risk assessments identified concerns about the child's parent/ carer being the victim of domestic abuse – just under one third of all episodes with assessment factors recorded.<sup>44</sup>

However, we know that child victims are seldom identified or referred to statutory agencies, suggesting these numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. For example, the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, which is hosted by Barnardo's, estimates that 500,000 children across England and Wales are sexually abused every year.<sup>45</sup>

# £1.1 billion cut

The YMCA in 2020/21 found that, in England, local authority spending on youth services totalled £379 million – a £1.1 billion cut in youth services from 2010/11.<sup>49</sup>

*“They [the police] really have got to have a clear message out there that exploitation is something that you don’t have a choice about. If you’re exploited, choice does not come into it. I’d really like to see the police have more of that at the front of their mind.”*

*Adam, Intern at Leaders Unlocked*



In 2018, the then-Children’s Commissioner estimated that up to 30,000 to 50,000 children and young people could be victims of exploitation through the county lines model.<sup>46</sup>

**The child protection system is not equipped to prevent, identify and safeguard child victims of abuse and exploitation, and a review of child protection mechanisms is urgently needed.**

This should include a **review of services that can prevent harm**, such as youth clubs, youth services, and mental health support teams (MHSTs) in schools. These services can play a vital role in protecting children from harm, yet are not available to all children due to provision varying across the country.

There should also be a **review into the specialist support services available for child victims of abuse and exploitation**. These services, which include therapeutic and counselling services, mental health services, and advocacy services, play a vital role in supporting and safeguarding child victims. However, many child victims struggle to access these vital support services, and often face a postcode lottery.

The review should culminate in the development, publication and implementation of a **National Action Plan for Child Protection**, which includes a focus on child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, domestic abuse and serious violence.

To aid the identification of victims of child criminal exploitation, a **statutory definition of child criminal exploitation should be introduced**. Without one, many children are going unidentified, going without access to support services, and are being blamed and criminalised for their own exploitation.

Furthermore, action needs to be taken on the recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. This includes the introduction of a **guarantee that all child victims of sexual abuse will be offered specialist and accredited therapeutic support**.

## What does the evidence tell us?

Access to youth clubs and youth services can be a critical protective factor from child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, and other harms. Youth workers are often not seen as connected with ‘scary’ statutory agencies and are therefore able to build trusted relationships with children, that are sustained.<sup>47</sup> Research by Barnardo’s for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime and Violence Reduction (now Child Criminal Exploitation and Knife Crime) found a link between increasing knife crime rates, and cuts to youth centres.<sup>48</sup> However, youth services are few and far between. Research by the YMCA in 2020/21 found that, in England, local authority spending on youth services totalled £379 million – a £1.1 billion cut in youth services from 2010/11.<sup>49</sup>

Child victims of abuse and exploitation face a postcode lottery when accessing specific specialist services. A Freedom of Information (FoI) request by Barnardo’s in 2023 found that **67% of local authorities had not commissioned any child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, or combined services in the past 12 months**. For Police and Crime Commissioners, this was 39%.<sup>50</sup> Research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that only 29%

of adult victims and survivors who wanted support for their children were able to access it.<sup>51</sup> Research by Action for Children found that there was significant variability in the level of provision for children and young people impacted by domestic abuse between and within local authorities across England and Wales.<sup>52</sup>

A much greater understanding of child criminal exploitation (CCE) is needed to help support the early identification and intervention of this abuse. There is no statutory definition of child criminal exploitation in England, meaning professionals do not have a clear and consistent framework to identify CCE at key early intervention points. In Barnardo’s Freedom of Information request to police forces across the UK **only one police force was able to provide any data on CCE, with many police forces asking questions about how CCE is defined**.<sup>53</sup>

A statutory definition of CCE would enable professionals, including within schools and education settings, to have more confidence in spotting the signs of CCE, helping with early interventions. Too often, children are blamed and criminalised for their behaviour rather than appropriately safeguarded.

# 67% of local authorities

had not commissioned any child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, or combined services in the past 12 months.



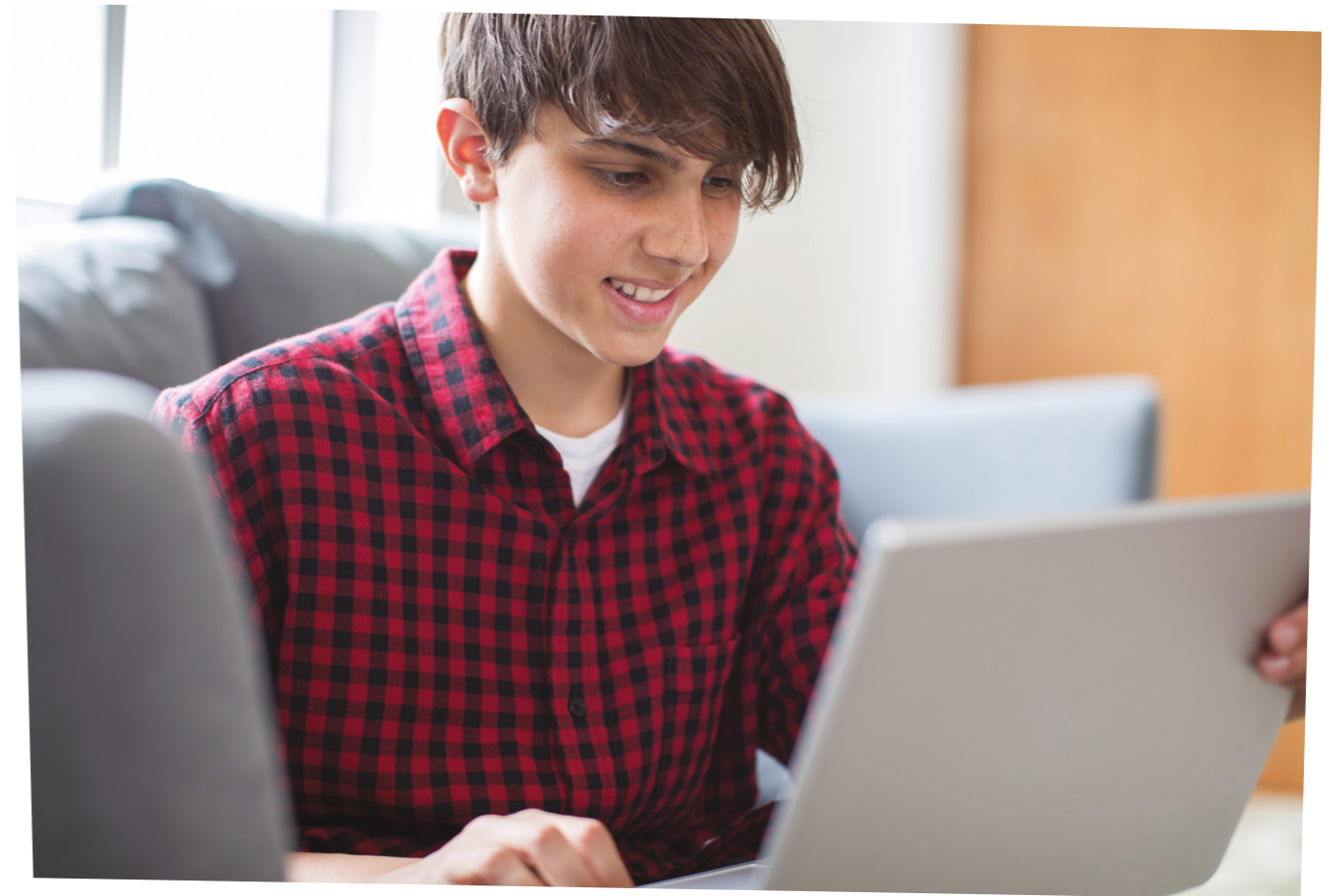
*“They need to feel self-worth and someone to believe in them. They need to understand that they deserve better, for example a support worker who understands the situation, someone who can be a positive role model.”*

*Barnardo’s practitioner*

*“If an adult is there it makes it safe. We just want a space where we can hang out and do our thing but you know there’s someone there who’s got your back.”*

*Young person supported by Barnardo’s*

## Tackle existing and emerging online harms



There is a need to build on the important work of the Online Safety Act to **ensure that children are protected from new and emerging technologies** which can pose a threat to children, and to deal with the unfinished business left over from the Act.

As new technologies emerge and evolve, they pose new risks, as well as opportunities, for children. This includes emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) platforms, which can be used to cause harm. Legislation and regulation must be able to keep up with these evolving changes in technology, including by ensuring safety by design. There should also be a better understanding of the potential impact of mainstreaming newer technologies, including AI and VR, on child development and child protection. This is particularly important given that children are often early adopters of technology.

We are also calling for **online pornographic content to be better regulated**. We are particularly concerned that content which would be prohibited offline and so illegal to own or supply for example on DVD, Blu-Ray, and for Video on Demand, is freely available on mainstream pornography websites. Offline, this content is regulated by the Video Recordings Act 1984, and the Communications Act 2003, however this regulation has never been extended to online pornographic content.<sup>54</sup>

This includes content which sexualises children, including 'barely legal' pornography, which sees petite, young-looking adult actors made to look like children through the use of childlike clothing and props; incest pornography; and pornography which shows sexual violence, often towards women, including strangulation and forced penetration.<sup>55</sup>

**YouGov polling for Barnardo's found that almost 70% of UK adults (69%) agree that pornography which would be illegal on DVD should also be illegal online.<sup>56</sup>**

The **Pornography Review** announced by the Government offers an opportunity to shine a light on these harms, and **its findings must be acted upon, including through legislative action where necessary.<sup>57</sup>**

#### **What does the evidence tell us?**

Emerging technologies are already posing harm to children. AI technologies are being used to generate child sexual abuse material. The Internet Watch Foundation reported how, **in a 5-week period in July 2023, they investigated 29 reports of URLs containing suspected AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery.<sup>58</sup>**

Furthermore, **research by the NSPCC into virtual and augmented reality spaces found that child sexual abuse is happening within VR spaces, and the spaces are being used to groom children for offline child sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>59</sup>** The report also found that this technology is allowing offenders to simulate sex with 3D models of children, including those modelled to look like children they know.<sup>60</sup>

Pornographic content which would be prohibited offline is prevalent online. For example, in 2019, 39 billion searches were made on Pornhub, with one of the most frequent search terms being 'teen'.<sup>61</sup> Research into the titles of videos available on the landing page of the UK's three most popular pornography websites revealed that one in eight titles described activity constituting sexual violence.<sup>62</sup> These titles used descriptions such as: pain, destroy, brutal, torture, violate, and hurt. The study also found that the three most common words in videos which contained coercion and exploitation were 'schoolgirl', 'girl' and 'teen'.

Barnardo's is concerned that the excessive use of this content can lead to viewers needing more and more extreme content to satisfy themselves, leading to the use of child sexual abuse material, and offending against children online and offline.<sup>63</sup> Interviews with offenders who viewed child sexual abuse material in the UK indicate that most had not intentionally sought out child sexual abuse material, but it was the result of 'entrenched pornography use' and spiralling online behaviour.<sup>64</sup>



**70% of UK adults agree**

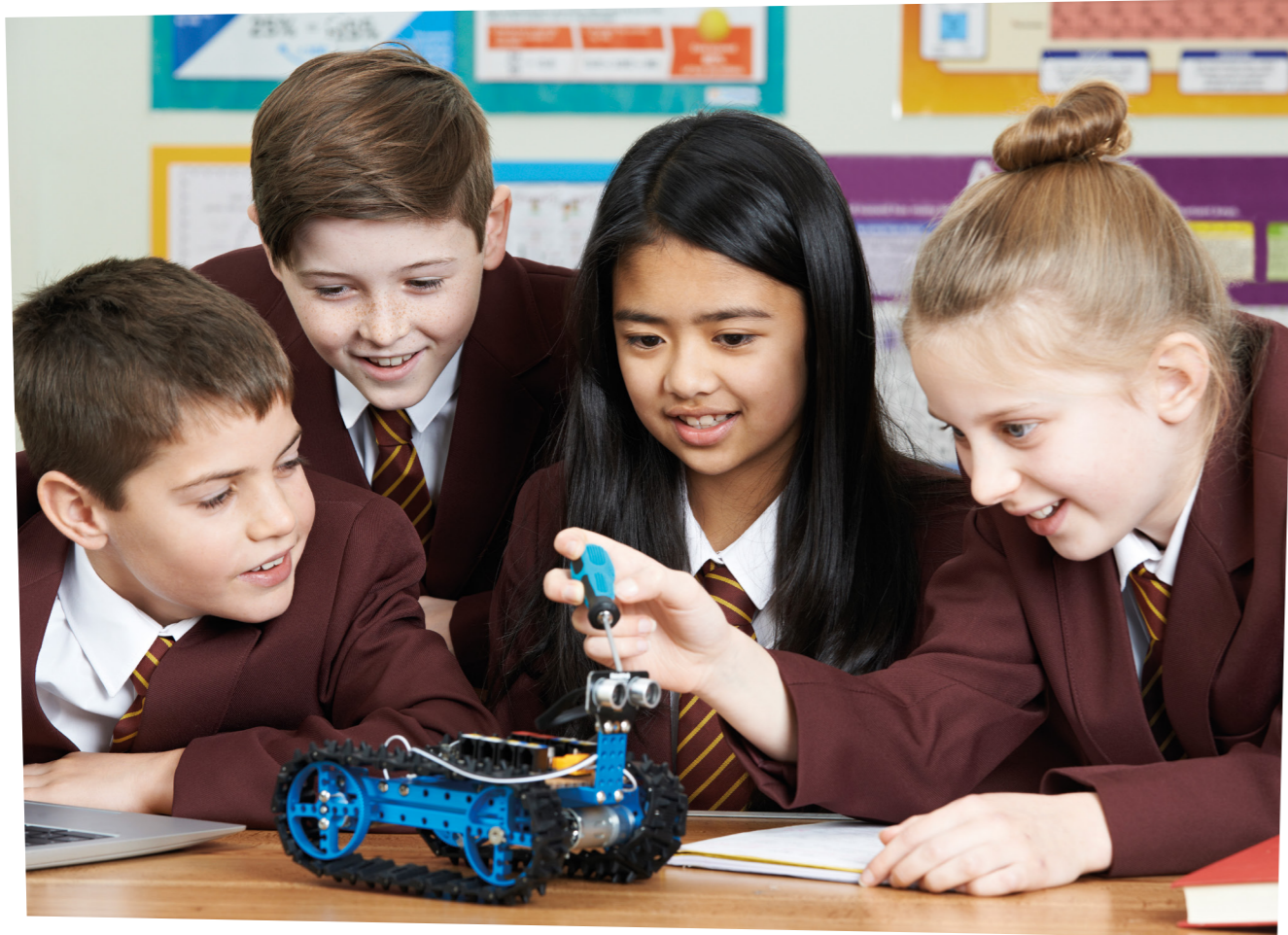
**YouGov polling for Barnardo's found that almost 70% of UK adults agree that pornography which would be illegal on DVD should also be illegal online.<sup>56</sup>**

### **Case study - Lucy Faithfull Foundation**

Peter was supported by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation.<sup>65</sup> Peter, 40, is an academic and lives alone. He has no children, nor does he have direct contact with any. He was arrested for engaging in sexual communication with a child online, including sending explicit images of himself and requesting self-generated sexual images from a child. Following his arrest, the police provided him with Lucy Faithfull Foundation's Stop It Now! helpline details and he has had regular contact with the helpline over several months. During his calls, Peter spoke about his poor mental health over a number of

years, including anxiety, depression and self-harm. He explained that he had begun viewing legal adult pornography online about 10 years ago, and that this behaviour had escalated quickly to sexual chat with adults and then sexual communication with children of varying ages, mostly pubescent girls. Peter disclosed that he had been engaging in such conversations with children for the last five years and that the severity and frequency of his online behaviour had escalated during lockdown. He believes this was, at least in part, due to him being inactive and feeling isolated.

## Ensure access to mental health and wellbeing support in every school and college



Children and young people are facing a mental health crisis.

**1 in 5 children and young people aged 8-25 are likely to have a diagnosable mental health condition<sup>66</sup> and the numbers needing specialist support are rising at a faster pace than Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) services can keep up with.<sup>67</sup>** Despite increased investment in acute care, children and young people's mental health receives around 1% of all health and care spending<sup>68</sup> and there is no consistent early support offer in community or education settings.<sup>69</sup>

Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) provide effective prevention and early intervention support to children and young people by promoting a 'whole school approach' to mental health and wellbeing, providing therapeutic help to pupils with mild to moderate mental health conditions, and support for teachers.<sup>70</sup> However, at present services are only available in around one in three schools and colleges in England, and the current plans to expand them to 50% by the end of 2024 will still leave millions without support.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the current MHST model of support through cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) does not provide effective early help for all children and young people.<sup>72</sup>

Barnardo's recommends a commitment to funding comprehensive mental health support across all schools and colleges in England. Alongside this, the MHST model should be expanded and given greater flexibility to include a school counsellor and to recruit other specialist workers with skills that are relevant to meet local needs.<sup>73</sup>

### What does the evidence tell us?

Schools and colleges with mental health support teams say they experience an improved approach to mental health and wellbeing.<sup>74</sup> Barnardo's report *It's Hard to Talk* found that 68% of children and young people receiving individual support from an MHST made a significant improvement with symptoms including those of anxiety, depression, and OCD. Our research also found a cost benefit of £1.90 for every £1 invested.<sup>75</sup>

However, Barnardo's practitioners, and other independent reports on MHST impact from the University of Birmingham have found that the current service offer of cognitive behavioural therapy is not effective for all children and young people. In particular, CBT is not always appropriate for younger children, those with special educational needs and complex mental

health needs.<sup>76</sup> In addition, MHST staff report that a lack of services for children and young people with moderate or complex needs who do not meet the CAMHS threshold, and long waiting lists for specialist support are risking children and young people falling through the cracks in mental health provision. **Barnardo's recommends that this 'missing middle' is addressed through the expansion of the MHST model, providing school counsellors as part of the model and giving MHSTs the flexibility to respond to local need.<sup>77</sup>**

Expansion of MHSTs has wide support from the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition,<sup>78</sup> BACP,<sup>79</sup> Young Minds<sup>80</sup> and the Centre for Mental Health.<sup>81</sup>

**68%** of children



and young people receiving individual support from an MHST made a significant improvement with symptoms including those of anxiety, depression, and OCD.

*"They provide a safe space that helps you relax... There are support groups, people who take you out of lessons and safe spaces to talk about your worries."*

*Barnardo's service user*

*"It's one of the most important things we've ever done. Getting the MHSTs in for emotional wellbeing of children."*

*MHST Service Commissioner*

*"For us and our teachers, MHSTs are accessible, and it feels as though there is no wait time compared to other services. We also hear back so we know when a child's had their assessment and what is happening next. We don't always get that elsewhere."*

*Headteacher in a school with an MHST*

# Establish a national strategy for social prescribing for children and young people



Approximately one in five GP appointments in England are for non-clinical issues.<sup>82</sup>

Social prescribing services connect people to local, non-clinical services in their area to support their health and wellbeing. Referrals to social prescribing services can be made by both GPs and other healthcare professionals, as well as schools, housing associations and other community organisations.<sup>83</sup> Examples of the type of support provided include:

- Group activities such as crafting and cinema clubs to reduce loneliness;
- Walking groups to improve low activity levels and reduce the effect of long-term conditions;
- Outdoor activities and exercise including gardening or swimming to reduce anxiety and improve wellbeing.<sup>84</sup>

Development of social prescribing is a key pillar of personalised care.<sup>85</sup> However, current models of social prescribing are focused on adults while services for children and young people are largely underdeveloped. **There is no dedicated funding or Government strategy for children and young people's social prescribing.**

The needs of children and young people accessing social prescribing are different to those of adults. This is reflected in the costs associated with running services, the training required for Link Workers supporting children and young people, referral pathways, and the type of support offered as part of a social prescription.<sup>86</sup>

Barnardo's recommends the creation of a national strategy for CYP social prescribing with attached funding for services, staff training and professional development, as well as funding for voluntary, community and faith sector organisations delivering interventions.<sup>87</sup>

## What does the evidence tell us?

In October 2023, Barnardo's released a new report into social prescribing for children and young people: *The Missing Link*.<sup>88</sup> Our research found that social prescribing acts as an effective early intervention and prevention service that improves outcomes for children and young people with mild or non-clinical mental health issues including social isolation and anxiety. The research also found that social prescribing can support children and young people with school attendance, and to connect with local community assets and nature spaces.<sup>89</sup>

If social prescribing was applied across England, it could reduce the need for GP appointments by 2.5-3% annually, this would save 2.8-3 million appointments, reducing pressure on GP services considerably.<sup>90</sup>

However, at present social prescribing services for children and young people are considered a specialist service. Access is fragmented and support available to Link Workers and organisations available as a social prescription is limited.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, reduction in funding for universal youth and family services has led to fewer services for children and young people to access on social prescription<sup>92</sup> and many families face barriers to access including lack of awareness, financial difficulties, and lack of transport. A national strategy is required to ensure social prescribing services are available to all children and young people, backed by sustainable funding.<sup>93</sup>

*"LINK has been a huge help for me. My anxiety was awful, I wouldn't leave the house or talk to people, my attendance was awful, I couldn't bring myself to go in. It's had such a positive impact on my life, I can do stuff now, my attendance picked up, I can go outside. It's sad to know that others in my position don't have access. I never thought I'd come this far, from where I was to a college place."*

*Barnardo's service user*

*"During the summer holiday they offer a variety of activities like craft days, activity days and doing stuff outside. They are trying to get kids with anxiety out of the house and link us to people who struggle with the same things. I have met a few people I am still in touch with and are friends."*

*Barnardo's service user*

*"I think I feel less isolated. Before I started coming here I didn't have a lot of friends or talk to people. It was isolating to be at home all of the time without anyone to talk to. But now I am excited for the next activity, and I feel less stuck and alone."*

*Barnardo's service user*

*"When [Link Worker] contacted us, it was like a lifeline. We had so many services who we were waiting to see, or had seen and been rejected, we were just desperate for help."*

*Parent of service user*



## Improve children's social care by committing to a fully funded, legislative reform programme with a particular focus on ensuring families can access the support they need earlier

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England published in May 2022, set out a vision for a once-in-a-generation reform of the system. It proposed the introduction of new family help teams to support families earlier; providing a new opt-out advocacy offer to give all children a clear right to have their voices heard, and outlined a range of reforms aimed at providing enhanced support to care leavers.

**An ambitious, funded plan is imperative to maintain the momentum from the Review. Yet to date just £200m has been pledged to implement the reforms over a two-year period, which is just a fraction of the £2.6bn which was recommended.**

**Barnardo's is calling on the next Government to recognise the need for a more ambitious reform plan for children's social care. This should include a significant allocation of funding – with a minimum investment of £2.6bn – alongside a clear roadmap on when legislation will be brought forward and when reforms can be expected to take effect.**

### What does the evidence tell us?

Young people tell us that too often the system does not meet their needs. They talk of feeling 'bounced around' - frequently moving between different foster carers and residential care, and often having to change school.<sup>94</sup> Changes in social worker are also common - statistics published by the Children's Commissioner have shown that it is more common for a child in the care system to have a change of social worker in a year than to keep a consistent worker.<sup>95</sup> This can make it difficult for children to feel like they can build trusting relationships, increasing feelings of isolation.

Pressures on children's social care are at an all-time high. There are now more children than ever in the care system in England. Latest figures show that there are 83,840 children in care - an increase of 23% over the last decade.<sup>96</sup> Current funding gaps in children's services are severe - evidence from the Association of Directors of Children's Services revealed the whole system is currently close to breaking point, with £778m needed in one year just to close the current funding gap.<sup>97</sup> This means that the system has become increasingly focused on delivering core services rather than early intervention services to help prevent families from reaching crisis point - evidence shows that early intervention services have reduced with a 45% drop in the last 12 years.<sup>98</sup>

The delay in introducing reform is also coming at a cost both to children and families, and to the state. **Recent analysis by Alma Economics<sup>99</sup> on behalf of the leading children's charities showed that the cost of delaying a national roll-out for two years will mean that ten years from now, allowing for inflation, the Government will have spent an additional £1bn more than if they had implemented the reforms on the timeline suggested by the Care Review.**

Reform of the system is required both to improve early help to enable more children to stay safely living with their birth families and also to provide better support for those children who do need to come into care to ensure that they can go on to live healthy, happy and fulfilling lives and it must come with a funding package to ensure effective delivery.

*"Feelings of loneliness and isolation are something me and many others in care feel. Being in care is often being made to adapt to the system. I didn't really have much help and support to deal with separation from family and the changes in day-to-day life."*

*Young care experienced person supported by Barnardo's*

*"It was stressful constantly changing worker... because just when you have adapted and become used to someone you then must adjust to someone else. The only social worker I was happy with out of many was the last one I had but she was unfortunately only around for a few months."*

*Child in care supported by Barnardo's*

## Create a national offer of support for all care leavers



Many care experienced young people continue to experience poorer outcomes than their peers.

They are less likely to gain good qualifications,<sup>100</sup> nearly half of children in care have a mental health disorder<sup>101</sup> and it is estimated that 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives.<sup>102</sup>

To help address this, the Children and Social Work Act 2017, set out a requirement that local authorities must publish local offers of support for care leavers up to 25 in their area. While this requirement is welcome, there is a significant variation between different local areas. There are pockets of good practice, with some areas having worked together to introduce more comprehensive support. For instance, the Greater Manchester Care Leavers Guarantee is a series of entitlements including free bus travel

and council tax exemptions for care leavers.<sup>103</sup> However, the package of support available for care leavers is inconsistent across England (and across the UK).

**Barnardo's is calling on the next Government to publish a national statutory offer of support for care leavers aged 18-25 in England. We are calling for all Government departments to be bound by corporate parenting responsibilities and a requirement to propose measures which would help level the playing field for those who grew up in care.**

**Care experienced children and young people should be directly involved in the process, but through our direct work, we believe it should contain the following measures:**

- **Free bus travel for care leavers:** Our *Transport for Freedom* report recommends all care experienced young people 18-25 are given access to free bus travel.<sup>104</sup> This would help them access employment, training and to visit family and friends – we estimate that it would cost approximately £77m a year to implement, depending on take up.
- **A comprehensive accommodation offer:** This should include improved access to the Staying Put scheme<sup>105</sup> so more care leavers can stay with their foster parents for longer (including looking at allowances for foster carers after children turn 18), national roll-out of the Staying Close scheme – to help young people leaving residential care to transition effectively into independent living,<sup>106</sup> and the introduction of a national rent deposit and rent guarantor scheme, making it easier for care leavers to access accommodation in the private sector.<sup>107</sup>
- **All care experienced young people who are claiming Universal Credit should receive the over-25 rate:** Young people who have just left care can struggle to make ends meet as a result of receiving a lower rate of benefits than older adults. This can make it difficult for care leavers who live independently since the cost of essentials such as food, energy and transport are not cheaper because they are younger and they do not have family to rely on to help them meet rising living costs.
- **Access to mental health support, including a lead for mental health in every local authority:** Barnardo's *Neglected Minds* report found that while young people who leave care are more likely to have mental health needs, they often face a cliff edge in support when they reach 18 and transfer from children's

services to adult services.<sup>108</sup> We are calling for a duty on all local authorities to develop bespoke offers for this group, including through a mental health lead, who would play a similar role to a virtual school head.

- **Improving access to further and higher education for care leavers:** This should include the extension of the role of the virtual school head to care leavers up to the age of 25, so they can work with local colleges and a requirement to tackle practical barriers such as lack of access to accommodation particularly in the holidays.

### What does the evidence tell us?

There are over 80,000 children in local authority care in England<sup>109</sup> and every year around 12,000 leave care – most when they turn 18 although some leave care as young as 16.

Providing improved support for these young people would not only help to address these adverse outcomes but could also benefit the state. **Evidence from PwC estimates<sup>110</sup> that the costs to the state of poor outcomes for care leavers, such as the cost of mental health support, homelessness services, welfare support and engagement with the criminal justice system, is around £1,816m per year.**

*"I don't have any access to anyone to lend me money. I am on my own unless it's loans but a lot of them need a certain credit score and it's hard when you are my age."*

Sarah, aged 25

*"I feel that a lot of people who are not care experienced get a lot of help from their parents – their parents will sit down and help them. The Government need to realise that care experienced young people struggle, we don't have the luxury of having family to support us."*

Kylie, aged 20

Around  
**12,000** children

leave care in England every year, most when they turn 18 although some leave care as young as 16.



## Develop a strategic plan for welcoming all displaced children



Thousands of unaccompanied children arrive in the UK every year seeking asylum.

Children who arrive alone and without their parents, are often frightened and highly vulnerable, having faced traumatic events both in their home country and on their journey to the UK. We must ensure these children are kept safe and protected, with access to healthcare, education, and trauma-informed support.

The Children Act 1989 places a responsibility upon local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people living in their area.<sup>111</sup> When children in need are identified, including unaccompanied children seeking asylum, an assessment of their needs should be undertaken. **The Government must ensure all unaccompanied children are taken into local authority care immediately on arrival and have access to the support, services and protection to which they are entitled.**

The UK Government does not have a national strategic plan for displaced people in the UK. This lack of an overarching framework means we are unable to provide people seeking safety, particularly children, with long-term solutions. The lack of strategic direction for how we support and integrate displaced people has a detrimental impact not only those who have lost so much already, but also on local governments and our communities. **We urge the next Government to develop a strategic plan for welcoming displaced children which sits within a wider national strategy for all displaced people.**

The development of a national plan would allow local government to properly plan and prepare services, which they are currently struggling to do. It would require cross-Government and multi-agency working to ensure effective collaboration across departments. The UK should also be doing more to support global

efforts to tackle forced migration and to support displaced people who have experienced profound loss and suffered unimaginable horrors. A clear strategy underpinned by sufficient funding for local authorities will enable us to unlock our potential as a country to offer displaced people, including children, the best possible start once they are here.

### What does the evidence tell us?

The Government published a safeguarding strategy for unaccompanied children seeking asylum and unaccompanied child refugees in England in 2017,<sup>112</sup> and whilst we recognise this was a step in the right direction, and welcomed recommendations centred around protecting this group of children,<sup>113</sup> there has been very little progress towards implementation since.

Drawing on the experience of the devolved nations, which have taken a different approach to welcoming individuals seeking protection, we know that a national support and integration strategy is an effective tool that benefits refugees and host communities. In Scotland, The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022 sets out a vision for a welcoming Scotland where refugees and people seeking asylum are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive.<sup>114</sup> Diversity and equality are at the

heart of policies that underpin better outcomes for children within the strategy, for example, the Additional Support for Learning framework entitles children and young people, who do not speak English, to help them overcome barriers to learning in school.<sup>115</sup> Wales issued the Nation of Sanctuary Plan in 2019, as well as an anti-racist action plan which highlights the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>116</sup> Their Refugee Strategy includes a number of actions and outcomes, to improve the lives of displaced children, including ensuring access to independent counselling services for children.<sup>117</sup>

England does not have a national strategy of its own, nor is there a national strategy for the whole of the UK. **There is likely to be a continued rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK. In England, they are projected to make up around 8-10% of the total number of children in care by 2027.**<sup>118</sup> Ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan and elsewhere, as well as climate crises will continue to displace children. Estimates of the number of environmental migrants by 2050 range from 25 million to 1 billion.<sup>119</sup>

We need a UK-wide response to manage the challenges of migration and embrace the benefits it can bring to people and communities.

*"I thought life would be simple and everyone would be smiling and nice to me; instead, the welcome was harsh."*

*An unaccompanied child seeking asylum supported by Barnardo's*

**25 mil. - 1 bn.**

**is the estimated worldwide number of environmental migrants by 2050.**

**8-10% of children in care**

**in England are projected to be unaccompanied children seeking asylum by 2027.**



*"I was placed in a police station straight away here in the UK, I felt like I did something wrong, I don't want other children to feel that way. I did not know that coming over to the UK in a boat was illegal, I just wanted a safe haven."*

*A separated child supported by Barnardo's Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship service*

# Make specialist foster care available for all unaccompanied children seeking sanctuary in the UK



Foster care provides a safe, secure and stable environment for children who cannot live with their birth family. Many unaccompanied children seeking asylum will have emotional, practical, language and cultural needs that require specialist, trauma-informed support that foster carers will have to consider.

Barnardo's provides over 20 fostering, adoption and short break services across the UK, including providing foster care to unaccompanied children. We provide foster carers with the tools and specialist support needed to help children reach their dreams. Experts provide comprehensive preparation and ongoing training, as well as offering support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Foster carers also get financial support, including an allowance to help make a positive difference to a child's life.

**Barnardo's is calling for a strategic plan and adequate funding to provide foster care for all children who seek sanctuary in the UK.**

It should be guided by the following quality principles:

- Specialist training (including asylum, legal processes and systems);
- Cultural competence (including around faith, culture, food etc.);
- Access to support;
- Understanding distinct needs including trauma, exploitation, and loss;
- Supporting contact with the family left behind;
- Language support and ensuring that children and young people seeking asylum learn and practice English.

## What does the evidence tell us?

Barnardo's has analysed the costs involved in providing specialist foster care for all unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK. We have calculated that this would amount to £183 million in 2024, £230 million in 2025 and £413 million across the whole 2-year period.<sup>120</sup>

**In 2019, a third of children placed in unregulated settings were unaccompanied children seeking asylum, despite making up just 4% of all children in care or a family home.**<sup>121</sup>

**There is already a shortage of foster carers in the UK; the Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need to recruit at least a further 7,200 foster families in the next 12 months alone.**<sup>122</sup> This will require a coordinated and well-resourced approach to recruit and mobilise new foster carers with specialist skills to support unaccompanied children who are refugees or seeking asylum, and who have experienced profound trauma. **We strongly urge for steps to be taken to increase the provision, training and funding for specialist foster carers for children who need them.** The National Foster Recruitment Campaign should contain a specific target for recruiting foster carers for unaccompanied children with bespoke campaign materials to attract potential foster carers.

There are different levels of experience among foster carers who care for unaccompanied children seeking asylum around the country, with some local authorities who have dealt with a higher volume of cases, developing specialised resources and knowledge.<sup>123</sup> Whether experienced mainstream foster carers or first-time carers, local authorities must be mindful of the specialist support that carers need for this cohort. A recent study found that the learning curve is often steep for foster carers and might be made easier with greater access to specialist training.<sup>124</sup> It has also been reported that where the training of carers is carried out by local authorities, it has not been shared more widely between other authorities, and there is often an inconsistent level of awareness, creating a postcode lottery of support. Training is therefore essential for the preparation of foster carers for unaccompanied children.

*"When I come here [to the foster carer] I learn a lot. In the previous place [the hostel] when I requested something they would not do it, but when I ask my foster carer, she helps me. She helped me with the doctor and got me a bus pass. When I come here it was family. My foster carer treats me like her son. She helps me with my college work. She is always happy and never gets upset with me even if I make a mistake, she just gives me information and advice. I like the way she is treating me."*

*M who was fostered by a Barnardo's foster carer*

**7,200**   
**fostering families**

**will need to be recruited in the next 12 months alone to make up for the current shortage according to the Fostering Network.**<sup>122</sup>

*"He was always respectful, and we have gone at his pace to build a trusting relationship. He called me by my first name when he came, and he now calls me auntie but said I am like a mother."*

*Barnardo's foster carer for an unaccompanied child seeking asylum*

# Footnotes

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- <sup>23</sup> Barnardos (2023), 'No Crib for a bed'
- <sup>24</sup> Child Poverty Action Group (2023), 'Six years in: the two-child limit is pushing 1.1 million children into deeper poverty'
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## About Barnardo's

At Barnardo's, our purpose is clear – changing childhoods and changing lives, so that children, young people, and families are safe, happy, healthy, and hopeful. Last year, we provided essential support to 373,200 children, young people, parents and carers through more than 800 services and partnerships across the UK. For over 150 years, we've been here for the children and young people who need us most – bringing love, care and hope into their lives and giving them a place where they feel they belong.

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