

# Barnardo's First Day Brief

Briefing | 10 July 2024



Changing childhoods.  
Changing lives.

## 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 over 370,000 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.

Through our work in communities across the country, every day we see that so many children and young people are facing growing challenges. We are looking forward to work with Ministers, MPs, Peers, Select Committees, and government departments, to achieve lasting, positive change so that children growing up in the UK are safer, happier, healthier and more hopeful.

## Challenges facing children today:

- **4.3 million children are growing up in poverty<sup>1</sup>:** facing hunger, poorer health, fewer opportunities and worse life outcomes.
- **Children's social care is facing a cliff-edge:** pressures on children's services are at an all-time high and there are now more children than ever in the care system in England. **Latest figures from the Department for Education show there are now over 80,000 children in local authority care<sup>2</sup>,** an increase of 23% over the last decade. The growing number of children entering care is concerning, not least because children who grow up in care continue to experience a range of poor outcomes compared to their peers.
- **1 in 5 children are living with a mental health condition<sup>3</sup>:** this affects their school attendance and ability to thrive socially, emotionally and academically.
- **Online harms have grown significantly over recent years<sup>4</sup>:** violent and harmful pornography which promotes sexual violence, most often against women and girls, and which is pervasive online, has placed children and young people, particularly young girls at risk of harm.
- **8-10% of children in care are projected to be unaccompanied children seeking asylum by 2027:**  
<sup>5</sup>Children arrive alone, frightened and highly vulnerable having faced traumatic events in their home country and on their journey to the UK. We need a national strategic plan for welcoming all displaced children and a commitment to respect their rights and meet their needs.

**55%**

of 14-17 year-olds believe they will be worse off than their parents' generation.  
[YouGov poll of 1001 children aged 14-17 across GB, February 2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2022-to-2023)

**Almost 120,000**

children of compulsory school age missing education.  
[-Department for Education Official Statistics, February 2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2022-to-2023)

**68%** of Barnardo's

practitioners have supported children and young people who have struggled to attend school over the last twelve months.

*Based on a survey of 985 Barnardo's practitioners in January 2024*

<sup>1</sup> House of Lords Library (2024) Child poverty: Statistics, causes and the UK's policy response <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/child-poverty-statistics-causes-and-the-uks-policy-response/#heading-1>

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education (2023) Children looked after in England including adoption: 2022 to 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2022-to-2023>

<sup>3</sup> NHS England (2023) One in five children and young people had a probable mental health disorder in 2023 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/11/one-in-five-children-and-young-people-had-a-probable-mental-disorder-in-2023/>

<sup>4</sup> Barnardo's (2024) Barnardo's General Election Manifesto: A guide to how the next UK Government can change childhoods and change lives. <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Barnardo's%20General%20Election%20Manifesto%202024.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## **Our calls:**

Ahead of the 2024 General Election, we published [Barnardo's General Election Manifesto](#), setting out our key calls on how the UK Government can change childhoods and change lives. We look forward to working alongside you to make these calls a reality.

### **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.

### **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.

**Barnardo's can support you to champion children's voices in Westminster and your constituency through:**

- Arranging and supporting visits to our services or shops.
- Providing briefings with our research and evidence from our service base.
- Thematic briefings for relevant debates, bills and events.
- Hosting the opportunity for you to meet children and young people supported by Barnardo's.

For more information, please contact: Sundeep Kaur Bhogal, Policy and Public Affairs Lead (England)  
[sundeep.bhogal@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:sundeep.bhogal@barnardos.org.uk)

**[Barnardo's in Westminster](#)**