

### **About Barnardo's**

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. Today we support around 300,000 children, young people, parents and carers through more than 1,000 services. These include providing family support to families on the edge of care, fostering and adoption services which place children in care with families and supported lodging and employment, training and skills support for care leavers.

### **Key messages**

Barnardo's welcome the Government's manifesto commitment to review the care system. For the review to be meaningful it should:

- Have an independent chair, and include independent voices.
- Review the full care journey from edge of care, to children in care through to care leavers (aged 25).
- Be accompanied by a commitment to act on the findings of the review, with a clear implementation period, including providing enough financial resources.

It is unacceptable that in 2020, young people who have been in the care system have far worse outcomes than their peers - **39%** of care leavers were not in education, employment or training as of March 2019.<sup>1</sup>

**We should be ambitious - aiming for a care system that gives the most vulnerable children the same opportunities available to the children of a Government Minister.**

### **Children entering care**

The number of children entering the care system continues to rise. As of March 2019, there were **78,150 children in care** in England. Meanwhile, the number of children being placed for adoption is continuing to fall - from 5,360 in 2015 to 3,570 in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

Children entering care are often older and have more complex needs. Barnardo's analysis of referrals we receive through our fostering services found:

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, March 2019. [Children looked after in England \(including adoption\), year ending 31 March 2019.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

- **16%** of children referred had issues related to child sexual abuse, violent behavior, self-harm, experience of domestic abuse or drug use;
- **17%** were unaccompanied asylum seekers or had been trafficked;
- **6%** indicated harmful sexual behaviour sometimes combined with other issues like learning difficulties or domestic abuse.<sup>3</sup>

We welcome the Government's manifesto commitment to "*review the care system to make sure that all care placements and settings are providing children and young adults with the support they need.*" It is unacceptable that in 2020 young people who have been in the care system have far worse outcomes than their peers - 39% of care leavers were not in education, employment or training as of March 2019.<sup>4</sup>

Barnardo's is investing voluntary funds in strategic partnerships with local authorities, such as in Plymouth, with the aim of radically improving life chances for young people who have been in the care system. We are working to identify the long term shifts needed to achieve system change, co-designing services with care leavers, and using technology to develop new approaches to supporting young people.

## **Role of children's services**

Local authority children services provide a crucial role in protecting children from harm. However, they are in the midst of a financial crisis. Our analysis<sup>5</sup> shows:

- **There has been an increase in demand for local authority children's services** with a 26% increase in child protection inquiries and a 17% increase in the number of looked after children since 2010.
- **There has been a sharp fall in funding for local authorities** from the central government, which has seen a 29% reduction in available resources for children's services.
- **As funding has fallen, early help services have disappeared**, leaving many children, young people and families only able to get the support they need when they reach crisis point.
- **Children receiving help are displaying more complex problems** requiring intensive, ongoing support from children's services.
- While local authorities have protected their spending on statutory children's services, **almost nine out of 10 local authorities in England overspent on children's social care** in the last financial

<sup>3</sup> Barnardo's, 2017. [A profile of children referred to Barnardo's fostering services in England](#)

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education, March 2019. [Children looked after in England \(including adoption\), year ending 31 March 2019](#).

<sup>5</sup> Barnardo's, The Children's Society, Action for Children, NCB and NSPCC, 2019. [Children and young people's services: Funding and spending 2010/11 to 2017/18](#).

year, as the rising number of children taken into care put extra pressure on budgets.<sup>6</sup>

The review of the care system is a once in a generation opportunity to look holistically at how we can best support vulnerable children and set a new direction, so local authorities are able to prioritise early intervention and plan for the delivery of high-quality care.

### **Scope of the review**

The review should:

- Take a holistic view of the **whole care journey** from family support services for families on the edge of care, to the different types of placements for children in care such as kinship care, special guardianships, fostering, adoption, secure estate, through to care leavers.
- **Work with charities like Barnardo's to hear from children, young people, parents and carers who have care experience, as well as professionals** such as social workers.
- Have an independent chair and Include independent representatives including charities like Barnardo's, which has been supporting vulnerable children for 154 years.
- Include a commitment from the Government to **introduce a thorough and costed implementation plan with a clear timeline based on the recommendations of the review** - to achieve real change by the end of this Parliament.

### **Questions for the Minister**

1. Will the Minister confirm that the review will take a holistic view of the whole care journey including edge of care, children in care and care leavers?
2. Will the Minister confirm that children, young people, parents, carers and professionals who interact with the care system will be consulted as part of this review?

**For more information, contact Sarah Murray, Public Affairs Officer, on 0208 498 7659 or email [sarah.murray@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:sarah.murray@barnardos.org.uk)**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jan/08/rise-in-children-taken-into-care>