



Barnardo's Scotland - In This Together

**Covid-19 - Responding to the needs of children,
young people and families**

**8th June – Supporting families experiencing or
recovering from domestic abuse**

**Believe in
children**
 **Barnardo's
Scotland**

This week we're highlighting the work of Barnardo's Scotland's services supporting children and families living with or recovering from Domestic Abuse.

We have a number of dedicated domestic abuse services across Scotland, but have found that in every service we deliver, we meet families impacted by this issue. This week's In This Together report focuses on this work, sharing our learning of this area through the Covid-19 period.

To protect the anonymity of those families who access our services, this week's report draws on the experiences of a variety of services and all case studies and examples have had names and place-names changed. Special thanks to Dundee Multi-Agency Independent Advocacy Service, Tayside Domestic Abuse Services, Barnardo's Forth Valley Services, Falkirk Pathways Service, Threads Family Support Service in Renfrewshire and the Family Plus service in North Lanarkshire for sharing their stories.

Increased Need During Lockdown

Nationally, it has been recognised that lockdown restrictions have increased some families' vulnerability to domestic abuse and evidence suggests that there has been a rise in the incidence and reporting of domestic abuse over recent weeks.

In places like Dundee, which has the highest prevalence rate of domestic abuse of any Scottish local authority, it is clear that the consequences of coronavirus and the current lockdown is having a severe impact on victims of domestic abuse, both adults and children.

The National Domestic Abuse Helpline has seen a 25% increase in calls and online requests for help since the lockdown started, and this level of increase is reflected in our Multi-Agency Independent Advocacy (MIA) Service and Tayside Domestic Abuse Service.



A number of factors has caused this increase in need.

Increased isolation: Since lockdown victims of domestic abuse have had limited or no access to their support networks, including friends, family, work colleagues and workers. Furlough measures and school closures mean whole households are often now at home all day together. Some report they literally feel trapped in their home.

Manipulation of lockdown measures: We know that many families living with abuse are facing greater restrictions on their activity as abusers manipulate lockdown policy to limit time outdoors, access to amenities, contact with children, and communication with support networks.

Financial pressures: For many families income has reduced due to furlough or loss of work. Changes in benefits and the increased cost of food and utilities due to being at home are resulting in real poverty. In addition to deprivation and stress, this can make some families more vulnerable to criminal and sexual exploitation.

Access to technology: Many households are reliant on digital devices and an internet connection to stay in touch with their family, friends and organisations offering support during lockdown. However, many families cannot afford this technology, or abusers restrict access to it, meaning our services have to think creatively to work with those in need.

Vulnerable groups: We have seen an increase in migrant women and those from BAME communities accessing support from our services. This group often have additional vulnerabilities due to language barriers and legal status, which can make support difficult to navigate. Many of these families were already very isolated but this has been reduced further by lockdown. Additional time and resources are required to ensure BAME women are supported in a way that is accessible for them, including accessing interpreters.

"One woman reported that ordinarily she could cope very well under the circumstances but coronavirus has made the situation worse – she is no longer able to leave the house for work or shopping which means she is unable to escape at any point – work was her safe place and didn't need to look over her shoulder constantly."

How our Services have Adapted to Lockdown

In our experience victims of domestic abuse can show a lot of resilience, but we are seeing this deteriorate the longer the current restrictions are in place. As a result we are finding that following a referral many individuals need input from the service for a longer period, reducing overall service capacity.

The combination of a surge in referrals, cases staying open longer, and the need to work in a different way, has had a significant impact on our capacity to support new referrals. In response to this we have increased our staffing capacity in Dundee for the next six months to meet needs 7 days a week so we're available at times when people need us most.

Lockdown and wider restrictions have forced our teams to find alternative ways of delivering support in place of face to face contact. Support is now delivered over the phone, including video conferencing.

We are also piloting an on-call system for evenings and weekends as we know an immediate response when somebody seeks help often leads to better engagement with the service over the longer-term.

Other services have been operating a duty system, whereby our partners in Health, Social Work and Housing are able to continue referring vulnerable families to our service and a holistic model of care can be provided.

We are being as creative as possible to keep families safe. For example, we have found ways to deliver mobile phones to parents experiencing abuse for them to use in an emergency or to seek telephone support when they are out of the house.

We have also supported vulnerable parents by purchasing mobile phones, SIM cards and data to help protect families experiencing abuse. This can protect their communication from being tracked by perpetrators and also provides a vital lifeline to access support, and if required, to be able to contact emergency services.



We have also provided fun activity packs and other creative resources to children experiencing distressing circumstances including having to flee their homes to stay with family and friends or whilst they seek refuge outwith the area.

Throughout Scotland, our services have utilised the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund to provide sanitary products, food parcels, toiletries and access to baby formula, nappies and baby wipes during the lockdown period.

Our services have seen an increase in referrals of women in the ante natal and perinatal period during the pandemic. We have been working hard with our partners to ensure these women get the right practical and emotional support, including access to health services, as their babies are born into lockdown.



How we use the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund

We have numerous examples of how we have used the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund to enhance the support we can offer to families experiencing or recovering from domestic abuse.

- Purchasing arts and crafts materials for a family who have little income and needed resources to amuse and stimulate young children.
- Supporting a mother, who had been financially dependent on an abusive ex-partner, to pay for gas, electricity and nappies, so that she did not need to contact him.
- Purchasing phone credit for a woman which was an essential part of her support and safety plan.
- Buying a train ticket for a woman to return to her hometown with her child following a serious physical assault by her partner.
- Supporting a family to move house before a perpetrator was released from prison because a private tenancy incurred additional costs and a council property was not available.
- Contributing towards gas and electricity bills because a family's usage was higher when all the children were home from school and the parent had been furloughed from an Employment Support work placement.
- Providing tablets to two young people to help them keep up with their schoolwork and also allow them to keep in touch with their grandparents during lockdown.
- Supplying one family with blinds for their windows to help them feel safer when they moved into a ground floor property during lockdown.

Feedback from Families and Partners

Feedback from local partners and the people who use our services on access to our services and the Wellbeing Fund has been extremely positive.

"I wanted to pass on the gratitude of a service user and the social worker for the amazingly speedy response to a referral. We are very grateful and thank you to Barnardo's staff for their excellent work." - Social Work Team Manager

"Thanks for the very quick support; I know the family will really appreciate it." - Social Worker

"I'm so grateful. I didn't know there was financial help out there for people like me. It really means a lot."
- Service user

"The kids being home they are eating me out of house and home and using so much more electric. Having a little help has totally taken the pressure off for now".
- Service user

"I have to say that I think the service you and your colleagues are providing is fantastic. You have been a great help to discuss referrals over the phone. I received a tablet delivered to my home today for a family and I only put in the referral a couple of days ago so the service has been so much faster than I ever expected... On behalf of the families I work with that you have supported a BIG thank you!" - School & Family Development Worker

"The Wellbeing Fund has been invaluable during Covid-19 with significant numbers of the women we support accessing the fund to help meet their daily needs and helping to cope with crisis too. The flexibility of the fund, speed of processing applications and us being able to help women with complex needs manage the money has really made a difference to them and their families." - Chief Executive Officer, Dundee Women's Aid

"Thank you so much... money is really tight just now so I'm not sure how I would manage."
- Service user

A Barnardo's Scotland worker explains their work with one family during recent weeks...

One family I am working with have experienced domestic abuse and the children are transitioning between both parents' homes as the parents are separated.

The father has frequently placed barriers for the children and mother communicating whilst the children are in his care. The children had not seen their mum for three weeks at the beginning of lockdown and he had stated that this was because of the health risk involved. In addition to this, he had withheld money from the mother and she could not buy food to feed the children whilst in her care which was why he felt they should remain with him.

We were able to use the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund to provide food and fuel provisions for the mother and break down this barrier. I was able to liaise with the social worker and both parents to establish a plan with focus on the children's physical *and* mental health and wellbeing therefore highlighting the impacts that not being able to contact their mother would have on them.

This was consistent with the 'Safe and Together' model with the use of the 'perpetrators pathways to harm' tool. I was able to use my training and this tool to make a thorough assessment of the support needed for the family and communicate this effectively with the parents and social worker.

I have been able to provide consistent support to the family with weekly video calls and access to activity resources. This work has provided some stability for the children as they know when they will have contact with each parent and the regular communication from me along with the activities/resources provided is adding further structure to their week.

Another Barnardo's Scotland worker shares how she has built a relationship with a parent facing a difficult situation...

A family I am in the initial stages of supporting have reached crisis as the child's father is currently serving a prison sentence for domestic violence and they were notified recently that he is being released from prison early.

The family now have a matter of weeks to find and move to a new home as the mother fears for their safety in their current home. The child is opting to stay with other family members as she does not feel safe at home.

When I recently had my initial phone call with the mother she was her fears for her child's emotional wellbeing with the level of anxiety they are living with at the moment and her child is in great need of emotional support.

The mother is very grateful that I have been able to start offering her and her child support during this difficult time.



And finally, another Barnardo's Scotland worker describe how they were able to build up a new mum's resilience prior to lockdown and are continuing support through this challenging time...

Earlier this year we started working with a young woman who referred herself to our service. When we initially engaged with her she was homeless, sofa surfing and a few months pregnant. Her ex-partner (and her baby's dad) was known to social work and police for previous violent crimes and his use of drugs. She disclosed there was a pattern of coercive control in the relationship.

We offered support through our Peri-Natal Infant Mental Health group. Through her attendance she gradually expanded her social circle and reduced her isolation which was very important as she had no family support due to a relationship breakdown.

We supported her to apply for benefits and made referrals to homeless services and all relevant housing agencies to try and secure her a new tenancy. A referral was also made to the Mental Health Team to get her more support and a CPN was appointed.

She has now had her baby, a wee boy, and with encouragement she is started rebuilding her relationship with her parents. Through lockdown we have been giving her emotional, practical and financial support and she is now working towards becoming debt free and is positive about her future and her ability to provide for her child.

Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 16,300 children and young people in over 140 specialised community-based services across Scotland, and 95 shops across the country directly supporting the services. Our work includes: fostering and adoption services and support; helping children break free from sexual exploitation; supporting young carers; helping young people in to employment and helping children living in poverty.

Visit www.barnardos.org.uk/scotland to find out how you can get involved and show you believe in children. **Twitter:** [@BarnardosScot](https://twitter.com/BarnardosScot) **Facebook:** [Barnardo's Scotland](https://www.facebook.com/Barnardo'sScotland)