



# Barnardo's Scotland - In This Together

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

**29<sup>th</sup> June - Supporting children and young  
people at risk of and experiencing  
sexual abuse and exploitation**

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

**This report highlights the work of Barnardo's Scotland's services supporting children and young people at risk of or experiencing sexual abuse and exploitation.**

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSA&E) are complex issues, and many of the young people and families we work with are experiencing multiple challenges in their lives. Our services work hard, alongside other agencies, to address any concerns that might prevent a child being properly safeguarded from abuse.

This week we'll spotlight the work of our Safer Choices service covering Glasgow and the surrounding local authority areas, RISE Service (Reducing the Impact of Sexual Exploitation – in partnership with Police Scotland in Dundee, Levenmouth and Glasgow), and the Barnardo's Early Intervention Service (BEIS) in Edinburgh. We'll also reflect on the challenges Covid-19 and the lockdown have created.

## Themes and Emerging Concerns

Our services have noticed that children and young people at risk of experiencing child sexual abuse and exploitation are facing additional vulnerabilities at this time.

- Some young people and families are at increased risk of being sexually and criminally exploited due to limited finances during lockdown.
- Families are worried about the implications of their children being criminalised for breaking lockdown rules, and are therefore hesitating to report them as missing, meaning some young people are going missing for extended periods without anyone looking for them.
- Young people, especially care leavers living in their own tenancies, are finding themselves even more socially isolated than usual, which abusive adults are taking advantage of to further harm or target them.
- There are fewer protective adults in communities interacting with children that previously may have acted as safeguards or disrupted exploitation. This has resulted in fewer opportunities to intervene meaning a rise in safeguarding issues.
- Lockdown has meant that many young people are dependent on technology to stay in touch and this has resulted in children being targeted and abused online.

Our services have also faced additional challenges in supporting this group of young people and families due to lockdown restrictions.

- In the early days of lockdown, many of our usual means of outreach (e.g. schools based work, home visits, street work, engagement with services for looked after and accommodated children, were not always possible. These approaches are once again becoming possible, however securing young people's participation in their care planning meetings remains challenging in the current circumstances. Workers' observation of young people is limited, and therefore their ability to ensure young people receive breaks or additional support around the meeting is also limited.
- Children and young people have told us that some support services are now using the same devices and platforms that have been used to exploit and abuse them. This has been challenging for some young people especially those that had moved away from social media for this reason.
- Many of the children we support live in overcrowded spaces with limited privacy and therefore any meaningful engagement on issues of abuse and exploitation is challenging. This significantly reduces the opportunities for young people to disclose their experiences of sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Supporting a young person who is traumatised remotely is challenging, and workers have had to find new ways of communicating with and supporting young people to cope with triggers.

We have, however, worked with a small number of young people who are thriving in lockdown. They are feeling safer, engaging more with family life, and are more relaxed in their home. This has in part been because everyone is 'in the same boat', but some of our young people are telling us they have a reason not to go out that is understood, and they are using this to manage some of the pressures from others, including their abusers. How we support these young people out of lockdown will be crucial.



## Barnardo's Early Intervention Service (BEIS), Edinburgh

### **Return home discussions**

Our team offers a return home discussion to children who have been reported missing. These conversations are vital for responding to the welfare needs of vulnerable young people, as well as building up information about potential exploitation in the local area.

We have been able to expand our delivery of virtual return home discussions for all City of Edinburgh run Children and Young People's Centres and many young people living at home during lockdown.

During the initial stages of lockdown, BEIS and Police Scotland rewrote the missing person return discussion protocol for Edinburgh's looked after and accommodated children, ensuring support and intelligence sharing remained a key focus.

### **Online Training**

Our training with parents, carers, social workers, and other professionals on how to identify and respond to concerns of sexual abuse and exploitation has continued throughout lockdown.

Within days of lockdown coming into place, we were able to deliver online a virtual version of our training. These sessions have been reviewed and updated to incorporate the impact Covid-19 is having on children, young people and families in relation to sexual abuse and exploitation, harmful sexual behaviours and childhood adversity.

### **Supporting Partner Agencies**

During lockdown BEIS has worked closely to support partner agencies with measures to support emergency interventions and strategies to prevent

"Covid-19 has presented children's services with many challenges in terms of continuing our work to protect children at risk of harm and to meet the needs of those who need our help. Barnardo's Scotland has continued to be a key player in the multi-agency partnership in City of Edinburgh and the team has been as positive and solution focussed as I have always found them to be. Well done all and I look forward to continuing this positive partnership as we move into the next phases of the easing of lockdown".

Andy Jeffries, Senior Manager, Children's Practice Teams, City of Edinburgh Council

“The [Barnardo’s Scotland’s] practitioner’s ability to constantly review and adapt his approach throughout the process when faced with different challenges and at the same time offer us guidance and strategies to deal with the many complex and challenging situations made all the difference”. Foster carer

CSE. This included assisting Police Scotland with discussions with vulnerable young people considered at significant risk of child sexual exploitation and conducting assessments to support children and young people displaying harmful or problematic sexual behaviours so we can better respond to their needs.

### **Responding to Technology Assisted Abuse**

Our services have been aware of the use of social media and smart devices in the grooming and abuse of children and young people for many years, and this knowledge and experience has been especially valuable during lockdown, when everyone has been more reliant on digital communications.

David Russell, a senior practitioner with BEIS, has worked with Stop It Now! and the National Organisation for the Treatment of Abuse in Scotland to produce an article and guidance to the sector, including safety plans, advice, interventions and assessments to tackle technology assisted harmful sexual behaviours.



## Safer Choices (Glasgow and surrounding authorities)

We have been inundated with referrals for individual support – with 11 referrals from 4 different local authorities from March to June. Our service continued to provide emotional support, initially over the phone or through video calls. The emotional support has subsequently developed and increased into doorstep visits, garden visits and face-to-face contact.

We have been meeting young people on their doorstep for a distanced chat; taking them 'distraction' packs or even their favourite cookie to remind them that there was someone out there thinking of them. Often we have been the only pair of eyes seeing a young person throughout this crisis period.

We have also been able to re-commence street work which is a vital way for us to reach and build our relationships with potentially vulnerable young people. We are now ready to once again allow young people to access our office bases.

Throughout lockdown, we have also supported a number of other Barnardo's Scotland services through direct support to young people that they have been concerned about or supporting the established Barnardo's worker to support the young person more effectively and confidently.

Safer Choices, as part of building capacity within other agencies, has continued to facilitate training with British Transport Police regarding criminal exploitation and with other Barnardo's services regarding trafficking and specifically the national referral mechanism.

### **International Missing Children's Day – 25th May 2020**

Young people working with the service designed and supported the development of materials to help educate children, young people and professionals in Scotland about running away and how to access support. The Missing Education Resource Development Project was set up and run in partnership with Missing People UK and Education Scotland and was formally launched on Missing People's Runaway Helpline website.

One young person wanted to thank the team for their continued efforts to support her and for thinking about her. So, using the sketching materials from a distraction pack, she sketched a picture for the service staff team. The young person's sketch of a Sakura (Japanese cherry blossom) - in Japanese culture representing hope and new life, and of the transient nature of life events - is a reminder that even these current circumstances of pandemic and lockdown will eventually pass! The young person has since taken up the offer of telephone contact with the worker.



## **RISE - Dundee, Glasgow and Levenmouth (Reducing the Impact of Sexual Exploitation)**

RISE is a partnership service with Police Scotland. There are CSE Advisors co-located in police stations in Dundee, Glasgow and Fife, but in the initial stages of lockdown staff could no longer be based within most police stations. Social distancing and shielding measures meant that there was reduced numbers in various police departments, or changes of shift patterns; this posed some difficulties for partnership working and CSE Advisors had to find new ways to communicate and work alongside police colleagues. Examples of this include remote intelligence sharing, joint socially distancing visits to young people, and ongoing check-in calls.

Pressure on police resources restricted our ability to share information e.g. flagging up exploitation or locations where there are additional risks to young people. This limited the response we could offer. RISE moved to remote meetings with the Police, allowing us to continue to share information and work together effectively.

RISE helps children and young people who have been abused and exploited. We work closely with a number of statutory and other agencies (e.g. social work, education, housing, and third sector bodies) and put young people in touch with professionals who can offer direct support. Lockdown meant that our CSE Advisors weren't able to maintain face-to-face contact with young people and with other professionals, and the ability to support and offer guidance was hampered.

For young people not currently working with the service, but where concerns have been raised, they have largely struggled to engage in telephone support. For these young people initial visits have been arranged to support a connection and a combination of direct work and telephone supports has been subsequently put in place. Socially distanced joint visits (using PPE) have been undertaken with social work and police to try to ensure young people who are experiencing exploitation during this time are still receiving supports and interventions. In addition, packs of basic supplies, such as clothing and food, have been given to a number of young people in contact with RISE.





## Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund

We have been able to use the Wellbeing Fund to provide children and families with what they need, when they need it.

- We have purchased distraction pack materials and coping tools for young people. We were able to provide things such as colouring-in materials, sensory items and fidget toys, computer vouchers, blankets, journals, art sets, workbooks for anxiety and stress, and various items to support young people's wellbeing during lockdown.
- We have supplied young people and families with food, fuel, nappies and white goods when they have been financially disadvantaged during lockdown.
- We bought clothing items for a young person who left her home where she was being harmed with only the clothes she was wearing.
- A young person, who returned to Scotland following being sexually exploited, trafficked and physically abused, was provided with some money to help her get food, milk, and nappies for herself and her new baby.
- We were able to provide a pregnancy test for a young person who was unable to access her GP during early lockdown.
- We purchased a washing machine for a young person when hers broke to prevent her having to make contact with her landlord, who was also the person abusing her.
- We purchased basic smartphones for young people with no other way to contact services and other support networks during this time.

Perpetrators of abuse have made some young people dependant on them for basic things such as food, a place to live and money. During lockdown, some of our young people have found themselves with no way to have their basic needs met and in one case this was because the perpetrator was fearful of catching Covid-19. The fund allowed us to ensure young people have a way to get these basic needs met safely.

One young person shared that receiving the distraction pack with fidget toys, anxiety 'wreck it' journal, has really helped when they are feeling anxious and they have begun to write in their journal to help get their thoughts and feelings out, as they find expressing their thoughts and feelings difficult.

## We're proud of the impact we've made

Young people shared how much they looked forward to receiving their distraction packs not least because the packs were delivered in person which allowed for some real face-to-face contact, albeit at a physical distance.

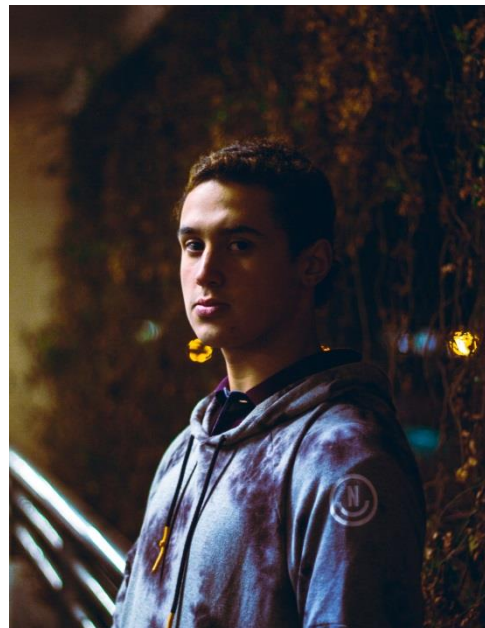
One young person who had received some pens, colouring books and fidget toys explained that it helps with their frustration and boredom, thanking the service. They especially like their magnetic fidget toy.

*"Nightmares and memories have been really hard and it [distraction pack] is helping a bit and how you're helping me work out how to use the stuff is good because it gets me to calm down a bit."*  
Young person

*"It was nice to know that even though I couldn't see [Barnardo's Worker] that she was still thinking of me and it was really good to know she cared enough to get me something - and it was a three months Xbox voucher as well, not just a little thing!"* Young person

*"Thank you so much for the food parcels as it would have been very difficult without your support"* Parent

*"The conversations and chatting are helpful to get through lockdown. Every 2 weeks the food parcel has been a great help."*  
Parent



### **Amy's story**

Prior to lockdown, a 13 year old girl named Amy had been going missing from her family home on a frequent basis. A 17 year old male was sexually exploiting her and despite police and social work intervention no charges were brought and Amy continued to be exploited but felt unable to tell about what was happening. Lockdown then gave her a reason not to go out. As she was able to stay home she spent positive time with and experienced care from her parents. As lockdown measures eased, the pressure on Amy from the 17 year old increased and she went missing in his company. When she returned, Amy was able to disclose to her mum and dad that she was sexually assaulted and they responded with the love and care she needed. Lockdown had allowed Amy to rebuild her connection with her parents and loosened the control of her abuser.

### **Jordan's story**

Peer on peer exploitation between two boys, aged 17 and 15, occurred during lockdown over a period of weeks. Jordan, aged 15 years, had previously been able to obtain cigarettes in the community, but during lockdown he became dependant on a 17 year old male for these. This situation was used by the older boy to establish some power over Jordan who was then sexually exploited over a period of around six weeks before this became known and support was put in place.

**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](http://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)