



Barnardo's Scotland - In This Together

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

**22nd June – Supporting children, young people
and families with experience of
the criminal justice system**

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

Barnardo's Scotland offers a range of services throughout the country to children, young people and families who are currently in contact with youth justice services or with previous experience of the justice system and imprisonment.

Our services include prison-based support such as those within HMP Polmont Young Offenders Institution and the HMP Edinburgh prison visitor's centre; community-based youth justice services including those based in Stirling and Clackmannanshire; women's justice services like our Shine Women's mentoring and Ayrshire Court screening; and family support for children affected by parental imprisonment.

As with all those we work with, these families are facing additional Covid-related pressures and our services have adapted their ways of working to ensure their needs are met.

Themes and Emerging Concerns

Our services contributed their experiences of lockdown to a recent report by the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice – its findings reflect the wide range of issues being faced by the young people and families we support.

- Children and young people cited isolation and lack of contact with others - family, friends and services - as the biggest issue affecting those in contact with the justice system. Other impacts of COVID-19 restrictions included boredom, not being able to attend school, managing financially and lack of information and the uncertainty of the current situation.
- Changes to the operation of the youth justice system were highlighted as a concern. This included delays owing to restrictions to court and Children's Hearings; progression of plans; maintaining contact with services and supports including social work and legal professionals and attending court; and for those in custody.



- For those who had been in contact with the police, mixed experiences were reported, varying between responses being deemed fair and appropriate and more adversarial and negative. A small group of children described negative experiences based on feeling targeted by the police.
- The impact on children and young people's mental health was a key theme.
- Changes in offence types have been noted in some areas, with particular challenges identified with the operation of the justice system across all areas of the Whole System Approach. Some existing challenges such as delays to processes and release from custody have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

CYCJ, 2020, p4-5

SPOTLIGHT: Stirling Youth and Adult Justice Services

Survey Monkey

To inform the development of appropriate digital support services, we created a very short Survey Monkey questionnaire. We received a fantastic response during the two short weeks of the survey with 16 young people and 2 parents contributing their comments and ideas. In response to this feedback we are in the process of developing our social media and other digital platforms to provide what young people and parents have told us is important to them.

Some of our young people and families are simply unable to meet the cost of appropriate devices or internet access. To enable them to stay in touch we have provided mobile telephones, data, top-ups and short-term internet packages.



Creative thinking

We have established a working group which meets fortnightly to consider how we can continue to improve and develop this exciting new way of working with young people. We are looking at different ways to create engaging and educational content for children, young people and families – including the use of animation!

We have just launched our first virtual art competition which offers young people from all our services a creative outlet and the opportunity to engage in a group activity while at home.

The challenge as we move forward out of lockdown is how we can continue to offer socially distanced support for what may be a lengthy period of time to come. One of the ways we are trying to address this is to purchase folding chairs, picnic and fishing equipment for workers to store in their cars. This will allow them to meet with young people in open space areas to provide more meaningful support and engage them more creatively in activities.

Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund

Our services have been using the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund to make emergency discretionary purchases for young people and families struggling with the consequences of the pandemic.

We were able to purchase two Tesco vouchers for a family experiencing reduced income during lockdown. This purchased one weekend's worth of food and essential replacement clothing for a child.

A mobile phone was provided to a young person to enable him to keep in touch with his family, preventing arguments around unannounced visits to their home.

Shine Women's Mentoring and Court Services

The current measures in place to ensure everyone's safety during the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted on women's experience within prisons and on the service delivery for women supported by Shine Women's Mentoring and court screening services. There's been a need for more creative ways to stay in touch; meaningful links with families; access to service and support networks. We've relied more on telephone and digital contact, pre-arranged "meetings" and facilitating links with families and others.



Heightened risks have included concerns when vulnerable women are not responding to texts and phone calls and the stresses and pressures associated with the lockdown restrictions. Staff within the service are working very hard alongside partner agencies to ensure the impact is limited where possible.

One of the areas being progressed is liberation packs which have been developed for women leaving prison to ensure they have information, essential toiletries and a phone to access support and remain connected with friends and family.



Shine and housing services have been working together to ensure women have essential items for their new tenancies. One woman stated that she was so thankful as otherwise she would have been sofa surfing and not in a safe place.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic a number of hostel accommodations have been closed. Due to this, one woman had to move out into her new tenancy earlier than was anticipated. A Community Care Grant application was completed by hostel staff prior to closure and she received white goods, a bed, bedding and sofa. A Barnardo's worker purchased and delivered a mobile phone and top up to her in order to facilitate ongoing support.

RAFT Service in Aberdeen

The Barnardo's RAFT (Reaching Aberdeen Families Together) service has risen to the challenges of the lockdown conditions to maintain contact and engagement with their young people and families. RAFT has continued to ensure at least weekly face-to-face contact with their young people and families. PPE has been used to allow workers to visit homes and undertake physically-distanced walks as well as the occasional kick about in back gardens.

However brief the level of contact, the positive impact on young people is obvious in their reaction and continued engagement rates. Young people have responded well to the use of social media and we

continue to be surprised by how well so many have adjusted to the current challenges.

Workers have used a wide range of platforms to engage young people remotely, such as FaceTime and WhatsApp, with examples of young people who weren't engaging pre-lockdown starting to engage, preferring the use of technology to communicate than face to face meetings.



Right-Based Approach to Lockdown Laws

After the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 was passed a number of 16/17-year-olds were being issued with Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for breaches to the lockdown restrictions. Scottish 16/17-year-olds were excluded from protections that apply to their peers in other parts of the UK and effectively being punished as though they were adults, conflicting with the UNCRC definition that a child is anyone under 18.

Working alongside the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland we successfully campaigned for an amendment to the legislation to close this loophole.

We are now supporting a call for all FPNs issued to 16/17-year-olds to be annulled, with a commitment that no one will be criminalised as a result. We have also supported the development of guidance for Police Scotland in relation to engaging with children and young people during Covid-19 restrictions.

Feedback from Families and Partners

We've heard back from the young people and families who have accessed our services, and the partner agencies we work with, about the impact our continued support has had during these challenging times.

"I used to use local resources e.g. library to use their soap, paper towels and toilet roll, however when they all closed due to Covid, despite the shame, I managed to tell my Barnardo's worker who supplied me with lots of toiletries which will keep me going for months. Thank you!!"

"We wouldn't have managed lockdown without your support, you are never judgemental and we know you are there for us"

"Thanks very much for Sunday he really did appreciate it :) he got a bit upset on the Monday tho as he only seen u and me for his birthday and only cards off us 2 also 😊 but was very proud of him he had a cry let it all out and got on with his day that's the first time I think he's actually been able to control his anger when upset. The cake was delicious I got a bit haha he even shared his wine gums too haha. Thanks again."

"You don't know how much your support has held me together from the stress and worries of how are we going to survive through this"

"[Newly referred woman] has specifically asked for [Shine Worker] to be her worker as she has built up a good trusting appropriate relationship. Could I just please add that [Shine Worker] truly is a genuine wonderful worker/colleague and I don't know what I would do without her support for the women. Nothing is ever a problem for her and she will go out her way to not only support the women but the worker too. I have just come back from [an absence] and the support [she] has shown to me is very much appreciated. ... I just wanted to show how very much I appreciate her and your fantastic service."

