

Briefing for Member's Business Debate – Thursday 13 January 2022 Championing the Right to Holistic Family Support

About Barnardo's Scotland

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity, operating in Scotland since 1892. Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 16,300 children, young people and families in over 150 services. We deliver a wide range of services which includes providing family support and early intervention, supporting children, young people and families through fostering and adoption services, helping children affected by sexual abuse and exploitation, helping young people entering employment, education and training, and supporting young people and families affected by drug and alcohol use. We use information and experience from our services across Scotland, and from the children and young people we work with, to seek positive change in policy and practice based on what matters to the people who use our services and what we see working in communities. For further information please contact Kirsty-Louise Hunt, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Lead for Barnardo's Scotland, at kirstylouise.hunt@barnardos.org.uk

Key Messages

- Barnardo's Scotland want to see **consistent access to family support** that is relationship-based, easily accessible, flexible to family need and responsive to practical, emotional and financial challenges.
- Barnardo's Scotland want to see a network of family support services which puts **an end to inequality in service availability** and ensures the delivery of support to all families who need it regardless of where they live.
- The Scottish Government's £500 million Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and work of the Family Support Delivery Group is welcome and an important step in the right direction. However, Scotland's **children and families need support now** and there must be urgency around directing this funding towards frontline support.

What is family support?

Family support is an approach that centres on relationships, by providing a range of practical and emotional support to help strengthen and nurture family connections - getting alongside children, young people, parents and carers in their communities and providing **compassionate, consistent and practical support** and operating a **'no wrong door' approach**. Barnardo's has dozens of family support services across Scotland which support thousands of individuals.

Family support can often be perceived as an early intervention approach, effectively reducing the need for more intensive, intrusive and expensive treatments at a later stage. However, it can also be offered at any stage of family life and be delivered flexibly increasing or decreasing in intensity in response to changing levels of need. Importantly, a longer-term involvement should not be perceived as inherently negative, as it may in fact be enabling a family to sustain improvements and keep children at home.

Family Support in Barnardo's Scotland

We know from our experience within Barnardo's Scotland that it can take some time for families to find the right type and level of support, often only being able to access help once their situation has deteriorated and there is a risk of statutory intervention. That's why we need to see a greater focus on **early intervention**.

- **Early Years**

We know a child's earliest years are critical, as our experience in this period starts to shape the way we relate to others. Our Perinatal Mental Health Service across Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, providing a range of group work and one to one support for expectant parents, new parents and carers and infants up to three years old. We use the Five to Thrive method to provide parents with knowledge and skills about attachment and development, so they have lots of information about how their baby will grow and develop and how they can support them. Many of the parents supported by 'Growing Together' are also care experienced. This is what Julie from our **Threads service in Renfrewshire** says about her role and the difference this can make: "I work with young families who are either expecting a baby or have a baby in that first year perinatal period. I work a lot with the Five to Thrive approach, giving parents more information about how their baby is developing and how their interactions have an impact on how their baby develops. I also work with families where I give a lot of emotional support, again through the peri-natal period, again young mums."

- **Schools-based support**

Barnardo's Scotland has a long history of working in partnership with schools and we deliver schools-based support to around 16% of the Scottish education estate and recognise the range of complex issues which can affect children and young people's engagement in education. Our work often includes individual and group support to children, young people and their families using a family support approach.

Lesley, who works in our **Barnardo's Scotland Nurture service in Inverclyde** has said: "I support families with any sort of need, so it could be problems with their tenancy, problems with their finances, budgeting, getting their benefits straight, those sorts of immediate practical supports. But I also offer support emotionally, if they are going through tough times either because they have mental or physical health problems, or because someone in their family has mental or physical health problems, or relationship issues with kids, partner or other people in their family or community. It can also be they have problems implementing routines and boundaries with their kids and addressing this can make family life much better.

"I try and give support that's appropriate to the level of their need, to come alongside them and not disempower them in any way. I want them to realise they have the power within themselves to get through whatever is going on for them and get out the other end. I always believe we can work together to get to a place where they no longer need me. Parents are the best people to know what's going on in their family, they are the experts and it's much better to support them to a place where they can deal with things on their own."

- **Supporting families affected by disability**

Across Barnardo's Scotland we provide **family support in partnership with children, young people and families**, who experience a range of additional support needs, including disability. Our staff can provide **practical support**, including help understanding a diagnosis or condition, alongside listening and supporting parental self-care.

Alison from our Dundee service said about her role:

"I work in a child and family service where we have a focus on children with disabilities. I predominantly work with parents, however, I use a whole family approach because a parent needs to be ok to be able to parent effectively.

"It can be supporting parents with their mental health, routines, structure, boundaries, understanding their child's diagnosis, and sometimes it's just being that person on the end of the phone, to listen and to say 'ok what solution can we come up with then'. It's about supporting parents to enjoy the uniqueness of their child and to learn and have the confidence to say what works for them and their child."

- **Supporting the transition to adulthood for young adults**

For many young people the transition to adulthood and independent living can be challenging if they don't have a **positive support network** to help them navigate the changes this brings. Barnardo's Scotland has a number of 16+, leaving care and housing support services who are able **be alongside young people and offer practical and emotional help** as they set off on their journey to independence.

Here is what Lucy from our Renfrewshire service said about her role:

"I work mainly with young people who live in our Gap Homes, who are transitioning from a care setting to independent living. Initially it is a very high level of support but as they get more confident that eases off. The pandemic has had a big impact on mental health so we have been getting out for walks, lots of nature activities, support with cooking and cleaning, a lot of conflict resolution and anything else which can support their day to day lives.

"When they go on to independent living I carry on supporting them... Previously we've had families in the house too so that included supporting the parents and the babies, being there in the evenings helping with bedtime routines and popping in each morning to help with the morning routine. We're always adapting to meet the needs of the young people either reducing the support down or building it up depending on what they need."