



Family Support Workers in Acute and Emergency Care Settings



Introduction to Barnardo's

Leading children's charity Barnardo's is one of the most comprehensive providers of integrated health and social care services for children and young people, with more than 150 years' experience of supporting them through a variety of challenging circumstances.



We work with a range of commissioners and partners including NHS England (NHSE), Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Department for Education (DfE) and local authorities (LAs) to support the delivery of cost-effective and innovative integrated health and wellbeing services across prevention, early intervention, targeted and specialist support in a variety of place-based settings throughout the UK.

Our services take a trauma-informed and inclusive approach based on the principles of personalised care and shared decision making. We put the voices of children, young people and families at the heart of what we do to ensure all our services are accessible and appropriate.

Our offer

Barnardo's Family Support Workers offer psycho-social support to families in various health settings.

This aims to reduce pressures on the health system whilst providing accessible, non-clinical support to families when they need it most. We work with families who may not meet the threshold for traditional children's services intervention but where there is a health benefit to providing additional support. We focus on the causes of ill-health to make lasting change for families. This can mean meeting someone at their home, or over the phone, to talk through their circumstances and either agree an action plan or signpost onwards, as agreed in partnership with the family.



The Barnardo's Family Support Worker model is a flexible offer that can be applied to multiple settings and to address multiple health issues:

- **Our Emergency Department (ED) model** supports children and families attending ED for non-medical reasons or in cases of repeated yet avoidable attendances. For example, over winter when respiratory infections are common, family workers advise on home environmental conditions, health promoting behaviours, and management in the home.
- **In outpatients settings**, we can offer both planned and walk-in appointments to support the wider, social aspects of health management. This can range from a single contact to follow-up support over a period of 6–12 months.
- **Within Primary Care Networks**, we provide a complementary offer to our social prescribing service. This targets families with wider social needs or who would benefit from more prolonged engagement with family workers to achieve lasting change.



Tiers of support

Tier 1 - Low level immediate support

Supporting immediate need (information, advice and guidance)

Immediate support to families through expert information, advice and guidance, including signposting to community support and basic health advice such as 5 ways to wellbeing. This can be offered at the time of the ED visit, or very soon after.

Tier 2 - Further follow up

Light-touch additional support after presentation at ED

This support recognises the family needs additional support to access services. Interventions include risk management plans, assessment of environmental factors and signposting to community and/or statutory services.

Tier 3 - Outreach support

Often families have complex health and social issues, requiring a multi-agency response. Inputs will include support to access mental health services, managing safeguarding risks, enabling safe and healthy home environments. Intervention in ED plus both telephone and 1:1 face-to-face follow up in the home and / or community settings.

Digital offer

To complement the tiered support offer, **Barnardo's Family Space** offers a suite of online sessions on a variety of topics:

- Child & family safety at home
- Child & family safety in the community
- Healthy smiles
- Mini-first aid
- Starting solid foods
- Childhood ailments & healthy homes
- Potty training

Sessions are free at point of access and are delivered during the week and in the evenings.



Outcomes

The Family Support Worker model is designed to reduce pressure on NHS services. In our 2022 Family Support Worker in ED pilot, an independent evaluator found that:

91%

of families referred, engaged with the service.

87%

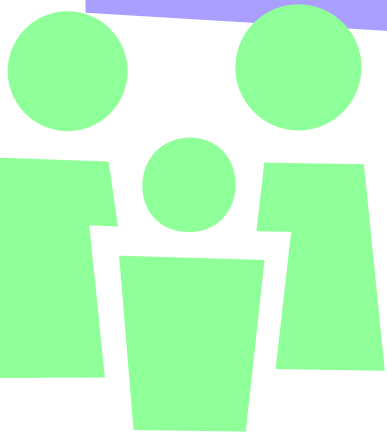
of families reported improvements in parental confidence.

84%

reported improvements in access to child health-related information.

82%

of survey respondents reported taking the action recommended to them by the Family Support Workers.



Feedback from ED nurses were also positive, often expressing relief that they knew a vulnerable family would get additional support after they were discharged.

Case study

Barnardo's ran a successful Family Support Worker pilot in The Lister Hospital Paediatric Emergency Department, Hertfordshire between January – June 2022.

Based within ED, the service became part of hospital psychosocial team meetings, receiving direct referrals from ED staff and staff approach families waiting for triage, where appropriate. It also formed part of the social prescribing and MASH referral pathway. NHS staff have reported appreciation of the value of the service in bringing the community into the hospital. Family Support Workers move between the hospital, Family Hubs and community and primary care services ensuring that children and families benefit from the expertise of each and making lasting systems links between professionals.

“ Tina Douglas, Assistant Director of Children's Services at Barnardo's:

Our aim is to work with families who don't really need to be attending ED and would ordinarily be sent home. Often people return to ED as the issue for them has not been resolved, yet this is placing a significant burden on teams working within the ED departments.

Our support means that we can help families with a wide variety of issues from housing, safety and family problems. We can signpost to the GP and other local organisations depending on the needs of the family and we also run family centres in the areas which have established local links and can provide ongoing assistance, as needed.

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Barnardo's is pleased to be NHS England's chosen voluntary sector provider to further test the Family Support Worker model across seven ED sites in England: Bradford, Ormskirk, Plymouth, Lincoln, North Middlesex, Hertfordshire, and Surrey. We are working in partnership with NHSE, ICBs and local acute trusts to effectively implement and evaluate this programme by April 2025.

To find out more

If you would like to commission this offer and set up a local service, please get in touch via healthteam@barnardos.org.uk



[barnardos.org.uk](https://www.barnardos.org.uk)



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