

Supporting vulnerable children in the post-covid era



Even before the pandemic vulnerable children were facing multiple challenges.



4.3 million

children were growing up in poverty¹



1 in 5

children experienced domestic abuse²



80,000+

children were in care³

In addition, **access to early support has been declining** for more than a decade, with the closures of children centres and youth services, often leaving children and their families **reaching crisis point before** they can access support. As a result, more children are developing more **complex problems** and require intensive, ongoing and expensive help, which led to more than 8 in 10 councils overspending on their children's social care budget by £832million in 2019/2020.⁴

During the pandemic, Barnardo's led a coalition of 87 charities to deliver See, Hear, Respond, a unique programme funded by the Department for Education, that supported over 100,000 'hidden' children who needed support but did **not** qualify for local authority services.⁵

The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing challenges facing children and families. Recent evidence shows:



1 in 6

children aged 5-16 have a mental health disorder⁶



77%

increase in "self-generated" child abuse material online⁷



284,375

children were referred to social services for the first time during the first 6 months of the pandemic⁸

Now is the time to focus on **supporting families earlier**, with long-term investment in the services children need so they can work towards a positive future.

You can help to achieve this by championing children in your local community and at the heart of our political system – Parliament.



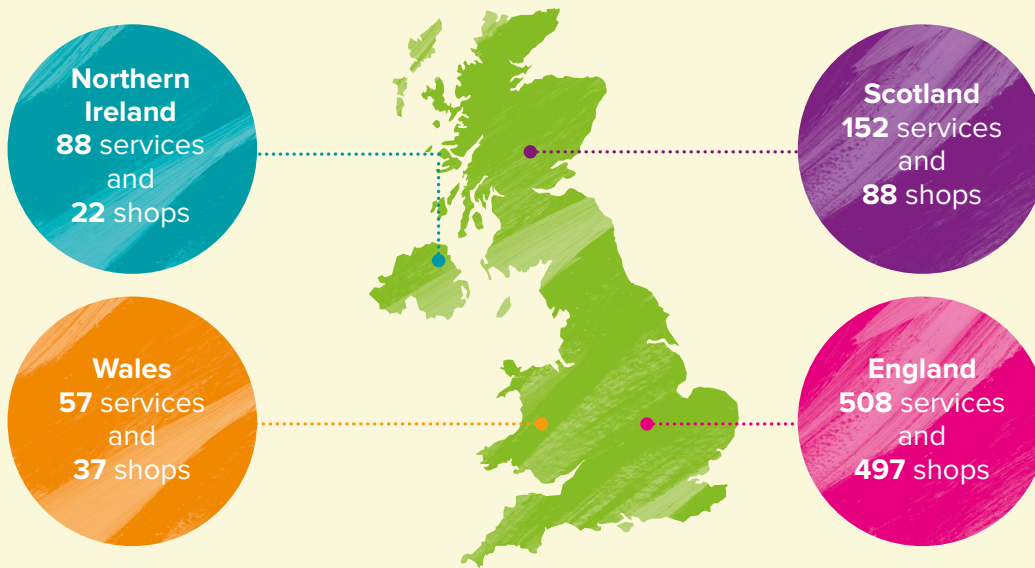
About Barnardo's



In 2020/21, we reached over 382,000 children and young people, parents and carers. We currently operate more than 800 local services and partnerships; and we have around 650 shops across the UK.⁹

We support children, young people, parents and carers through family hubs and children's centres, delivering mental health support and programmes in schools, support children who have been abused to recover, and care for

children in and leaving care to thrive. Our goal is to achieve better outcomes for more children. To achieve this, we work with partners to build stronger families, safer childhoods, and positive futures.



Our national programmes:



Barnardo's Family Space is a virtual family hub, informed by our nationwide network of family hubs and children's centres, which provides guidance and support for parents and carers from pre-birth to parenting teenagers.



Barnardo's Education Community is a space for professionals working in education settings, from early years to further and higher education, to access free online trauma informed resources and training to support the wellbeing of staff and students. Follow on twitter [@barnardoseducom](https://twitter.com/barnardoseducom).



Barnardo's hosts the **Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse**. Funded by the Home Office, the centre leads the way in understanding the causes, scope, scale and impact of child sexual abuse with the aim of reducing the impact child sexual abuse has through improved prevention and a better response.



How can we improve outcomes for vulnerable children?

Support for all families in every community

Many families struggle to access the support they need, especially new parents. The Government should aim to have a Family Hub – in person and virtual – in every community to provide the ‘village’ it takes to raise a child – and keep them healthy and safe – from pre-birth up to the age of 19.

A key opportunity to achieve this is through the implementation of the [Best Start in Life: A vision for the 1,001 critical days](#) and the [National Centre for Family Hubs](#).



Improving children and young people's mental health

Children and young people need access to the right support, at the right time – whether in-person or digitally – through a spectrum of support at school, in the community and from specialist services. The Government should commit to mental health support in every school as soon as possible and to ending the ‘cliff edge’ of support young people face at the age of 18.

The Health and Care Bill provides a key opportunity to improve integrated health and social care support for children and young people, so they only need to tell their story once.



Better outcomes for children in and leaving care

More than 80,000 children are in care in England. For young people leaving care, they are more likely to experience poorer outcomes than their peers – 4 in 10¹⁰ are not in education, employment, or training; they are more likely to experience homelessness and take their own life.

The Government should commit to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable by improving stability, reducing the number of times a child moves between foster families or children's homes; and strengthening

support for care leavers including their mental health and [accommodation](#) when they leave care.

A key opportunity to achieve change for children and families engaged with children's social care is through the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England](#) which is expected to report to the Government in Spring 2022.



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How can we improve outcomes for vulnerable children?

Making the online world safer for children

With children spending over 20 hours a week online¹¹, and even more during the pandemic, we must ensure they are protected from seeing harmful content, such as pornography, and are safeguarded from harassment, abuse and exploitation.

The Draft Online Safety Bill is a key opportunity to make the internet safer for children. However, it falls short of protecting children. This Bill intends to repeal Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 which would have introduced age-verification for

accessing pornography sites, barring access to children.

It is essential this Bill protects children from harmful material. **The Government must ensure all safety measures to protect children online, like safety-by-design, are extended to cover pornography sites and are not limited to social media sites.**



Protecting children from harm at home and in the community

It is essential that children who have experienced sexual abuse, domestic abuse at home or in their own intimate relationships, and those who have been criminally exploited receive the specialist therapeutic support they need to recover.

The forthcoming Victims' Bill is a key opportunity to introduce a guarantee of

specialist support for all children who have experienced domestic and sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour, to help them recover.



MP Toolkit: how to support vulnerable children in your constituency and in Parliament



Find out if there is a Barnardo's service or shop in your local area.



Host a virtual surgery for children and young people in your local area to hear their views and experiences.



Share support for families and professionals.



Work with Barnardo's to highlight the needs of vulnerable children in Parliament and read our parliamentary briefings.

Contact us

To find out more about our work:

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Footnotes:

1. Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2019/20, Table 4.3tr. Department for Work and Pensions, 2021.
2. Office for National Statistics, 2020. Child abuse extent and nature, England, and Wales.
3. Department for Education, 2020. Children looked after in England including adoption: 2019 to 2020.
4. Local Government Association , 2021. Eight in 10 councils forced to overspend on children's social care budgets amid soaring demand.
5. Barnardo's. See, Hear, Respond.
6. NHS Digital, 2020. Mental health of children and young people in England 2020.
7. IWF, 2021. 'Grave threat' to children from predatory internet groomers as online child sexual abuse material soars to record levels.
8. ADCS, 2020. Safeguarding Pressures Phase 7 – Full Report. [https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation//ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Phase7 FINAL.pdf](https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation//ADCS_Safeguarding_Pressures_Phase7_FINAL.pdf).
9. Barnardo's, 2020. Impact Report 2020.
10. Department of Education (2013/2021) Statistics on children under local authority care at national and local authority level.
11. Statista, 2018. Time spent consuming media per week among children in the UK.