

# An Assembly for Children

Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2022  
Barnardo's NI Manifesto

**Believe in children**  
 **Barnardo's**  
Northern Ireland



Barnardo's NI has been supporting children and young people in Northern Ireland for over 100 years. However, the challenges that children, young people and families have faced since March 2020 have been some of the most difficult in our history.

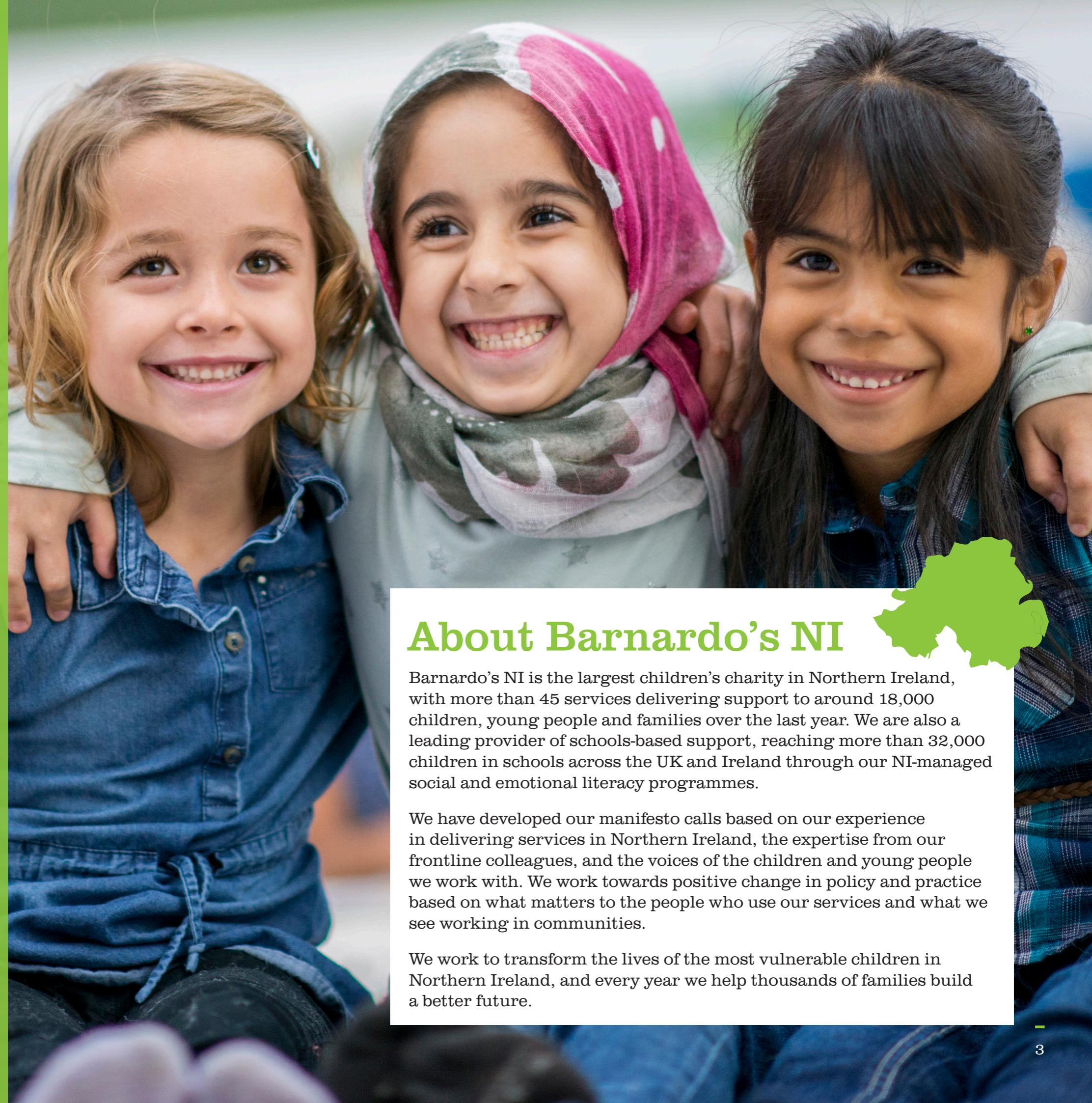
At Barnardo's NI, we believe the system around children and young people is going to be more critical than ever if we are to help the next generation not just adapt to a new reality, but to thrive.

The next mandate of the Northern Ireland Assembly must be determined, ambitious and collaborative if it is to tackle these challenges head-on. Since March 2020, we have seen the change, flexibility and ambition that is possible if the will is there. We now need to use that same determination to address the persistent issues and new challenges facing our children and young people as they grow up in Northern Ireland today. We need to work together across public, private, and community and voluntary sectors to improve the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

Barnardo's NI's goal is to achieve better outcomes for more children; to do this, we work with partners to build stronger families, safer childhoods, and positive futures. Ultimately, the question we ask you to consider is: ***will the next Assembly be an Assembly for children?***

The calls we have for the next mandate get to the heart of this question, and we hope that we can count on your support.

Michele Janes,  
Director, Barnardo's Northern Ireland



## About Barnardo's NI

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland, with more than 45 services delivering support to around 18,000 children, young people and families over the last year. We are also a leading provider of schools-based support, reaching more than 32,000 children in schools across the UK and Ireland through our NI-managed social and emotional literacy programmes.

We have developed our manifesto calls based on our experience in delivering services in Northern Ireland, the expertise from our frontline colleagues, and the voices of the children and young people we work with. We work towards positive change in policy and practice based on what matters to the people who use our services and what we see working in communities.

We work to transform the lives of the most vulnerable children in Northern Ireland, and every year we help thousands of families build a better future.

## Barnardo's NI in numbers...

We work with  
over  
**18,000**  
children,  
young people  
and families

**400+**  
volunteers



**20+**  
retail shops



We have  
**45+**  
services



## Stronger Families

*We believe children should thrive with the love and support of their families. But sometimes they come up against challenges that prevent this. We support them and work with them to overcome these challenges.*

Building resilience in children starts on day one, which is why we need good infant mental health support for families in Northern Ireland. We can support children to develop resilience and good mental health through universal early intervention, mental health support in education, and specialist support through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

To make this a reality for every child, there is a need for better investment in mental health services. Specialist infant mental health is only delivered by a small number of teams in Northern Ireland, schools do not receive enough resource or support to provide mental health support, and children referred to CAMHS face long waiting lists, often 'ageing out' before they even receive their first appointment.

### Our calls:

Prioritise children's mental health and wellbeing so our children receive the right support at the right time.

- Full implementation and funding of commitments made in the Mental Health Strategy.
- Expand the pilot of primary school counselling to full commissioning of primary school counselling services.

### Service spotlight:

ABC PiP (Attachment, Bonding and Communication Parent Infant Partnership) is a therapeutic service which works with the strengths of parents to help them build a positive relationship with their baby.



ABC PiP is a strategic partnership between Barnardo's Northern Ireland, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, and TinyLife, which aims to provide a specialist infant mental health service, build capacity in the infant mental health workforce, and initiate system-change related to infant mental health in the SEHSCCT.

# Safer Childhoods



We believe every child should be safe from harm. But for many this isn't the case. We support children and young people who have been abused and help them feel safe again.

For too long, children and young people in Northern Ireland have lacked the legal protection that is afforded to their peers elsewhere in the UK. Children are the only group in Northern Ireland who it is currently acceptable to strike in certain circumstances. This means that children are afforded less protection from assault than adults. This legal anomaly must be put right to protect the most vulnerable members of our society.

Another area of concern is the low age of criminal responsibility in Northern Ireland. Barnardo's NI believes that we need to raise the age of criminal responsibility, and that children in contact with the youth justice system should be treated as children, first and foremost.

In order to support our children to grow up to become resilient adults, we need to equip them with the skills and knowledge to understand consent and healthy relationships, as well as challenging myths and stereotypes. Providing standardised, well-informed Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in all schools as part of the core curriculum would play a key role in educating young people about healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries.

## Our calls:

- Close the legislative gaps to protect children in Northern Ireland. In particular, raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and providing children with equal protection from assault as adults.
- Develop and implement a standardised RSE curriculum for all schools.

### Service spotlight:

SEEN (Sexual Exploitation Ends Now), is our regional specialist child sexual exploitation service. SEEN supports children, young people and families affected by, or at risk of, sexual abuse, and provides specialist therapeutic support for children who have experienced sexual exploitation.

LifeSkills is a highly evidence-based early intervention and prevention programme that improves children's emotional health and wellbeing in schools. LifeSkills promotes resilience through the development of emotional literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, healthy relationships and strategies to prevent risk taking behaviour.



# Positive Futures



We want children to have the best chances in life so that they can achieve their full potential. It can be hard for some children to access the right support to get them started. We help them deal with what can be a challenging transition to adulthood.

Many children growing up in Northern Ireland today will have experienced some form of trauma, whether that is growing up in poverty, domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, or intergenerational trauma from the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland.

All government strategies, policies and services delivered to children and young people must be trauma-informed; this means that they take into account the impact of trauma and consider that each child may have particular needs that must be addressed alongside the support they are receiving.

Nearly 1 in 4 children in Northern Ireland are growing up in poverty, and little has changed in the past two decades. Poverty can impact children in many different ways, from disrupting their development to putting young people leaving care at a higher risk of homelessness. The Assembly and Executive must deliver and implement a robust and ambitious Anti-Poverty Strategy which will eradicate poverty and ensure no child in Northern Ireland grows up in poverty.

## Our calls:

- Adopt a trauma-informed approach for all systems, services and policies that impact children and young people.
- Deliver and implement a robust and ambitious Anti-Poverty Strategy which will protect and support children and families.

### Service spotlight:

Barnardo's NI Family Placement recruits and supports foster carers in Northern Ireland for children with additional support needs, for example children who have suffered early childhood trauma and children who have attachment difficulties. The service provides a variety of foster care: short-term, long-term, emergency overnights, parent and child placements, fostering to adopt and for young people leaving the care system.

Our Family Placement team were recently approved as an adoption agency in Northern Ireland which will mean more consistent support for our children and families going through the adoption process.



# Working together



Barnardo's NI has strong relationships with partners across the public, community and voluntary, and private sectors. It is the strength of these partnerships that allows us to address challenges as they arise.

However, the pandemic has highlighted the weakness of the current funding approach of statutory agencies. Too often, contracts for services delivered by the community and voluntary sector are not funded at full cost recovery. This means that the funds provided by public bodies do not cover the full cost of delivering the service, with the remainder being subsidised by the voluntary organisation.

At Barnardo's NI, we subsidise public contracts with voluntary funds which we raise through our shops and fundraising activities. This funding model is unsustainable and has already resulted in essential services closing, including some of our long-standing services.

'Building back better' means valuing the expertise and experience of the community and voluntary sector and reflecting that in the way that services are commissioned and funded.

## Our calls:

- Development of co-production and co-design principles, including with children and young people, that will be the foundation for this type of work undertaken by government bodies.
- Commitment to working in partnership with the community and voluntary sector as valued and equal partners in the development and delivery of services.
- Full cost recovery commissioning model as standard, in conjunction with longer commissioning cycles of at least 3-5 years.

### Service spotlight:

Barnardo's NI co-ordinates the THRiVE collaboration in Newtownabbey. THRiVE is a group of local parents, schools, community and voluntary organisations and statutory partners, working together to improve outcomes for children in Newtownabbey.



THRiVE has been pioneering a collaborative, community-based approach using collective impact strategies to help improve outcomes in the area. Fundamental to the success of THRiVE is the role of partners, especially pupils and parents, as equal co-architects in building the foundations so the community can thrive.

## Our calls

### Stronger families

- Full implementation and funding of commitments made in the Mental Health Strategy.
- Expand the pilot of primary school counselling to full commissioning of primary school counselling services.



### Safer childhoods

- Close the legislative gaps to protect children in Northern Ireland. In particular, raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and providing children with equal protection from assault as adults.
- Develop and implement a standardised RSE curriculum for all schools.



### Positive futures

- Adopt a trauma-informed approach for all systems, services and policies that impact children and young people.
- Deliver and implement a robust and ambitious Anti-Poverty Strategy.



### Working together

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Barnardo's  
Northern  
Ireland  
our calls...

#AnAssemblyForChildren



# I support

## #AnAssemblyForChildren

and  
**Barnardo's  
Northern Ireland**

Sign your name to pledge your support



#AnAssemblyForChildren  
@BarnardosNI  
#BarnadosManifesto

**Believe in  
children**  
**Barnardo's**  
Northern Ireland

Pledge your support  
to Barnardo's  
Northern Ireland  
with this manifesto  
pledge sheet.

Simply print, as 'fit to page'  
on a white piece of card.  
Sign your name on the line,  
to pledge your support and  
then pose and smile for  
the camera!

Don't forget to share your  
picture and show your  
support on social media,  
tagging in Barnardo's.



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