



# The case for a Mental Health Support Team in every school

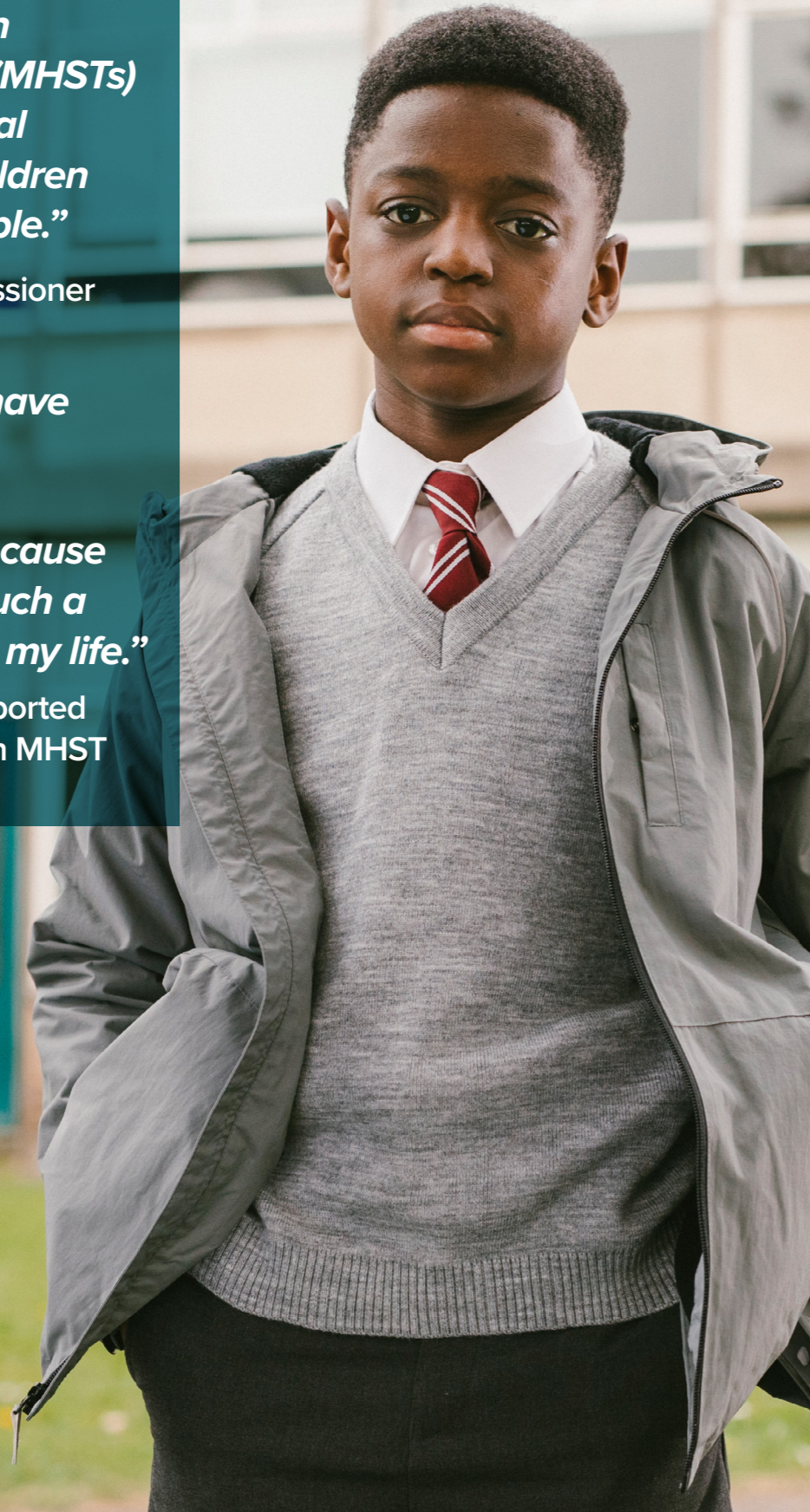
A Barnardo's briefing paper

*“It’s one of the most important things we have done, bringing in mental health support teams (MHSTs) for the emotional wellbeing of children and young people.”*

Local NHS Commissioner

*“Although I still have a bit to go, I will remember you (practitioner) because you have had such a huge impact on my life.”*

Young person supported by a Barnardo’s-run MHST



## Children in England are facing a mental health crisis

Globally, poor mental health is a leading cause of illness in children and young people, resulting in long term health, social and economic impacts. Despite the importance of good mental health and wellbeing in childhood, growing numbers of children and young people are experiencing mental health issues.

**Approximately 1 in 6 children in England have a probable mental health disorder.** Referrals to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) rose 134% from 2019/20 to 2020/21, and emergency care presentations are up 80%. Despite this, children and young people’s mental health investment by the NHS in England is around £1 billion, **less than 1% of the NHS budget.**

For children needing specialist support, only around one in four are seen by services each year. Average waiting times contain high levels of local variability **with some children and young people waiting up to two years to be seen.** With demand frequently exceeding capacity, there are concerns that the threshold children and young people must meet for treatment is often too high.



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## Less than 1%

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## Up to 2yrs...

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<sup>1</sup> Who.int. 2022. Adolescent mental health. [online] Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health> [Accessed 25 August 2022].

<sup>2</sup> NHS Digital (2021): 'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021'. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

<sup>3</sup> NHS Digital (2021): 'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021'. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

<sup>4</sup> [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk). 2021. Record number of children and young people referred to mental health services as pandemic takes its toll. [online] Available at: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/news-and-features/latest-news/detail/2021/09/23/record-number-of-children-and-young-people-referred-to-mental-health-services-as-pandemic-takes-its-toll> [Accessed 22 August 2022].

<sup>5</sup> Childrenscommissioner.github.io. 2021. CCG spending on children's mental health services. [online] Available at: <https://childrenscommissioner.github.io/mhbriefing2021/spend/pages/spend.html> [Accessed 22 August 2022].



In April 2020 **seven out of 10** practitioners reported an increase in mental health issues among the children, young people and parents they worked with.

**61%**

**61% of parents said mental health issues affected their children's attainment at school.**

**76%**

**76% of 12–18-year-olds believe that they would benefit from mental health services in school but only 34% currently have access to specialist support.**

## This crisis threatens children's futures

Barnardo's quarterly surveys of frontline workers since March 2020 have showed a steady increase in concerns about the deteriorating mental health of the children and families they work with. In April 2020 **seven out of 10** practitioners reported an increase in mental health issues among the children, young people and parents they worked with. By April 2021 this had increased to nine out of ten practitioners.

Barnardo's quarterly survey of frontline workers (January 2022) found:

- **31% of respondents are still seeing an increase in mental health issues among children, young people and families**
- **44% of respondents felt that the main long-term impact of the pandemic on children, young people and families was on mental health and wellbeing**
- **76% of respondents supporting children who have not re-engaged with school identified unmet mental health and wellbeing needs as a primary reason.**

Children and young people also said they were concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their mental health, and in turn their futures.

*"Not being able to do things that normally make me happy and help me cope has made my mental health decline massively"* (Young person supported by Barnardo's)

*"I often dream and think about the impact it [Covid] could have on my future"* (Young person supported by Barnardo's).

Parents are also concerned about the wider effects of worsening mental health and wellbeing issues for their children and how this might impact on their futures. In a YouGov poll commissioned by Barnardo's in August 2022, **61% of parents said mental health issues affected their children's attainment at school.** 49% noted a drop in concentration and focus on schoolwork.

Children and young people say they need more support at schools, but policy and funding has not yet gone far enough to address this. Barnardo's polling revealed that **76% of 12–18-year-olds believe that they would benefit from mental health services in school but only 34% currently have access to specialist support.**

## Mental Health Support Teams in schools are vital

Schools and colleges are playing an increasing role in mental health provision. The UK Government first announced Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in a 2017 green paper *"Transforming Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Provision."* Since that time, approximately 400 MHSTs have been commissioned across England, each serving an average of 8,000 children and young people across 10-20 education settings. MHSTs work together with school mental health leads and wider staff to:

- **Deliver evidence-based interventions for mild to moderate mental health issues (for example cognitive behavioural therapy to help manage anxiety)**
- **Support or develop a culture of positive mental health and wellbeing known as a 'whole school approach' to mental health and wellbeing which recognises that it is 'everyone's business,' with genuine engagement across the entire community: staff, pupils, governors, parents and external services alongside school mental health leads**
- **Give timely advice to school and college staff regarding referrals and keeping children and young people within education.**

MHSTs have the potential to provide solutions to many of the challenges children and young people currently face in accessing mental health support. They are positioned to identify vulnerable or at-risk children and young people, provide early intervention, and fill the current gap in provision between self-management and a referral to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Services also play a key role in identifying children and young people in crisis and refer onwards in a timely manner. This positioning allows MHSTs to build strong relationships and bridge gaps between health services and education.

Barnardo's currently **delivers 12 MHSTs across England, serving a diverse population of approximately 96,000 children and young people** from the Isle of Wight to Morecambe Bay. Each MHST works with children and young people, their families and school staff to support those with mental health needs, help schools prioritise wellbeing and provide links to community and health services.

**2017**

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**96,000**

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<sup>6</sup>Tidman, Z., 2022. Vulnerable children wait almost three years to access mental health care while others seen in just a week. The I, [online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/child-mental-health-waiting-times-b1972830.html> [Accessed 24 August 2022].

<sup>7</sup>Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2013. *Building and sustaining specialist CAMHS to improve outcomes for children and young people.* London: Royal College of Psychiatrists.

● Barnardo's MHSTs



## 6.5 million

Present plans to ensure that 36% of schools have an MHST by 2023 **leave 6.5 million children without support**, increasing existing inequality in access to mental health services and outcomes.

For MHSTs to be able to deliver on the opportunities they provide, the government must now commit to long term funding and increase the pace of roll out. Present plans to ensure that 36% of schools have an MHST by 2023 **leave 6.5 million children without support**, increasing existing inequality in access to mental health services and outcomes. No additional funding has been confirmed for MHSTs beyond 2024.

### Case study Swindon Mental Health Support Teams

**Barnardo's delivers three Mental Health Support Teams in Swindon providing early intervention support for young people experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues (including anxiety, low mood, anger and emotional regulation).**

The model provides 1:1 Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), group psychoeducation interventions where children can learn about their condition and how to manage it, as well as information and support. The service includes triage and outreach functions and works with children, young people, parents and carers.

*"Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has been impressed by the innovation, dedication, pace and passion that all Barnardo's Team members have shown to make a success of the Swindon Mental Health Trailblazer Project in schools.*

*Swindon CCG has received consistent feedback from the DfE and NHSE and seen significant change in the engagement and delivery of the local mental health system for children and young people in Swindon. Team Barnardo's have consistently delivered high quality services, with a strong approach to clinical governance and project management throughout. Quality and patient safety and the young person's journey have been at the forefront of thinking for both Barnardo's and the CCG. The project is highly regarded by stakeholders at all levels with Swindon teams now supporting other areas in their learning around future implementation."*



**"Quality and patient safety and the young person's journey have been at the forefront of thinking for both Barnardo's and the CCG."**

Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

## Recommendations

In order for Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) to meet their potential and provide support to all children and young people who need it, Barnardo's recommends:

- **The UK Government commits to funding for MHSTs beyond 2024 and delivering a rapid roll out of MHSTs across England** to ensure access for all school age children and young people.
- **Integration of schools into Integrated Care Systems and with wider community services** to allow education and health care providers to work together and make joint decisions about the mental health support available for children and young people. This should help to prevent siloed working and create a smoother pathway to support for children and young people and their families.
- **Ensuring that MHSTs are supported by a 'whole-school approach'** where positive mental health and wellbeing is a priority and support is available to all who need it.
- **Expanding the support offered by MHSTs** to provide a year-round service to children and young people including during the school holidays.
- **Investing further in the long-term future of the MHST workforce** through training, clinical supervision and the creation of a career framework.

### About Barnardo's

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. In 2020/21, we reached 382,872 children, young people, parents and carers through our 791 services and partnerships across the UK. 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.