

**Barnardo's Northern Ireland**

**Department for Infrastructure**

**Consultation on free and discounted fares on public transport  
(concessionary fares)**

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. In the past year we worked with approximately 18,000 children, young people and families across more than 45 different services and programmes. We are 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 deliver a wide range of services, from providing family support and early intervention, to working directly with children and families who have experienced adversity and need our support. 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.

Barnardo's NI welcomes the Department's consultation on free and discounted fares on public transport. Barnardo's NI has over 25 years' experience supporting children and families who are new to Northern Ireland, some of whom are refugees or asylum-seekers, and our comments are informed by this service experience. More recently, since December 2015, we have delivered the Northern Ireland Refugee Support Service (NIRSS) and work with displaced children and families through a number of programmes of support. NIRSS provides intensive support to refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland, supporting families and children to cope with both past trauma and integration into Northern Ireland.

Since April 2018, Barnardo's NI has delivered the Independent Guardian Service, which provides guardians for separated and unaccompanied children, including those who are victims, or potential victims, of human trafficking. A key element of the Guardian's role is to ensure that the child's voice, wishes, and feelings are heard and represented with all professionals involved in their case and to advocate for the best interests of the child.

Our response will focus on those areas of the consultation that impact on asylum seeking families, and victims of human trafficking, Options 8 -10.

## **1. Option 8**

- 1.1. Barnardo's NI fully supports the proposal to extend the Scheme to provide free transport to asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking in Northern Ireland. The consultation document clearly outlines the challenges that people seeking safety in Northern Ireland face when they arrive, including barriers to accessing public services and support, as well as the limited financial support they receive.
- 1.2. By extending the Scheme to all asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking, we will better enable children and families to adapt to life in Northern Ireland. This will enable children and families to attend GP appointments, community activities, or collect their child from school if they are unwell. In providing this support to families, it will allow them to begin the important steps of integrating into the Northern Ireland community.
- 1.3. Given the delays in the asylum system, a review every six months may be too short a window for review. We would encourage the Department to consider whether a longer time period may be more appropriate, for example one year.
- 1.4. Additionally, it is essential that any informational material and documentation or forms that need to be completed are available in a range of different languages to ensure that the process is as easy to complete as possible. It is already challenging for families who have arrived in Northern Ireland to navigate our complex systems to receive support. Providing accessible, translated materials will be crucial to ensuring that asylum seeking children and families, or victims of human trafficking, can access the Scheme.

## **2. Option 9**

- 2.1. Barnardo's NI supports the proposal to replace the current residency test to make it more accessible to all Northern Ireland residents. The proposal set out in the consultation document will allow the scheme to be accessed more quickly by people who are new to Northern Ireland, who are entitled to the scheme, and for whom Northern Ireland is their primary residence.

## **3. Option 10**

- 3.1. Barnardo's NI welcomes the proposal to review and widen the list of documentation that can be used to prove residency. Given that the aim of Option 9 is to ensure that people who are eligible can access the

Scheme as soon as possible, it would assist in widening access to the Scheme to simultaneously widen the list of documentation required to prove eligibility.

- 3.2. We welcome the Department's engagement with the Law Centre on this issue and the commitment to ensure the list is reviewed to ensure that the Scheme is open and accessible to everyone who is entitled to this support.

*For further information, please contact:*

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