

# Evaluation of Barnardos Community Family Support Service in Youghal

MARCH 2020



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## Executive Summary

### Background

The aim of this evaluation was to assess the performance of Youghal Community Family Support service two years on from its establishment in 2017. Youghal urban area is home to 7,075 people, 5,276 adults and 1,799 children (Health Atlas, 2020), and a socio-demographic profile of the town shows that significant populations within the town experience varying degrees of disadvantage. Barnardos in Youghal aims to provide support to children and families in Youghal, in order to have a positive impact on children's social-emotional wellbeing, educational outcomes and overall family functioning.

### Methods

A mixed methods approach was employed for this evaluation, using both primary and secondary data. Two forms of secondary quantitative data were analysed for the purposes of the evaluation. The first was demographic data taken from Barnardos' Electronic Record Keeping (ERK) system, which records the direct work with children and their families, and the second was outcomes data obtained from the Parent Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI; Gerard, 1994). The PCRI is an internationally recognised tool used before and after work with parents, in which parents indicate how they are feeling about aspects of their role as a parent. Finally, successes and challenges of Barnardos services in Youghal were explored through qualitative interviews with six participants. This included one Barnardos staff member, two referrers and three parents who had received a service from Barnardos.

### Findings

From 2017 to 2019, 33 families received a service, comprised of 53 children and 49 parents. Families were referred to Barnardos from different sources such as the Tusla, the HSE and self-referrals, for reasons such as relationship difficulties between a child/young person and their parent or carer (attachment and relationship issues), or difficulties in managing a child/young person's behaviour (behavioural issues).

It was clearly demonstrated from both quantitative and qualitative findings that families experienced improvements as a result of their engagement with Barnardos services. Quantitative analysis of pre and post PCRI outcomes scores, indicated statistically significant improvements in 'Limit setting' and 'Support' skills within the parent-child relationship. Through the process of qualitative analysis, four major themes emerged for analysis:

- Life before Barnardos, which outlines issues and challenges parents and families were facing before working with Barnardos;

- Working with Barnardos, which details how parents and referrers found working with Barnardos;
- Barnardos in Youghal, looking at parents and referrers experience of Barnardos in Youghal; and
- Room for Improvement, scoping where Barnardos in Youghal could make changes to increase accessibility and engagement with services.

## Conclusion

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative feedback received during this evaluation, points to a service that is valued by both referrers and participants in the various programmes of work. While increased resources, such as additional staff or a dedicated space for Barnardos services, could lead to potential improvements, the current level of support has provided a much-needed service, showing positive impacts for children and families in the Youghal community.

## Introduction

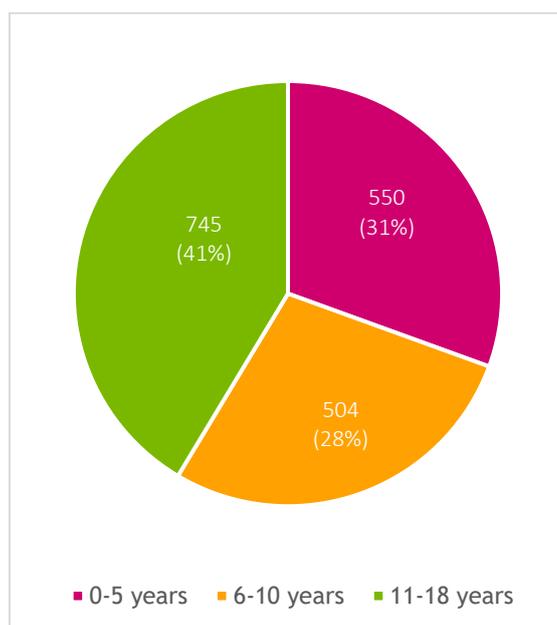
### Aim

Barnardos' strives to ensure that our work with children and families is embedded in evidence-based best practice through ongoing evaluation, quality improvement and innovation. The aim of this evaluation is to assess the performance of Youghal Community Family Support service two years on from its establishment.

### Background

#### *Youghal Demographics*

Barnardos operates in Youghal town, which has a population of 7,075 people; 3,555 females, and 3,520 males (Health Atlas Ireland, 2020). The most common age bracket for females in Youghal is 45-49 (8%), compared to 35-39 (8%) for males. In Youghal, there are 1,799 children and young people under the age of 18 (Health Atlas Ireland, 2020). There are 550 children between 0-5 years, 504 aged 6-10 years and 746 aged 11-18 years (see figure 1).



*Figure 1: Breakdown of children's ages in Youghal across Barnardos services*

There are 116 people living in Youghal over the age of 15 who reported having no formal education, while 1,006 people ceased education after secondary school (Health Atlas Ireland, 2020). Eight-hundred and seventy nine people in urban Youghal continued to third level college education. In relation to self-reported health status, a slightly higher proportion of people in Youghal report having fair, bad, or very bad health compared to the National average (12% vs. 10%; Health Atlas Ireland; 2020). In terms of

ethnicity, 84% of people in urban Youghal are ‘White Irish’, 11% are ‘White Other’, 1% are ‘Black or Black Irish’, 1% are ‘Asian or Asian Irish’ and 1.5% are ‘Other’.

Just over 3,000 people in Youghal work in a professional, managerial or other non-manual occupation, while the vast majority are employed in some form of manual labour both skilled and unskilled (38% of population; see Table 1; Health Atlas Ireland, 2020). Over 2/3 of the population in urban Youghal are disadvantaged according the Haase-Pratschke (HP) deprivation index, with 962 people and 339 people classed as being “very disadvantaged” and “extremely disadvantaged”, respectively (Health Atlas Ireland, 2020).

*Table 1: Socio-economic breakdown in Youghal by Occupation*

<b>Socio-Economic Breakdown by Occupation</b>	
<b>Professional Workers</b>	284
<b>Unskilled</b>	359
<b>Skilled Manual</b>	1,158
<b>Semi-Skilled</b>	1,183
<b>Non-Manual</b>	1,270
<b>All others gainfully occupied &amp; unknown</b>	1,303
<b>Managerial &amp; Technical</b>	1,518
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,075</b>

### *Barnardos in Youghal*

Barnardos Youghal Community Family Support was established in October 2017, jointly funded by Tusla and Tomar Trust. The service aims to provide support to children and families in Youghal, in order to have a positive impact on children’s social-emotional wellbeing, educational outcomes and overall family functioning.

This service is based in Cumann Na Daoine in Youghal, with one staff member operating from Monday to Thursday, integrated into Barnardos line management and governance structure through Barnardos Cork North Family Support Service.

Barnardos Youghal Family Support service is offered to families with children under the age of 18 who live in the Youghal urban town area. Barnardos in Youghal currently offers a range of different services to children and families including:

- Individual work with parents to help parents manage the practical and socio-emotional elements of parenting. This includes Barnardos own Partnership with Parents™ Programme,

which is an intensive, individualised, home-based parenting programme (Connolly, Adams, & Fleming, 2019);

- Individual work with children to help them overcome challenges associated with complex peer, home and family issues;
- The Roots of Empathy programme, delivered to school aged children in their classroom to raise their socio-emotional competence and increase empathy.
- Barnardos also occasionally offers once-off parenting workshops in the community, depending on need and demand.

The service can typically work with between 12-15 families when working at full capacity depending on the level of need within the families receiving a service. The service typically provides 1-2 sessions each week in the family home, providing support to parents, children and young people on the specific aspects of their family life, which is causing them difficulty.

The approach that Barnardos takes in its work in Youghal incorporates the following:

1. This focus of the service from the outset is prevention and early intervention. Helping families to improve parent-child relationships, and enhance parenting skills can help to reduce and prevent difficulties as children grow older, such as early school leaving, anti-social behaviour or risky behaviour. Furthermore, preventative support is paramount in situations where there are child development and welfare issues, which if unaddressed could evolve into child protection concerns. In practice however, the service has sometimes prioritised cases with higher levels need.
2. Barnardos in Youghal utilises a strengths-based approach while working with children and families, with the goal of improving parental competence and confidence; with the focus of, developing coping strategies for families under stress, and promoting resilience in children and young people.
3. Barnardos in Youghal offers home-based support, with the goal of making the service more accessible, and more tailored to the specific needs of each family, particularly for the most vulnerable children and families in the community.
4. Barnardos in Youghal works closely with other agencies in the broader community in order to achieve a co-ordinated approach to working with children and families. This approach ensures that Barnardos' work complements local initiatives to achieve optimum outcomes for families. Similarly, this inter-agency approach allows families to be connected with supportive networks in the community, and can facilitate onwards referrals to other community-based services, if appropriate,

## Methods

This evaluation was conducted internally by a team of researchers employed by Barnardos, and based in Barnardos Head Office in Dublin. A mixed methods approach was employed for this evaluation, using both primary and secondary data.

Barnardos has some information that is routinely collected in the course of its work with families. This includes a confidential record/file (electronic) of work done with each child and their family who receive a service. It also includes some measurement tools that are used to document needs and outcomes before and after the intervention/service provided. Routinely collected information (i.e. Barnardos electronic record keeping system data and retrospective outcomes measures) was used to inform this evaluation (Secondary data). Primary data were obtained through qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders including a Barnardos staff member, two referrers and three parents.

### Secondary Data

Two forms of secondary quantitative data were analysed for the purposes of the evaluation. The first was demographic data taken from Barnardos' Electronic Record Keeping system, which was analysed using Microsoft Excel. ERK data were used to establish trends and patterns across various demographics such as summary of referrals, source of referrals, and age breakdown of children involved with Barnardos.

The second was outcomes data obtained from the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI; Gerard, 1994). The Parent-Child Relationship Inventory is a standardised and valid measure of the quality of relationships between parents and their children across seven<sup>1</sup> domains: Support, Satisfaction, Involvement, Communication, Limits, Autonomy and Role. Six domains were measured as part of this evaluation:

- Support relates to the availability of practical help and emotional support that the parent receives;
- Satisfaction relates to the enjoyment a participant receives from being a parent;
- Involvement relates to the level of engagement by the parent with the child and interest in their activities;

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<sup>1</sup> The role orientation scale, which focuses on parents' attitudes about gender roles, is not calculated or analysed for the purpose of this study

- Communication relates to how capably a parent communicates with his or her child in a variety of situations;
- Limit Setting relates to a participant's perception of the effectiveness of their discipline techniques;
- Autonomy relates to the parent's capacity to promote his or her child's independence. (Gerard, 2005; Coffman, Guerin, & Gottfried, 2006).

Paired-sample t-tests were used to statistically analyse the pre and post scores across six domains, using SPSS software (Nie et al., 2017).

Secondary qualitative data were also used for one participant who had previously been interviewed about working with Barnardos, and consented to their contribution being made available for use in this evaluation; this contained audio material where they discussed their experience of completing the Partnership with Parents™ (PwP) programme with Barnardos in Youghal.

## Primary Data

### *Participants*

Six participants were recruited using purposive sampling and consented to being interviewed as part of this evaluation. This included one Barnardos staff member, two referrers (one community-based organisation and one statutory organisation) and three parents who had previously worked with Barnardos in Youghal.

### *Procedure*

Participant recruitment was managed by Barnardos staff members in Youghal, and potential participants were invited to take part in face-to-face interviews on site in Cumann Na Daoine. Participants were provided with information sheets (see Appendix 1) outlining the purpose of the research and how their data would be used, and written consent was obtained from all individuals before the commencement of interviews. Participants were informed that interviews would be audio recorded using a Dictaphone (if agreeable), but all data would be anonymised and stored securely in line with Data Protection Legislation and Barnardos Data Protection Policy and Data Retention Policy. It was also made clear that participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. While the researcher was a Barnardos employee based in the National Office, no working relationship was established between the researcher and participants prior to interviews.

An interview guide (see Appendix 1) developed by the research team was used to inform interviews. Topics included their relationship with their Barnardos Project Worker, knowledge of Barnardos'

services prior to engagement, barriers to engaging with Barnardos' services and the impact of working with Barnardos. However, questions differed slightly across service-users, Barnardos staff and referrers.

### *Data analysis*

This evaluation used Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyse qualitative data recorded during interviews. This involved transcribing and anonymising interview data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once transcribed, interview transcripts were imported into NVivo software (Richards & Richards, 2015) and then initial codes were developed, based on common topics emerging from the line-by-line coding. Once the coding process had been completed, the interview transcripts and codes were read and re-read in order to identify themes. Once major themes and subthemes had been established, quotes were identified that were congruent with these themes. Write up began once themes and subthemes had been finalised.

## Findings

In line with the methods outlined above, the findings will now be presented as secondary data and then primary data.

### Secondary Data

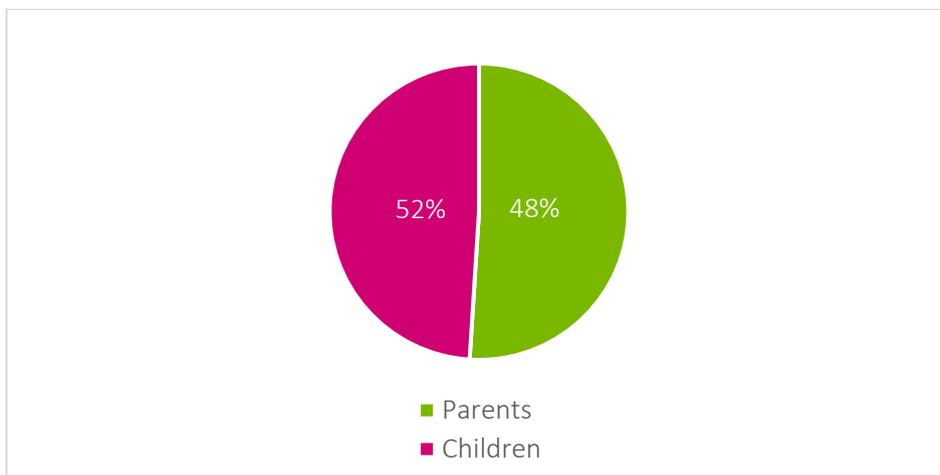
#### *Source of Referrals*

There were 35 families referred to Barnardos between 2017 and 2019. Referrals to Barnardos in Youghal came from different sources such as Tusla, HSE, self-referrals and other voluntary agencies. Table two (below) details the breakdown of sources of referrals for families from 2017-2019. While self-referrals represent the highest proportion of referrals, anecdotal evidence would suggest that these tend to come on foot of recommendations from health and social care professionals.

*Table 2: Breakdown of families referred to Barnardos from 2017-2019 by source*

	<b>Families Referred</b>
<b>Self-Referral</b>	14
<b>Voluntary Agency</b>	8
<b>Tusla Social Work</b>	7
<b>HSE</b>	4
<b>GP</b>	3
<b>Other</b>	2
<b>Gardaí</b>	1
<b>Schools</b>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>

Of these 35 families, 33 families received a service, reflecting 53 (52%) children and 49 (48%) parents. (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Breakdown of children and families directly or indirectly impacted by referrals to Barnardos (n = 102)*

## Overview of Children involved in Barnardos in Youghal

### i) Children's Age Breakdown

There were three age groups recorded on Barnardos Electronic Record Keeping system (ERK): 0-5 years, 6-10 years and 11-18 years. There were similar numbers of children within the different age groups engaging in Barnardos services in Youghal. From 2017-2019, there were 17 children aged 0-5 years, 16 children aged 6-10 years and 19 children aged 11-18 years involved in Barnardos services in Youghal (see figure 3a). As seen in figure three (below), the proportion of children engaging with Barnardos services in Youghal is very similar to the general Youghal population, when comparing the same age groups – indicating Barnardos reach across all age groups within the community.

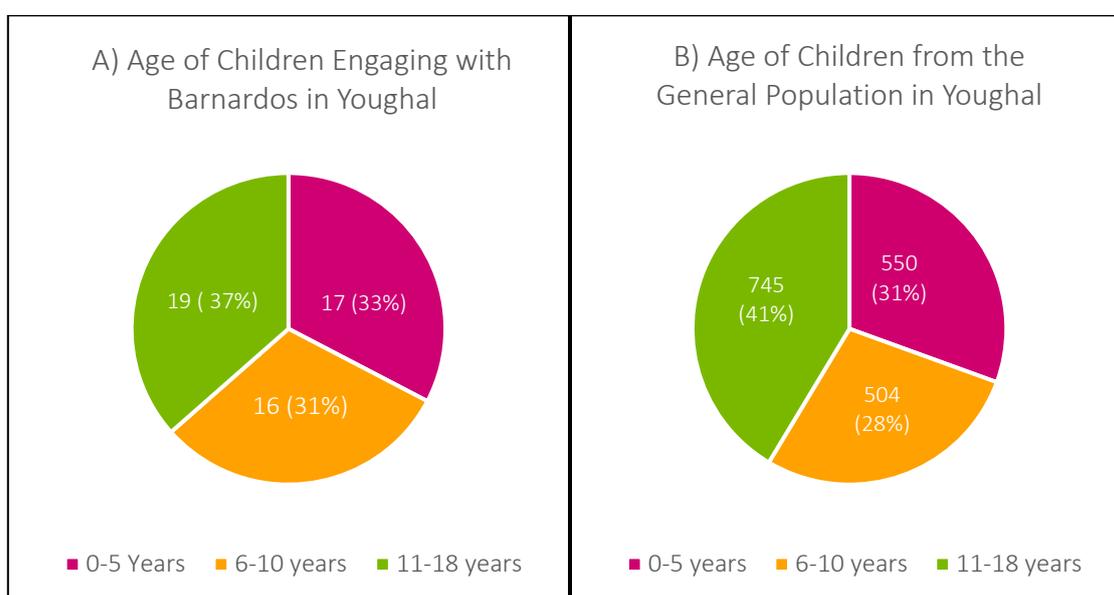


Figure 3: Breakdown of children's ages who engaged with Barnardos' services in Youghal, compared with a breakdown of the general population in Youghal

(n = 53; n = 1,799)

### ii) Hardiker's Level of Need

Table two below details the breakdown of children involved in Barnardos services by Hardiker's level of need. There are four different levels of need, ranging from universal support to intensive long-term support for children and families. See figure four for a detailed explanation for each level of need (O'Doherty, 2018).

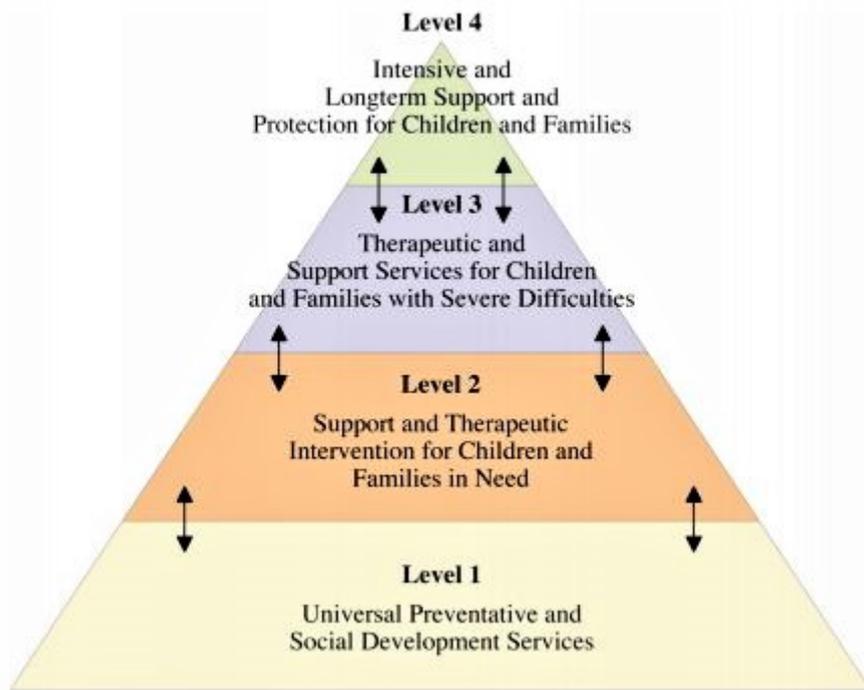


Figure 4: Hardiker's levels of need from 1-4 (O'Doherty, 2018).

There was one child categorised as being at level two, 37 children categorised as being at level three and 15 children categorised as being at level four (see Table 3). As evident from table two, the majority of children were deemed to be at level three.

Table 3: Number of children involved in Barnardos services broken down by Hardiker's Level of Need

Hardiker's Level of Need	No. of Children	%
2	1	2%
3	37	70%
4	15	28%

iii) *Reasons for referral*

Fifty-three children were impacted by the work of Barnardos. Of these 53, 20 were directly assessed/underwent direct assessment for targeted services, with the remaining being their siblings. Concerning the presenting needs of children, six different areas of difficulty and/or needs were noted for the children who received a service. These were:

- Relationship and attachment needs,
- Living situation and environment needs,
- Learning/education needs;
- Identity, self-esteem and self-care needs;

- Physical and psychological health needs; and
- Behaviour and social participation needs.

Table four (below) outlines the percentage of children receiving a service based on their presenting need. As can be seen, all children presented with at least two needs i.e. relationship and attachments, and behaviour and social participation. The least common reason for referral was for issues relating to physical and psychological health.

*Table 4: Areas of difficulty for the assessed children accessing family support*

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total children</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Relationship &amp; Attachment</b>	20	100%
<b>Behaviour &amp; Social Participation</b>	20	100%
<b>Identity, Self-Esteem &amp; Self-Care</b>	14	70%
<b>Learning/Education</b>	11	52%
<b>Living situation &amp; Environment</b>	4	22%
<b>Physical &amp; Psychological Health</b>	1	4%

#### *iv) Children's Ethnicity*

In terms of ethnicity, according to Barnardos Electronic Recording Keeping (ERK) system, 94% of the families who availed of Barnardos services were 'White Irish'. This is in line with Census data from 2016, which found that 84% of the population in urban Youghal were White Irish (Health Atlas Ireland, 2020).

#### *Parent Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) Data*

The Parent Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) is a self-report measure, which provides insight into parents' perceptions of the task of parenting and the quality of their relationships with their children (Gerard, 1994).

The PCRI outcome measure is used before a parent commences the Partnership with Parents™ Programme, and again when they are finished, to determine where improvements have been made, across six domains (Table 5). There were 13 participants included in the Youghal evaluation, with 11 matched pre and post data. The before and after scores improved across all six domains: Support, Satisfaction, Involvement, Communication, Limit Setting and Autonomy, however the improvements were not statistically significant in four of the domains. This may have been a result of the small sample size involved in the analysis

Statistically significant changes were observed in two of the six domains, i.e. “Support” and “Limit Setting”. Details of this analysis can be seen below in Table 5.

*Table 5: PCRI t-test results*

	<b>Pre mean score (Time 1)</b>	<b>Post mean score (Time 2)</b>	<b>95% confidence interval</b>	<b>Sig (two-tailed)</b>
<b>Support</b>	37.20	52.20	(-22.16, -7.84)	.001
<b>Satisfaction</b>	44.09	45.91	(-6.53, 2.89)	.410
<b>Involvement</b>	41.55	46.36	(-10.97, 1.33)	.111
<b>Communication</b>	41.64	43.64	(-7.72, 3.72)	.454
<b>Limit Setting</b>	38.27	48.27	(-14.49, -5.51)	.001
<b>Autonomy</b>	44.91	48.45	(-7.91, 0.82)	.101

#### *Support Scores*

As reported in Table 5, there was a statistically significant increase in support scores from Time 1 (M=37.20, SD=10.83) to Time 2 (M=52.20, SD=5.55),  $t(10) = -4.74$ ,  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). The mean increase was 15, with a confidence interval ranging from -22.16 to -7.84.

This tells us that when parents were asked to reflect on their situation before and after the intervention, that they reported significant improvements in areas such as feeling supported raising their child; feeling confident making decisions for/about their child; and being able to manage their responsibilities and stress.

#### *Limit Setting Scores*

As reported in Table 5, there was a statistically significant increase in limit setting scores from Time 1 (M=38.27, SD=4.17) to Time 2 (M=48.27, SD=4),  $t(11) = -4.97$ ,  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). The mean increase was 10, with a confidence interval ranging from -14.49 to -5.51).

This tells us that when parents were asked to reflect on their situation before and after the intervention, that they reported significant improvements in areas such as disciplining their child, managing their child’s challenging behaviour and setting limits and boundaries for their child.

## Primary Data

### Themes

Interviews were subjected to thematic analysis (as outlined previously), and table six outlines the four major themes and 13 sub-themes that emerged from the data. A range of themes were explored in the interviews with interviewees to determine their views and experiences. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from interviews were as follows:

*Table 6: Themes and sub-themes resulting from thematic analysis*

<b>Life Before Barnardos</b>	<b>Working with Barnardos</b>	<b>Barnardos in Youghal</b>	<b>Improving the Youghal Service</b>
Lack of Parental Capacity	Supporting Families, Empowering Parents, Relationship with Barnardos Staff, Impact of Barnardos, Barriers to Accessing Services, Accessibility	Community Involvement, Unique Selling Point of Barnardos	Room for Improvement, Knowledge of Barnardos Services

The themes summarised in table five will be expanded in the following sections, to provide context and meaning to the feedback received. Throughout interviews, participants spoke about topics such as: their lives before working with Barnardos; how they felt about the accessibility of Barnardos services in Youghal; and their relationship with their Project Worker. There were also some suggestions made about improving the service. The feedback from interviewees is summarised below, drawing on key examples that illustrate the relevant theme.

### *Life before Barnardos*

*Lack of Parental Capacity.* When asked about family life before working with Barnardos, parents spoke about finding managing their children’s behaviour very challenging. One parent described her home as “stressful [...] and loud”, and felt that she and her husband were not on the same page about their approach to parenting. Another parent reported that she was allowing her three young sons to “walk all over” her, and felt “excited” at the prospect of working with Barnardos as she was aware she needed extra support. Two parents reported that they were “upside down and inside out” after a change in family circumstances, and did not know what to do, or who to turn to for support. One referrer spoke about a homeless family who had been housed in Youghal, and felt they needed support

implementing routines for their children, managing challenging behaviour and linking the family in with wider supports and services within the Youghal community.

#### *Working with Barnardos*

*Supporting Families.* It was clear from interviews with parents, referrers and staff, that Barnardos plays a key role in supporting children and families within the community in Youghal. One referrer spoke about Barnardos supporting parents and families who are struggling, and highlighted the benefits of staff in Youghal being “somebody to ring when things are tough at home”. Two parents described their Barnardos Project Worker as “a god send”, and felt their “stress load was reduced quickly” by “having somebody to talk to”.

While Barnardos in Youghal plays an important role in providing emotional support to families, the practical support offered is also essential for some children and families. A staff member spoke about a family she worked with, and recalled that their house was often dark and the curtains were always closed. She knew that practical support in general household management was needed before “even attempting the parenting piece”. Barnardos helped this family with general household management and finances, and supported them in reaching out to other agencies within the wider community. Once this piece of practical family support had been completed, the family were able to engage in more reflective work with their Project Worker about what changes are needed within their family.

*Empowering Parents.* Interviews conducted also highlighted how working with Barnardos in Youghal helped parents to work on building their confidence in their own parenting skills, as well as learning to problem solve when faced with new scenarios. One parent reflected on the advice that she was given by her Barnardos Project Worker, reflecting that when she was faced with a new challenge, she would look back at her workbook to see what had worked before in a similar scenario. Another parent spoke about using the problem-solving skills she had learned, to teach her children how to reach a solution together when they were arguing.

Working with Barnardos also helped two parents build their confidence, as their Project Worker would reinforce everything they were doing right, so they no longer felt “completely useless”. A Barnardos staff member spoke about the importance of helping parents to understand their role and the importance of modelling positive behaviour for children. She acknowledged that for her, it was not about doing everything for families, but rather “handing that confidence” back to parents by empowering them to do things for themselves with her support and guidance.

*Relationship with Barnardos Staff.* Throughout the interviews, parents and referrers reflected on their professional relationships with Barnardos staff. One parent spoke about not feeling judged by her Project Worker, and knowing she was there to help. She felt “listened to 100%” and was able to be “honest and open” about the challenges that herself and her family were facing. Similarly, one mother reflected on her time working with Barnardos, and recalled feeling that she “didn’t have to lie about anything” and explained that support from her Project Worker was the biggest factor in the success of her parenting work. Another family described their Project Worker as “a lifeline”, and recalled the “whole mood in the house lift[ing] straight away” when she visited their family home.

Referrers also reported positive relationships with Barnardos staff. One referrer spoke about their close working relationship with Barnardos staff in Youghal, and noted how “down to earth” and “approachable” they were. Another referrer spoke about how accommodating Barnardos staff are, and feels the flexibility that Barnardos offers in their approach to working with children and families - being able to “meet [families] halfway”, is very useful. They also spoke about the feedback they have received from families about their impressions of Barnardos staff in Youghal, and described it as “unbelievable” and “really, really positive”. They felt that staff in Barnardos have “good attitudes for families” and are “very good at connecting with families”.

*Impact of Barnardos.* Working with Barnardos in Youghal has had a positive impact for children and families, which was apparent from interviews from parents and referrers. One parent spoke about a piece of advice that her Project Worker gave her, and said she would “always remember and treasure and pass [it] onto other people”. According to her, working with Barnardos “opened a new positive light” for her family, and feels they can cope better when things go wrong because of the tools they have been given. Since finishing her work with Barnardos, another parent said her family “haven’t looked back”. Working with Barnardos helped her to regain her confidence in her parenting skills, reporting that “Barnardos changed [her] life”.

Referrers also highlighted the value and impact of Barnardos services in Youghal, describing the role of Barnardos staff as “really important” within the community. One referrer felt that creating connections with families in the Youghal is “huge for parents”, allowing them to get a “straight forward, informed response”, resulting in additional support when “things are tough at home”. Another referrer described Barnardos in Youghal as “a god send” and remarked that she “didn’t know what [they’d] do if it doesn’t continue in the town”.

*Barriers to Accessing Services.* Although parents and referrers spoke about the value of Barnardos services in Youghal, some barriers to accessing services were also mentioned. For example, one referrer spoke about the level of need in Youghal, and felt that having more staff in Youghal would

better address the demand for family support services. They also spoke about the location of Barnardos services in Youghal, and noted that for particularly vulnerable families who may struggle to engage in structured or group work, a location/property owned by Barnardos might be useful. Similarly, Barnardos staff spoke about the potential drawbacks of operating out of such a focal point within the Youghal community; and felt that some parents may be hesitant to attend services as “it’s a community building and they might know people” who attend the other services in the building.

However, it also emerged from the interviews that Barnardos services play a vital role in the community in supporting families who may be having trouble accessing other supports. For example, one referrer spoke about children of a certain age being too old for early childhood initiatives in Youghal, but too young for certain youth projects, and as a result they are “left with nothing”. Similarly, some other services do not allow children to be involved with two services at the same time, and sometimes the intervention is only short term. This referrer felt that Barnardos addresses this gap for these children by having the capacity to do “direct pieces of work” with them.

*Accessibility.* Throughout the interviews, staff and parents spoke about the accessibility of Barnardos services in Youghal, not only in terms of physical location but also in the delivery of services. One referrer explained that services in the community are often “fragmented”, but highlighted the value of Barnardos staff having “that flexibility in [their] approach to be able to offer supports” to both parents and children concurrently. One parent spoke about Barnardos home-based services, and felt that it was “definitely more comforting” being in their own home, as they were “more comfortable and it was more personal”. Similarly, they described Partnership with Parents™ programme as “individualised and personalised”, and felt that their Project Worker “moulded it to fit [their] family, and to fit [their] child”.

Barnardos staff also spoke about making services more accessible for children and families, by ensuring appointments are run on the same day and at the same time each week - in order “to give continuity” to families. Despite the potential drawbacks, as previously highlighted by staff, of operating from such a focal point within the community, staff also acknowledged that the ‘Cumann na Daoine’ building was “very [physically] accessible” for the community as “everybody is aware” of the building.

### *Barnardos in Youghal*

*Community Involvement.* Staff, parents and referrers all spoke about the role Barnardos in Youghal has in the wider community. One referrer spoke about the working relationship they have developed with Barnardos staff in Youghal, and explained that they were “excellent, and really supportive” in the establishment of a Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) in the North Lee area. Staff are regularly and actively involved in Meitheal meetings, and often act as lead practitioners for

children and family they are working with. This referrer spoke about the value of Barnardos involvement in interagency work, and felt they brought “a lot of knowledge” of children and families to the table. According to her, it “makes parents feel at ease if they know the services” who are present at the meetings, and Barnardos always “give good insight to the needs of the family and how to develop [an] action plan” to suit their needs.

Barnardos are also involved in delivering the “Roots of Empathy” programme in a local primary school, and are currently the only organisation who offer this programme in Youghal. A Barnardos staff member reported that this community engagement was important, and felt “parents being aware that [they’re] walking the corridors in the school” increases the community’s knowledge and awareness of Barnardos in Youghal.

*Unique Selling Point of Barnardos in Youghal.* Before Barnardos, there were no dedicated family support services in Youghal. Across the board, the most advantageous aspect of Barnardos Family Support service in Youghal was the ability to offer individualised, home-based parenting interventions. One referrer spoke about some parenting interventions being too loose and unstructured, while others are too rigid; however, she noted that Barnardos “have the right balance in that, which is really good”.

Similarly, another referrer felt that offering a home-based approach might increase engagement with services, as she felt parents might fear stigma around accessing family support services in an interagency community building. One parent reflected on her time working with Barnardos, and enjoyed that “it was in [their] environment and it was [at] a time that suited [them]”. Two other parents felt the home-based approach was useful, because their Project Worker had the opportunity to see the environment they were living in and “get a vibe from the environment”.

Having the flexibility to offer direct pieces of work to children who are unable to access other forms of support in the community is another selling point of Barnardos in Youghal.

#### *Improving the Youghal Service*

*Knowledge of Barnardos Services.* Across the board, the importance of creating awareness of Barnardos services in Youghal was spoken about. One referrer felt that other professionals in the community had a good knowledge of Barnardos services, and “most families have heard of... Barnardos when [they] introduce it”. However, the importance of keeping in touch with and maintaining lines of contact with other services and communities in Youghal was also mentioned. One referrer noted the importance of individual services making an effort to continuously promote themselves in the community. They noted that “once it gets any bit quiet [referrers] think ‘that [service] must be gone’

[...], instead of picking up the phone to check". They advised that Barnardos should "keep putting up the posters [and] keep sending out reminders" about the service.

Parents also reflected on their own knowledge of Barnardos services before accessing supports; three parents remarked that they knew of Barnardos "from the TV ads", but knew nothing about what services were offered. One parent felt that other families in Youghal would not know of Barnardos unless they were accessing supports, as they themselves had not been aware of the services available previously - despite describing themselves as being "fairly active in the community".

Staff also spoke about the community's knowledge of Barnardos services, and explained that some families did not have a good understanding of Barnardos services prior to engagement. One family they worked with feared that Barnardos would "take their children", and staff highlighted the importance of sitting down with families and explaining Barnardos' role in helping to support children and families. Staff spoke about their plans to visit different services and organisations in Youghal in order to "remind everyone, and refresh everybody of who [they] are".

*Room for Improvement.* Having their own building, and offering both individualised and group parenting supports, were two potential improvements suggested for the Barnardos services in Youghal. One referrer had previously run parenting groups in Youghal, and deemed it as a "softer approach" to accessing supports for parents. They felt that parents who had completed a parenting programme were "more willing" to access additional supports after a relationship had been established with the facilitator and the other parents. At present, there are no parenting groups available in Youghal, and this referrer felt that it would be a good alternative for parents who may not be comfortable accessing support in their own home.

Having a building specifically for Barnardos services was also suggested, because at present staff are "dependent on trying to find the space... in a very busy building" in order to provide services for families. Similarly, a referrer explained that having a space specifically for Barnardos services would make it "a lot easier to co-ordinate work", as rooms could be used for Meitheal meetings. Furthermore, they felt that having a "child or youth friendly space" dedicated to providing individualised work, in "an informal" or "unstructured type way", would be encourage teenagers and older children in Youghal to engage in services.

## Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The aim of this evaluation is to assess the performance of Youghal Community Family Support service two years on from its establishment in October 2017. Barnardos in Youghal supports children and families by offering a range of different services including individual work with parents (including Barnardos Partnership with Parents™ Programme); individual work with children; and the Roots of Empathy programme. Barnardos staff also regularly engage in interagency work in the broader Youghal community.

### Secondary Data

From 2017 to 2019, 33 families received a service, reflecting 53 children and 49 parents. Families were referred to Barnardos from different sources such as the Tusla, the HSE and self-referrals, for reasons such as attachment and relationship issues or behavioural issues.

### Primary Data

#### *Quantitative*

Improvements were seen in all six domains of the parent-child relationship, with parents reporting the greatest improvements in 'Limit setting' and 'Support'. While the sample for this evaluation was small, these findings did correlate with the largest improvements seen among a sample of 200 parents in a national evaluation conducted by Barnardos from 2012 to 2017 (Connolly, Adams, & Fleming, 2019). Results from the 2019 evaluation showed that Limit Setting and Support were seen to have the largest improvement, however there were statistically significant improvements seen across all domains of the PCRI, i.e. Support, Limit Setting, Satisfaction, Communication, Autonomy and Involvement.

#### *Qualitative*

Through the process of thematic analysis, four major themes emerged: Life before Barnardos, Working with Barnardos, Barnardos in Youghal and Room for Improvement. Across all interviews, there were many positive aspects of the Barnardos service in Youghal highlighted, and there were also some areas for potential improvements recommended:

Among the positive feedback, participants highlighted their relationship with Barnardos staff, the impact of working with Barnardos and the accessibility of Barnardos services.

- *Positive relationship with Barnardos staff.* One participant described Barnardos staff as “down to earth” and “approachable”, while another spoke about feeling listened to and being able to be open and honest about the challenges they were facing at home. One mother felt that her support from her Project Worker was the biggest factor in the success of her parenting work, and reported that her family “haven’t looked back” since.

- *Accessibility of Barnardos in Youghal.* One participant spoke about the usefulness of Barnardos' Partnership with Parents™ (PwP) programme being delivered in their own home, describing it as “more comfortable” and “more personal”.
- *Positive Impact of Barnardos.* Working with Barnardos in Youghal reportedly had a positive impact for children and families, which was apparent from interviews from parents and referrers. One parent spoke about feeling more confident in their ability to cope with new challenges that arise, while another parent felt that “Barnardos changed [their] life”. Barnardos was described as being “really important” for the Youghal community, and one referral felt it is “a god send” and remarked that she “didn't know what [they'd] do if it doesn't continue in the town”.

Among the suggestions for improvement, participants identified a couple of areas including:

- *Increased Promotion of the Service.* One referrer spoke about the need to continually remind other services and organisations in the area about Barnardos.
- *Improving the reach of the programme.* Another referrer felt that running group parenting courses as well as individual parenting might improve the reach of the programme, potentially encouraging more parents to engage with services.
- *Dedicated space.* It was also suggested that having a space solely for Barnardos services would be useful for maintaining continuity for families, and engaging in interagency working e.g. being able to facilitate Meitheal meetings.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative feedback received during this evaluation, points to a service that is valued by both referrers and participants in the various programmes of work. This is particularly striking given the fact that the full programme of work is delivered by just one Barnardos Project Worker. While increased resources, such as additional staff or a dedicated space for Barnardos services, could lead to potential improvements, the current level of support has provided a much-needed service, showing positive impacts for children and families in the Youghal community.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Schedules

### Barnardos Staff

1. **Can you tell me a little bit about your role as a Project Worker in Youghal?**
  - a. What does a normal day look like for you?
    - i. From when you leave your house in the morning to when you leave work in the morning
  - b. Talk me through a typical week for you
2. **Can you tell me about your involvement with**
  - a. PwP
    - i. How many families would you be working with at any one time?
    - ii. What plug ins have you used most
  - b. Other individual work
    - i. Can you talk me through an example of a case you've done individual work?
  - c. Roots of Empathy
    - i. How are you involved in this programme
3. **What are the most common reasons for referral to Barnardos in Youghal?**
  - a. e.g. social work, schools etc.
  - b. Who are the most regular referrers?
4. **Have you identified any barriers to service-user engagement? e.g. location, transport etc.**
  - a. Can you give me example of that?/Talk me through a scenario where you and a family faced this barrier
  - b. How did you get around these barriers?
5. **What were the biggest changes you saw for families you worked with?**
  - a. If only acknowledges the positives – were there any negative changes?
6. **How have you found working in an interagency setting like Cumann Na Daoine?**
  - a. What are the advantages?
  - b. What are the disadvantages?
7. **Through your role, are you involved in the community in Youghal in any other ways?**
  - a. How so?
  - b. What are the advantages of this community involvement?
  - c. Are there any disadvantages?
8. **What were the a) key successes and b) challenges you experienced while working in Barnardos in Youghal?**
9. **Is there anything you feel could be done differently to improve the Youghal service?**
  - a. e.g. access/opening hours etc.
10. **Is there anything you would like to add about your experience of working for Barnardos in Youghal?**

## Parent/Caregiver

1. Can you tell me about yourself, who is at home, how many kids?
2. How did you begin working with the service here in Cumann na Daoine?
  - a. When was this?
  - b. How did you first hear about the service?
  - c. Who referred you to the service?
  - d. Why did they refer you?
  - e. Had you been involved in any other services previously?/or were you involved in any services at the same time?
3. What was your initial experience of working with [Project Worker] and Barnardos in the beginning?
  - a. How often did you meet?
  - b. Can you tell me about your relationship with [Project Worker]?
  - c. Has your relationship with [Project Worker] changed over time?
4. Did you experience any barriers to accessing services while working with Barnardos in Youghal?
  - a. E.g. transport/opening hours
  - b. How did you overcome these barriers?
5. Did you set any goals when you started working with [Project Worker]?
  - a. What were they?
  - b. Did [Project Worker] help you reach these goals?
    - i. If yes, what were the key parts of the work that helped you reach these goals?
    - ii. If no, what were the obstacles that prevented you from reaching your goals
6. Overall, what were the a) key successes and b) challenges you experienced while working with Barnardos in Youghal?
7. Are there things you liked about working with [Project Worker] and Barnardos?
  - a. Can you tell me why?
8. Are there things you did not like about working with [Project Worker] and Barnardos?
  - a. If yes – could you tell me a little bit more about that?
9. Overall, what impact did your work with [Project Worker] have on your family?
10. Is there anything you feel could be done differently to improve the Barnardos service in Youghal?
  - a. If you were running the service, what would you change? To make more accessible/run smoother etc.
11. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience of Barnardos

## Referrers

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your current role?
  - a. How did you become involved with working alongside Barnardos?
2. How long have you been referring families to Barnardos?
  - a. What sort of things would you refer families to Barnardos for?
  - b. Would you refer to Barnardos often?
3. What role do you think Barnardos in Youghal has in providing family support to families in Youghal?
  - a. Early intervention, one of a kind service
4. Do you feel the Youghal service fits in within the community of Youghal?
  - a. If yes, how so?

5. **Is there anything that you're aware of that sets this service apart from other services in the area?**
  - a. How so?
  - b. Do you think it would impact families if the service in Youghal wasn't there anymore?
  - c. How would it impact them? In a good way or a bad way?
6. **What has your impression of Barnardos and Barnardos staff been since the establishment of the Youghal service in 2017?**
7. **Have you identified any barriers to families engaging in Barnardos?**
  - a. Can you talk me through a specific example of a scenario where a family has faced a barrier to accessing the Youghal service?
  - b. How did they overcome this barrier?
8. **What impact do you think working with [Project Worker] has had on families?**
  - a. Can you talk me through a specific case?
  - b. Are you aware of any negative impacts?
9. **How aware do you feel the public are of family support services in the Youghal area?**
  - a. How are family support services promoted?
  - b. What works well to promote family support services?
  - c. How do you think this could be improved?
10. **Is there anything you feel could be done differently to improve the Youghal service?**
  - a. Capacity, more staff etc etc
11. **Is there anything you would like to add about your experience of Barnardos?**

Barnardos' vision is a country where no child has to suffer and every child is able to reach its full potential.

Barnardos' mission is to deliver services and work with families, communities, and our partners to transform the lives of vulnerable children who are affected by adverse childhood experiences

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