



## Cost Of Living Crisis – Impact on Children

### Summary

#### About Barnardos

Barnardos provides frontline services to children and their families. We work with children and families who are affected by traumatic life situations such as poverty, abuse, parental mental health challenges, neglect, separation, bereavement and parental addiction. We offer a range of early intervention and targeted services in our 45 service locations, in family homes, schools, early learning and care settings and communities.

#### Introduction

New research launched today by national children’s charity Barnardos outlines the impact that recent cost of living increases are having on parents and children across the country. We highlight the impact the cost of living crisis is having on children and families across Ireland, through our survey with Amarach. Additionally, we detail the impact it is having specifically on the families and children we work with from our experience on the ground, and the immediate and longer-term solutions the government should adopt.

#### The National Picture - Amarach findings

Barnardos commissioned Amarach Research to carry out a nationally representative survey with over 300 parents/guardians with children aged 17 or younger living with them. It found that:

- Almost two thirds of parents (63%) stated they and their children had to go without essentials, such as those listed in the table below, over the past 6 months due to cost of living increases.
- Over one quarter of parents (28%) have cut back or gone without heat, and almost one in four (23%) have cut back or gone without electricity.
- Over one third stated they have had to cut back on clothes and alarmingly, one in six have cut back or gone without medical appointments/medicines.

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Activities/entertainment for your children	50%
Heat	28%
Electricity	23%
Food	16%
Clothing	34%
Transport	10%
Medical appointments/medicines	17%
No/none of the above	37%

- 70% of parents said that cost of living increases have negatively affected their children over the past six months. One in eight parents (12%) said cost of living increases have significantly negatively affected their children.
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of parents are regularly worrying (28% always worrying) about being able to provide their children with daily essential such as food, heat and electricity.
- One in five (20%) said that they are very worried about having enough money over the next 6 months to meet the needs of their children.

## The Barnardos Picture

Barnardos works with families across the country facing various adversities and issues, such as mental health, addiction and domestic separation.

Over the same period, Barnardos has witnessed more and more families we support struggling to cope with cost of living increases. Our services are working with families who are really struggling to provide their children with minimum essentials, such as heating, food and electricity due to cost of living increases.

The majority of Barnardos staff are reporting that the increases are having a substantially negative affect on the health and wellbeing of the children they are supporting. Staff are witnessing families going without and cutting back, being forced to choose between having the heating/electricity on and having food in their cupboards. Children in those households risk living in cold homes, missing social activities with parents facing 'financial distress', who may have less capacity to concentrate on parenting.

### Barnardos staff said:

*'Families who were surviving in the past...these increases are the straw that broke the camel's back.'*

*'In all my years with this service I've never seen so many families getting to the point of being cut off from electricity, having to make choices about what they are going to go with/without this week.'*

*'You'd be blue with the cold after you visit several houses in a row.'*

*'In the past families would pay for one pre-payment energy card which would see them through for a week. Unfortunately, now they will only last four or possibly five days, leaving them to have to go without heating for those two or three days.'*<sup>1</sup>

*'One parent is borderline hysterical about new financial pressures, constantly worried about the next bill that she won't be able to pay, she has lost all hope of being able to manage.'*

*'In one family we support we are seeing a young baby whose breathing difficulties are being worsened because of the conditions of the housing they are in.'*

*'All it takes is for one cost to crop up or one thing to breakdown and they are tipped into financial crisis.'*

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, for many families in certain areas there is a reliance on briquettes or coal for heating. In the past a fuel voucher might have stretched for a bag of each, now it's only one.

### Lived experience

A family cannot afford to pay for heating and as a result, their infant child has to wear an outdoor coat inside the house in order to keep warm. One of the parents has been in tears with staff about heating the house, which is badly in need of renovation. It is very hard for this parent to look at their parenting, what they want to improve and what they would like support with, when they are simply trying to survive day to day.

### The Solution

Working with and supporting children for 60 years, we know that the longer a child spends living in deprivation, and going without essentials the larger an impact it can have on their future health, wellbeing and general development. The experience of our staff, and rigorous research, consistently demonstrates that the impact of deprivation can last a lifetime.

As a society, it is unacceptable that children are going without absolute minimal necessities. All children across Ireland should be entitled to a standard of living that supports their emotional, social and physical development. As the cost of living crisis continues there is a risk that more and more children will spend longer and longer without sufficient food, heat and electricity. It is vital that Government does what is right and targets further support at low income families who are struggling most to provide children with essentials.

In the short term it is clear that some families need access to immediate funds when they can't meet essential costs such as heating/food and electricity. The Government should establish a hardship fund, through the Department of Social Protection, for families to apply for help with payments for essential services and goods. As a society, in the longer term, we should aim to ensure all children have a minimum standard of living. In order to better guarantee that the government should benchmark welfare rates to the minimum essential standard of living.

1. **Hardship Fund:** The Department of Social Protection should introduce a hardship fund.
2. **Social Welfare payments:** Benchmark social welfare payments in line with minimum essential standard of living measurements.
3. **Fuel allowance and energy providers:** Recently introduced extensions to fuel allowance should be continued next year and additional families should be able to benefit from it, for example, parents on working family payment.