



Children's Budget 2022

SEPTEMBER
2021

About Barnardos

Barnardos provides frontline services to children and their families. We work with children and families who have been 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.

Our work combats social, educational and economic disadvantage, minimising the negative impact on children's lives through a range of services and programmes. Barnardos services are needs led, outcomes focused and based in evidence and research. We enable children and families to build their resilience and meet their behavioural, emotional, educational, physical and social needs. Our approach is to develop and deliver a suite of trauma informed programmes, driven by a culture of hope and possibility. In 2020, Barnardos worked with almost 18,000 children and their families.

Introduction

Over the last 12 months, children and their families have faced great uncertainty and disruption to their lives. For some, it has compounded existing disadvantage. For others, it has presented children and parents with and forced them to confront certain adversities and challenges for the first time.

Our annual [Back to School Survey](#) report found families faced considerable levels of financial concerns, isolation, lack of social support, mental health difficulties and tensions at home, particularly heightened for certain groups such as lone parents and unemployed parents. There is a risk that these adversities have had a knock on impact on children's development and their wellbeing. As one parent said:

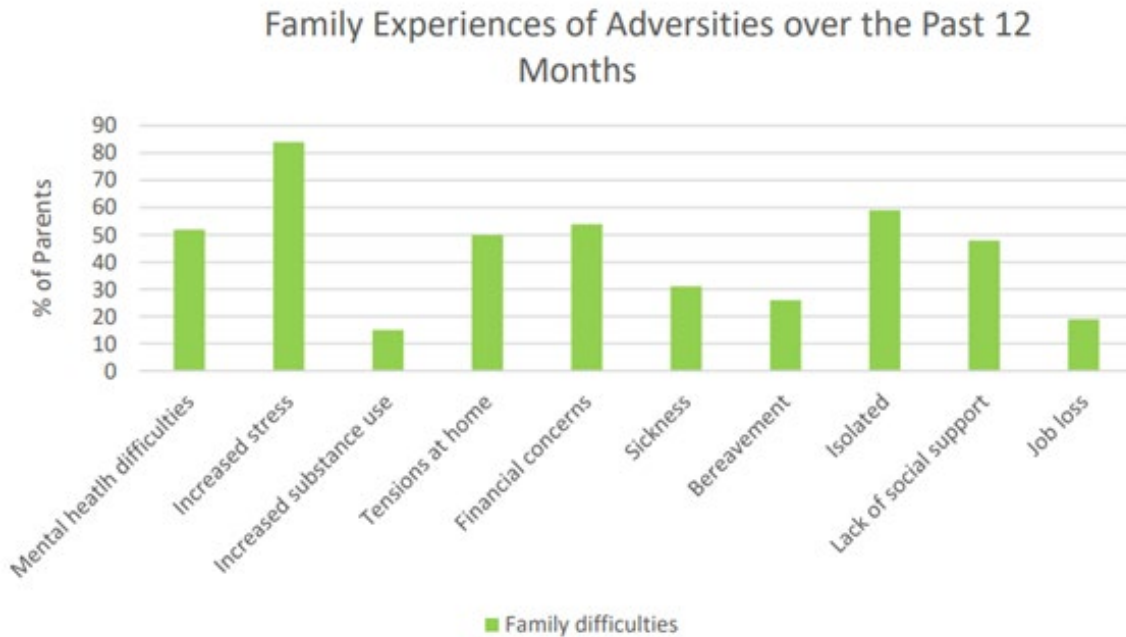
'Children adapt but they also soak everything in like little sponges. They see and hear everything at home, even when we try our best to shelter them from adult conversations etc. Then they carry this with them on top of their worries & the covid anxiety.'

Our survey findings echo what we have witnessed across our services. Children struggling to readjust to rules and routines, and an increase in families being referred to our services suffering a combination of mental health issues, domestic violence and addiction issues.

Budget 2022 must signal hope and opportunity to children and families whose lives and wellbeing have been negatively affected by the pandemic and/or disadvantaged prior to the Covid-19 outbreak. A hope that where there is a need for help and support it will be met, that they will not have to address problems on their own. It must demonstrate that where children and families are struggling the government will provide the resources and opportunities necessary to provide a helping hand. Finances need to be committed in the Budget by Government in order to ensure this. Below we outline where we believe these resources would be best directed.

Family Support

Our Back to School survey found that over the past year families have had to deal with considerable adversities, challenges and difficulties. Fifty two percent of parents said that their families had experienced mental health difficulties over the past year, 15% dealt with increased substance use, 19% experienced job loss. Fifty percent of parents reported tensions at home, 54% experienced financial concerns, 59% of parents reported that they felt isolated over the course of the past year, 48% stated they lacked social support.



Parents stated they are concerned that these adversities likely had an impact on their children's wellbeing.

'Children can sense the worry although it might not be expressed, my children know things are tight financially and I suppose this cause concern in them and they have become anxious with an inability to sleep at times.'

Family support is a key means of tackling adversity and helping parents and their children to address detrimental issues in their lives. It provides help to children and families who are vulnerable and in need of support, without which families may struggle to address their problems and not feel in a position to best help their children and promote their wellbeing.

Family support work is aimed at children dealing with challenging experiences that are likely to impact on their development. As we can see from our survey and other research these challenging experiences, such as substance use,¹ domestic violence² and poor mental health³ have become more prevalent over the past year. Intervening early with intensive

¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-sic19/socialimpactofcovid-19surveyapril2020/changesinconsumption/>

² [2020-06-09 l-rs-note-domestic-violence-and-covid-19-in-ireland_en.pdf \(oireachtas.ie\)](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/media/2020/06/09/l-rs-note-domestic-violence-and-covid-19-in-ireland_en.pdf)

³ [Mental health impacts of COVID-19 in Ireland and the need for a secondary care mental health service response \(nih.gov\)](https://www.nih.gov/mental-health-impacts-of-covid-19-in-ireland-and-the-need-for-a-secondary-care-mental-health-service-response)

child and family support to improve outcomes for children deemed to be vulnerable or at-risk is needed now more than ever.

A significant proportion of families facing adversities will have faced trauma, often the underlying cause of the issues they are facing. Family support delivered in a trauma informed manner, something Barnardos has implemented across all our services, helps address some of the root causes of certain adversities confronting issues families and places them in a better position to address them.

The Programme for Government claims to recognise the value community and voluntary family support services in preventing harm and responding to the needs of vulnerable families and the need to continue to invest in them. There is a commitment to strengthen early intervention and family support services through the proactive expansion of services that have strong outcomes for children and their families.

Unfortunately, despite this, family support provision remains limited across the country. Cuts made to community and voluntary family support services ten years ago, when 'temporary cuts' and freeze on cost of living increases were implemented, are having a protracted squeezing of funds over time. As a result, the State is not paying for the services it requires. Community and voluntary organisations providing family support services have to use substantial funds raised through the public to meet the cost of providing family support services. For example, in Barnardos' case, Tusla funds under 70% of the costs for services they have 100% contracted for, compared with 80% in 2008, and prior to Covid-19 we projected this to fall as low as 63% in 2021⁴. Long-term cuts amount to false economies by placing significant pressure on services and increasing the risk of unmet needs escalating, leading to more costly problems later on.

As we can see from our survey results and our own services the need for family support services is likely to increase post-pandemic. There is a choice to be made - to truly invest in quality, sustainable service provision for children and families or continue down the road of under investment.

Recommendation: Restore the annual cost of living increase and begin the expansion of family support services outlined in the Programme for Government in 2021 covering the full costs for current and new service provision. This should be provided through multi-annual funding over the lifetime of the Government.

Education

Covid-19 has had a considerable impact on the educational, emotional and social development of children across Ireland who were forced to spend significant periods home schooling. School closures meant some children struggled to engage with learning on a daily basis. Our [Back to School survey](#) found that 23% of primary school parents and 9% of secondary school parents estimated that their children spent less than an hour a day

⁴ Just Economics (2019) *Breaking Point: Why investment is needed now to ensure the sustainability of quality services for children and families*.

learning during the lockdown. These children will be at disadvantage to their peers who were able to spend considerably more time learning.

Over 62% of parents said they were concerned about the educational development of their child. Thirty percent of parents stated they are concerned about their children's behaviour and their ability to follow school rules and structure when returning to the classroom and cope with routines.

“My sons start to school has been so tumultuous. He hasn't had any consistency and has had trouble making friends and socialising. As a result he's stressed and sometimes lashes out.”

Twenty-four percent of parents are concerned that their children may not want to return to school in September. Forty-seven percent of parents who expressed concerns about the behaviour of their children were worried about their child not wanting to return to school. Our results suggest that parents facing difficulties and experiencing disadvantage themselves were more likely to be concerned about their children not wanting to return to school with 35% of parents with children in DEIS schools, 36% of lone parents and 42% of unemployed parents concerned about their children not wanting to return to school. Leaving school early can have a significant impact on a child's future.

Additionally, 64% of parents said they were worried about their children's emotional development, 57% about their children's stress levels while 58% were worried about anxiety when they were asked about their children returning to school. Missing significant periods in school has impacted some children's confidence. As one parent said:

“My child suffers terribly with anxiety & doesn't like to leave the house for anything! It's like ww3 to go for a walk! On returning to school last April, his anxiety was manifesting in physical.”

Just over half of parents (52%) stated they are concerned about their children's social skills when thinking about their return to school, their peer relationships and their ability to interact with others. Fifty-one percent of parents were worried about their child's loneliness.

It is clear parents are concerned that the extended time spent away from schools has reduced their children's social interactions and as a result the development of their social skills.

“Child does not mix as well as she use to, lives more in her own bubble, I worry about social skills and separation anxiety”.

“I worry for my sons social skills. He can be over familiar with kids he meets as he is afraid he won't ever meet them again - if we have another lockdown.”

The majority of parents believe their children required additional support when return to school, 63% of primary school parents and 73% of secondary school parents, with issues ranging from educational and psychological to general wellbeing.

“While my younger son does not have additional educational needs he has fallen significantly behind due to lockdowns and there does not seem to be any additional supports to help them catch up.”

Unfortunately, 49% of parents are not confident that these support needs will be met on return to school.

Recommendation: While the Department of Education’s Covid Learning and Support Scheme is welcome there must be a commitment from government to provide additional resources to schools if it is clear that the money provided is insufficient to meet the additional need among children generated by the pandemic and school closures. Currently, there is minimal mental health and wellbeing support available to children within schools. Schools should be given additional resources to access or provide emotional wellbeing and mental health supports.

- **Back to School Costs**

Each year our Back to School Survey examines the costs associated with attending primary and secondary school in Ireland. Half of the parents surveyed (51%) said they were concerned about the cost of returning to school (48% primary school and 58% secondary school). Seventeen percent of primary school parents and 19% of secondary school parents said they borrowed money to pay for back to school costs. One third of all parents said that meeting costs this year will be made more difficult as a result of Covid-19.

“The stress of trying to afford sending children back to school, the financial impact and trying not to run out of money.”

“Our education system is way too expensive, the back to school allowance definitely doesn’t even half cover the expenses of primary school kids, even with a book rental scheme. I dread this time of year even more than I dread Christmas time.”

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is a much needed and targeted allowance for low income families which contributes towards these costs. Currently, the thresholds for one parent families are lower than for two parent families. This makes it harder for lone parent families to qualify for the payment. Given that school costs per child are the same for all families, regardless of how many adults are in the household, this system unfairly penalises lone parents. Currently a couple with one child can earn up to €608.70 per week and qualify for the BSCFA but a one parent family with one child will not qualify if they earn more than €443.00 per week.⁵

Recommendation: Equalise the income thresholds for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for one and two-parent households and introduce ‘tapering’ for the BSCFA to provide greater access to support with school costs for working poor households and to reduce poverty traps.

- **School books and voluntary contributions**

Books remain a significant cost for parents at the start of the school term. The average cost for primary school books is €101 and the average cost of secondary school books is €201.

⁵ Citizen’s Information (2020) Available at - https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/social_welfare_payments_to_families_and_children/back_to_school_clothing_and_footwear_allowance.html

Just over half of parents (52%) said the cost of their child's books had increased since last year.

The availability of school book rental schemes remains inconsistent with not all schools run book rental schemes. For those that do, different items are included, and parents are charged different amounts. Almost three quarters of primary school parents said their school operated a rental scheme while less than half of secondary schools did. Parents in primary school pay an average of €60, while parents of secondary school pupils pay €111 on the schemes.

While rental schemes can assist some families and bring down their costs we believe school books should be free for all children as part of their right to free education. Barnardos welcomed the announcement of a free schoolbooks pilot scheme made by the previous Government in Budget 2020. Barnardos would like to see this expanded upon until ultimately all children in school in the Republic of Ireland being able to benefit from free school books.

Seventy-two percent of parents reported being asked for a voluntary contribution. This can add significant pressure on parents as schools mainly seek the payment in September on top of all the other expenses. This year the average amount being paid by primary school parents as a voluntary contribution is €79 and the average amount paid by secondary school parents is €127.

Recommendation: The government should commit to expanding on the pilot free school book scheme by investing a further €5m in this initiative. Budget 2022 should also commit to a roadmap of funding that will ensure that all children will receive free books over the next five years.

Recommendation: Increase capitation fees by 10 per cent in order to begin to offset the need for voluntary contributions. Commit to restoring capitation to 2010 levels, allowing for inflation, by 2023.

- **Bridging the digital divide**

Many families struggle with affordability and access to digital learning for their children.⁶ While parents recognise the importance of digital learning, some struggle to pay for the hardware and software required by their child's school. This was particularly brought into light during Covid19 restrictions and school closures when home-schooling pushed digital learning to the centre of children's education. No child's access to education should depend on their parent's right to pay.

Our survey found that over 10% of children and parents said they still struggled to access the technology that they needed. As digital learning becomes increasingly more important, it is vital children have access to the tools they need to learn no matter how much their parents can afford.

Recommendation: Develop a grant scheme to offer support to parents to pay for the digital hardware and software required by their child's school.

⁶ Barnardos (2020) *Back to School 2020 Briefing Paper*.

- School meals and food poverty

According to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, almost 10% of the Irish population experience food poverty.⁷ For families on a low income accessing a nutritious and balanced diet can be particularly challenging. Our survey found that 50% of parents were concerned about their child's diet.

Families with older children face increased costs compared to those with younger children. Two thirds of these higher costs relate to food, clothing, personal care and social inclusion.⁸ Research has found that 21% of schoolchildren in Ireland report going to school or bed hungry because there is not enough food at home. Children who report going to school or bed hungry are less likely to report excellent health and feeling very happy about their lives. They are more likely to report having been drunk, current smoking, being injured, frequent emotional and physical symptoms and to have bullied others⁹.

The initiation of a pilot hot school meals scheme in 2019 and funding for its expansion in 2020 were welcome developments. An evaluation of the pilot found that over a third of parents said that it had a very positive impact on their child's attendance at school, physical health and psychological wellbeing and 40% agreed it encouraged them to eat more healthily. Two-thirds (66%) of teachers/SNAs say the pilot project had a positive impact on children's diet, while over half say it positively impacted behaviour, attentiveness and psychological wellbeing¹⁰.

In Budget 2021, the additional €5.5 million provided to extend the provision of hot school meals to a further 35,000 primary school children was extremely welcome. However, we are aware that one third of schools (33%) that expressed an interest in taking part were not selected. We believe there is therefore clear room for continued growth and expansion of the scheme. In Budget 2022 further investment infrastructure and training is required to expand and ensure the continued success of the scheme.

Recommendation: Further expand the hot school meals programme to allow all schools interested to partake in the scheme so long as they have the local infrastructure to do so. Allocate funding to establish a Small Grants Scheme to improve school infrastructure to ensure appropriate facilities for school food provision. Ensure plans for all new school builds include provision for dining and catering facilities.

Domestic Violence

Approximately 40% of the families we work with have experience of domestic violence and abuse. Often it is not mentioned when a family is referred to Barnardos for support, but emerges during the course of our work when a child, young person or parent is comfortable enough to tell us what is happening in their family.

⁷ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2019) *Social Inclusion Monitor 2017* Available at: http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/Social_Inclusion_Monitor_2017.pdf

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ [Food poverty among schoolchildren in Ireland. HBSC Ireland Research Factsheet No. 13. \(nuigalway.ie\)](https://www.nuigalway.ie/~128275_29e96cca-68fc-4e55-9d3b-8713f0d8bbb7.pdf)

¹⁰ [128275_29e96cca-68fc-4e55-9d3b-8713f0d8bbb7.pdf](https://www.nuigalway.ie/~128275_29e96cca-68fc-4e55-9d3b-8713f0d8bbb7.pdf)

We see first-hand the harmful impact domestic violence and abuse can have on all domains of a child's life. However, through our work, children and families are supported to keep safe and to heal from their experiences and we see the positive outcomes that can be achieved.

Children are centrally involved in domestic violence and abuse and experience it as victims in their own right. Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into force in September 1990, guarantees every child the right to live free from the threat of violence, and obliges States to respond appropriately to protect children and young people from all forms of violence.

Domestic violence and abuse affects every aspect of a child's life, including their health, wellbeing and development from conception through to adulthood. Children are not passive bystanders. Living in an abusive environment generally hinders a child's developmental progress and can lead to a range of social, emotional, physical and behavioural problems.

Research on domestic violence and abuse demonstrates children experience negative affects both when they are present for incidents of physical violence and when they experience coercive control behaviours. Living in an abusive environment hinders a child's developmental progress and can lead to a range of social, emotional, physical and behavioural problems. Any form of abuse occurring in the home or within the family unit is abuse of the child. Unfortunately, the true scale of harm to children in Ireland due to domestic abuse is currently unknown.

It is vital that a more accurate understanding of the true level and scale of need of children experiencing domestic violence and abuse in this country is developed. Without knowing this, it is impossible to determine the level, type and breadth of support required to protect and help children recover, nor the most effective ways of preventing future domestic violence and abuse.

Children who experience domestic violence and abuse should have seamless access to support across prevention, early intervention, crisis and recovery through local co-ordinated community responses across the country. This should be underpinned by keeping children safe with the non-abusing parent and holding the perpetrator to account as a partner and a parent.

Training professionals to promote a shared understanding of childhood domestic and abuse and increasing skills for professional to be more attuned to its presence and how to appropriately respond to it within their respective roles, would help this programme of support to be more successful.

Recommendation: The government should provide additional resources to enable all children experiencing domestic violence and abuse to access support services throughout the country. Longitudinal research must be funded to get a more accurate picture of the scale and prevalence of children experiencing domestic violence and abuse within Ireland.

Child Poverty

- Minimum Essential Standard of Living

Growing up in poverty can negatively affect the entire life course of a child, limiting opportunities and making it more difficult for them to realise their full emotional, educational,

and social potential. The longer the period growing up in poverty, the worse and far-reaching consequences for children's development and wellbeing, including likelihood of chronic health conditions and disengagement from education.¹¹

Too many children continue to live in poverty in Ireland. The 2019 Survey on Income and Living Conditions demonstrates that children are most vulnerable to poverty, with 8% of children living in consistent poverty and 15.3% of children at risk of poverty¹². There are concerns that rates of poverty might increase post-pandemic¹³. The government must take steps to address this. One of the most practical and effective methods of doing so is by ensuring adequacy of social protection supports for families with children.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice publish their Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) data and analysis each year. It shows the income needed to provide a minimum standard of living to various household types and how well social welfare payments meet these requirements. A MESL is one which meets the minimum needed to live and participate in Irish society and is a standard of living which no one should be expected to live below.

The 2020 MESL data and analysis found income from social welfare falls short of meeting the needs of all family types it examined.¹⁴ This is despite increases in social protection rates in recent Budgets; highlighting the need for a more strategic, long-term approach to social protection provisions. The reality of this shortfall is families having to make weekly compromises on essential basics such as food or heating.

Living below an MESL has an impact on the well-being of parents and children, with implications for mental and physical health, educational attainment, loss of confidence and erosion of resources such as savings. Budget 2022 must begin to remedy this situation and commit to increasing core welfare rates.

Recommendation: Poverty proof social welfare rates by benchmarking directly against MESL, ensuring payment increases are related to the real costs of adequate standards of living. Set a target of full income adequacy across all social protection payments over three consecutive Budgets.¹⁵ Set a target of reaching an adequate level for all primary payments and qualified child payments by 2025 in line with the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025. Additionally, Jobseekers Transitional Payment should be extended until a parent's youngest child reaches the end of second level education. The existing cut off point of 14 years old coincides with when children can become much more expensive to maintain.

- **One Parent Families**

One parent families continue to be at considerably high risk of living in poverty in Ireland. In 2019, 17% of one parent families lived in consistent poverty, 45% were experiencing enforced deprivation and almost 80% were unable to afford an unexpected expense. MESL analysis finds that one parent household compositions continue to demonstrate the greatest rates and depth of income inadequacy. In 2021, the gap between the social welfare income

¹¹ [The dynamics of child poverty in Ireland: Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland survey | ESRI](#)

¹² Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2019*. (CSO 2020).

¹³ The Economic, Social and Research Institute (ESRI) has projected that, in the absence of economic growth and employment recovery, child poverty could increase to 22.6 per cent due to the pandemic. Mark Regan, and Bertrand Maitre 'Child poverty in Ireland and the pandemic recession' (ESRI 2020)

¹⁴ Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. (2020). *MESL 2020*. Available at - <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2020/>

¹⁵ Benchmarking Social Welfare Rates: SVP Submission to DEASP: April. 2019.

of a one parent household with two children is €80 every week.

Lone parents are more likely to be in low paying insecure jobs and experience in-work poverty than two parent households. Research shows that high housing and childcare costs combined with low levels of income, mean that it is challenging for many families with children to make ends meet. In 2018, a report on the impact of the changes on the financial incentives to work confirmed that reforms reduced the income of working lone parents and weakened the financial incentive to take up employment among non-employed lone parents. During this time, the rate of in-work poverty among lone parents had more than doubled from 9% in 2012 to just over 20% in 2019. Changes to the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) reduced the income of lone parents who were already working, pushed more lone parents into low paid employment, increased their risk of poverty and deprivation, and reduced the well-being of their children.

Lone parents whose eligibility for the OFP ends can transition to the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST), Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) and the Family Income Supplement (FIS, renamed Working Family Payment in 2017). The earnings disregard attached to the OFP was reduced over a five-year time period, from €146.50 per week to €90 per week in 2014.

The Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly tax-free payment available to employees with children. It gives extra financial support to people on low pay. You must be an employee to qualify for WFP and you cannot qualify if you are only self-employed.¹⁶ Currently one-parent families need to work the same number of hours per week as two-parent families to benefit from the Working Family Payment.

Recommendation: To tackle the fallout from the pandemic, it is vital that measures are taken to increase income for lone parents to provide a greater assurance that their children are not living in poverty. In order to address discrepancies of the WFP that have a negative impact on lone parents Budget 2022 presents the opportunity to reduce the weekly threshold to 15 hours per week for one-parent families to reduce the disproportionate pressure they are under and to help them increase their earning capacity.

Recommendation: We propose that the Department of Social Protection incorporates the Back to Work Family dividend payment into the Working Family Payment long term. This would help support parents to remain on this payment for longer and into employment in the future. When families lose their entitlement to this payment after two years the drop in income can be substantial and have a negative impact on children as well as reducing the incentive for parents to maintain work.

- Fuel Poverty

Children are a group particularly exposed to the risk of energy poverty. Growing up in an energy poor household has a distinct negative impact on children's health outcomes.¹⁷ However, despite this greater risk for children, particularly those living in one parent families,

¹⁶ Citizens Information, Available at - https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/social_welfare_payments_to_families_and_children/family_income_supplement.html

¹⁷ SVP (2019) Growing up in the cold: a policy briefing on the nature and extent of energy poverty in households with children. <https://www.svp.ie/getattachment/2cb10388-e3ca-41ef-9911-a17f252ce09c/Growing-up-in-the-Cold.aspx>

current policies and schemes are failing to effectively target children and families experiencing energy poverty.

It is estimated that energy poverty (measured as spending 10 per cent or more of a household's disposable income on energy) affects one in six households in Ireland, with the rate for lone parents reaching 31 per cent. Living in cold and damp homes puts children at increased risk of respiratory and other illnesses.¹⁸ The pressure fuel poverty puts on the household budget can mean children have less food, clothes and other basic necessities. Furthermore, the current housing crisis means many families are living in substandard accommodation, afraid to complain and with no option to move.

Fuel Allowance was increased by €3.50 to €28.00 per week in January 2021. However, cuts to the rate in previous years, energy price rises and increases in taxes and levies mean the Fuel Allowance has not recovered purchasing parity compared to 2010 levels.

Recommendation: Expand eligibility to the Fuel Allowance to households in receipt of the Working Family Payment and remove the waiting period for those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance. Increase the payable period for Fuel Allowance to 32 weeks and ensure the rate is adequate to alleviate energy poverty.

Housing

The latest Government statistics show that almost one thousand families were homeless living across Ireland last month, 2,167 dependent children¹⁹. No child in this country should have to spend a single night without a home. Living in homeless accommodation affects every aspect of a child's life. Unfortunately, too many children are living in temporary emergency accommodation, and for far too long, often for much longer than six months.

The negative effects are far ranging with implications for their emotional, social, educational and even their physical development. Children report feeling shame, sadness, anger and a sense of the injustice of their situation²⁰. Parents report feeling unsafe, stressed, losing employment and education opportunities, negative health effects and above all, overwhelming worry for their children.²¹

Figures demonstrate the considerable achievement and progress made during the pandemic/lockdown, with a 25% decrease in homeless families. However, it appears that progress has stalled and there is a real concern that the gains made during this time will regress. That means more children going through the hardship of becoming homeless and the subsequent negative impact it has on their health, wellbeing and enjoyment of childhood.

As the Government's eviction moratorium has ended we are beginning to see evictions again for families we support and are concerned that this will likely increase the number of homeless families and children we work with in the coming months.

It is vital the Government learns from and builds on what has worked well during the pandemic in terms of reducing the number of homeless families, in particular the impact of

¹⁸ World Health Organisation. (2011) *Environmental burden of disease associated with inadequate housing*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

¹⁹ Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. (2021) *Homelessness Report June 2021*

²⁰ Ombudsman for Children's Office (2019) *No Place Like Home*. Dublin : Ombudsman for Children's Office.

²¹ Walsh, K. and Harvey, B. (2017) *Finding a Home: Families' Journeys out of Homelessness*. Dublin: Focus Ireland.

the evictions moratorium, and uses this to inform the development of their Housing for All strategy.

Recommendation: The government should ring fence funding to provide additional Child and Family Support workers so that every child experiencing homelessness can access support. These Child and Family Support workers can be based in existing organisations to avoid the need for additional infrastructure. The government must guarantee that no child will be housed in emergency accommodation beyond six months.

Support for families seeking international protection

The institutionalisation, mental health effects, poverty and health problems experienced by children in Direct Provision is well documented.²² We remain concerned about the experience of children living in Direct Provision prior to the implementation of planned reforms. Additionally, the reforms must not be seen as a silver bullet to the significant issues and challenges facing these children. Children and families seeking international protection often have considerable additional needs, both because of their experiences in their country of origin and their experiences living in Direct Provision.

Even after families are granted leave to remain in Ireland or are successful in their application for family reunification challenges persist. Research published by NASC showed that access to reception and integration, housing and health support are inconsistent for these families. Furthermore, the report highlighted the toll separation, trauma, social isolation and the logistical pressures of finding suitable accommodation, education and employment can have on families and children.²³

Budget 2022 should include provision for supports for these children and families for the duration of their application process and beyond as families transition to life in Ireland. It is imperative such family support services are tailored to meet the particular needs of children and young people seeking asylum, granted refugee status or applying for family reunification.

Recommendation: The government should guarantee all children and families seeking international protection in Ireland receive a family support service for the duration of their application process and for those granted leave to remain as they transition out of State reception and integration services.

Health - Waiting Lists

Many of the children Barnardos works with are in need of assessment or treatment for issues relating to mental health, disability or speech and language among other health conditions. However, all too often these children are left waiting long periods to access even an assessment.

For example, almost 45,000 children across Ireland are on waiting lists for speech and language assessments and therapy, according to the latest figures from the HSE. More than 14,000 of these children have been waiting for more than 12 months for services. 16,000 children are awaiting initial assessments, with over 3,500 on waiting lists for over 12

²² Shannon, G. (2019) *Twelfth Report of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection*.

²³ Smith, K., Ni Raghallaigh, M, Johnson, D and Izzeddin, A. (2020) *Invisible People: Integration Support Needs of Refugee Families Reunited in Ireland*. Dublin: NASC

months.²⁴ Similarly, there are long waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), with approximately 2,500 children and young people are on waiting lists.²⁵ Children and young people have faced increased uncertainty and higher levels of adversity through the pandemic.

In some instances, children who are left waiting longer than a year for an assessment then face considerable additional time waiting for actual treatment or support once that they have received an assessment.²⁶ Our services regularly support children who are left waiting several years from the point of first attempting to get an assessment to receiving support for the specific additional need. A year, often two or three, is a significant period of development in a child's life, particularly when many of these children are two or three years old when their parents first seek support for them. For a child with a speech delay, poor mental health or awaiting disability supports this length of time can be devastating to their wellbeing and future development.

At times children who are waiting for assessment or treatment are referred to Barnardos to try and help them and their family cope with problems associated with their undiagnosed and/or untreated condition. In our early years services parents often turn to us for support for children with additional needs when they are left with no other option, no other service or childcare facility will support them. Similarly, Barnardos staff will refer children they are supporting to different services such as CAMHS to receive and assessment for support. Whilst children wait for specific health or disability related appointments Barnardos helps them and their families manage. Barnardos provides support to children with additional needs who are referred to our early years and family support services, and to their families.

All children have a right to health treatment and to special care and assistance if they have a disability.²⁷ The impact of lack of access to timely healthcare has significant repercussions for children's development. It also leads to increased stress and anxiety across entire families. Some parents are forced to turn to private assessments. However, that is not an option to the majority of children and families we support and children living in disadvantaged communities.

The government recently took steps to go some way to addressing waiting lists for primary care psychology services. In August 2018 there were 6,293 children waiting nationally for primary care psychology services. Shockingly, of these children a quarter (1,607) were waiting longer than a year. The announced approval of up to €4 million to reduce the number of children and young people under 18 waiting more than 12 months was welcome, although it was acknowledged that there is a need to develop a sustainable longer term provision plan.

Recommendation: The government needs to take practical steps forward to address waiting lists in particular those for speech and language and CAMHS. Budget 2022 must provide the resources to do so, specific money set aside for tackling waiting lists. For

²⁴ [Almost 45,000 children on 'appalling' waiting lists for speech and language help \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/almost-45000-children-on-appalling-waiting-lists-for-speech-and-language-help-1.4444444)

²⁵ [More than 8,500 young people on waiting list for primary care psychological services, Dáil hears \(thejournal.ie\)](https://www.thejournal.ie/more-than-8500-young-people-on-waiting-list-for-primary-care-psychological-services-1244444.html)

²⁶ Barnardos. (2018) *Winter Waiting List Report – November 2018* – available <https://www.barnardos.ie/media/2781/barnardos-2018winter-waiting-list-report.pdf>

²⁷ United Nations. (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva: United Nations

children on waiting lists a triage system should be adopted. Additional support and funding should be made available for children not reaching thresholds who might benefit from other support and services in the community.

Childcare

The first few years of a child's life are the most critical in terms of development and learning. Research studies have consistently found the early years of life are critical to the emotional intellectual development of a child, with 75% of children's brain growth completed during their first few years.

The experiences children have during this time lay the foundation for the rest of their childhood and for the adults they will become. Supporting parents in their role is crucial to improving outcomes for children, central to this is encouraging and facilitating a nurturing relationship between parent and infant.

The positive influence of quality early childhood care and education (ECEC) on a child's outcomes is also well documented, benefitting children's social, emotional, physical and educational development. Participation in ECEC is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Quality care and education helps even the youngest children develop important life skills such as communication, social skills, how to maintain friendships and how to navigate rules and boundaries. Barnardos runs seven early years centres and works with thousands of families reliant on government childcare schemes such as the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE). Barnardos also supports the ELC and SAC sector nationally through provision of information, mentoring and training to enhance quality practice.

We believe that the ELC system should be accessible for all children and is adequately resourced to provide a quality service to children and families. Ensuring universal access to affordable and quality early childcare and education would give all children the best possible start in life.

The current National Childcare Scheme (NCS) does not subsidise the cost of school age childcare (SAC) provision, for example after school care, during term time for children of parents who are not working or in education. This can leave this cohort of children without access to SAC and all the benefits it bring such as hot meals, access to play opportunities and more. This can have a particularly negative impact on children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a heightened risk that they will not get equal educational support from school hours alone and at home compared to other children living in less disadvantaged circumstances.

The sponsor arrangement put in place as part of the NCS to provide free access to ELC and SAC for vulnerable children is not working for many families as the criteria is too limited and the five agencies listed as potential sponsors too restrictive. There is a need for a review and overhaul to the system - including a review of the application process that would extend sponsor bodies to include additional relevant agencies and improve administration of sponsor referrals to ensure funds are received in timely manner and meet the costs of the place.

The Access and Inclusion model (AIM) helps support access for preschool age children with additional needs. Targeted AIM support allows children acquire one or more further supports to ensure that they can participate meaningfully in the ECCE programme. These might take the form of specialist advice and support, specialist equipment or appliances, minor building alterations, therapeutic intervention or, in a small number of cases, extra assistance in the pre-school room. Presently, AIM only applies to children eligible for ECCE. However, we know that children need ELC prior to this age and children who require additional support should be able to access it before then and for more than 15 hours a week during term time.

Finally, In order to ensure quality practice and provision of ELC It is important that there is investment in the workforce. Significantly more funding is needed to provide better pay and working conditions with appropriate nationally agreed salary scales for the sector, linked to occupational role profiles. A coordinated, cohesive and effective governance structure at policy level that sets professional standards and oversees quality assurance and monitoring, accompanied by a unified professional body is necessary for development in the sector.

Recommendation: The NCS should expand to cover the cost of school age childcare for vulnerable children during term time for children of parents who are not working or in education. The criteria for the NCS sponsor arrangement should be extended to allow more children to benefit from the scheme.

Recommendation: Extend AIM to include younger children accessing ELC and for children accessing SAC. Additionally, extend AIM beyond 15 hours per week during term time hours to reflect the fact that some children spend far more time throughout the year in full time ELC.