

Children's Budget 2021

September 2020

Introduction

This new Government has taken office at what is undoubtedly one of the most challenging periods in recent history. For children, this is a critical time with much uncertainty; but with the right budgetary allocation it could also be a time of hope and opportunity. Barnardos' Children's Budget sets out how, with targeted investment in evidenced based services and supports, this Government could change the course of vulnerable children's lives.

The pandemic restrictions have been hard on children, particularly vulnerable children who are often without the same support structures and relationships available to other children. The coming months and years are likely to bring a recession the scale of which we do not yet know. We do know children bore the brunt of the last recession. Child poverty doubled and vital services and social welfare supports were cut; many children are still living with the consequences today.¹ This time we are prepared and must not be found wanting. We have the benefit of experience and the knowledge that with the right investment all children can thrive.

It is welcome that the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future focuses on investment rather than austerity as a response to the latest economic downturn; but the absence of austerity is not enough. The children Barnardos works with were already living with fear, uncertainty, educational disadvantage and poor access to health services before the pandemic began. For them, we must strive for more than a 'return to normal life'. We believe the Government can do this by investing in evidence based programmes and services designed to recognise and respond to trauma and reduce childhood adversity.

Our Children's Budget recommendations are informed by our experience and expertise in working with vulnerable and at risk children and families. They set out a blueprint for what the new Government must do to reduce the impact of trauma and ensure a brighter future for vulnerable children.

About Barnardos

Barnardos is a leading provider of frontline services to children and their families. We have been providing practical services and emotional support to children and parents for almost 60 years in Ireland. 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 2019, Barnardos worked with over 21,000 children and their families. This year we are seeing record levels of demand for our services. In each of the first four months of 2020 the number of children on our waiting list exceeded records set in previous years. We anticipate this trend will continue.

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 do this by offering a range of early intervention and targeted services

¹ Central Statistics Office. (2018). *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office

in our 44 project locations, in family homes, schools 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. Barnardos has always been, and remains committed to being, an innovative, cutting edge and adaptive organisation.

In 2019, Barnardos launched a new Trauma Informed Strategy at the centre of which, is our continued commitment to delivering supportive, helpful, nurturing services to vulnerable children and their families. Building on our high quality service provision, our new strategy incorporates current research and thinking on the impact of trauma and childhood adversity, both during childhood and across the lifespan. Our service delivery model and entire organisation is now underpinned by a trauma-informed approach.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Family Support

“We will strengthen early intervention and family support services through pro-active expansion of services that have strong outcomes for children and their families.”

Programme for Government – Our Shared Future

Prior to the outbreak of Covid19 most children in Ireland were doing well; but around one in five children have poor economic, social and educational outcomes.² These are the children hit hardest by the pandemic restrictions. Children for whom home is not a safe or happy place were left stranded without key supports and outlets available to them in school or their community. Existing issues, such as domestic violence or parental mental health, may have been compounded by the pandemic restrictions. A Barnardos' survey found parents reported lack of childcare, worrying about loved ones and less sleep and exercise were all contributing to increased stress levels.³ There has also been a rise in reports of domestic violence and novel issues arising in child care proceedings caused by the crisis.^{4 5}

A key means of tackling adversity and inequality is through provision of family support services in tandem with early childhood education. Intervening early with intensive child and Family Support service should be the primary focus to improve outcomes for children deemed to be vulnerable or at-risk. Services falling under the umbrella of Family Support are normally provided in either a family's home or their community. Barnardos supports the State in its statutory obligation, under the Childcare Act 1991, to provide services to vulnerable

² Walsh, B. and Cullinan, J. (2015) 'Decomposing socioeconomic inequalities in childhood obesity: Evidence from Ireland'. *Economics and Human Biology*, (16) pp. 60-72.

³ Barnardos. (2020) *Impact on Family Life during Covid19 Pandemic*. Available - <https://www.barnardos.ie/policy/the-issues/covid19-impact-survey>

⁴ Women's Aid. (2020) *Garda Statistics on Domestic Abuse During Covid-19 on the tip of the iceberg*, *Womens Aid*. Available - <https://www.womensaid.ie/about/newsevents/news/2020/06/09/media-release-garda-statistics-on-domestic-abuse-d/>

⁵ Child Care Law Reporting Project. (2020) *Novel issues in child care proceedings raised by Covid crisis*. Available - <https://www.childlawproject.ie/publications/novel-issues-in-child-care-proceedings-raised-by-covid-crisis/>

children and families in Ireland. In 2019, 92% of children and families working with our intensive family support services presented with high end, complex levels of need.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) recently published a review to inform the development of National Standards for Children’s Social Services. It recommended five key State commitments; meaningful participation; protecting and promotion of child safety and wellbeing holistically; strengthening families and communities; accountability through strong governance and leadership; and staff who are responsive by being skilled, trained and experienced.

The review pointed to international examples of good practice such as Sweden where child protection concerns are viewed as a failure by the State, rather than the family, and Scotland where a child’s wellbeing is given statutory footing. The review also pointed to jurisdictions where there is a statutory obligation for integration and collaboration of services. It noted that Northern Ireland is particularly strong on early intervention leading to high referral rates; however the majority of these referrals are supported successfully in the community. These are models we should learn from and emulate in Ireland.⁶

Barnardos welcomes the recognition, in the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future, of the value community and voluntary family support services in preventing harm and responding to the needs of vulnerable families. In order to successfully prevent harm and respond to the needs of vulnerable families it is imperative, however, that community and voluntary family support services receive adequate investment. This is something that has been lacking in the last decade when “temporary” funding cuts and a freeze on cost of living increases was implemented.

It is important to view the cuts to community and voluntary family support services not as a onetime change, but a protracted squeezing of funds over time. In short, the State is not paying for the services it requires leaving community and voluntary organisations to fundraise to meet the cost of providing services supposedly fully funded by the State. For example, in Barnardos’ case, Tusla funds under 70% of the costs for services they have 100% contracted for. This compares with 80% in 2008 and pre-Covid19 we projected this to fall as low as 63% in 2021.⁷

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. Historic and persistent underfunding of public services in Ireland – particularly a failure to prioritise prevention and early intervention services - have led to Ireland faring unfavourably when compared to other European countries both for social problems and spending on these problems. Research commissioned by Barnardos found that Ireland has the second highest costs in Europe when responding to preventable negative outcomes for children.

⁶ HIQA. (2020) *Evidence review to inform the development of National Standards for Children’s Social Services*. Dublin: HIQA.

⁷ Just Economics (2019) *Breaking Point: Why investment is needed now to ensure the sustainability of quality services for children and families*.

During the last decade, demand for service provision has increased. For example, Barnardos worked with 5,672 children and families in 2009, rising to 21,168 in 2019.⁸⁹ The need for family support services is likely to increase post-pandemic and into likely recession. Worryingly, we saw during the last recession the public's ability and willingness to make donations to fund the shortfall in funding evaporate and it is expected the same will happen now. A perfect storm of increased need for family support services and a plummet in the available income to bridge the gap in State funding is inevitable. 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, which will undoubtedly lead to a crisis of unmet need.

Recommendation 1: 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 and include restoration of the annual cost of living increase for service providers in the Community and Voluntary Sector and provide funding for pilot/innovative work.

Expand access to proven parenting Programmes

“We will expand access to parenting support programmes that have been proven to be effective.”

Programme for Government – Our Shared Future

Expanding access to proven parenting support programmes is most welcome and much needed. Barnardos has extensive experience in designing, implementing and evaluating parenting programmes and we know the transformative effect they can have on a child's life and outcomes. It is crucial that there are a range of parenting support programmes made available to all families who need them – it cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach. All parents need support; but the level of need and intensity of the support provided varies widely. A suite of universal programmes which are available to everyone and targeted programmes which are allocated based on referral and assessment are both needed. Figure 1 is a pyramid graph, as developed by Hardiker, depicting the different levels of need.

⁸ Barnardos (2010) *Annual Report 2009*. Dublin: Barnardos.

⁹ Barnardos (2020) *Annual Report 2019*. Dublin: Barnardos.

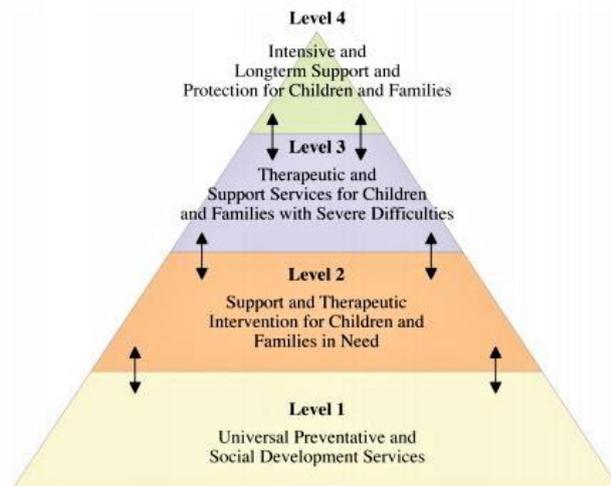


Fig. 1

Universal programmes which cater to a low level of need, such as parent and toddler groups or parenting groupwork programmes, should be available in tandem to and in some cases in conjunction with more targeted parenting programmes. Barnardos’ Partnership with Parents (PWP) is an example of a successful targeted programme for parents with complex needs who benefit from receiving input and support on a one-to-one basis in the home. Programmes like PWP work well for parents who have multiple complex needs, perhaps where group-based or universal programmes are unsuitable.¹⁰ Other parenting programmes, such as Parents Plus! which helps with parenting during separation, can be provided both on a universal and targeted basis ensuring parents get a response tailored to their need.

Recommendation 2: Building on plans contained in the First 5: Government Strategy for Babies and Young Children, develop a targeted universalism approach to the funding of proven parenting programmes providing a suite of approaches which cater to the varying level of need.

Support for families seeking international protection

Commitment in the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future to ending the Direct Provision System and replacing it with a not for profit model is extremely welcome and long overdue. The institutionalisation, mental health effects, poverty and health problems experienced by children in Direct Provision is well documented.¹¹ While, Barnardos looks forward to submitting recommendations on the design and implementation of the replacement to the current system, we remain concerned about the experience of children living in Direct Provision in the meantime. Indeed, commitment to replacing Direct Provision must not be seen as a “cure all” solution to the current crisis facing these children. Children and families seeking international protection often have 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. Recent research published by NASC

¹⁰ Connolly, N., Adams, K. & Flemming, P. (2019) *Evaluation of the Partnership with Parents Programme*. Dublin: Barnardos
¹¹ Shannon, G. (2019) *Twelfth Report of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection*.

showed that access to reception and integration, housing and health support are patchy for these families. Furthermore, the report highlighted the toll separation, trauma, social isolation and the logistical pressures of finding suitable accommodation, education, employment etc. can have on families and children.¹² Budget 2021 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 3: 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. Include those successful in their application for family reunification under Section 56 and 57 of the International Protection Act 2015 and extend these supports for the first year of the family's reunification in Ireland, paying particular attention to supporting young refugee sponsors.

Department of Health

Reduce Waiting Lists

“Expanding primary and community care is at the heart of Sláintecare – making the vast majority of healthcare services available in the home or close to home, rather than in our hospitals.”

Programme for Government – Our Shared Future

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. Oftentimes 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. Barnardos has been shining a light on the waiting times for services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) and disability services. Of particular concern is the strong regional disparity in the length of waiting time and the number of children waiting. In some cases children waiting longer than a year for an assessment face additional time waiting for treatment.¹³ A year or two is a significant period of development in a child's life. For a child with a speech delay, poor mental health or awaiting disability supports a year or two waiting is simply too long.

All children have a right to health treatment and to special care and assistance if they have a disability.¹⁴ The impact of lack of access to timely healthcare not only has significant repercussions for children's development; but later interventions are more likely to be less successful and far more costly. Furthermore, the impact on the whole family should not be

¹² Smith, K., Ní Raghallaigh, M, Johnson, D and Izzeddin, A. (2020) *Invisible People: Integration Support Needs of Refugee Families Reunited in Ireland*. Dublin: NASC

¹³ Barnardos. (2018) *Winter Waiting List Report – November 2018* – available <https://www.barnardos.ie/media/2781/barnardos-2018winter-waiting-list-report.pdf>

¹⁴ United Nations. (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva: United Nations

underestimated. Parents describe feeling helpless, anxious and stressed. Siblings too can be affected if their own needs aren't met because of reduced parental attention or if behavioural problems arise.

Many exasperated parents are forced to seek private assessment or treatment for their child at a high personal cost. However, even securing private assessments does not automatically trigger access to treatment in the public system. Often parents cannot afford this or are told their child must be assessed through the public system for access to treatment publicly. Growing Up in Ireland research shows a strong correlation between lower income levels and health problems meaning many children are suffering where parents cannot afford to pay for faster access to assessment or treatment.¹⁵ Multi-disciplinary teams, as envisioned in the Sláintecare report, could alleviate waiting times for these children by providing universal access to primary care services in the community.

Whilst children wait for specific health or disability related appointments Barnardos helps them and their families manage. We support them, particularly during transitions in their life like starting school. Our work is underpinned by prevention and early intervention and as such, we work with children to develop tools to relieve stress or anxiety, build self-esteem and resilience. Our Early Years services and parent and toddler groups help children improve their speech and language through play. We work to strengthen the parent-child relationship, helping parents develop skills to manage their child's behaviour, communicate and meet their child's needs. We work to capture the child's voice and ensure it is forefront in decisions about their care and future. We also advocate for children locally and help parents navigate health, education and social protection services. And we support parents to support their children in these very stressful circumstances.

Barnardos provides support to children with additional needs who are referred to our early years and family support services, and to their families. By recognising the role of community organisations in providing early intervention and prevention supports and utilising existing resources in the community the Government could free up much needed resources

Recommendation 4: Implement the Sláintecare Report recommendation for universal primary care, giving children access to multidisciplinary primary care services in the community comprising GPs, nurses, physiotherapists, speech and language, social workers, occupational therapists and family support workers

Recommendation 5: Reduce unsustainable waiting lists by triaging children with lower levels of need to receive the appropriate support services within the community. Develop a referral pathway for children with additional needs due to developmental delay, behavioural, social and emotional needs or disability facilitating them being triaged in the community the Government could free up much needed health resources in areas such as speech and language and mental health.

¹⁵ Williams, J. et al (2018) *Growing Up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children the Lives of 13-Year-Olds* – available <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/media/file-uploads/2018-10/BKMNEXT368.pdf>

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

“As we emerge from the COVID pandemic, we must build upon the unity, which was fundamental in our response, to improve outcomes for those who are struggling on low incomes, struggling with caring responsibilities, or having to raise their families alone and those who are living with a disability.”

Programme for Government – Our Shared Future

Minimum Income Standard

The adequacy of social protection supports for families with children is an ongoing issue which should be a priority for this Government. The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) 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. The 2020 MESL data and analysis finds income from social welfare falls short of meeting the needs of all family types it examined.¹⁶ 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.

Recommendation 6: Poverty proof social welfare rates by benchmarking directly against Minimum Essential Standard of Living rates (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.¹⁷

Qualified Child Increase

While none of the family types examined meet the minimum essential standard, families with older children fare particularly poorly. The Qualified Child Increase (QCI) is crucial in assisting families with children who are dependent on social welfare for their income. The QCI aims to ensure children are adequately provided for within the family. The MESL analysis shows that families dependent on social welfare income with older children have significantly deeper income inadequacy due to the high cost of food, clothing, etc. associated with over-12s. Figure 2 below shows the gap between social welfare income and the MESL for different family types comparing families with younger and older children.

	Children aged 3 and 6	Children aged 10 and 15
Two parents (urban)	€6.81	€83.95
Two parents (rural)	€53.16	€129.13
Lone parent (urban)	€10.54	€87.69
Lone parent (rural)	€73.33	€149.23

Fig.2

Barnardos welcomed increases to QCI in recent Budgets, in particular the higher rate given to families with children over 12 years of age. However, the impact of these increases has

¹⁶ Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. (2020). *MESL 2020*. Available at - <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2020/>

¹⁷ Benchmarking Social Welfare Rates: SVP Submission to DEASP: April. 2019.

not been sufficient in reducing the shortfall for families with older children. In order for QCI to have a meaningful impact for older children Budget 2021 must commit to a further increase.

Recommendation 7: Increase the Qualified Child Increase for older children by €10 and for younger children by €3 per week.

Daily Expenses Allowance for Children in Direct Provision

Children living in Direct Provision centres are at a high risk of consistent poverty although they are not counted in the official poverty statistics. Budget 2019 increased the rate of the weekly Direct Provision allowance for children, increasing it from €21.60 to €29.80 in line with the McMahon Report recommendation.¹⁸ This positive measure was the third increase in less than three years to the payment. However, at the time of the McMahon report, the recommendation equated to the rate of Qualified Child Increase (QCI). In the intervening years the Qualified Child Increase rate has been increased to €34 (children under the age of 12) and €37 (children over the age of 12) for children of other social welfare recipients, the increase was not extended to children in Direct Provision.¹⁹

Children in Direct Provision cannot access other social welfare supports like Child Benefit. The introduction of the right to work for people in the protection process after a set period of time means that some parents may have access to supports like the Working Family Payment to supplement a low income from employment but it is not clear how many people, if any, are receiving these types of supports.

Recommendation 8: Increase the daily expenses allowance for children living in Direct Provision to the rates of the Qualified Child Increase (QCI).

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.²⁰ However, despite this greater risk for children, particularly those living in one parent families, 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.²¹ Living in cold and damp homes puts children at increased risk of respiratory and other illnesses.²² 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. For families living in

¹⁸ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2018) *Budget 2019*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 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>

²¹ Ibid

²² World Health Organisation. (2011) *Environmental burden of disease associated with inadequate housing*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

accommodation which is draughty, mouldy or has broken windows for example, access to fuel is vital.

Recommendation 9: Increase the Fuel Allowance to €25.30 and restore the payment season to 32 weeks so that the value of the payment is restored to 2010 levels and is in line with current energy costs. 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.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance

Each year Barnardos' School Costs Survey examines the costs associated with attending primary and secondary school in Ireland. The most recent data shows it costs an average of €365 for fourth class pupils and €735 for first year pupils, with much of the cost front loaded at the beginning of the school term. Clothing and footwear costs account for around 40 percent of the total.²³ 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 €603.70 per week and qualify for the BSCFA but a one parent family with one child will not qualify if they earn more than €438.30 per week.²⁴

Recommendation 10: 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.

Reduce Working Family Payment threshold for lone parents

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.²⁵ 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. During the last recession (2008-2013), research has shown discretionary policy changes particularly affected the incomes of lone parents.²⁶ To tackle the fallout from COVID19, it is vital that measures are taken to increase

²³ Barnardos (2020) *Back to School Briefing Paper 2020*

²⁴ 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

²⁵ 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

²⁶ Doorley, K., Bercholz, M., Keane, C., Callan, T., and Walsh, J.R. (2018). The gender impact of Irish budgetary policy. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute and Parliamentary Budget Office. Regan, M., Keane, C., and Walsh, J.R. (2018). Budget Perspectives 2019, Paper 1. LoneParent Incomes and Work Incentives. July 2018.

income for lone parents to address the discrepancies of the WFP that have a negative impact on lone parents. Budget 2021 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 11: To ensure equality between different household types and increase the income of one parent families in work, reduce the Working Family Payment weekly work threshold from 19 hours to 15 hours for one parent families.

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

“We recognise the particular challenges of homelessness, for families and for individuals. We will focus our efforts on reducing the number of homeless families and individuals and work with local authorities and housing agencies to support them into long-term sustainable accommodation.”

Programme for Government – Our Shared Future

Family support worker for each child in homeless accommodation

The housing crisis which has gripped the country in recent years has unfortunately had an enormous impact on the vulnerable children caught in this appalling situation. Living in homeless accommodation affects every aspect of a child’s life. 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 situation.²⁷ Parents report feeling unsafe, stressed, losing employment and education opportunities, negative health effects and above all, overwhelming worry for their children.²⁸

In recent months there has been a small but notable decrease in the number of children and families living in homeless accommodation. This is likely as a result of the effect of Covid19 on the housing market. Yet, at the time of writing there are still 2,653 children living in hubs, hotels and B&Bs.²⁹ The problems facing these children have not gone away during the pandemic and, in fact, they have been exacerbated by the closure of schools, crèches and other support services.

Schools and crèches provide much needed stability for children, they are a source not just of education but also provide meals, a place to play and receive emotional support. For parents, school and childcare offer a respite from caring for and entertaining children in a small room.³⁰ Home-schooling and social distancing are extremely challenging with a whole family sharing a small space. Closure too of playgrounds, libraries and other public amenities, coupled with the fact that many families living in emergency accommodation are

²⁶ St Vincent DePaul, Pre- Budget Submission 2020 <<https://www.svp.ie/getattachment/9c80c2ed-9d17-4a47-9dac-0aa86cffb3d7/Pre-Budget-Submission-2020-Investing-in-a-Just-So.aspx>> 9 accessed 10 July 2020

²⁷ Ombudsman for Children’s Office (2019) *No Place Like Home*. Dublin : Ombudsman for Children’s Office.

²⁸ Walsh, K. and Harvey, B. (2017) *Finding a Home: Families’ Journeys out of Homelessness*. Dublin: Focus Ireland.

²⁹ Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. (2020) *Homelessness Report June 2020*

³⁰ Scanlon, G. and McKenna, G. (2018). *Home Works: A Study on the Educational Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accommodation*. Dublin: The Children’s Rights Alliance.

housed far from family and friends meant restrictions were particularly hard on these families.

Barnardos has continued to work with families experiencing homelessness throughout the pandemic, offering socially distant family support services, emotional support and help with practical issues such as delivering meals or groceries. Services such as Barnardos are already working with many families living in homeless accommodation; but as a baseline all children living in homeless accommodation should be allocated a family support worker.

Recommendation 12: 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.

Department of Education and Skills

“We will continue to develop our education system to meet the needs of all students and to tackle disadvantage from an early age.”

Post- Covid19 educational Supports

Recent research by Barnardos on parental attitudes to returning to school this September showed parents recognised the benefit of their child being in school, particularly for their social and emotional development. Around half of all parents expressed worry about their child’s return and the majority felt they did not have sufficient information about their child’s school day. A similar survey of children and young people carried out in tandem found three in five children and young people are worried about Covid19 and their return to school.³¹ Children’s access to education has been severely curtailed due to the Covid19 pandemic. The impact is worse for those children who were already experiencing educational inequality before the outbreak of Covid19. Research shows children of better-off parents spend more time on at-home learning, have access to more resources and are more likely to use technology for home-schooling.³² Every child should have equitable access to education and the quality of access should not be dependent on a parent’s ability to pay. Furthermore, as children return to school some bring with them the trauma of their experience; children who have been confined at home with abuse or neglect, children who have been restricted in a room due to homelessness or Direct Provision or children who were unable to access the mental health or developmental services they required. In the interests of these children, teachers must not be expected to cope with these issues without support.

Recommendation 13: Formally link schools with services providing family support services and provide principals and teachers access to trauma informed CPD, wellbeing training and other resources to enable them to cope with children returning to school after restrictions, the on-going impact of the pandemic on children’s mental health and wellbeing and to manage an increase in child protection and welfare issues arising.

³¹ Barnardos (2020) *Back to School Briefing Paper 2020*

³² Andrew, A. Et Al. (2020) *Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children’s experiences during home learning*. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14848> [Accessed 22 May]

Tackling the cost of school

Barnardos welcomes commitment in the Programme for Government to commence a free schoolbook pilot scheme and expand the scheme nationwide subject to resources. Each year Barnardos reports of the cost of sending children to school. This year we found the cost of sending a child to senior infant's is €330, to fourth class is €365 and to first year is €735³³ While the Department of Education and Skills favours the establishment of school book rental schemes, the availability of such schemes is inconsistent and limited.³⁴ In 2013, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection recommended a 'five year template for the delivery of an entirely free schoolbook system, based on the UK model' and that all schools should discontinue the use of workbooks; but these recommendations have not yet been implemented.³⁵

Recommendation 14: The Department of Education should build on the pilot free school book scheme by investing a further €5m in this initiative. The second tranche of funding must target those experiencing disadvantage in non-DEIS schools.

Recommendation 15: Budget 2021 should also commit to a roadmap of funding that will ensure that all children will receive free books by September 2023.

Recommendation 16: 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.³⁶ 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. As digital learning becomes increasingly more important, particularly in light of possible ongoing restrictions on classroom based learning, in response to the pandemic, it is vital children have access to the tools they need to learn no matter how much their parents can afford.

Recommendation 17: Develop a grant scheme to offer support to parents to pay for the digital hardware and software required by their child's school.

School meals

According to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, almost 10 per cent of the Irish population experience food poverty.³⁷ For families on a low income accessing a nutritious and balanced diet is particularly challenging. As highlighted earlier in this submission, families with older children face increased costs compared to those with

³³ Barnardos (2020) *School Costs Survey 2020 Briefing Paper*.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection, (2013) *Report on Tackling Back to School Costs*.

³⁶ Barnardos (2020) *Back to School 2020 Briefing Paper*.

³⁷ 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

younger children. Two thirds of these higher costs relate to food, clothing, personal care and social inclusion.³⁸ The initiation of a pilot hot school meals scheme in 2019 and its funding for its expansion in 2020 were most welcome developments. In Budget 2021 further investment infrastructure and training is required to ensure the scheme is a success.

Recommendation 17: Allocate funding to establish a Small Grants Scheme to improve school infrastructure to ensure appropriate facilities for school food provision.

Recommendation 18: Invest in training and support for school staff to facilitate them establishing a successful school food programme. Cost €0.5m

Recommendation 19: Ensure plans for all new school builds include provision for dining and catering facilities.

Department of Justice and Equality

“We must focus on reforming our family court system to ensure that proceedings involving children are dealt with in a manner which recognises the unique vulnerability and needs of children.”

Programme for Government – Our Shared Future

Family court system

Barnardos welcomes commitment in the Programme for Government to enact a Family Court Bill creating a new dedicated Family Court within the existing court structure and providing for court procedures supporting a less adversarial resolution of disputes. Domestic violence, acrimonious separation and child welfare and protection are some of the most common reasons a child comes in contact with the court service. These children may be experiencing trauma and are extremely vulnerable. To protect the welfare and safety of children a new Family Court must include a high quality, national Court Welfare Service. Such a service should include a national system of Child Contact Centres; a system for the statutory assessment and management of child maintenance payments; the management and resourcing of necessary court assessments in relation to children and parents; a range of ancillary family support services including parenting courses, counselling, mediation, and mentoring; and expert training for all relevant staff and stakeholders.

Recommendation 20: Develop a Court Welfare Service as part of the creation of a dedicated Family Court. Phased investment should begin in Budget 2021, with full investment spread out over five successive Budgets. This service to include a national system of Child Contact Centres; a system for the statutory assessment and management of child maintenance payments; the management and resourcing of necessary court assessments in relation to children and parents; a range of ancillary family support services including parenting courses, counselling, mediation, and mentoring; and expert training for all relevant staff and stakeholders.

³⁸ Ibid.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation	Department
<p>Recommendation 1: 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 and include restoration of the annual cost of living increase for service providers in the Community and Voluntary Sector and provide funding for pilot/innovative work.</p> <p>Recommendation 2: Building on plans contained in the First 5: Government Strategy for Babies and Young Children, develop a targeted universalism approach to the funding of proven parenting programmes providing a suite of approaches which cater to the varying level of need.</p> <p>Recommendation 3: 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. Include those successful in their application for family reunification under Section 56 and 57 of the International Protection Act 2015 and extend these supports for the first year of the family’s reunification in Ireland, paying particular attention to supporting young refugee sponsors.</p>	<p>Department of Children and Youth Affairs</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Implement the Sláintecare Report recommendation for universal primary care, giving children access to multidisciplinary primary care services in the community comprising GPs, nurses, physiotherapists, speech and language, social workers, occupational therapists and family support workers.</p> <p>Recommendation 5: Reduce unsustainable waiting lists by triaging children with lower levels of need to receive the appropriate support services within the community. Develop a referral pathway for children with additional needs due to developmental delay, behavioural, social and emotional needs or disability facilitating them being triaged in the community the Government could free up much needed health resources in areas such as speech and language and mental health.</p>	<p>Department of Health</p>

Recommendation	Department
<p>Recommendation 6: Poverty proof social welfare rates by benchmarking directly against Minimum Essential Standard of Living rates (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.³⁹</p> <p>Recommendation 7: Increase the Qualified Child Increase for older children by €10 and for younger children by €3 per week.</p> <p>Recommendation 8: Increase the daily expenses allowance for children living in Direct Provision to the rates of the Qualified Child Increase (QCI).</p> <p>Recommendation 9: Increase the Fuel Allowance to €25.30 and restore the payment season to 32 weeks so that the value of the payment is restored to 2010 levels and is in line with current energy costs. 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.</p> <p>Recommendation 10: 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.</p> <p>Recommendation 11: To ensure equality between different household types and increase the income of one parent families in work, reduce the Working Family Payment weekly work threshold from 19 hours to 15 hours for one parent families.</p>	<p>Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection</p>
<p>Recommendation 12: 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.</p>	<p>Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government</p>
<p>Recommendation 13: Formally link schools with services providing family support services and provide principals and teachers access to trauma informed CPD, wellbeing training and other resources to enable them to cope with children returning to school after restrictions, the on-going impact of the pandemic on children’s mental health and wellbeing and to manage an increase in child protection and welfare issues arising.</p>	<p>Department of Education and Skills</p>

³⁹ Benchmarking Social Welfare Rates: SVP Submission to DEASP: April. 2019.
Barnardos | 2020

Recommendation	Department
<p>Recommendation 14: The Department of Education should build on the pilot free school book scheme by investing a further €5m in this initiative. The second tranche of funding must target those experiencing disadvantage in non-DEIS schools.</p> <p>Recommendation 15: Budget 2021 should also commit to a roadmap of funding that will ensure that all children will receive free books by September 2023.</p> <p>Recommendation 16: 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.</p> <p>Recommendation 17: Allocate funding to establish a Small Grants Scheme to improve school infrastructure to ensure appropriate facilities for school food provision.</p> <p>Recommendation 18: Invest in training and support for school staff to facilitate them establishing a successful school food programme. Cost €0.5m</p> <p>Recommendation 19: Ensure plans for all new school builds include provision for dining and catering facilities.</p>	
<p>Recommendation 20: Develop a Court Welfare Service as part of the creation of a dedicated Family Court. Phased investment should begin in Budget 2021, with full investment spread out over five successive Budgets. This service to include a national system of Child Contact Centres; a system for the statutory assessment and management of child maintenance payments; the management and resourcing of necessary court assessments in relation to children and parents; a range of ancillary family support services including parenting courses, counselling, mediation, and mentoring; and expert training for all relevant staff and stakeholders.</p>	<p>Department of Justice and Equality</p>