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BARNARDO'S RESEARCH - CHILDREN ON INNER CITY STREETS IN DUBLIN

1. Background and Context:

For some time Barnardo's has been concerned with the problem of children being on the streets in Dublin in at risk or vulnerable situations. To investigate the problem first hand two child care workers, over a period of six weeks in October/November 1996, were asked to spend time on the streets and to assess the situation. This document summarises their findings and outlines the types of services Barnardo's feels are necessary to tackle the problem.

During their investigation the child care workers established that there were two different problems emerging - one during the day and the second at night. Information is presented on these separately.

2. Day Time - Children Begging on the Streets in Dublin's Inner City:

The main problem during the day time appears to be one of children begging on the streets in the inner city area. These children are to be found in busy pedestrian areas such as O'Connell Street, O'Connell Bridge, Halfpenny Bridge and Temple Bar.

Children begging on the streets is a daily occurrence with more at weekends. Most of the children are from the Travelling community and live in a variety of sites, some unserved, around the city. The children arrive into the city on foot, by bus or they are dropped in by family or friends.

During the day the children tend to stay in one spot, unless moved on by guards. The majority of them are noticeably neglected, vulnerable and sad. Some show obvious signs of withdrawal and hopelessness. The children tend not to seek shelter and are often exposed to intolerable conditions.

At prearranged times the children assemble or are collected and they then go home.

The following chart illustrates the Barnardo's child care workers observations of this problem.

Daytime Observation of Children Begging on the Street

Day/Date	Time	Place	No.	Ages, Male			Ages, Female			Activity	Profile
				0-6	6-12	12-18	0-6	6-12	12-18		
Tues. 29/10/96	12.00 to 14.00	Grafton St.	2					1	1	Singing & tin whistle	Travellers
		Baggot St.	1	1						Baby with adult	Traveller
		Wicklow St.	1						1	Standing alone	Traveller
Wed. 30/10/96	14.00 to 16.00	Duke St.	1						1	Standing alone	Traveller
		Grafton St.	6		2		1	1	2	Assembling	Travellers
Sat. 02/11/96	13.00 to 16.00	Wicklow St.	2					2		Sitting	Travellers
		Duke St.	1						1	Standing alone	Traveller
		Grafton St.	2						2	Playing Music	Refugees
		Grafton St.	2				1	1		Walking	Travellers
		Grafton St.	5		2			2	1	Assembling	Travellers
		O'Connell Bridge	11	1	4	1	1	3	1	Assembling	Travellers
Sat. 09/11/96	15.00 to 16.30	O'Connell Bridge	3		2		1			Sitting with sign	Travellers
		Nassau St.	5		2		1		2	Assembling	Travellers
		College Green	2		1			1		Going Home	Travellers
Thurs. 14/11/96	14.30 to 16.00	O'Connell Bridge	2		2					Sitting with sign	Travellers
		Half-penny Bridge	5		2		1	2		Standing with cups	Travellers
		Temple Bar	1				1			Sitting with cap	Traveller
		Suffolk St.	1					1		Standing	Traveller
		Grafton St	2					2		Standing & Sitting	Travellers
Fri. 15/11/96	16.30 to 18.00	Grafton St	2		2					Busking	Settled
		College Green	1			1				Asking for money	Settled
Tues. 19/11/96	12.30 to 12.45	Stephens Green	6	1	1		1	1	2	Counting money	Travellers

Responding to the problem of Children Begging:

This is clearly a most serious problem that demands an urgent response. It is recognised also that a number of agencies are already grappling with what is undoubtedly a complex problem, which does not have any easy or 'quick fix' solutions.

Barnardo's believes that services developed in response to the problem of children begging should have the following features:

- Making direct contact with the children in a skilled and sensitive manner, involving building of trust, confidence and rapport.
- Working on an inter agency basis involving the Gardai, Health Board, schools and other relevant agencies.
- Making sure that members of the Travelling community and their organisations are centrally involved in strategies to tackle the problem.
- As most children begging are Travellers living with their families it is essential that services work at that level, building relationships with the relevant families so that their children are not subjected to this treatment.
- Working with families at local community level will also mean trying to ensure that other relevant support services are available - schools, youth activities, parenting support, etc.

It may well be that in certain situations children will continue to be neglected in this way and may have to be taken into care. However, in as far as possible, the strategy employed should be one of improving family relationships and ensuring that parents are not using children in this manner.

3. The Problem at Night:

The problem at night is almost of its nature harder and more difficult to quantify. Information was gathered by the child care workers through observation and meetings with relevant people.

Young people were observed in the street nightly with an apparent increase from Thursday to Sunday. Locations include O'Connell Bridge/Westmoreland Street, Mespil Road, Mount Street, Benburb Street and the Phoenix Park. Both boys and girls are on the streets with their ages ranging from 12 to 18 years.

The problems of these young people can include homelessness, drug abuse and prostitution. Some of the young people were observed in selling sex. The following chart illustrates the observations of the child care staff.

Nighttime Observation of Children on the Street

Day/Date	Time	Place	No.	Ages, Male			Ages, Female			Activity	Profile
				0-6	6-12	12-18	0-6	6-12	12-18		
Thurs. 7/11/96	00.00 to 02.00	Pearse St.	2			2				Soliciting	Settled
		Benburb St.	3					3		Soliciting	Settled
		Westmoreland St.,	6			6				Soliciting	Settled
Fri. 15/11/96	18.00 to 19.00	Montpellier Hill	1			1				Soliciting	Settled
		Arbour Hill	2			2				Soliciting	Settled
		Benburb St.	1					1		Soliciting	Settled
		Westmoreland St.,	10			10				Soliciting & Dealing	Settled
Sun. 17/11/96	01.30 to 03.30	Percy Place	1					1		Soliciting	Settled
		Benburb St.	7			2		5		Soliciting	Settled
		Parkgate St.	3			3				Soliciting	Settled
		Wolf Tone Quay	1					1		Soliciting	Settled
		Phoenix Park	4			4				Soliciting	Settled
		Mespil Road	1					1		Soliciting	Settled

Responding to the Problem of Children on the Streets at Night:

As indicated young people end up on the streets for varied reasons and with different problems - drug abuse, homelessness, involvement in prostitution. It is clear that different services will be required and again co-ordination between the different agencies will be essential. The following are some of the important components of an effective response:

- Outreach workers to make contact with young people on the street, building up confidence and rapport.
- Provision of a suitably anonymous city centre premises as a drop-in facility. Within this the provision of food, shower, laundry, recreational facilities.
- Provision, as appropriate, of necessary medical, family planning and health education services.
- Provision of a counselling and referral service.
- Building links with agencies at local community level so that efforts are made, as appropriate to reintegrate young people with their families or into another supportive situation.
- Identification of training needs and provision of relevant skills training, either on or off site.

Conclusion:

The research undertaken by Barnardo's child care workers confirms what is already known - there is a serious problem in Dublin of at risk or vulnerable children ending up on city centre streets. In the case of children begging the problem is long established. The problem 'at night' while it is more recent has been recognised by state bodies and voluntary organisations for some time.

The challenge and requirement now is to develop appropriate services that will begin to respond to these very serious problems. Barnardo's is committed to making a contribution to tackling these problems in conjunction with other key agencies.