

## Barnardos Children's Budget 2018

### 1. Introduction

While the economic recovery is clearly evidenced in some sections of society, there are many others who are still struggling to catch up due to the combination of inadequate public services and persistent cycles of poverty and deprivation. Barnardos has been a long-time proponent that the solution to tackle child poverty is a combination of increased availability of quality public service and sufficient household income. For a child, their life chances should not be largely determined by where you live and your family household income but until Ireland addresses its growing inequality levels it will unfortunately remain the case. Thereby failing to capitalise on and encourage each individual child's innate potential.

### 2. Income:

"Mum often can't pay for some bills or borrows money from granny or moneylenders. I know at the end of the week, mum has either no money or just a few cents. I would love to go to the football club or even the cinema the odd time with my friends but don't even bother to ask because I know she doesn't have the money". Conor aged 14 in Waterford

The social welfare system must become more responsive to the needs of recipients. Too often the system fails to recognise atypical working patterns, provides insufficient rates of payments to lift families out of poverty and perpetuates welfare or poverty traps.

#### 2.1 Qualified Child Increase

Barnardos believes the targeted Qualified Child Increase is an important tool in assisting families who are dependent on social welfare for their income. However, the rate of €29.80 per week is payable per child regardless of their age and has remained unchanged since 2010. Raising a teenager is one of the most expensive family types especially for those living on social welfare (second only to having an infant in full time childcare)<sup>1</sup>. The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice research places the weekly cost of an infant at €82.81, a pre-school child at €50.20, a child in primary school at €84.66 and a child in secondary school at €132.58. These costs comprise of food, clothing, household goods, health, social inclusion, transport, education, etc. (It does not include childcare costs applicable for younger children)

- Increase the Qualified Child payment for children 12 years and older by at least €5 bringing the payment to €34.80 at a cost of €35m.

#### 2.2 Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance

Barnardos annual School Costs Survey consistently shows parents under huge financial burden due to the cost of school uniforms and footwear. The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is a much needed and targeted allowance to low income families to contribute towards these costs. The recent increase in the rates bringing it to €125 per primary school pupil and €250 per secondary pupil are much needed, and this should be a first step in full restoration to the pre-recession rates.

- Restore the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance back to the 2010 level. This can be introduced incrementally with a first phase increase of €25 per child at a cost of €7m in Budget 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, (2016) *Minimum Essential Standard of Living*

### 2.3 Working Family Payment

The introduction of the Working Family Payment must remedy the current pitfalls that are present in the social welfare system such as Family Income Supplement (FIS) not fully supporting atypical work patterns or creating further poverty traps which were the unintended consequences of the lone parent reforms.

Barnardos and others have been vocal that facilitating the transition from welfare to work must be accompanied by a fully subsidised quality childcare and afterschool care system for all children. Without this it is not possible for many in low paid sectors, predominately women, to take up work, and consequently the rate of poverty among lone parent families will continue. Steps were taken in Budget 2017 to address the affordability of childcare for parents with the phased introduction of the Single Affordable Childcare (SAC) Programme and this must continue along with a greater emphasis on securing quality provision across the sector.

The Working Family Payment must to be closely aligned to the income eligibility criteria for the new SAC Programme. Any discrepancies between these will see parents unable to stay in employment and their children denied access to quality early years care and education and afterschool care.

- Ensure introduction of Working Family Payment is compatible with the introduction of the Single Affordable Childcare programme so those parents eligible for both experience seamless support and tapered withdrawal.

## 3 Early Childhood Care and Education

“I can see how my son benefited from going to childcare, if all children did it it would prepare them better for school.” Parent based in Kilkenny

It is heartening to see the importance of investing in Early Childhood Care and Education remains a political priority. One that the Government is urged by the EU in the 2017 Country Specific Recommendations to act promptly on. Budget 2018 must see this investment continue to ensure the plans under the SAC Programme can be implemented in full and expanded upon. Developing a fully subsidised quality system for children aged 1-12 years must remain the priority. Addressing the affordability of childcare for parents is a primary goal of the SAC programme as the fees are a real barrier for those seeking to return / take up low paid employment. But focus must now switch to enhancing the quality of service provision across the country through supporting appropriately trained staff, supporting adherence to Siolta and Aistear and inclusion of childminders and afterschool providers. The benefits to a child’s development of participating in a quality stimulating caring environment are well known but the opposite also exist that poor quality settings can be harmful and damaging to children. In the interests of transparency and accountability, public investment in services must only be given to those delivering high quality.

- Continue the roll out of the Single Affordable Childcare Programme and the Access Inclusion Model programme but increase funding to providers to guarantee improvements in the quality of service provision. This should include increasing the capitation rates by €10 for each children participating in the ECCE programme, at a cost of €48m. Adequately resource non-contact time for staff at a cost of €29m (note: €14m of which was awarded in Budget 2017 but remains unspent).

- Move away from an hour based system for the Single Affordable Childcare Programme as it is too complicated and expensive to administer. Instead replicate the Community Childcare Scheme model as providers are used to this system.

#### 4. Education disadvantage:

“I want to leave school early because I can see the stress on mum trying to pay for all the books and stuff we need for school. She says no but I’ll get in trouble for not having all the books anyway. Our school should give out books to those who need them.” Sarah aged 15 in Dublin

The Government’s own vision to make Ireland’s education system the best in Europe within a decade can only be achieved through increased investment across all levels of the system and a concerted effort to ensure all children have the chance to reach their educational potential. Supporting children at primary level yields the biggest dividends in terms of educational attainment and progression. It is the ultimate foundation stone from which to build upon.

Barnardos was pleased to see free education as a core policy plank within Leo Varadkar’s manifesto. Now as Taoiseach, it is vital that Budget 2018 demonstrates his commitment to deliver.

##### 4.1 Capitation Rates

Capitation rates must be prioritised. It is an action within the Government’s Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 but only if resources permit. It is inappropriate that schools nationwide are currently asking parents to contribute to the costs of running their schools, this is not experienced in the delivery of other key public services so why is it acceptable in education?

- Raise the capitation rates per pupil by a minimum €20. This would cost circa €11.6m for primary schools and €7.2m for secondary schools. This would still fall short of restoring it to 2010 levels but would provide a much needed boost to school coffers.

##### 4.2 Tackling educational disadvantage

Barnardos believes educational disadvantage cannot be tackled simply through the DEIS system as we know that over 56% of children living in disadvantaged and deprived areas do not attend DEIS schools. Viewing disadvantage through DEIS is far too narrow a lens to achieve real change. It will also do little to remedy that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are five times more likely to perform poorly in science, reading and maths compared to their advantaged peers<sup>2</sup>. All children should have access to the supports they need to succeed in education, and this should not be dependent on where they live, but rather on guaranteeing timely appropriate interventions and supports based on their needs.

Specifically, with regard to the need for Special Needs Assistants, the Government has promised that every child who needs an SNA will get one and is committed to recruiting an additional 860 SNAs bringing the total nationwide to just under 13,000, with a gross annual cost of €425 million. However, even this growth is not keeping pace with demand for SNAs.

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<sup>2</sup> OECD (2015) PISA Database

- All children who need extra support should have access to such supports to help them perform well in the educational systems. Provide for an additional 900 SNAs at a cost of €30m per annum.

#### 4.3 Genuinely free primary education

Barnardos' annual School Costs Survey makes it clear our current education system is far from free and in fact places a huge financial burden on parents to fund school books, voluntary contributions, classroom resources and bus passes (among other costs)<sup>3</sup>. The lack of national guidelines mean there is huge variation depending on where you live and which school you attend. Cuts to the capitation grants paid to schools over the last five years have meant school resources are stretched and parents are being asked more and more to step into the breach – either by directly funding their child's costs or through fundraising.

Inevitably low income families face the greatest challenges footing the bill, so already disadvantaged children are at even greater risk of failing to fulfil their potential. Many parents are forced into debt in order to give their child equal access to what should be a freely available, human right. This is grossly unfair as all children deserve a level playing field from which to progress into adulthood with the same opportunities as their peers, regardless of their parent's ability to pay.

- Introduce genuinely free primary education at the cost of €103.2m per annum. This is only an extra yearly cost-per-pupil of just €185. This would provide all textbooks and workbooks, remove the need to pay for classroom resources and voluntary contributions, provide free transport for those availing of the School Transport Scheme and restore capitation rates back to 2010 levels.

## 5 Child Protection and Welfare

"I have been living with my foster family for 3 years and they are good to me but I would like to see my real mum more often now that she is well again but I don't want to see my dad yet. I feel confused because I don't know why I can't have regular access and no-one has told me why." Mark aged 13 in Wexford

Current developments in Tusla include ongoing recruitment of social workers and the launch of the new Child Protection and Welfare Strategy 2017-2022. These developments will help address some of the inadequacies of Ireland's child welfare and protection system that have been highlighted recently such as failings in the handling of some cases and the continued lack of collaboration between key statutory agencies. While Tusla will always need to tend to high risk child protection cases, they must invest greater efforts in keeping children from entering the care system by providing wraparound supports to their families and communities.

The cost effectiveness of adopting a more preventative approach by different agencies has been repeatedly shown. For example, a UK study has shown that for every £1 invested annually in targeted services designed to catch problems early and prevent problems from reoccurring, society benefits by between £7.60 and £9.20.<sup>4</sup> The return on any investment comes from all the savings the

<sup>3</sup> Barnardos, (2016), School Costs Survey

<sup>4</sup> NEF (2009), *Backing the Future: Why investing in children is good for us all*. London: New Economics Foundation. [https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/3254/backing\\_the\\_future.pdf](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/3254/backing_the_future.pdf)

State will make over the course of a child's life. Costs associated with provision of care, social services, health services, and welfare payments, among others. In Ireland, the State is paying €100,000 annually per child in care, and on average there were 6,353 children in care at any one time in 2016, which comes at a high cost to the Exchequer.<sup>5</sup> Whereas, the cost of a quality family support programme is on average €1,000 - €3,000 per child and provides the tools to enhance family functioning, increase parenting capacity and improve children's social and emotional development. Similarly, expanding the staff and resources within the Public Health Nurse system to ensure more home visits are conducted will reap dividends as those most in need will be identified sooner and subsequent follow up supports can be triggered.

The work of the recently established Prevention and Early Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform remains unclear but does have a role to play in switching department's expenditure to more preventative approaches.

- Adequately resource quality family support programmes and services, with particular emphasis on service provision in communities with high levels of need. These must be delivered by a combination of statutory and non-statutory providers.
- Allocate and ringfence an additional €20m of Tusla's budget exclusively for preventative work. This would enable them to pump-prime the development of wraparound services within the community for children within the care system, or at risk of going into care, to enable those children to remain with their families (or to come home to their families) on the basis that holistic, timely, proportional and accessible supports existed for them.
- Create a "Child and Family" Public Health Nursing service by a combination of redeployment of existing staff, filling of current vacancies and recruitment of 100 additional Public Health Nurses per year for 2017, 2018 and 2019, at a cost of €4.5million per year – reaching 500 Child and Family PHNs by 2020.

## 6 Health

"...because I am poor my child's quality of life is just left in the balance. What message does that give our children, because you're poor you don't matter as much" Parent based in Mayo

Everyone needs timely access to health assessments and interventions but this is even more important for children due to their rate of growth and development during childhood. Any delay or failure to receive assessments and treatments can affect all aspects of their childhood as they may miss essential developmental milestones which can inhibit them in excelling in school, in their friendships, and in their future employment prospects as later remedial interventions are more likely not to be as successful and far more costly.

Access to health services must be based on need, not on ability to pay or on geography. Denying timely and appropriate interventions to low income families reinforces cycles of poverty, disadvantage and ill-health.

Recent Barnardos research<sup>6</sup> found very strong regional variations for accessing crucial health services. For instance, in the Cork/Kerry region, over 100 children and young people were waiting for more than 12 months for an initial CAMHS assessment, whereas in the Clare/Limerick/Tipperary

<sup>5</sup> Daniel McConnell (2017), 'State spends €11m caring for just 11 children', *Irish Examiner*, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Barnardos (2017) Waiting Lists Affect Child Development

region no one waited for more than a year. These inconsistencies are extremely worrying. Where you live should not determine how quickly you can get help for your child when they need it.

Unfortunately Ireland's public health system is under immense pressure characterised by extensive waiting lists across many areas of the health services and chronically under-staffed community based health teams. This is despite almost a quarter of the Government's entire budget is spent on health (€14.6 of €58 billion).

Providing a comprehensive community based health service was the vision under the Primary Care Strategy 2001, and more recently the Slainte Report (2017), but is still far from a reality even though it is more cost effective than having such a reliance on the hospital system. According to a recent Parliamentary Question<sup>7</sup> it would only take an investment of €268 million over the next five years to ensure a full complement of early intervention staff of 3,885 which will fully clear the backlogs that exist that prevent children from accessing the early intervention teams, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists they should be entitled to under the Disability Act. Over five years, this will see the recruitment of an additional 917 speech and language therapists, 934 occupational therapists, 1019 physiotherapists and 1015 child psychologists.

- Commit approx. €54m in Budget 2018 to begin the roll out of the full complement of early intervention staff in community based settings.

## 7 Housing:

Anna and her family have been couch surfing now since June 2016. She is sleeping with her Mum, and 2 of her siblings in the one bed. There are 12 people living in a 3-bedroomed apartment in Dublin.

A record 2,708 children were homeless in April 2017, the highest ever, living in hotels or B&Bs across the country for lengthy periods of time. These ever-increasing and alarming figures are indicative of the housing crisis spiralling and deepening. Each monthly increase represents more children living in inappropriate accommodation, totally confused over what is happening to them and scared for their future. While their parents are struggling to cope with stress, uncertainty and feelings of inadequacy that is not of their own making or within their control to resolve.

While the majority of homeless children and their families are in the Dublin region, accessing alternative affordable appropriate accommodation across the country is a real problem primarily due to the lack of supply. As a result, many families are living in substandard and overcrowded homes and these are not recorded in the official homeless statistics.

The Rebuilding Ireland plan, while ambitious and trying to address all the aspects of the housing sector is not being effective to stem the flow of homelessness. Targets for new builds are too low and are not being met. In 2016, the target was 2,200 new social housing units but only 650 were built. While the overall goal is to construct 26,000 new social housing units by 2021 which is far behind what is required. The focus has shifted now from replenishing and expanding the social housing stock nationwide to providing payments to individuals for private rent, which means that money that could be used to create long term tenancies for families is being paid instead to private landlords. This is a very short sighted approach and will compound the housing issue in the long term.

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<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary Question 2016

There is a real lack of supply within the private rented sector meaning many landlords are favouring private tenants over those in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Also some local authorities are withdrawing families off the social housing list once they have secured a private rented tenancy through the HAP. This practice is a real deterrent for families to accept HAP as there is little security of tenure.

Additionally, efforts need to be redoubled to keep families at risk of homelessness in their homes and prevent them from ending up in next month's statistics.

- Expand the availability of family emergency accommodation units which offer wrap around services to help the family unit move quickly from homelessness to more secure accommodation. End the practice of using B&Bs and hotels to house families, except as a measure of last resort.
- Rent Supplement rates and Housing Assistance Payments should be reviewed and adjusted on an ongoing basis to ensure they are in line with market rents. Presently these rates are well below the price of rent in certain areas. This increases the likelihood of people becoming homeless as they are unable to afford to pay the full rent being sought. There should also be more discretion for those in receipt of payments to have their payments increased should circumstances require it. The estimated cost is €15-20m per annum.
- The Homeless HAP pilot should be rolled out across the country. There is a clear need for its extension and it has proved effective in the Dublin region. People who accept HAP should not be removed from their social housing list and their place should not be compromised.
- The Government should prioritise the construction of social housing through increasing capital budgets to local authorities to enable them to directly build tens of thousands of houses on their vacant lands. The majority of that housing should be social, affordable and co-operative, not private market. This would be cheaper on the exchequer than the Public Private Partnership arrangements that are currently in place and not working.
- Introduce a vacant property tax as a driver to generate revenue and stimulating the refurbishment of viable properties. It would also prevent hoarding of properties.
- Expand the Repair and Leasing Scheme beyond the targeted return of 3,500 properties, and review annually<sup>8</sup>. The current target represents only 1.8% of total vacant properties in the State. A public awareness campaign should be launched outlining the benefits to owners of vacant properties. Approved Housing Bodies must be supported to engage with the scheme to ensure their expertise can be utilised to ensure the maximum return of vacant properties as soon as possible.

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<sup>8</sup> Simon Communities of Ireland (2017) *Empty Homes: Unlocking Solutions to the Housing and Homelessness Crisis*