



Adult stress a major factor in child anxiety for families living in poverty at Christmas

Christmas is one of the most stressful times of year for many families but for those living in poverty, stress during the festive season has a much greater negative impact on children’s lives.

Mary Haiek, a Barnardos Program Manager at the Auburn Children’s Family Centre says, “Over 420,000 of Australian households with children under 13, survive on an average of \$347 per week*. These parents and carers feel pressured to buy gifts for their children at Christmas that they simply cannot afford and end up in debt long after the festive season. The financial stress can have a massive impact on the family dynamic leading to alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness or violence towards partners and children.

“Every Christmas we see more and more families who are already living in poverty, we see an increase in homelessness and more domestic violence as alcohol and stress takes its toll on troubled families. We work with more young people who are sleeping under bridges or staying with friends who are trying to get away from a bad situation at home.”

In the lead up to, during and after Christmas, Barnardos is busier than any other time of year and the charity relies heavily on Christmas toy donations and cash donations through its annual Star of Wonder Gifts for Kids appeal: www.barnardos.org.au/starofwonder

The cash and toy donations help Barnardos provide support to families by offering services to minimise stress in families in need:

- The toys purchased online by the public will be sent to Barnardos to distribute to parents and carers, who will give them to the children with on Christmas morning. This relieves the financial burden on parents and ensures that every child that Barnardos works with has a present to open on Christmas morning
- With cash donations Barnardos provides 24 hour counselling and support to clients in need
- With cash donations Barnardos assists with emergency accommodation for young people, children and families. These people may be fleeing domestic violence, evicted from a property or escaping abuse, and
- Barnardos ensures food packages are available during the Christmas season to families.

All families can lower the impact of stress this Christmas by following these ten suggestions:

1. Give a Christmas gift to charity. Involve your children so they understand the true spirit of giving at Christmas as there are other children who are less fortunate. To donate a toy, gift card or cash online to Barnardos’ Star of Wonder Gifts for Kids: www.barnardos.org.au/starofwonder
2. Be realistic about what you can afford – have a budget of necessities, such as gas bills and phone/ rent/ mortgage for January so you’re not over-extending yourself
3. Consider organising a Secret Santa for the adults – pick a name out of a hat and each person has only one gift to buy, plus you can set a price limit too, so no one goes overboard
4. Use cash instead of credit cards so that there is no big surprises in January as you can monitor your spending
5. Plan what you’re going to buy people and put a cost to it, to keep a running tally of what you aim to spend
6. Try to stick to purchasing one good gift for children, rather than lots of smaller gifts – these smaller gifts tend to add up to more than you originally planned to pay
7. Children are happy to simply spend time with their families, so focus on child-friendly activities and enjoy each other’s company
8. Everyone should pitch in to help on Christmas Day – this is good bonding time and takes the pressure of just one person who would otherwise do everything



9. Take some time out to relax in the run up to Christmas; remember that it is only one day and it isn't the end of the world if it doesn't go exactly to plan
10. Christmas may be an emotional time for some. Take time out for yourself if you feel you need it and remember that if you or anyone you know cannot cope; seek support from professionals such as welfare agencies like Barnardos, mental health helplines or your local medical centre.

*Statistic taken from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – A picture of Australia's Children, 2009

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For more information, images or interviews with Mary Haiek or Fundraising Director Manisha Amin, please contact:

Mary Hickey, Director, MCH Consulting

0414 652 442

Mary@mchconsulting.com.au

Notes to Editor:

About Barnardos

Barnardos is a non-government, non-denominational child welfare charity that has been helping children in need for over 120 years.

Barnardos Australia is one of the largest children's charities in the country, caring for children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect. The work of Barnardos Australia focuses on the prevention of abuse and neglect and entry into care. Children and young people of all backgrounds and cultural heritage are helped through a range of welfare programs including crisis care, family support, counselling and permanent foster care.

Our vision is that all children and young people will have caring families, in which they can grow up safely and reach their full potential supported by quality services and engaged communities.

For more information visit: www.barnardos.org.au

About Star of Wonder Gifts for Kids

Barnardos Star of Wonder Gifts for Kids is an annual Christmas gift and donation appeal, which goes towards providing gifts for children in Barnardos programs. Gifts can be purchased and donations made at www.barnardos.org.au/starofwonder and gifts start at \$10.50.

By making online gift purchases, Barnardos keeps its overheads such as administration and transport logistics to a minimum compared to traditional toy collection appeals. The website manages the number of gifts purchased by age group and gender, based on the needs of children in Barnardos programs. Therefore, through the Star of Wonder, every child will have an appropriate gift to open on Christmas morning and there is no need for volunteers and staff to spend their time sorting and distributing gifts, leaving staff to focus on providing the best possible care for its clients.

Star of Wonder Gifts for Kids also caters to the gift needs of young people, offering the public the opportunity to purchase gift cards so that teenagers can choose their perfect gift.