



To: Committee Secretary
Federal Parliament House of Representatives
Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence

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Barnardos Australia (Barnardos) thanks the Select Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on intergenerational welfare dependence and the chronic poverty and complex circumstances experienced by disadvantaged families that impact heavily on outcomes for children in Australia.

We have focused our comments on the impact of intergenerational trauma and long-term disadvantage and poverty on children; and what can be done to assist parents and children together to break the cycle of disadvantage. Our relevant expertise lies in the development and delivery of evidence informed service models for interventions targeted at families at high risk or vulnerable to child maltreatment due to, for example, parental substance abuse, parental mental health concerns, or intimate partner violence.

Background: Barnardos knowledge of this area

Barnardos is a family support and out-of-home care (OOHC) agency, which assists over 11,000 children and their families in New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) each year and maintains 1,550 children in NSW and the ACT in foster and kinship care. In our family support work we aim to reach vulnerable children at risk of separation from their families, and we work in areas with significant Aboriginal populations¹ such as Central West NSW, the South Coast and Inner Sydney.

We are committed to supporting families in caring for their children and to ensure permanency for children who cannot safely live at home. In 2016-17 we achieved 43 adoptions from care, which represented 33% of the 127 adoptions in NSW and 30% of all adoptions from care nationally. Of the 16 adoptions from care in other Australian states and territories in the same period, Barnardos achieved eight in the ACT.

We take seriously the need to ensure that the next generation does not suffer the problems of the past. For this reason, we work together with children, young people and families to break the cycle of disadvantage, creating safe, nurturing and stable homes, connected to family and community.

¹ Note that we use the term "Aboriginal" throughout our response to reflect that in the NSW and ACT there are only very small numbers of people who report they are of Torres Strait Islander origin.

From the analysis of evidence of our case files and administrative data, we can provide the Select Committee with pertinent case studies that demonstrate the impact of intergenerational trauma and what can be done to assist both parents and children to break these cycles and help prevent problems in the future. We have provided three salient examples in the attached appendix (see Attachment A).

TERM OF REFERENCE (b) (iii)

The important role of parents as ‘first teachers’

Our experience in service delivery to highly disadvantaged families highlights the need for evidence-informed service models that give parents the skills to be their child’s first teachers. We deliver a range of secondary prevention programs that we have identified as critical in breaking cycles of disadvantage. These programs provide early parent support for vulnerable, young Aboriginal parents in communities with poor service infrastructure (see Attachment A, Case Study 3).

Barnardos has a number of parent education programs. We have been particularly pleased with the outcomes of the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, trialled in rural New South Wales, which has been designed specifically for Aboriginal parents (Grace, Bowes, McKay-Tempest, Burnstein & Tregeagle, 2016).² Our HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters) evidence-based program works with parents to ensure the family is ready for school (see Attachment A, Case Study 1). In a letter dated June 13, 2018, a local kindergarten teacher in Warrawong (Wollongong) encapsulated the practical value of work done by HIPPY tutors and coordinator, and her perception of the key role it has played in her students’ successful transition to kindergarten:

Children who have participated in the HIPPY program arrive at school, equipped with the basics. They tend to have a better ability to count, recognise and write numerals and identify letters and sounds, compared with students who have not participated in HIPPY. These skills are enormously beneficial as students begin to read, write and develop an understanding of numbers.

HIPPY also appears to be beneficial to the parents of kindergarten students. Parents who have participated in HIPPY are often more willing to work collaboratively with teachers and are keen to foster a shared responsibility for student learning. Generally, they have the skills required to assist their child with learning and have a good understanding of how their child learns best.

In terms of improving parental interactions with their children, we have also observed promising outcomes from SafeCare, an evidence-based training program to help parents of young children at risk of neglect and abuse, which we are currently trialling in Orana, Central West and Western NSW (in partnership

² Grace, R., J. Bowes, J. McKay-Tempest, J. Burnstein and S. Tregeagle (2016) ‘Early parenting education to strengthen Aboriginal parents in a remote area: The development and piloting of a group program’. *Children Australia*, 41(4): 249–257.

with the Parenting Research Centre, NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) and Georgia State University).

TERM OF REFERENCE (b) (iv)

A multi-generational approach which assists parents and their children together

Entrenched and elevated levels of economic disadvantage, social instability, poor parental mental health and substance use are strongly associated with increased risk of child maltreatment. Furthermore, the risk of maltreatment is cumulative and increases with the number of risk factors experienced—for example, in a recent prospective study of child maltreatment, prevalence in the highest risk groups exceeded 80% (Doidge, Higgins, Delfabbro and Segal, 2017).³ The vulnerability of highly disadvantaged families we assist, whilst multicausal in nature, typically stems from histories of trauma. Families often experience multiple issues at one time which can result in the removal of their children and entry into the child protection system. However, our experience is that the problems facing many of the families in the communities in which we work are dire and that there are not adequate State and Territory programs to assist these families.

We draw your attention to the disproportionately high level of disadvantage and prevalence of intergenerational trauma faced by Aboriginal children and families. Recent research conducted with highly vulnerable Aboriginal users of our services shows that families are dealing with generations of loss, poverty, substance abuse, violence in the home and lateral violence (Newton, 2016).⁴

Families involved in the study were living in Wiradjuri country in a small township in NSW where one quarter of the town's population is Aboriginal. Like many other Aboriginal communities, the township has very poor access to support services and to early childhood education. Families lived in chronic poverty and young parents themselves frequently had a history of growing up in situations of gross neglect. The researcher concluded that Aboriginal parenting in that community was adversely affected by shifts in parenting norms, historic trauma, lateral violence, a pervasive sense of powerlessness and reluctance to engage with services because of concerns about child protection policing. Importantly, the findings show that there are very few differences in how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents perceive child neglect; like non-Aboriginal parents "*it is the difficult circumstances experienced by Aboriginal families that keep parents from actualising their parenting expectations*" (Newton, 2017, p. 262).⁵

Barnardos Australia's experience leads us to believe that a major problem in addressing the developmental vulnerability of children and the risk of maltreatment arising from long-term poverty and social isolation is the poor support available to highly disadvantaged Aboriginal families. We speak from experience working as a non-government agency which aims to care for Australia's most vulnerable children. For the past twelve years, we have increasingly targeted our support towards Aboriginal parents to assist them in caring for their children,

³ Doidge, J.C., D.J. Higgins, P. Delfabbro, & L. Segal (2017) 'Risk factors for child maltreatment in an Australian population-based birth cohort'. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 64: 47-60.

⁴ Newton, B.J. (2016) *Understanding child neglect from an Aboriginal worldview: Perceptions of Aboriginal parents and workers in a rural NSW community*. SPRC. Sydney, UNSW.

⁵ Newtown, B.J. (2017) 'An Aboriginal community's perceptions and experiences of child neglect in a rural town'. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 52:262-277

and also towards supporting kin carers and helping Aboriginal agencies assist children who cannot live at home.

To get services to highly disadvantaged Aboriginal families Barnardos has had to tailor its direct service delivery strategies. We offer direct services in NSW and ACT in rural and urban areas through Children's Family Centres and rural networks of services. We have organised our services into local Children's Family Centres which are 'one stop shops' and rural networks which can integrate State and Federal government programs in local areas (see Attachment A, Case Study 2). It is only through the integration of early intervention family support (largely a Federal responsibility) and more intense help to families (a State or Territory responsibility) that the most vulnerable families in the community can be targeted and assisted. These Centres are managed in an integrated way so that Aboriginal families have one point of relationship with a centre.

Our Children's Family Centres have managed to overcome reluctance to use services by developing strong local relationships with the Aboriginal community (Newton, 2016). We have found that many Aboriginal families are open to seeking help and more than willing to access services when they are offered in a culturally respectful way. Our family support services are at capacity. Our Learning Centres have waiting lists of children wanting to improve their engagement with mainstream schools.

Furthermore, our experience is that child welfare programs linked to education and health information work best when delivered in a holistic way which can address the range of issues facing a family. For example, families are more willing to accept assistance from family support workers and engage with prevention services when they address the concrete needs of family members such as helping with food, violence prevention and relationship problems.

We note that Children's Family Centres work best when they are delivered by well-supported Aboriginal workers. We have increased the number of Aboriginal staff working in family support programs in our Children's Family Centres so that currently 15% of our family support staff are Aboriginal.

TERM OF REFERENCE (c) (i)

Breaking cycles of disadvantage

Barnardos believes that there is a lack of availability of 'secondary prevention' services—that is, services which work with families known to be vulnerable. We are particularly concerned to get these services to families who are known to have been neglectful or abusive, so that further harm to children and their removal can be prevented. These families, as we have noted above, are typically affected by social isolation, substance use and chronic poverty.

We strongly believe that with limited resources available the services should be targeted to those most in need. We also believe more funding should be allocated to targeted and place-based services.

We are committed to supporting families to care for their children *and* to ensuring permanency for children who cannot safely live at home. With a history of severe abuse and neglect, many children in care experience emotional and behavioural difficulties, as well as

developmental disabilities which emerge as they grow older. Further, young people leaving out-of-home care are overrepresented among teenage parents (Mendes, 2009).⁶

For those (non-Aboriginal) children for whom a care and protection court has found they cannot be safe at home, adoption can address the very poor outcomes for young people growing up in care. This can help ensure the next generation grow up experiencing a strong sense of security and belonging, which in turn can lead to positive life outcomes and a reduction of the risk factors faced by care leavers from unstable foster care settings. Barnardos is currently collaborating with Oxford University on the *Australian Open Adoption Outcomes Study*, to evidence the long-term positive educational and employment outcomes experienced by adoptees from care.⁷

Barnardos regards adoption as beneficial for children as well as for the care system. We note the significant disparity in outcomes and greater economic costs for foster care in comparison, especially given the estimated size of the cohort of younger children in care, who may benefit from permanency with an adoptive family for the whole of their childhood and into adulthood.

Of the total number of children in care in Australia in 2016/17,⁸ Barnardos estimates that there are currently up to 4,000 children who are in long-term care, aged under 5, not indigenous, where open adoption could have been considered as an appropriate permanency option (depending on the child's age, best interests and other factors).⁹ We estimate that approximately 2,000 children under five years each year, going forward, could be adopted from out-of-home care.

Importantly, given the rapid growth in the number of children entering long-term care at an early age (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018 *Child Protection Australia 2016-2017*), Barnardos has collated financial analysis which shows that open adoption can make a considerable improvement in the circumstances of all very vulnerable children because it relieves the cost pressures on the out-of-home care system. Independent actuarial analysis of Barnardos' Find-a-Family program data for 2017 shows that average cost saving for each individual adoption as compared to a non-adoption exit¹⁰ was \$268,000. The average cost saving realised for each individual adoption as compared to a child ageing out of care¹¹ was even greater at \$477,000 (McGarva, 2017).¹²

For all the above reasons, Barnardos strongly supports greater consideration and utilisation of adoption from care as a means of improving longer-term outcomes for children who have

⁶ Mendes, P. (2009) 'Improving outcomes for teenage pregnancy and early parenthood for young people in out-of-home care: A review of the literature'. *Youth Studies Australia*. 28: 11-18.

⁷ The final report of the study will be released in 2019.

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2018) *Child Protection Australia 2016-2017*. Child welfare series no. 68. Cat. no. CWS 63. Canberra: AIHW.

⁹ As at 30 June 2017, 32,635 of the 47,915 children in OOHC were not living with relatives. Of the cohort of children not living with relatives, 8,539 were in long-term care and non-Aboriginal. Of this group of 8,539 children, 53% or 3,932 children were aged 0-9 years where open adoption might be considered a permanency option (AIHW, 2018).

¹⁰ Exiting by transfer to FACS/NGO, restoration or deceased.

¹¹ Exiting by ageing out/independent living.

¹² Scenario based costing analysis of program data. Lifetime program direct costs included direct care costs, caseworker costs, and duration in care. Lifetime indirect costs were not estimated. Full report available on request.

suffered severe abuse and neglect and cannot safely return home, thereby breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

We believe scope exists for income support services to be made more responsive to the needs of vulnerable families. For example, rather than ceasing family payments and support outright to birth parents at the time when children are removed from their care, a mechanism could be established to instead cumulate the monies that would have been paid if the child had remained at home, and reallocate the funds towards services to support the parent's capacity for their children to be safely restored. This would have net expenditure implications as carer payments costs would also be incurred, but would be an opportunity to make income support payments more child-centred.

We believe that the adequate provision of quality childcare is needed for new parents where there are underlying concerns about the baby's safety. We note recent research that demonstrates that good quality child care is an effective resource for supporting at-risk children, by enabling children to complete educational tasks that, for different reasons, are not being successfully fulfilled in the home context (Hidalgo, Jiménez, Grimaldi, Ayala-Nunes and López-Verdugo, 2018)¹³.

We are concerned there have been unintended consequences arising from changes this year by the Australian government under the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Act 2017. The 'Jobs for Families' package of changes effectively reduces the provision of subsidised long day care to Australia's most developmentally vulnerable families, especially new parents. Further, we are concerned that the changes mean that foster carers are not being recognised as volunteers where they were previously, which may lead to carers being forced out of fostering.

We believe the impact of the changes on vulnerable new parents, and on foster carers' ability to access subsidised child care should be reviewed and consideration given to further policy development to compensate these families for any unintended deleterious effects.

Key Recommendations

1. Develop secondary support services for vulnerable families in local communities which link State child welfare preventative programs with Federal early intervention and local Aboriginal welfare workers and families.
2. Invest in the local Children's Family Centres approach to provide 'on the ground' integration of services which can work closely with local Aboriginal priorities for families suffering chronic poverty, isolation and violence.
3. Fund Aboriginal Learning Centres linked to family support programs in every community with poor educational outcomes.
4. Allocate 'top-up' funding to employ and support Aboriginal welfare workers within non-government welfare agencies. Such funding would allow for skill development

¹³ Hidalgo, V., L. Jiménez, V. Grimaldi, L. Ayala-Nunes, & L. López-Verdugo (2018) 'The effectiveness of a child day-care program in child welfare services', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 89: 145-151.

especially in the areas of literacy, computerisation and governance in these non-government organisations.

5. Consider innovative ways to utilise income support for birth families that support and enhance their ability to care and protect their children sustainably and to prevent entries into care.
6. Review any unintended deleterious effects on vulnerable families access to quality child care from the implementation of the 'Jobs for Families' package of changes, and consider adjustment to the work and study activity test and related policy and procedures as required.

Attachment A

Three Case Studies – Breaking cycles of disadvantage

Case Study 1

Case Study 1 shows the intergenerational benefits of our evidence-based parent education programs:

Young Parent, HIPPY Wellington

Molly completed the Home Interaction Program for Parents & Youngsters (HIPPY) program in 2017 with her son, Billy, who is now attending a local primary school. Molly is a single mother with 4 boys, between the ages of 2 and 16 years. Molly became a first-time mum at the age of 16 and receives very little support from her family and friends. Molly has had various employment and has also volunteered in the local community.

Molly began the HIPPY Tutor role at the start of 2018, and continues in this role as a highly capable, engaging and supportive tutor to the families she works with. Molly identified that she would like to engage in some study within Community Services to broaden her knowledge, skills and abilities and to identify which path she would like to take within the Community Services sector.

Molly has begun her study in a Diploma of Community Services and is actively involved with completing assessments, tasks and seeking out relevant resources. Molly will continue her studies as she works in the HIPPY program to support the families through the two-year program.

Case Study 2

Case Study 2 demonstrates the outcomes that can be achieved by providing a ‘one-stop shop’ service to facilitate wrap around support services to a family who are dependent on welfare due to the father’s mental health and physical disability. The father was at risk of his children being removed due to neglect before the Family Referral Service (FRS) became involved:

Family with neglect concerns – FRS in Schools Program, Sydney Metropolitan

A family was referred to the FRS in Schools Project through the Learning and Support Team of a participating secondary school. The family comprised a single dad with both a mental illness and a physical disability, and 2 boys, 14 and 15 years old.

The referral was made due to concerns of neglect as the boys were presenting to school in dirty clothes and without food, which was deteriorating over time. The school had attempted to contact the father with no success. After numerous phone calls from the FRS worker the father agreed to meet with the FRS worker at school. After three face-to-face meetings the FRS worker was invited into his home. On arrival at the home it was identified that the father was unable to meet the boys’ basic needs around provision of food, hygiene, and appropriate and safe housing. FRS referred the family to a service that offers in-home help such as cleaning, food preparation and washing. When they arrived at the home they deemed the home too unsafe for their workers to enter due to a severe cockroach infestation and general lack of hygiene. At the same time a local charity organisation were

engaged to carry out a furniture assessment, however, would also not enter the house due to the unsafe environment.

FRS organised and provided brokerage for pest control, industrial cleaning and the removal of all household items infested with cockroaches including beds, mattresses and lounges. FACS replaced the carpet which was riddled with cockroaches and was stained and ripped. After the cockroaches were eradicated the family was referred to a case management service for support, the charity refurnished the house and the household management service agreed to work with the family around household functioning. Due to the care the sons provided to their father, the FRS worker registered them as young carers for further support. The family is now closed with ongoing case management to support them long term.

Case Study 3

Case study 3 evidences the value of providing a range of specialist support services to Aboriginal children and their parents who live in social housing and have been exposed to issues such as substance abuse and family breakdown or violence. These children have often had limited access to reading materials and other stimulus at home which results in them being behind in their development even before they start school.

The Yurungai Learning Centre delivers a range of after-school services to 30 Aboriginal children aged 5-12 years old. The program provides a safe and secure after-school environment for the students and plays a crucial community role, not only by strengthening relationships between parents/carers, students and teachers in the area, but by also providing a hub for a range of social services.

Young girl at risk of school disengagement, Yurungai Learning Centre, Waterloo

Ella is an eleven-year-old girl who has one younger sister, three older sisters and two older brothers. Ella was facing some difficult times living with her mum, dad, younger sister and older sister.

Mum was using drugs, and mum and dad were arguing on a regular basis, sometimes leaving Ella and Jackie (aged 13) at home to look after themselves for quite some time. Ella became very withdrawn and started ignoring her school work, was not listening in class and not completing her homework.

Ella was falling behind in everything and she was not motivated to achieve at school. Her older sister Jackie who she relied on heavily started running away.

Both Ella and Jackie went into the care of her Aunty. Ella started a new school and then was enrolled into Yurungai learning Centre to help her with her homework to get her back on track.

Since attending Yurungai Ella has got her enthusiasm for life back, she gets excited to spend her afternoons there as she has made real friends. Also, getting help with her homework means she doesn't feel left behind and hopeless.

Yurungai has worked with Ella and her Aunty to enrol her in the local Indigenous choir one afternoon a week. Ella is also in the school choir and Ella runs into the centre every afternoon with a "massive" smile across her face.

Ella's self-esteem and confidence have risen dramatically and she hasn't held back on wanting to be a part of anything that she puts her mind to.

Yurungai is not just a homework centre, it becomes a safe place for the families to talk about personal issues they may be facing at home and they know the staff will do their very best to help them with whatever the problem is or they will guide the families to the appropriate services that can help.

Yurungai has helped Ella get into boarding school for the following year and helped Ella's sister Jackie obtain a scholarship for a boarding school.

Yurungai treats every child as if they are family and that's what Ella and her Aunty felt when they received all the support they needed.