

August 30, 2022

Project Team - Draft NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan
DFV Strategic Priorities
Women, Family and Community Safety Directorate
Strategy, Policy and Commissioning Division
Policy, Reform and Legislation Branch
Department of Communities and Justice
Locked Bag 5000, Parramatta NSW 2124

E: dfsivr@justice.nsw.gov.au

Dear Project Team,

Draft NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027

Barnardos Australia (Barnardos) thanks the NSW Department of Communities and Justice for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027 (Plan). In doing so we note and express concern at the very short period available for consultation and input by non-government organisations such as Barnardos, who possess deep community expertise in this crucial area of safety (13 business days for feedback on the Draft Plan). Barnardos urges further community input on such an important NSW Plan, from a diverse range of perspectives and experiences and within a culturally sensitive, informed and safe approach.

Barnardos is a not for profit, children's social care charitable organisation providing direct support to 15,000+ children and their families in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and New South Wales (NSW) each year, in addition to foster care and open adoption (the latter for non-Aboriginal children) for over 1,000 children and young people. We work in areas with significant Aboriginal populations such as Central Western NSW, the South Coast, Western Sydney and Inner Sydney. For close to 100 years, we have been working together with children, young people and families to break the cycle of disadvantage, and create safe, nurturing and stable homes, connected to family and community.

Barnardos' knowledge of this area

Domestic and family violence (DFV) heavily impacts the lives of the children and families Barnardos supports. For example, DFV is one of the most common reasons for referral for

Barnardos Australia

60-64 Bay Street Ultimo NSW 2007
GPO Box 9996 Sydney NSW 2001

Chair Janett Milligan

Chief Executive Officer Deirdre Cheers

ABN 18 068 557 906 • A Company Limited by Guarantee

Contact

Reception (02) 9218 2300
General enquiries 1300 237 507

barnardos.org.au

Donations 1800 061 000
Foster care 1800 663 441



families to services delivered by Barnardos Children's Family Centres. Barnardos Australia data indicates that 80% of referrals for families to Brighter Futures and Family Preservation services have DFV as a referral reason. In rural NSW, DFV continues to be the number one referral reason to Barnardos homelessness services. In Penrith, an outer metropolitan area of Sydney, 90% of family referrals to our intensive family preservation program (for families who have children at risk of significant harm and are at risk of placement in out-of-home care) have DFV identified as one of the main reasons for referral.¹ Further, in FY21 nine out of 10 (89%) of the 1,262 children and young people in Barnardos' out-of-home care (OOHC) had domestic and family violence identified as a key contributory issue to the need for care, by the NSW Children's Court.²

As a large non-government provider of safety and prevention and OOHC services to children and families vulnerable to DFV, Barnardos is deeply committed to successfully implementing the measures under the proposed NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan, National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, and the dedicated NSW Aboriginal Family and Sexual Violence Plan. We are well known for our substantial investment in service excellence and best practice, built on a foundation of child centered culture and practices. The children, young people, families, kin, and carers we work closely with fall within all the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan's population groups who experience disproportionately higher levels of violence. They include (Plan, p.8-9):

- people who have experienced child abuse
- young women and adolescents
- women
- Aboriginal women
- women with mental illness
- women in pregnancy and early motherhood
- women with disabilities
- LGBTQIA+ people
- migrants, refugees and people who are culturally and linguistically diverse
- women in regional, rural and remote areas
- women experiencing sexual violence

Barnardos suggests inclusion of the following who, from our practice experience, also experience elevated levels of violence including coercive control:

¹ MyStory Referral Analysis Report.

² Barnardos Annual Review 2020-2021; MyStory Referral Analysis Report for NSW (Barnardos Agency) and ACT Together out-of-home care programs.

- children and their mothers in contact with the child protection system, for example those receiving family preservation and support services for non-offending parents and their children
- women and children who are homeless

Barnardos has extensive experience in working with these groups who experience disproportionately higher rates of DFV and we would be happy to provide our expertise and knowledge when individual actions are being implemented for the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan and National Plan.

Given the extremely tight timeline provided for consultation, and that it has coincided with overlapping requests (including on the Coercive Control Exposure Draft Bill and the Draft NSW Sexual Violence Plan), we have focussed our written comments below on the overall vision, principles and outcomes of the Plan and achieving outcomes in our areas of expertise as they pertain to children and young people.

It is important to note that the benefits to be realised from the Plan will be determined by the extent of new investment that the NSW Government commits to realise the outcomes. This includes a focus on enhanced funding for direct service delivery and commitment to quantitative targets (developed collaboratively with the sector). Transparency of reporting of progress under the Plan will also be critical.

Vision, principles and outcomes

Barnardos strongly endorses the proposed shared vision that *'all NSW communities are free from domestic, family and sexual violence.'* The proposed vision aligns with Barnardos Towards 2025 Strategic Directions Vision *'to empower every child in Australia to reach their full potential.'* If the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan is effective the future and potential for NSW children will be greatly enhanced.

We endorse the six identified guiding principles that underpin all aspects of the proposed NSW Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Action. Barnardos particularly welcomes the recognition that for the Framework to be effective in preventing and responding to DFV in NSW for the next five years, an inclusive and intersectional approach is needed. We strongly endorse that for Aboriginal people and communities, services and activities must be led and driven by First Nations people and communities.

We welcome the inclusion of being victim, survivor, child, and family centred as a proposed principle (Plan, p. 14). However, Barnardos strongly believes it is time to recognise children and young people as equal victim-survivors with their own safety and support needs. To this end, we

suggest that being child centred should be promoted to the status of a distinct principle in its own right in the Framework, instead of being amalgamated together with the principle of being adult victim-survivor and family centred as it has been. The description of the separate and related child centred principle would also be an opportunity to reinforce that children and young people are recognised victim-survivors in their own right with their own safety and support needs. Until children are made fully visible as victim-survivors of DFV, and there is sufficient investment in strategies to recognise their status and support them, we will not be able to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma and perpetration.

The Barnardos commissioned research report, *Truth is the abuse never stopped - Adult insights on the support they received when impacted by childhood domestic and family violence*, which is about to be released, provides compelling evidence on the impact of domestic and family violence on children, including how children's experiences of coercive control differ from those of adults.³ The report identifies areas of broad concern and makes a number of recommendations to improve outcomes for vulnerable children experiencing DFV informed by these findings. These include education and training, provision of services and professional support, and further research and child-focused data. Barnardos would welcome the opportunity to support the Department operationalising these strategies.

By flagging its commitment to a separate child centred principle underpinning all aspects of the Framework, the NSW Government will be at the forefront of jurisdictions fundamentally committed to making children visible as victim-survivors in their own right.

We believe it is essential to listen to the voices of children and people with lived experience of DFV and their expertise should shape the design, delivery and evaluation of responses to DFV. Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to see how their voices will be prioritised within the governance framework.

We agree that the proposed outcomes should be informed by and align with the vision five pillars of the National Plan, and that the logical first step is to seek to align with the National Outcomes and Evaluation Framework.

³ For a distillation of survivor stories see Urquhart, R., & Doyle, J. (2022). *Truth is the abuse never stopped: Adult insights on the support they received when impacted by childhood domestic and family violence* (Barnardos Australia Survey 2022). Barnardos Australia.

Focus areas for the next five years

- Barnardos strongly supports the inclusion of actions to ensure that responses consider children and young people in their own right as a focus area in Pillar Three: 'Response' (Plan, p. 26)
- However, we believe a more substantial, comprehensive and co-ordinated set of actions is needed to achieve this than the three actions that have been proposed
- We suggest a further action should be added to this focus area, that is to undertake a collaborative and co-designed approach to develop more holistic, integrated and trauma-informed responses to children and young people victim-survivors. Barnardos would welcome the opportunity to contribute to support the Department to implement this significant action
- We welcome the inclusion of partnering with organisations to develop and implement support for children and young people experiencing ongoing trauma as an action in Pillar Four: 'Recovery' (Plan, p. 29). Barnardos is keenly interested in contributing its expertise to assist the Department to implement this important action. Barnardos' research report identifies gaps in the availability of help and support to children and young people and informed by these findings makes recommendations on addressing them (Urquhart & Doyle, 2022). Barnardos would be happy to assist the Department in operationalising these strategies
- We support the action to develop and implement a NSW research agenda in Pillar 5: 'System Enablers' (Plan, p. 33) which we believe would be best achieved in partnership with research organisations and non-government service providers
- To build on Barnardos' learnings from our recent DFV survey research, and to amplify the voices of those who are the most marginalized, a small-scale qualitative research project is also currently underway exploring the views of children, young people, and their mothers in our domestic and family violence programs. Barnardos will release a report of these findings in 2023 and looks forward to sharing these insights once available to help inform and further develop a NSW DFV research agenda

Barnardos is strongly committed to contributing to the improvement of the domestic, family, and sexual violence service system and the implementation of the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Action 2022-2027. We understand the Department of Communities and Justice is seeking to consult widely and flexibly and have engaged WSP Australia to support this, and our Executive Leader, Children and Families, Penny Hood is available to provide more detailed verbal feedback to the consultants. If the opportunity is available, we could also provide input from our clients who have been directly affected by domestic and family violence.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide this written submission, and please contact Dr Robert Urquhart, Head of Knowledge, Outcomes & Research on rurquhart@barnardos.org.au, tel (02) 9218 2392 or mobile 0431 404 199 should you require further information on our feedback.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deirdre Cheers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Deirdre Cheers
Chief Executive Officer
Barnardos Australia