

## Jobseeker Senate Inquiry Submission Barnardos Australia

Inquiry: The Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support)  
Bill 2021

### Submitter Details

Barnardos Australia  
60 - 64 Bay Street  
ULTIMO NSW 2007

### Introduction

Barnardos Australia is an organisation that believes all children deserve caring families to grow safely and fulfil their potential. Tragically, more than 45,000 Australian children are unable to live with their parents due to abuse or neglect. We work with families and communities facing issues such as violence, poverty, mental illness and homelessness, to keep children safe and change their lives for the better. Our extensive range of services include family support and preservation, domestic violence support, counselling, transitional accommodation, parent education, youth support, foster care and open adoption. Barnardos Australia works tirelessly to deliver our services and programs across NSW and the ACT to protect children and young people and create a safe family environment in which they can grow and develop.

### Position on Income Support

Far too many families that Barnardos works with, live under incredible financial stress adding to their already burdened lives, at times dealing with homelessness, poverty, domestic and family violence and the impact of this on their children. Therefore, Barnardos welcomed the Federal Government's COVID-19 response package that supported individuals and their families through JobSeeker and related payments. These measures that were put in place momentarily eased financial pressure for many of our families, helping them to avoid destitution.

Barnardos therefore urges the Federal Government to guarantee that income support for working aged people will not return to levels prior to COVID-19. These payment levels make it impossible for families to survive and thrusts them into abject poverty. We ask the government to increase base rates of allowances for people in need, and depending on the circumstances of individuals, provide payment supplements such as rent assistance, single parenting assistance and disability and illness assistance. Barriers to accessing these payments need to be lifted urgently as this causes additional stress and trauma for families already in need. There is acknowledgement across the board that recovery from the pandemic will take time. Hence the need to keep in place these supports that were given to families. A crucial part of the recovery will be ensuring people without paid work or with insufficient paid work have enough income to cover basic costs like keeping a roof over their head and putting food on the table for their children.

### Impact of Proposed JobKeeper Rate

With this proposed \$44 a day JobKeeper rate, the impact on our Barnardos community will be dire. Our core business is to work with vulnerable children and families experiencing extreme pressures for a variety of complex reasons. Poverty is a core component of these pressures and this causes the exacerbation of other issues such as housing stress, drug and alcohol addiction and family violence. We believe that reducing the current financial support will only increase child protection reports,

further increasing the demand for our services through our Children’s Family Centres across NSW and the ACT and ultimately leading to the breakdown of an increasing number of families resulting in more children requiring Out of Home Care.

### Barnardos Case Studies of Support

During 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we supported so many families that were impacted by job loss, income loss and domestic and family violence. We saw the need for our services increase dramatically and are still working with these families as they endeavour to get back on their feet. The unemployment, financial and emotional pressure from the pandemic created unprecedented anxiety in the community and our vulnerable children, young people and families were hit the hardest.

During the height of the pandemic we saw a massive increase in the number of families asking Barnardos for food. Our Children’s Family Centres were often the only emergency food service in operation for hundreds of local families in need. During lockdown, when children were learning from home and were away from school and services, we saw an increased risk of vulnerable children falling through the cracks. We worked even harder to make sure this didn’t happen by staying connected with our families to ensure the safety of their children.

We found innovative ways to support struggling families, even at a distance. We introduced “virtual home-visiting” by telephone and video-conference to help share the burden and gave practical assistance. Deliveries of food and grocery parcels, including nappies and other baby products enabled us to check-in with our families. We assisted parents lacking the literacy or numeracy skills to home-school their children and put together early learning and activity packs. We continued to provide our parenting programs online by producing videos of each module and following up by phone. We created care parcels for our vulnerable young people focusing on coping mechanisms and positive mental health during this time of crisis.

Our Barnardos workers have always lived by the motto “all in this together” but this year especially it has galvanised our belief in the need for a strong community to support our families and their children.

Here are some stories from our programs and centres that worked with children and families in need throughout this time. They represent the ongoing need and the reason why we urge the Federal Government to keep supporting families rather than cutting the JobKeeper rate.

### Southern NSW

Youth Worker Tina and Homework Club Worker Travis put together activity packs for Queanbeyan youth clients. The packs were all individualised for each client and had a focus on mindfulness and keeping young people calm.



Bron from Queanbeyan Homework Club delivered activity packs to all her Aboriginal Homework Club clients. Many families didn't have internet access and found home-schooling impossible. Southern NSW/Canberra Manager Michael says the staff have been fantastic with all the changes. They have real concerns for their clients in isolation. Without community supports, domestic violence and mental health issues will be on the increase. They are also worried about the young people getting 'cabin fever' and wandering the streets.

There were lots of requests for grocery supplies as parents couldn't get out to shop nor afford basic items. Michael says there were lots of requests for nappies, other baby related items and bed linen. For many families, they only have one set of ben linen and they are finding it challenging keeping up with the washing.

### **Western NSW**

Similarly, in Western NSW, many families don't have internet access. An additional challenge for our Western staff is that, for some staff that live remotely, internet is unavailable at home. They have made provisions for work from home hubs, so staff can have internet access. As always, they continue to maintain social distancing.

Without face to face support, staff have huge concerns for how their families will cope. In many houses' resources are scarce and violence is an ongoing issue. They are donating food items and activity packs to families to support them at home. The Wellington Centre has produced several frozen meals to give to families. The food donations give them an opportunity to check in with families. You can see below the fridge and freezer in the Wellington Centre, completely packed with food, as well as a picture of some of the activity packs they are delivering. Wellington Program Manager and Reconnect Worker, Mark Hoare, shows off some of the goods including packs of pumpkin soup.

