

Barnardo's Scotland Welcomes Ukraine Service

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Abstract

Barnardo's has a long history of helping people seeking sanctuary in the UK, and today our work includes supporting children and families that have arrived after fleeing the invasion of Ukraine more than a year ago. The Barnardo's support to families from Ukraine over the past year builds on our significant experience across the UK of supporting refugees arriving from Afghanistan and Syria through a range of services. As the largest children's charity in the UK – with more than 150 years of experience supporting children and families – Barnardo's is able to provide the co-ordination and structure through which those displaced from Ukraine can be welcomed into a safe environment with support in place to ensure their needs are met. We fully understand that families fleeing Ukraine are likely to have experienced significant trauma and have limited resources, which, when combined, makes them highly vulnerable. In Scotland, we have developed the 'Barnardo's Scotland Welcome (Ukraine) Service' because we recognised the need to reach those children, young people and families coming to Scotland to seek refuge from the war against Ukraine. This article sets out the details of the Barnardo's Scotland response to the crisis and our learnings so far, in Scotland and across the UK, from the support we've provided.

Keywords

Child refugees, child and family displacement, trauma, war, Ukraine

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The Barnardo's Scotland response to the Ukraine crisis

Following discussion with the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB), Barnardo's set up the Ukrainian Support Helpline to provide a holistic support service. The Helpline is available to anyone fleeing to the UK as a result of the war against Ukraine and, to date, more than 31,000 calls have been received.

The Helpline provides:

- Therapy with a qualified psychotherapist, delivered via the phone or online, with access to interpreters.
- Advice on a range of issues e.g., housing, accessing key health services, education, employment and more via our trained helpline support workers.
- Practical support, such as access to digital devices to ensure families stay connected to loved ones during this worrying time, as well as stimulating toys for children, food vouchers and more.

Structure of the Barnardo's Scotland (Ukraine) Welcome Service

In Scotland, we have developed the Barnardo's Scotland Welcome (Ukraine) Service because we recognised the need to reach those children, young people and families coming to Scotland to seek refuge from the Ukraine crisis.

The Scotland-wide service currently comprises an Operational Manager, seven project workers operating across the country, as well as a flexible bank of sessional staff to further support within areas of particular need.

We have been very fortunate to recruit several staff who have been displaced from Ukraine, alongside Ukrainian staff who have been settled in the UK for a number of years. This ensures that we have cultural understanding and compassion for those living with us in Scotland.

So far, we have supported more than 800 children, young people, and families. The service has been working closely with local authority resettlement teams,

the Scottish Government, and third sector partners, including the Scottish Refugee Council, British Red Cross, and education, training, and employment resources, as well as health and localised support services, to ensure that children, young people, and parents feel less isolated and can begin to integrate into their communities.

Supporting families and hosts

Through an allocated project worker, an initial assessment allows workers to ensure that the needs of each family/host are prioritised. This can include practical support; for example, access to digital devices to ensure families stay connected to loved ones, and information about how to access support with money, housing, benefits, and employment, along with exploring ways to reduce isolation. We have access to therapeutic services to address the impact of trauma, and staff work with children, young people, and families to assist them in navigating their new lives in Scotland.

We offer support across the whole of Scotland, which is particularly important to those families who may need to move, ensuring support can move with them if required. Contact and support takes place via face-to-face and digital groups, email, text, phone, and Teams/Zoom calls. One-to-one and face-to-face support is offered for those who need it; notably in hotels and on board the cruise ship in and Edinburgh (MS Victoria).

Group work across Scotland includes teen groups, play sessions for families, and women's groups, where those displaced from Ukraine can come together to spend time sharing experiences, worries, successes, fun and play, and to develop a deeper understanding of Scottish culture and systems. These groups continue to grow and develop, ensuring we make these as accessible as possible to those who need it most. These have been particularly important to those living in hotels across Scotland and on the cruise ships.

We have gifted 300 vouchers worth £100 each which can be used in our network of Barnardo's Scotland shops across the country. Other items given to displaced

families from Ukraine include toys from IKEA and dozens of mobile phones and SIM cards.

Using our Emergency Fund, Barnardo's Scotland has also been able to ensure that essential items such as food, utility support, clothing, footwear, baby items, strollers, wheelchairs, and walking aids have been sourced and provided.

Barnardo's Scotland also recognises the value of those who have welcomed Ukrainian families into their homes and has worked to ensure that they feel supported.

After listening to the needs of hosts, we developed Online Host Workshops. This programme of workshops aims to help hosts to support Ukrainian children and families with presenting needs arising from the difficult experiences which led to them being displaced.

There were six workshops developed to provide appropriate support to hosts, with each 90-minute workshop covering the following topics:

1. Cultural awareness
2. Understanding the impact of trauma
3. Responding to challenges
4. How to help keep families safe
5. Support around navigating Scottish systems
6. Children and young people's rights and advocacy

The first cohort provided a total of 36 sessions for hosts to book; this being six workshops delivered over six sessions each week, with 20 places available per workshop. The total number of sessions booked was 429. The second cohort has now been completed and in total 460 Hosts have been supported through the workshops.

A Digital Peer Network began in February 2023 and was developed collaboratively with those hosts who have expressed that they would like to meet on a monthly basis to come together in a digital space to listen, learn, make local connections and discuss any issues/concerns/worries that they or their guests may be experiencing.

Government engagement

Barnardo's has been engaging constructively with the UK and Scottish governments to support displaced people from Ukraine. Barnardo's sits on the UK Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Core Delivery Group where we contribute to discussions with government, local authorities, and the third sector, currently focussing on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

Children arriving from Ukraine have often suffered trauma and loss and need specialist support. Governments across the UK must therefore urgently focus on child protection and safeguarding, access to food, clothing, and education, supporting mental and physical wellbeing, including trauma, and the needs of unaccompanied children requiring care.

In Scotland, Barnardo's is a member of the Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy sub-group on Ukraine and also participates in safeguarding meetings organised by the Scottish Government.

Our recommendations to the UK and Scottish Governments centre around them acting swiftly to ensure all refugees have access to support to address their trauma, as well as access to education, training, and suitable, long-term housing. This includes acting swiftly to ensure that all refugees have access to long-term, safe, and suitable accommodation.

Safeguarding should be at the heart of the rules and guidance setting out the details of how the extension of Homes for Ukraine will operate in practice. We also want to see continuity for families – if families are moved, efforts should be made to ensure there is consistency in childcare, schooling, and healthcare.

All refugee and asylum-seeking families and children we are supporting need support to address their trauma and to access education, training, and suitable housing, regardless of their nationality.

Case study

Katerina (name changed for confidentiality purposes) contacted the Barnardo's Welcome (Ukraine) Service through the Helpline. She requested walking aids as she and her husband have disabilities. The Helpline allocated the case to a project worker in their locality who got in touch with Katerina and discovered that she was part of a large family living at a hotel. The family was made up of four generations, with a range of health needs.

Barnardo's provided support with registering and attendance with a GP, filling out benefit forms, travel passes for going to school, toys, and clothing vouchers.

The family was then transferred to another local authority in Scotland far from where they first arrived. Barnardo's provided support to prepare for the move, including re-registering for school/GP/nursery, referrals for support to get into work and learn ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). We also provided a mobile phone for the young person to keep in touch with her friends, along with walking aids and a bed for the baby.

Barnardo's has continued to provide support remotely using video calls, and recently posted presents for their first Christmas in Scotland. The children have settled well, are attending primary school or pre-school, and are making friends.

The adult family members, however, have faced multiple challenges, such as accessing rural public transport with a disability, finding work, and their accommodation not being accessible and needing repairs, alongside the increasing cost of living. Barnardo's called a video meeting with the local authority to discuss housing and has referred to the charity Shelter Scotland for independent housing options advice.

One of the family members noted a lack of space in ESOL classes which continues to be a barrier to better employment for many. Katerina felt that the

employability support didn't meet her needs and is now taking a course about setting up her own business in the future. She and her husband ran their own company in Ukraine and would like to do so again.

The older family members are receiving health appointments to follow up their previous health conditions, and many of the benefits they applied for are starting to be paid now.

Katerina said:

We hope that we will find good accommodation and Scotland will be the place we feel like home in these difficult times for our Motherland. We wish for a quick victory for Ukraine, but we realise it will be difficult to reach.

We would like to make Scotland another Motherland where we feel safe and live here for a longer time. I would recommend to all of Ukrainians, especially with children or people who face difficulties with special needs to call Barnardo's, and to receive some advice and help.

Media engagement

In order to promote the work of the Welcome Service and ensure that we could reach those who needed it most, we engaged with the media by sending out a News Release.

The release, on 4th December 2022, was sent to scores of media outlets in Scotland, with many publishing a story on 5th December. It was also posted on our website and on social media.

The release focused on the number of displaced people from Ukraine that had been supported to date by Barnardo's Scotland, and it went on to explain how the service worked. At the end of the release, information and contact details were provided for anyone wishing to engage with the service.

Overall, the coverage received was very positive. The story featured in many of the country's leading national newspapers such as *The Scotsman*, *The Herald*,

The Independent, The (Dundee) Courier, the (Aberdeen) Press & Journal, The Sunday Post and The National. It also appeared on the STV (Scottish Television) website.

To complement the national coverage, there were stories in several local papers, as well as coverage in the charity sector press, notably *Third Force News* and *Children & Young People Now*. It also appeared in publications in England and Ireland.

Conclusion

Families from Ukraine will need support for a considerable amount of time as the war against Ukraine continues, and the need for mental health and wellbeing support will be crucial to children, young people and their families learning to cope with the trauma caused by the war.

Barnardo's will continue to work with families across Scotland and the UK, and, in doing so, we will continue to constructively engage with all spheres of government to ensure that displaced people from Ukraine and people seeking refuge, no matter what part of the world they come from, will continue to be made to feel welcome in Scotland.

We recognise that other refugee populations also need support. For this to be achieved, we would like to see suitable housing, and opportunities to grow and flourish in Scotland, being made available to all.

Host accommodation was only ever considered to be a temporary solution and whilst we want to see hosts that continue to welcome families continue to be recognised and supported, we also want to see the development of better, more sustainable and long-term housing solutions.

We will be using the learning from Barnardo's Ukraine Scotland Welcome Service to explore how support can be delivered for all displaced people and for those seeking refuge arriving in Scotland.

About the authors

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David Findlay, Media and Communications Lead for Scotland, spent 15 years working as a newspaper journalist, notably at The Scotsman, before spending the past decade as a media and communications professional at a number of Scotland's leading charities, including Barnardo's and Poppyscotland.