

£7 million for new coalition of vulnerable children's charities

A 'coalition of charities' will help vulnerable children most impacted by the coronavirus pandemic as part of a Department for Education programme.

More than £7 million will fund the launch of the [See, Hear, Respond](#) service, to provide targeted help to vulnerable children, young people and their families affected by the virus and the measures put in place to stop its spread. The coalition, led by Barnardo's, will work alongside local authorities, schools and colleges, police forces, healthcare professionals and other vital services involved in protecting these children.

Funded by the Department for Education, the partnership will harness the role and reach of the charity sector. Barnardo's will work in partnership with other national children's charities as well as community-based organisations to provide solutions to the challenges facing children and families that may have been exacerbated by the unique circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic.

The launch of the programme comes as the Department for Education and Home Office prepare to open a new joint £7.6 million fund for national vulnerable children's charities working in England and Wales on issues including child sexual abuse and child criminal exploitation. The money is aimed at those charities that have suffered financial harm as a result of the virus, helping them to stabilise and continue delivering for vulnerable children and young people.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

We all have a collective responsibility to protect children and young people who face challenges in their home lives, or who may not have the same support network keeping them safe outside of school or college as their peers. Many of them may be at additional risk from abuse, neglect or exploitation during these unprecedented times.

By working with charities directly supporting these young people on the front line, we can expand their reach to provide a much wider safety net to those in need of mental health support, counselling or protection from people trying to exploit them, as well as helping to get them safely back into education.

Safeguarding Minister Victoria Atkins said:

As a government, we have acted decisively and adapted our response to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable children during this

pandemic. I'm delighted we can provide further funding to frontline charities so those most at risk can get the help they need.

See, Hear, Respond will provide support online to children and families who are struggling, street-based youth work to identify and support children at risk of harm outside of the home, including exploitation, and help vulnerable children to successfully reintegrate back into school or college if they have not been attending during the pandemic.

The programme will focus on finding and reaching out to children around the country who are experiencing negative impacts on their health and wellbeing, as well as those at risk of harm.

This funding will provide:

- Access to an online support package to children and families ensuring they have readily available, accessible and interactive information;
- Online and telephone referral service by trained professionals who can source further help and support from charity workers within the partnership;
- Online counselling or therapy for those experiencing high levels of anxiety, trauma or other mental health issues that can be safely addressed through digital means;
- Youth interventions and face-to-face crisis support, particularly for those at risk of or experiencing various forms of exploitation, including criminal exploitation;

Barnardo's Chief Executive Javed Khan said:

The coronavirus pandemic has meant that vulnerable children and young people are increasingly hidden from support services. With the support of the Department for Education, Barnardo's will bring together a coalition of national and local charities working together to identify and support those who need support at this time of crisis.

This initiative is a vital lifeline for the thousands of children and young people as we navigate the coronavirus crisis and its aftermath, helping to improve their long-term outcomes so they can have successful futures.

The announcement builds on the Government's Hidden Harms Summit, held virtually on Thursday 21 May, which focused on support for people at risk from domestic abuse, wider harms and exploitation, including children.

Children may be facing additional risks during the pandemic, including being less visible to safeguarding professionals and isolated from normal support structures. At the same time, reports of domestic abuse have been rising, with the charity Refuge reporting increased visits to its website and calls

to its helpline.

Harun Khan, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, said:

The pandemic has clearly exposed deep inequalities in our society, with many groups disproportionately impacted and needing extra support. Children in particular are at risk of being left behind and their needs not met. We're pleased to be supporting Barnardo's and the Department for Education to ensure every child that is at risk and needs additional support receives this, particularly those in marginalised groups which may fall through the net. It is imperative we all work together to make sure no child is left behind.

The project will aim to reach those children and families who are not in contact with children's services, and the support provided to them will aim to prevent their needs escalating. The project will prioritise those most at risk of harm either inside or outside the home, including very young children and adolescents.

The Department for Education has also provided funding to other charities working with vulnerable children, including Grandparents Plus, Family Rights Group, FosterTalk, the Care Leavers Association, Become, Drive Forward Foundation and Adoption UK. This adds to investment in the NSPCC's Childline, while some £10 million has already been committed to the Family Fund, helping families with children that have complex needs and disabilities through grants for equipment that makes their lives easier while implementing social distancing measures, including computers, specialist equipment and educational toys.

Steven Stockley, Managing Director of FosterTalk said:

The last three months has seen unprecedented times for all our families, and none more so than our foster families. Foster parents are incredibly adaptable but COVID-19 has seen additional stresses, anxieties and pressures impact on their family lives. This funding provides an important opportunity to improve both the retention and recruitment of foster parents by extending the Fosterline service to provide additional and specific crisis support.

Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of Family Rights Group said:

The crisis monies are extremely welcome, funding us to provide specialist legal advice to an additional 900 parents and kinship carers whose children are in need, deemed at risk or are in the care system. And significantly, enabling us to work in partnership with the charity Become so we together can provide legal and child welfare advice and follow up support to young, care experienced

parents in order to enable, wherever possible, their children to be able to live safely within their care.

Lucy Peake, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus said:

We're delighted to receive a grant to support kinship carers who have been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. They are older, poorer and in worse health than other groups raising children, so they are especially vulnerable. We will be extending our services to offer tailored advice and information, intensive one-to-one and peer support, and digital skills support so carers can get online. As the lockdown has progressed, new issues are emerging for kinship families. We're delighted to be able to offer more of them the holistic and responsive support they need at this time.

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All funding is provided as part of the £750 million package of support committed to charities by the Chancellor. The application process for the £7.6 million Department for Education and Home Office fund for national vulnerable children's charities will open shortly.

Additional funding of £125,000 will be delivered to Fosterline to deliver free-to-access and specialist one-to-one support to foster families, in recognition of the additional support needed at this time to keep foster families together.