



# Peer led practice learning

Barnardo's Scotland and the Scottish  
Community Development Centre

Summer 2019



# 1. Summary and key learning points

This learning report describes a project by SCDC and Barnardo's to develop a peer led evaluation of Barnardo's Nurture Service in Inverclyde. The report outlines the worth of an evaluative process which places an emphasis on the full participation of those involved in a service – both service participants and workers. It explains that in this case, participants were active co-creators of their successes alongside their workers. The report also outlines the iterative process of working with peers who have a variety of challenges in their personal lives. In particular we emphasise the importance of group formation and creating a process which fits the participant group first and foremost.

The report outlines key learning with regard to: the process of developing a peer-led evaluation; the benefits that participants experienced from working with Barnardo's; and a model for the closer integration of peers into an evaluation process.



### 1. Learning from the approach of developing a peer-led evaluation

- Peer participants in an evaluation are likely to require significant local support and confidence building activity before and during the evaluation process.
- Participants bring different levels of confidence, skills and knowledge to the process and methods used should reflect and build on this.
- The outcomes of the evaluation should be shaped by the participants' confidence and capacity levels – this means that funders and practitioners may need to be led by the participants to allow an authentic participant voice to emerge.
- The pace of the process should be built around participants.
- Core community group work skills are required to deliver a successful project – at least as much, if not more than, 'technical' evaluation knowledge.
- Encouraging peer led direct delivery of evaluation (e.g. peer-to-peer interviews) might be a daunting task for some participants (as in this case), depending on their own experiences, skills, confidence and perspectives.

### 2. The difference working with Barnardo's Nurture Service made to participants

Participants described significant and sustained positive benefits from working with Barnardo's Nurture Service in Inverclyde including:

- Better and more settled family relationships
- Access to parent's peer networks and other support

- Improved communication skills and coping strategies for families
- Improved practical parenting techniques and life skills
- Greater understanding of child development and psychology
- Improved ability to deal with parent's own emotions and circumstances
- Children happier, more content and less anxious especially in regard to significant life events.

### 3. A model for the closer integration of peers into an evaluation process.

- The process of the intervention offered was not from/to – but with, within and between. Positive outcomes for participants were collaboratively created by both workers and participants. Both brought particular attitudes, skills and behaviours which made the process successful.
- The evaluation process we outline below attempted to match the nature of this interaction. Many of the positive benefits occurred because of the working partnership with participants and their identified worker and between participants (e.g. peer support). By continuing to work in this way it allowed participants to confidently describe both the nature and impact of support received. It was felt that a traditional, more 'objective' evaluation might not pick up on these subtleties and complexities.

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## 2. Initial project outline

Barnardo's approached SCDC in summer 2018 regarding the development of a peer led evaluation of Barnardo's Nurture Service in Inverclyde.

### SCDC

SCDC is the lead body for community development in Scotland and works towards a vision of an active, inclusive and just Scotland where our communities are strong, equitable and sustainable. SCDC works directly with: community groups and organisations; community development practitioners; government and other policy makers.

This project was located at an intersection of SCDC's work strands combining aspects of community capacity building, research, evaluation and community involvement in service design. SCDC's primary role in this project was to design and deliver a process that would facilitate the involvement of service participants in the evaluation of Barnardo's Nurture Service in Inverclyde.

### Barnardo's Nurture Service

Barnardo's Nurture Service has been supporting Inverclyde's children for over 18 years. They work with families providing them with a wide range of interventions to promote family well-being. Children and families are at the

core of service delivery, they use a range of individual and group work at the service base, within the family home and in schools and nurseries. They have developed bespoke support aligned to children's developmental needs and key life transitions.

The services delivered by Barnardo's across Inverclyde are all supported via time-limited project funds. The range and scope of delivery has grown over the years and developed in line with the needs of commissioners and families. One of the more recent commissioned contracts (the service referred to in this paper) is linked to the families and communities element of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in Inverclyde. Inverclyde's Education Authority commissioned Barnardo's Nurture Service to provide the family support element of the multi-agency model to achieve the aims of the education initiative. The aim of Barnardo's work within this initiative is to build the capacity of children and parents, assisting them to overcome the barriers that have a negative impact on children's learning and achieving in school.

## Project design and delivery

The initial proposal for the work with SCDC was to first understand the impact the Nurture Service had on parents and carers. Secondly, SCDC would support those parents and carers develop their own approach to evaluation of the service which they would undertake. Ultimately, as will be explained below, the latter part of this proposal was not possible to deliver. A revised proposal was developed in early 2019 with the objectives as follows:



### Parents/carers and workers will work together with SCDC to:

- Develop questions that might inform a future approach to evaluation that focuses on the process of support delivered by Barnardo's Nurture Service in Inverclyde
- Gather evidence from the participant's perspective of how and why the service approach operates effectively – with an emphasis on the development and evolution of a service participant and worker relationship.
- Test a working model of a process which encourages consultees to participate on their terms, thus creating a grounded perspective of 'what works' in such service delivery.

Parents/carers involved in the service will sketch out how this process might be taken forward to broaden the scope of the evaluation.

### Outputs:

- Parents/carers and workers involved in the service will define the focus and approach to evaluation process(es) and participate in the design of this.

### Outcomes:

- Parents/carers, Barnardo's, SCDC will have an understanding of the difference the Nurture service has made for parents/carers and children
- Parents/carers, Barnardo's, SCDC will have an understanding of what has worked in Nurture service delivery, and what has not.

## 3. The process and summary of sessions

### Session 1.1 17th September 2018



The first session aimed to introduce the programme, allow participants to meet one another, introduce the idea of evaluation, and find and set dates and times of future activities. 8 participants attended. Support workers were not present as it was felt that this might inhibit participants' willingness to speak candidly about the support they received.

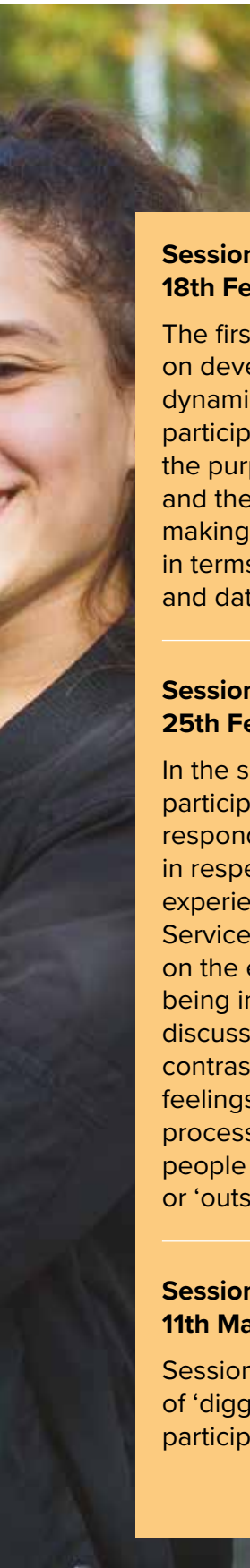
### Session 1.2 8th October 2018

Only one parent turned up for the second session. It was decided to reboot the process. On reflection, the remaining parent, SCDC and Barnardo's noted the following issues which led to the low turnout and the need to re-assess the format of the project. Based on feedback from all involved the reasons for the lack of success were, in no particular order, as follows:

- The group was of a large size
- Participants did not know each other
- Feeling of nervousness and anxiousness amongst participants inhibited engagement
- Initial group work task appeared pointless from the perspective of the participants
- The group selected lacked confidence to take part – as those selecting them were not fully briefed on the required capability to participate.
- The overall project proposal (especially that participants might engage with other parents and carers) seemed too grand.

As a result of this the project was placed on hold to be re-established in early 2019.





The project reconvened in February 2019 with three participants, one of whom was continuing from the previous sessions.

Based on the previous learning, the emphasis on peer delivered engagement (e.g. carrying out evaluation interviews with others) would be downplayed in favour of drawing out a model of evaluation based on participant experience.

### **Session 2.1** **18th February 2019**

The first session focused on developing a group dynamic amongst the three participants, and establishing the purpose of the process and the practicalities of making this possible for them in terms of venue, location and dates.

### **Session 2.2** **25th February 2019**

In the second session, participants began responding to questions in respect of their own experience of the Barnardo's Service. They also reflected on the experience of being interviewed by, and discussing with, peers contrasted against their feelings about the same process facilitated by people who were unfamiliar or 'outsiders'

### **Session 2.3** **11th March 2019**

Session 3 began the process of 'digging deeper' with participants on key themes

of Barnardo's Nurture Services support which were initially unearthed in session 2.1 and 2.2. In particular, the group explored in more detail preconceptions of Barnardo's as an organisation; the process of support; and the role of the worker and their support for participants and their children. Whilst the first two sessions were a gentle introduction to the process, the third was more focused on specific ideas and experience.

### **Session 2.4** **25th March 2019**

During the three previous sessions, the idea that change occurred between and through the participant/worker relationship began to emerge. Participants emphasised the qualities of the relationship with their work at length. They described how this relationship helped them build on their existing capabilities and develop new ones. Whilst singular interventions or 'tools' were mentioned approvingly, the greatest emphasis was on the development of a sophisticated and productive

relationship. Workers described the importance of participants recognising and accepting their role as primary caregiver and emphasising the skills and knowledge they had in this role. They also outlined that their role was not to be a 'pal' but a 'partner in change'. To explore this, session 4 used a 'body mapping' (see appendix 1, 2) exercise to make sense of the productive space and dynamic created between participant and worker.

### **Session 2.5** **15th April 2019**

Session 5 returned to the more direct and substantive concept of 'difference made' through the relationship in terms of impact on 'children; me; my family'

### **Session 2.6** **29th April 2019**

The final session asked: if any further evaluation was carried out, who else should be spoken too and what form should this take that would make it work?



## 4. Findings

The findings can be grouped in three categories: substantive; evaluative; procedural.



**Substantive findings** are those relating to the difference made by Barnardo's Nurture service to the participants.



**Evaluative findings** are those that relate to how the process of a larger scale evaluation might proceed



**Procedural findings** are those that relate to learning from the process described herein.





## 4.1 Substantive findings

### Perceptions of Barnardo's

Before engaging with Barnardo's Nurture Service in Inverclyde participants reported that their perceptions of Barnardo's as an organisation centred on the organisations' shops and history:

*"It [Barnardo's] was for poor people, I didn't realise how big they had become"*

There was also a lingering concern about the nature of services more generally. This included concern that any assistive social support might be lumped in with statutory services such as social work. There was a concern that these services might also function as a network;

*"services might be in your life forever – any sorts of agency"*

*"that they would hound you forever"*

However, as the support progressed for the individual, and within a school it was noted that:

*"People have learnt about Barnardo's through the school... it is a bigger part of the community"*

The notion that there are 'many Barnardo's' services was highlighted – whereby the support was tailored depending on the needs and preference of the participant (see below). However, it was also the case that Barnardo's relationship with other agencies and organisations was flexible depending on context. Workers described this as follows:

*"sometimes we are used as a 'step-down' from social work"*

*"for some families it is different – some families want it to be close to the school, others want it seen as separate"*

This practical and pragmatic flexibility was a hallmark of Barnardo's Nurture services in Inverclyde.

### The process and content of Barnardo's support

Participants described how their support and experience evolved during their support. Developing the above preconceptions of Barnardo's, the participants described how they were first introduced to Barnardo's Nurture Service:

*"I couldn't get the support I had previously. I couldn't get an appointment [through the council]. "The school said we've got Barnardo's in tonight, why don't you come along?" I didn't know Barnardo's existed within the school"*

*"They were trying to ship my wean off [to another school], but the new head came in [and suggested Barnardo's]"*

This was followed by the 'Choice' visit in which;

*"It was explained a lot more – before I thought it [Barnardo's] was just a shop"*

One of the workers noted that:

*"the choice visit is intended to undermine the idea that there is a pressure to take the service due to school issues"*

Participants described how the support they were offered was firstly tailored to their needs and then evolved and changed as they progressed. Participants noted the holistic format of the support, and its intersubjective approach.

*“To support me and the two weans – we had just been through my relationship breakdown. Build up the relationship between the weans and their dad – she helped and supported that process”*

*“I thought the support was just for the weans – but it was much more than that”*

*“From losing her mum to losing the dog, coping with grief. We are working to build it up – to get her prepared this time. She’s been a bit better about it this week”.*

*“Although we left the school the worker came with us.”*

And, in developing communications between the school and the participant:

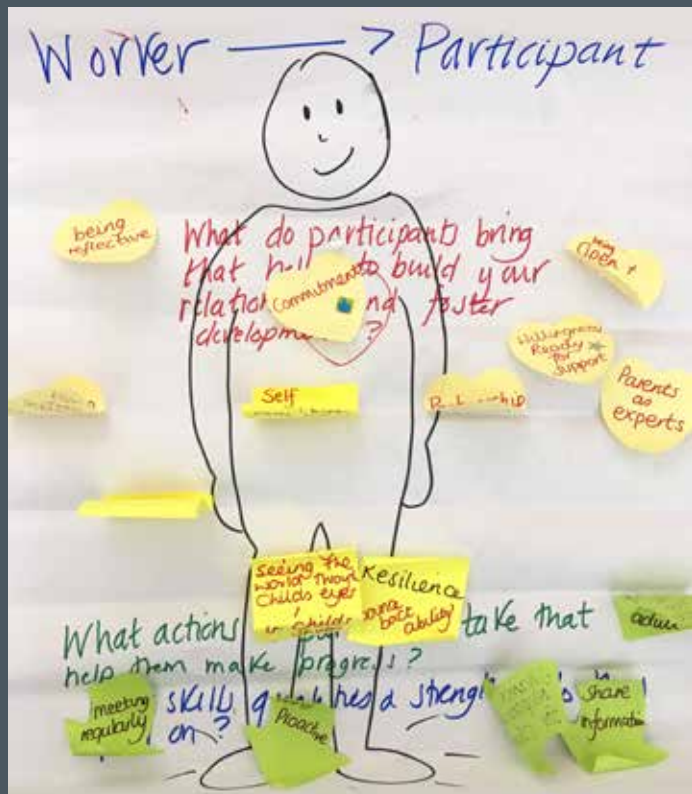
*“in between point between me and the school – it got the school to take me seriously – she [the worker] could help them hear from me in meetings”*

One of the workers summed up this approach as;

*“the child is at the centre, but the carer parent is their main relationship”*

Overall, participants described how the support evolved and changed as necessary, and often the considerable support that they as parents and carers received.

*“Although we left the school the worker came with us... it got the school to take me seriously – she [the worker] could help them hear from me in meetings.”*

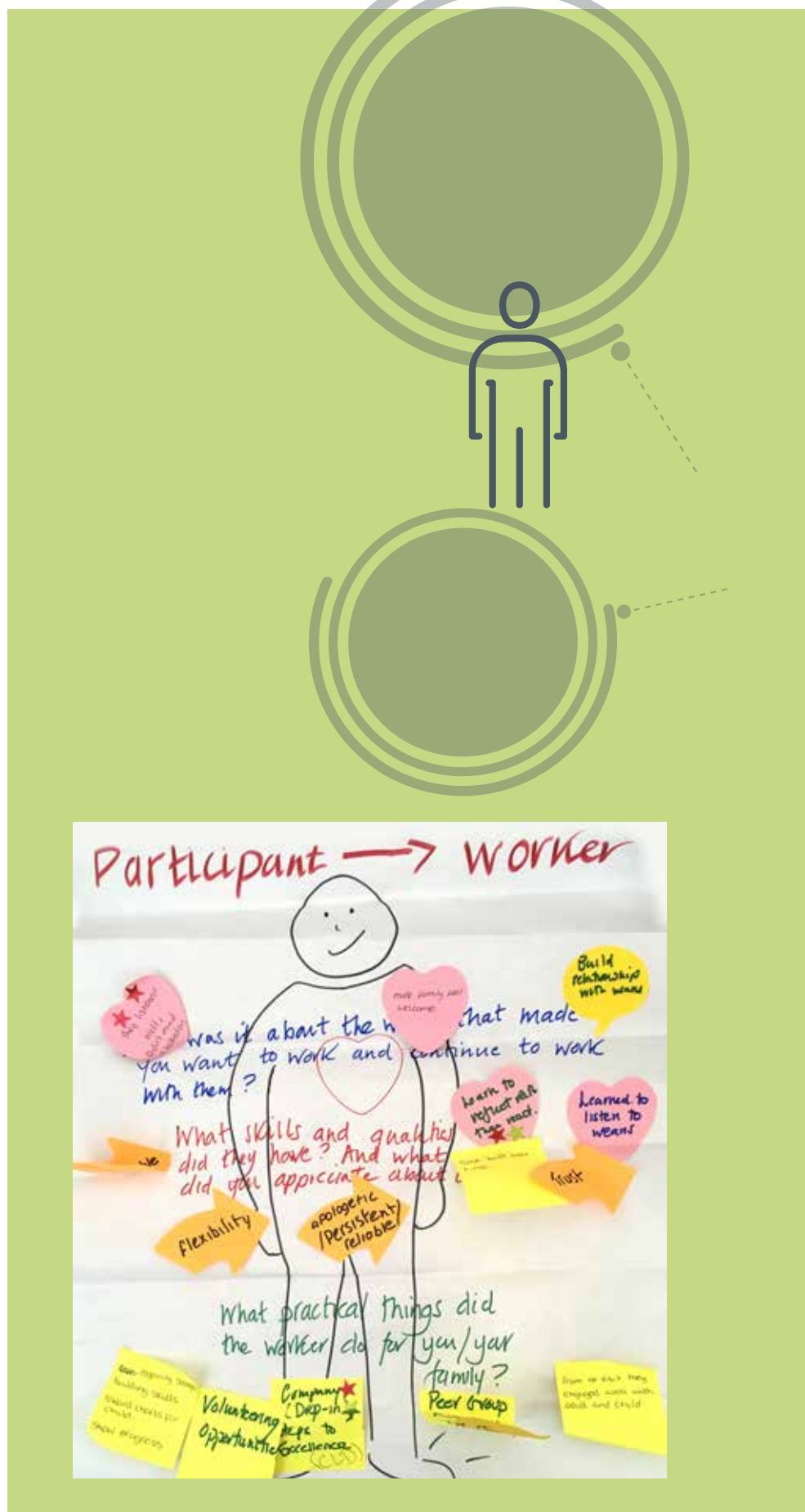


**A support not from/to – but with, within and between**

Evaluation as a process tends to look for the specifically defined and identifiable ‘impact’ of a given process or intervention. The understandable assumption being that the intervention in question has a series of inputs, process, outputs and outcomes. This is a useful schematic to approach a social intervention. And, whilst there were clear inputs (e.g. investment, staff training etc.) in this instance, the process of making impact did not conform to this schematic model.

In this case, the workers and participants emphasised the way in which participants changed, developed and progressed as part of collaborative project. Within this collaborative project the worker and participant each brought skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions to bear on the process.

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Participants were asked to reflect on what the 'other side' of the partnership brought to the support (i.e. we asked participants what workers brought and vice versa). They described the attributes as follows:

## Worker → Participant



# Participant → Worker

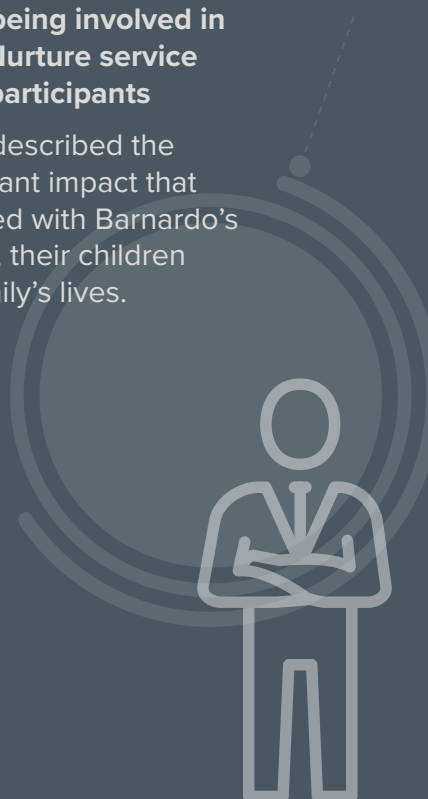


Workers and participants emphasised the way in which support offered through the Nurture Service (by design) was a collective, collaborative and flexible endeavour.

As such, a ‘traditional’ style of evaluation, focusing on scale, replicability, quantification, and pre-set categorisation may not be well suited to capture the highly specific experience of the support offered nor the complexity of the process through which success was generated.

### The impact being involved in Barnardo’s Nurture service has had on participants

Participants described the often-significant impact that being involved with Barnardo’s had on them, their children and their family’s lives.



“Just a chance to meet other people – that you’re not the only one going through those things”

#### What difference did Barnardo’s make to my children?

☆ Less stressed and better able to cope with stressful situations when they arise “He [son] can cope with stress more now. On one occasion before he didn’t eat lunch all day long, because he was so stressed”

☆ Happier and more content

☆ More confident and self-assured with peers “Things have been a lot better, he’s less likely to be led and follow others”

☆ Better able to respond to discipline and boundaries “we’ve got clearer

boundaries now and limits they respond to!”

☆ An understanding of their own behaviours and able to express emotions and feelings “She doesn’t get upset as much – she can use her words”

☆ Better relationship with parents/carers

☆ Able to ask for help and support and has developed own coping mechanisms

☆ “She knows she is not alone – that she is not the only one in her situation in kinship care”

### What difference has Barnardo's made to me?

- ☆ Access to peer support and networks "Just a chance to meet other people – that you're not the only one going through those things"
- ☆ Participation in other activities, programmes and volunteering opportunities e.g. CLD; becoming a peer support worker "I ended up going to money choices – having that stress lifted off your shoulders was great"
- ☆ Development of life skills such as budgeting, shopping, cooking "Learning to cook better, I'm now cooking more fresh food. [Worker] suggested trying Aldi rather than Tesco"
- ☆ Greater confidence in parenting skills (e.g. boundary setting; encouragement) "I'm more confident and can take charge of situations"
- ☆ Greater confidence to deal with general life challenges "I had a meltdown but I used the strategies"
- ☆ Greater sense of control over life and a more positive outlook "just feel that I have more control over my life"
- ☆ Strategies to avoid and deal with negative situations "I avoid people and behaviours that trigger negativity"
- ☆ Improved communication skills on challenging topics (e.g. bereavement) 'a turning point was coping with the dog [dying]

- ☆ Practical strategies and tools to enhance parenting. "Support with her behaviours – charts and strategies"
- ☆ Greater understanding of child development and psychology "I've been helped to understand behaviours, age and stage, and dealing with loss is normal"
- ☆ Improved ability to deal with own emotions and circumstances "I can now speak about my [deceased] daughter positively and without getting upset"
- ☆ Less anxious about specific issues such as transition to school "I had anxiety surrounding [transition to new school] and knowing that the support will continue relieved this for me"

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"She knows she is not alone – that she is not the only one in her situation in kinship care"

### What difference has Barnardo's made to my family?

- ☆ Reduced family stress and arguments resulting in better homelives "there was stress before, husband and me were arguing over things like homework. Things are happier at home now"
- ☆ Greater proportion of quality time
- ☆ Other family members have greater understanding of their emotions and reactions. "Me and my mum work together [parenting] more now"
- ☆ Improved communication within family "We are happier as a family – involvement with Barnardo's gave me confidence I needed to make changes I needed to make"

## 4.2 Evaluative findings

In effect, the process of evaluation described here represents a pilot project for how such an endeavour may unfold in future. As described above, as our inquiry into the experience and difference made by Barnardo's Nurture service developed, we noted more and more the emphasis placed on the working relationship between participant and worker.

The vital nature of this relationship has implications for how an evaluation may proceed. In terms of delivering and designing an evaluation, should we wish to understand the 'high-level' difference made with a degree of statistical confidence then perhaps the 'traditional' evaluation approach might be most suitable. Such an approach might be able to ascertain the 'what difference' (e.g. the extent to which confidence has improved; the extent to which child behaviour has improved etc.) made by the Nurture Service intervention

**However, there are four things to consider:**

# 1

Firstly, participants reported that the nature of the process conducted here helped them tell their stories and share their experiences with more confidence. By working with peers and workers, they developed their ability to share their experience with others in their own words.

# 2

Secondly, the productive interaction between worker and programme participant was, as described above, an essential part of both the support process and this evaluation. This extended into this evaluation process where workers became co-creators of knowledge with participants and SCDC staff members. As the process is built upon this relationship, it follows that the evaluation should involve (and understand) this relationship.

# 3

Thirdly, should we be interested in 'how' and 'why' the process of support was successful – rather than 'what' questions (see above) – then the approach described herein would be more effective. It is possible that the support experience received by others differed in important ways from those described here.

# 4

Fourthly, the differences made were often fine grained, highly-detailed and individual-specific. A large-scale evaluation would need to be careful to be able to unpick the subtle – yet hugely significant – changes to participant's lives as a result of taking part in this process. Many of the changes described were personal and sensitive and needed the warmth of a trusting environment to bring them forward. A more clinical – perhaps colder – standardised survey administered in minutes may not be able to achieve this.



## **A model for future peer led evaluation of Barnardo's Nurture service**

Working with the project participants (workers and participants) the following model for a larger scale evaluation was devised. It should be noted that – understandably – their clearest focus was on an evaluative process that would apply to parents and carers:

### **Core themes to evaluate**

For parents/carers

- Pre-conceptions of Barnardo's (and how this may have changed)
- The choice visit: experience of this and its impact
- The process of support
  - What did the worker bring?
  - What did you bring?
  - What practical things did you do?
  - How was feedback and support offered on an ongoing basis?
  - How and why did it end?
- The difference working with Barnardo's has made to:
  - My child(ren)
  - Me
  - My family

For schools:

- What difference has working with Barnardo's made to the children in my school and their families

For children:

- What difference has Barnardo's made to you?



### Process

An evaluation process that stays true to the principles described above whilst being relatively manageable was co-designed as followed:

**1** A reference/core group – as outlined in this report – to develop the core themes of inquiry, mechanism and process of support and to test ideas and practice.

**2** '1 to 2' interviews where the interviewer is a known and trusted (but not main) support worker. The interviewer would work with the participant and primary worker in a way similar to the above (although over a tighter timeframe) to unpack the complexity of the support and the difference made. Small groups would be suitable should the group be well established and high functioning.

**3** Additional evaluation activity – possibly carried out by a third party – with key stakeholders such as school staff. They would take their lead from the reference/core group.

**4** Elements of 'traditional' evaluation that may be desired could be a parallel process.

### Caveats

The following caveats should be noted:

- This was a time and resource intensive exercise. It required significant levels of commitment and effort
- This was an effective process for those with an underlying level of confidence, and those with a positive experience of the programme. Modified processes may be required for those with less confidence and/or a less favourable experience of the programme.



### 4.3 Procedural findings

As noted in section 3 above the project was not initially a success. The factors which led to the successful conclusion were as follows:

- A group of participants was assembled who had high underlying levels of confidence to participate and were comfortable sharing their journey.
- The support of their workers was essential. Rather than ‘influencing’ the process they actively contributed by supporting participants and offering their own insights.
- Workers and participants came with a commitment to share and engage with others.
- The development of a group dynamic was key and took time.
- There was a reluctance on behalf of this group of participants to undertake evaluation work with peers. This is fully understandable and should be expected (although perhaps others in different contexts would be more willing).



## 5. Conclusion

We hope that this report provides some insight into our efforts to deliver a peer-led evaluation. Ultimately, we developed an evaluation – and a model for a more expansive evaluation – which first engaged with the substantive question of ‘difference made’ before considering the question how best to understand the process of making this difference.

We found that the impact of working with Barnardo’s Nurture Service was significant for individuals – and that this impact emerged from a collaborative endeavour between worker and participant. Our approach was to understand and mirror the nature of this support process in order to understand it. By doing this, we were able to create an environment where

participants could speak both in and with confidence about their often deeply personal experiences. This confidence allowed a depth of understanding that may not have been possible using more traditional methods.

This offers an approach to evaluation which differs from ‘standard’ approaches in that participants have a greater input into what is considered worth evaluating, and how that evaluation might be carried out. It is not a quick fix or easy solution – but the creation of deep understanding seldom is.

Lastly, working with participants we devised what we think would be a workable format for expanding this evaluation to a larger cohort of participants whilst staying true to the principles of the approach.

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**SCDC** and **Barnardo's**  
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transform the lives of  
vulnerable children  
and young people  
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