

*Invitation to tender for evaluation supports for the Barnardos National Support Service for*

*Parents of Children in Care*



**Barnardos**

Because childhood lasts a lifetime

## **Invitation to tender: Overview**

Barnardos wishes to contract a researcher, or team of researchers, to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework and methodology, advise and support data collection processes, and conduct an evaluation of the Pilot of the new National Service to Support Parents of Children in Care. It is seeking tenders from suitably qualified consultants or researchers to carry out this process. This is an open invitation to tender, and all researchers, academics, consultants are invited to submit proposals.

### **1. Barnardos**

Barnardos is the largest charity in Ireland working with and supporting marginalised and disadvantaged children and their families. Barnardos' mission is to help transform children's lives through our services; support parents; and challenge society where it fails our children.

To advance this mission, Barnardos provides a range of services for families and children in over 45 centres around the country. By focusing on needs led, evidence informed and outcome focused work, Barnardos seeks to achieve the best outcomes for children in Ireland by working with them and their families through our services. The core service model is to deliver community based services tailored to meet the needs of children and their parents. Barnardos staff will work in partnership with parents and others to ensure a child's needs are met.

### **2. Background and Context**

Barnardos have been commissioned by Tusla - Child and Family Agency to establish a pilot National Support Service for Parents of Children in Care. While commissioned by TUSLA – Child and Family Agency, a unique oversight structure has been established to ensure independence from Tusla - Child and Family Agency. Contract performance monitoring has been delegated to the Children's Rights Alliance. A Project Oversight Group has been established to guide, monitor progress and report to Tusla - Child and Family Agency.

The new service will be piloted over a 5 year period.

### **The National Support Service for Parents of Children in Care**

Many of the parents of children in care have experienced their own unresolved childhood traumas and have multiple and complex needs. These traumas impact on parents' abilities to engage or respond appropriately in their child's care. Parents of children in care can feel powerless, shame, anger, frustration, isolation and exclusion. Parents want to be included and involved in matters pertaining to their children. The new service is designed to address these needs, making sure information is shared in creative ways, removing obstacles to maximize active participation and seeking to create opportunities to empower the parent's voice. The service will be delivered in two pilot sites: Dublin North City and Waterford/Wexford.

The service is made of two core components: (i) an advocacy service for parents of children in care; and (ii) an information provision and communications service.

#### **(i) Advocacy service**

The aim of the advocacy service for parents of children in care is to empower and enable parents to actively participate in the child protection and court systems in an informed and supported manner. The advocacy service will operate from a neutral, professional, independent position which is non-judgmental and one which parents experience as trustworthy. This service is parent focused, to support and empower parents, but it is important that decisions and discussions are informed by the child's best interest. Overall, the service is a rights-based service, balancing the rights of the parent with the best interest of the child and an overall focus on family

outcomes. The role of the advocate will be to act as a bridge, an interpreter of information and an enabler between parents and the legal and child protection systems.

This role will differ depending on the nature of the care arrangement (e.g. voluntary care agreement or court ordered care order), the duration of care order /agreement(e.g. emergency care order or long term care order), the different pathways through care (e.g. long term foster care, special care or residential care) and the extent of contact between Tusla - Child and Family Agency and parents (e.g. long term family open to Tusla - Child and Family Agency for many years or a crisis element for parents where there is sudden removal of child and where the family has had no previous contact with Tusla - Child and Family Agency). The specific nature of the advocacy service will vary from parent to parent. This can include brief information checking and fact sharing; one to one sessions to reflect on situations and empowering parents to respond or intensive support wherein parents are accompanied to different meetings. It will need to be tailored accordingly and can include:

- Providing the information that parents need to understand what is happening (in legal or child protection contexts) and what it means for them and their child
- Advocating for fair process for parents in child protection and court systems
- Supporting parents to be strong and grounded and solution focused in challenging proceedings (for example where there is risk their child is going to be taken into care)
- Preparation for and support in attendance at meetings with Tusla - Child and Family Agency, legal professionals or court hearings
- Helping parents understand why their child is in care and what they need to do for their children to be returned from care (if suitable), and understanding their child's journey through the care system
- Helping parents understand the role of social workers, courts and other relevant agencies
- Helping parents understand their rights and responsibilities
- Promoting positive and constructive communication and good working relationships between parents and the legal / child protection systems
- Helping to establish clear agreements and plans regarding access and supporting parents to meaningfully engage in these
- Supporting parents' connection with all aspects of legal aid, courts, child protection system (e.g. case conferences, child in care reviews)
- Enabling social workers, legal representatives and parents to work together in best interest of the child
- Supporting parents to identify and mobilize their support networks
- Signposting parents to therapeutic and other specialist services as required
- Ensuring parents have all the practical things they need to engage meaningfully, such as childcare, transport, etc.
- Ensuring parents presenting with additional needs have the necessary support and tools needed to engage
- Paying close attention to issues of diversity and inclusion, ensuring ethnic and religious needs are respected and honored
- Building capacity in parents who have come through the system effectively to become mentors / support buddies for other parents
- Advocating for accessible and fair distribution of resources - systemic policy recommendations

It is important in the provision of an effective advocacy service that the parameters of role and boundaries are clearly laid out. The service will not seek to take on the role and responsibilities of either the parent or the social worker. Rather, it will seek to focus on empowering parents to participate and in supporting parents to hear and understand risks and concerns from a legal / child protection perspective. A key indicator of success for this project is developing parents' skills and capacity to speak for themselves and their ability to influence and have their voice heard in different fora.

Working with others effectively will be key to success and we will achieve this by working in an open, transparent and collaborative manner. We will also work in partnership with and bring in the expertise of key agencies as required, for example New Communities Partnership 'Migrant Family Support Service' and the Legal Aid Board's 'Persons to Assist Scheme'.

## (ii) Information Provision and Communications

The aim of the information and communication component of this service is to produce accessible user friendly information in a variety of formats to ensure the information is available to a broad range of parents. The key to the success of this aspect of the service is to ensure parents know and understand what's happening, to enable them to navigate the systems effectively.

During the pilot phase, this part of the service has potential national reach and will be accessible for all parents of children in care. Communication and language needs, wishes and preferences can all vary and differ amongst parents of children in care. As illustrated below, multiple methods of communication / dissemination have therefore been proposed to reflect these diverse needs. A broad spectrum of communication methods will be developed including verbal, visual, written, audio etc. This strand of work will include:

- Developing a dedicated web presence with accessible interactive format and utilising variety of social media platforms
- Using creative methods to explain key information to parents such as animations / videos
- Developing leaflets (multiple languages) which will be in written and audio format
- Provision of a professionally staffed helpline (Monday to Friday) which parents of children in care can contact for information and advice
- Providing information for parents on their rights within the child protection and legal processes
- Creating a suite of resource material and tip sheets for parents. There are many different topics that could be developed. The service will start by consulting with parents of children in care to identify what would be most helpful information and resources for them. Examples could include: All you need to know about your children moving into care; Access – what it means for you and your child; How to talk to your child about being in care
- Using plain English and / or translators to explain the legal and child protection systems and how they work
- Considering the information needs of parents with additional requirements such as learning disability and mental health challenges.
- Making sure not to overload parents with too much information. Developing a route map with key points of information for parents, providing them with essential information at the different stages of the care process
- Developing local directory of services which are available to support parents of children in care in the area
- Arranging workshops and webinars for parents on relevant topics

### **3. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Service- Aims and objectives**

A third strand of the service will also be established which will involve monitoring and evaluation. A systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation will be required in order to observe trends, track progress and consider achievement of sustainable outcomes. The purpose of monitoring these trends and data is to track the success of the service, determine whether the service is of high quality and assess the impact of the service. This monitoring process will be used throughout service delivery to make adjustments and ensure service efficacy (e.g. are parents' needs are being met in a timely manner and if there are adjustments that need to be made quickly to make the service more effective). The monitoring and evaluation process should include the following:

#### **Monitor Quality and Progress**

Demographic information and history of service involvement/previous intervention will be collected from each parent on an agreed data collection system. These may include: education level; marital status; number of

children in care; age of children in care; type of care placement; ethnicity; primary language; additional challenges for parents such as disability, mental health, addiction, source of referral, focus of service, nature of service provided.

Performance indicators will be agreed with the CRA and reported on quarterly. These could include:

- number of referrals
- number of parents worked with (advocacy service and information service)
- number of cases open
- number of cases closed
- average length of time cases open
- number of information campaigns
- number of formats delivered in
- number of language options developed
- number of enquiries
- number of website visits
- number of video watches

An accessible mechanism for capturing the parent's voice will be developed and agreed. This will involve asking parents what is their experience of the service, what is working well for them and what would they like to change. This feedback will be reflected on as it is received to inform a continuous cycle of service improvement.

### **Evaluate Impact**

In order to track the impact of the service, dedicated assessments will be completed by the advocacy worker with service users before and after service engagement. Assessments will be connected to agreed outcomes and performance indicators and could include:

- Levels of stress parents feel relative to their engagements with the child protection and legal system
- Level of support parents feel
- Amount of information and knowledge they have on their rights
- Confidence in speaking for themselves
- Confidence in navigating the child protection and legal systems
- Understanding of why their child needs to be in care
- Understanding of the individual care arrangements orders for their child
- Understanding of their role and rights as parent whilst children in care
- Understanding of the steps needed for their child to be returned
- Knowledge and access to other support services.
- Knowledge of appeal processes

Interviews / focus groups will be conducted with key programme stakeholders including parents, project staff, social workers, solicitors, judges, foster carers, residential staff etc. exploring the wider impact of the service. Specifically it will explore whether the service was successful in empowering parents to participate in an informed manner in the child protection and legal processes. These interviews could also explore whether the service has supported and empowered parents to speak for themselves wherever possible, promoted good communication, and a positive working relationship between the parents and all those involved with children who are in care. It should also explore whether the service was effective in signposting relevant services to parents generally and assisting individual parents with accessing tailored services. The interviews could also explore the extent to which the service has increased the level and quality of interactions between parents and the different agencies involved.

The different types of care journeys could be mapped with examples of the support offered and the outcomes achieved. Case Studies for different parents on different pathways through the service could also be tracked and presented in the evaluation. An accessible mechanism for capturing the parent's voice will be developed and agreed. This will involve asking parents what is their experience of the service, what is working well for them and what would they like to change. This feedback will be reflected on as it is received to inform a continuous cycle of service improvement.

#### **4. Methodology and Timeframes**

We now wish to commission a consultant researcher to advise on, establish and report on the findings of an evaluation and monitoring system for the new service. The required output from the evaluation will be the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework, supporting the collection and analysis of data and production of interim and final evaluation reports.

It is expected that the set-up of monitoring and evaluation measures will be completed between October/November 2022 and March 2023; interim reports produced at end 2024 and 2025 with final report due in March 2027.

Development of a monitoring and evaluation framework, supporting the collection and analysis of data

This work is aimed at establishing effective monitoring and evaluation framework and processes which can capture the delivery of the service and how well the service is working. During Phase 1 the objectives are to:

- Develop recommendations on the implementation of assessments/ratings and data collection methods with parents
- Provide recommendations and develop methods to enable the capture of performance indicators
- Develop a mechanism to capture the service users' voice and experience of service delivery
- Establish monitoring systems (e.g. database and analytical systems) and provide guidelines for monitoring service implementation and performance
- Develop dedicated assessments comprising rating scales which can be used by advocacy workers and allow the collection of pre/post outcomes data by advocacy workers with service users
- Establish methodologies (e.g. data collection processes, data harvesting systems) to support the collection and utilisation of outcome data
- Provide interim reports (produced at end 2024 and 2025) on the delivery and impact of the service, as well as implementation and success of the monitoring and evaluation processes outlined above
- Provide recommendations for adjustments for monitoring and evaluation processes on the basis of key findings from interim reports.

Evaluation of impact

This work is aimed at assessing the impact of the service using the data harvested from the monitoring and evaluation processes, as well as fieldwork with service users and other key stakeholders. The objectives are:

To analyse performance data and explore the impact of the service as follows:

- Assess the impact of service delivery on user outcomes,
- Examine service users' experiences of service delivery
- Explore the wider impact of the service through fieldwork with parents and other stakeholders, including project staff, social workers, solicitors, judges, foster carers, residential staff etc.

We expect the evaluation to use a combination of desk and field research including quantitative, qualitative and evaluation methods to enable the impact of the service to be captured.

We would therefore like the consultant to consider the following:

- Mapping/outlining an approach to performance monitoring (inputs, outputs, activities, etc)
- Mapping/outlining an approach to the assessment of service user outcomes
- Developing an effective, feasible and accessible mechanism for capturing service users voice
- Exploring barriers and facilitators to implementation of monitoring and evaluation processes
- Providing feedback on the effectiveness on monitoring and evaluation recording systems
- Assessing the effectiveness of service outcomes, including examining the impact of the service on user outcomes, as well as their experiences and involvement in service delivery
- Understanding the degree to which the service resulted in parental empowerment
- Examining the broader impact of the service and capturing key stakeholders' perspectives on and experiences of service delivery.

## **5. Outputs**

The required outputs from the evaluation will be:

- A monitoring and evaluation framework for the service outlining the identification of performance indicators, service outcomes, recording methodologies and data collection timings and processes
- Monitoring and evaluation fieldwork materials including: a mechanism for capturing performance indicators, mechanism for capturing parents' voices, and outcomes assessment scales (October – March 2023)
- Interim reports at end 2024 and 2025 based on data harvested from monitoring and evaluation systems as outlined above
- A final report outlining the findings relating to the impact of the service based on data harvested from monitoring and evaluation systems as outlined above, as well as fieldwork with parents and other key stakeholders (March 2027).

## **6. Closing date**

The closing date for the submission of proposals is **30th September 2022**.

## **7. Management of the evaluation process**

Day-to-day management of the contract / evaluation process will be led by the Head of Service and Evaluation and Research Manager

## **8. Format of tenders**

Selection of a consultant researcher or research team to carry out the evaluation will be made at the discretion of Barnardos. Applicants should submit a tender document which addresses the points listed below in the order

given. The tender document should be no more than 10,000 – 12,000 words (excluding researcher CVs, which should be added as appendices).

Information headings to be addressed in the tender document

#### General information

- Name, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the applicant, who should normally be the principal investigator or leader of the research team.
- Name, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the person who will act as administrative contact, if not the same as the applicant.
- Name, address, telephone number and e-mail address of any third parties, partners or collaborators involved in the tender, along with a description of their role or the element of the contract that they will fulfil.
- Confirmation of acceptance by the applicant and any third parties of the conditions of the tendering process as set out in section 11.
- A copy of your Tax Clearance certificate, or in the case of a non-resident applicant, a statement from the Revenue Commissioners confirming suitability on tax grounds.
- Previous relevant experience and expertise
- Outline of the qualifications and relevant professional experience of each member of the evaluation team. Please add a summary CV of each member of the research team as an appendix to the tender document. Each CV must not exceed three A4 pages.
- In particular, please describe how the team's expertise and competencies relate to the area of work described in the tender, substantiated with evidence such as published work where possible.
- Provide evidence to demonstrate the team's knowledge of current national and international policy and practice with respect to family support services with a specific focus on support for parents of children in care
- Outline your understanding of data protection legislation including responding to data access requests, sharing of information etc.

#### Project methodology

Based on the description of the required consultancy and evaluation process in Section 3 above, provide an account of how you/your team would tackle this project. This should include:

- An outline of the approach to developing the monitoring and evaluation framework
- Methodology for the identification and development of monitoring and evaluation materials and systems
- Methodology for the evaluation of service impact
- Proposal for a calendar/time-table of activities from start to finish (for the purpose of the tender, assume a contract is signed by late October 2022, on the understanding that dates will be adjusted accordingly if contracts are agreed later than this).
- Outline of the principal resources which will support the project.

## 9. Schedule of costs

The schedule of costs should include

### Notes

- Quote costs in euro (€).
- The value of the tender should be in region €23,714 inclusive of VAT – approximately €11,443 for the development of the evaluation framework and €12,271 for subsequent evaluation and reporting.
- The budget must show the total costs of the evaluation project, including any expenditure to third parties, collaborators or subcontractors.

Use the following as main headings for the breakdown of costs. Subdivide these as required.

- Salaries/ studentships (include details for each person involved and note their role or position in relation to the project).
- Fieldwork costs
- Data collection and processing costs.
- Administration (explain the basis of apportionment of costs).
- Overheads (give details of cost headings for overheads, and explain the basis of apportionment of costs).
- Other costs appropriate to a project of this nature (which must be specified and defined).

## 10. Requests for further information or clarification

Requests for further information or clarification on any aspect of this process or expectations for this evaluation can be made by email to [research@barnardos.ie](mailto:research@barnardos.ie).

Further information regarding the service approach is available from Niamh McCarthy, Head of Service, Barnardos by email to [niamh.mccarthy@barnardos.ie](mailto:niamh.mccarthy@barnardos.ie).

To ensure equitable treatment of prospective tenderers, where such additional information or clarification is provided, Barnardos will seek to make relevant information available to all. All those who are interested in preparing a tender should therefore provide a contact email address to the Barnardos Research and Evaluation Manager to facilitate this information-sharing.

## 10. Submission of tenders

Tenders should be submitted by email attachment as a single PDF or Microsoft Word document (with researcher CVs as appendices) to: [research@barnardos.ie](mailto:research@barnardos.ie).

Receipt of tenders will be acknowledged.

The closing time and date for receipt of completed tenders is 5pm on the **30<sup>th</sup> September**. Incomplete tenders, tenders that do not follow the format prescribed above, or tenders received after the closing date will not be considered.

## 11. Assessment of tenders and selection of researcher(s)

Barnardos will use the following criteria to assess all complete tender documents received by the above closing date:

- Knowledge of the subject area, particularly the experiences and needs of parents of children in care
- Experience of research with vulnerable parents and children and an understanding of the methodologies most appropriate for work with these groups.
- Experience of applied research in service settings, particularly in child and family service settings
- The proposed approach to establishing performance monitoring and evaluation framework
- Proposed methodologies for evaluating service impact
- Budget and value for money.
- Proposed time-frame, and evidence of ability to meet deadlines.
- Capacity for project management and administration.
- Capacity to develop and maintain relationships with the variety of stakeholders.
- Capacity to develop reciprocal relationships and be open to feedback.
- Ethics and ethos.

Barnardos reserves the right to seek additional information and/or interview tenderers in connection with its assessment of their tenders,

It is anticipated that a number of tenderers will be shortlisted for interview, and interviews will be conducted week beginning **10<sup>th</sup> October 2022**.

The principal investigator and other key members of the research team should be available to attend the interview. Barnardos will not be held liable for any costs incurred by tenderers in relation to the tender submission or the assessment/interview process.

Barnardos reserves the right not to award the contract in the event that no tender is found to be suitable.

## 12. Terms and conditions

### 12.1 Conflict of interest

Any registered interest involving the contractor and Barnardos, their staff or relatives must be fully disclosed in the response to this Invitation to Tender, or should be communicated to Barnardos immediately upon such information becoming known to the contractor. In any case, such information must be made available prior to the award of the contract. The terms "Registered Interest" and "Relative" shall be interpreted as per Section 2 of the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest may disqualify a tenderer or invalidate an award of contract, depending on when the conflict of interest comes to light.

Any other conflicts of interest must also be fully disclosed to Barnardos.

### 12.2 Freedom of information

Information supplied in respect of this tender may be disclosed by Barnardos under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, unless it is exempt from Disclosure under that Act (e.g. personal information or commercially sensitive information where the public interest in non-disclosure outweighs the public interest in disclosure). Tenderers are invited to indicate if they consider any information supplied to be sensitive. Under

Section 29 of the Act, any tenderer must be consulted by Barnardos before any decision to disclose such information.

### 12.3 Ownership

Barnardos will remain the sole owner of all end-products including, but not limited to, research data, reports, manuals or other documentation, programmes, information, etc., irrespective of whether or not the project is completed. The contractor's work shall be acknowledged by Barnardos in materials produced and disseminated on the basis of work completed under this contract.

Proposals for scholarly/academic publishing under the name(s) of the researcher(s) arising from this research can be discussed with Barnardos, as owner of the data and other products of the evaluation, and may be agreed to subject to prior approval in writing from Barnardos.

### 12.4 Garda clearance

All researchers who may be required to work directly with children and families throughout this evaluation process will be subject to Garda clearance. If any such researcher has been living or working outside Ireland in the past three years, Barnardos may also require equivalent clearance from the police in the country or countries where she or he has been living or working.

### 12.5 Changes to invitation to tender

Barnardos reserves the right to update or alter the information contained in this document at any time, but not later than seven days before the closing date for the receipt of tenders. Participating tenderers will be informed as the need arises.

There is no obligation on Barnardos to accept the lowest cost or any tender, and it may be decided, following the review of the tenders, not to proceed or to proceed with a new invitation to tender or an amended version of the proposed research.