




Making children visible

**Reducing the impact
of poverty on
Australian children**



**Barnardos
Australia**

Because **every child**
needs a champion



**Barnardos Australia
acknowledges the
Traditional Custodians of
the land on which we live
and work.**

We acknowledge Elders past and present who have walked and managed these lands for many generations and recognise their ongoing contribution.

We acknowledge the children who are our hope for a brighter future.



A message from our CEO

Paying the price: children and the impact of poverty

At Barnardos, we work with children and families who are really doing it tough. And I've never seen it tougher than it is today.

Parents and caregivers are doing their best to provide for their children and protect them from harm, and yet they can't seem to get ahead. The lines for our food banks are growing and we are seeing families we've never seen before, all of them saying the same thing: they can't afford to shop at the local supermarket. They can't afford to buy medicine and they can't afford to pay rent.

When government and policy makers talk about the growing cost of living pressures on households, it seems short-sighted and missing something critical: acknowledgement of the children who bear the brunt, and the true impact of pushing them into poverty. Children are Australia's future and with the rising cost of living, Australia risks losing more families to the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

We know from research that children raised in families experiencing financial stress face greater risks of psychological and educational difficulties and behavioural problems later in life. This highlights the critical need for substantial, early-intervention support and trauma-informed job readiness programs so that families avoid falling into the poverty trap.

But right now, in the shorter term, families not being able to afford a roof over their heads can sometimes even lead to children being separated from their parents and placed into foster care arrangements. We are also seeing women and children risking their lives by being forced to choose between staying in violent relationships or becoming homeless because there is nowhere for them to go, and the current urgent need for housing far outweighs the availability of safe accommodation.

Children should not have to pay the price of poverty. It's time for us all to recognise the harmful impact of poverty on children and that we have an obligation to be champions for Australian children so that they can look forward to a future of opportunity and equality.

Deirdre Cheers
Chief Executive Officer, Barnardos Australia



The scale of poverty in Australia should not be underestimated



1 in 6 children in Australia are living in poverty.¹

In 2024, our Barnardos Children's Family Centres observed that children, young people and their families are increasingly going without essentials like food and medication and are unable to find safe accommodation. Many are living in cars or in overcrowded and unsafe housing.

Children who experience poverty are more than three times as likely to be poor as adults. They are 2.5 times more likely to live in social housing, and more than twice as likely to experience financial stress. They are also more likely to experience poor mental and general health.²

Children who grow up in a family that receives government support payments are also twice as likely to receive support payments themselves, compared to children whose families do not receive support payments.³ For most families, regular and adequate income is the single most important determinant of their economic situation.⁴ Unemployment has economic, social and emotional impacts. It can lead to homelessness and serious disadvantage for children growing up in these families.

Brutally in NSW, the number of households skipping meals has risen by 30% since 2022 and 90% of single parents have gone without essentials.⁵

These statistics paint a very bleak future for Australian children – we are failing to provide the basic needs to build a safe and secure life, and this will have impacts for many generations.

With the rising cost of living and basic government income support falling short, more children and young people are at risk of poverty than ever before.

Our recent survey indicated that nine in ten Australians agree that experiencing poverty impacts children into their adult lives[^] This highlights the need for early intervention to prevent the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage, which is a key strategic support area for Barnardos.

Barnardos Australia's vision is to empower every child to reach their full potential, with children's well-being at the centre of everything we do. We support families for as long as it takes, to move beyond the poverty trap and meet the needs of their children so they can flourish.

¹ ACOSS: Poverty in Australia 2023

² Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic and Social Research

³ Productivity Commission 2024

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. Australia's children. Cat. no. CWS 69. Canberra: AIHW.

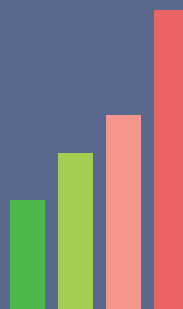
⁵ NSW 2023 Cost of Living Crisis Report: Barely Hanging On – UTS and NCOSS, Inequality in Australia: Insights from the Life Chances Study 1990-2024

[^]YouGov Survey 2024 Commissioned by Barnardos Australia

Despite growing awareness of the impact of poverty on Australian children, our poverty rate has steadily increased over the past two decades and the evidence suggests the rate of poverty in Australia is at its highest since 2001.³

Little is being done by governments to protect our future generations. The rate of homelessness is rising due to a lack of affordable housing for families and there was no increase to Job Seeker payments in the last federal budget. Women and children escaping domestic violence are often forced to choose between staying in violent, unsafe situations or homelessness. And many families we support are going into debt on Buy Now Pay Later schemes to cover essential items including food, medicine and utility bills.

90% of Australians agree that the rising cost-of-living crisis is pushing more families into poverty.[^]



Poverty is deeply intertwined with a range of other social problems:



HOMELESSNESS

The lack of affordable housing means more families with children are living in cars or in overcrowded and unsafe accommodation, which results in children living in potentially dangerous situations or being exposed to violence or other inappropriate behaviours.



EDUCATION

Disrupted education from regularly moving house or being homeless – living in cars, couch surfing, overcrowded environments – impacts a child's ability to focus on their schooling. The lack of consistency interrupts their routine and children become concerned about their safety or feel embarrassed. In addition, not having breakfast or lunch can impact their ability to concentrate in class, while not being able to afford school supplies or uniforms means children feel shame and don't want to go to school. This has a knock-on effect that can lead to unemployment.



SOCIAL ISOLATION

When families are unable to afford essentials or face homelessness, their children often stop attending school and are unable to participate in extra-curricular activities. This means fewer opportunities to make connections or participate in community activities, leading to social isolation.



HEALTH

Families going without doctor's visits or medication for their children leads to poor physical and mental health, which sadly means many childhood disabilities or special needs may go undiagnosed. While inability to afford healthy meals leads to poor nutrition and health problems.

³Productivity Commission 2024

[^]YouGov Survey 2024 Commissioned by Barnardos Australia

Meet James, Jackson and Olivia*

Now a family with hope.

James is a single dad who initially came to our Barnardos Penrith Children's Family Centre to access the free food bank. Tamara, (a Barnardos case manager) discovered some bigger problems that James needed help with and that's when Barnardos stepped in to help the whole family.

James had lost his wife some months before in an accident and was overwhelmed with grief and loss. He had moved from interstate and he didn't have any family to help him and was facing homelessness due to a rent increase that he simply couldn't afford.

James was a truck driver but when his wife died unexpectedly he had to leave his job to become the primary carer for his two-year-old daughter Olivia. He and his wife Cristina*, who was originally from the Philippines, had taken out a \$10,000 loan to pay for her permanent residency application. Even though she had passed away, the debt remained. He had also incurred other debts trying to pay for other necessities which amounted to almost \$25,000 and his rent was going to be increased. This was just too overwhelming for James and he couldn't cope, especially with going from a full-time wage to a Centrelink payment as he had to quit his job to care for his child. It just wasn't enough.

Jackson, James's 15-year-old son from a previous relationship, had recently come to live with him. When Jackson told his Dad that 'if we need to be homeless then that's going to be ok', it was a wake-up call for James and he reached out for help from the Penrith team.

We welcomed James into our Family Support program where we helped him with overdue utility bills and advocated for him with his real estate agent to negotiate down the rent increase so that it was just manageable for James. That, along with the food bank, was helping James to keep his head just above water.

We then assisted James to get subsidised child-care for Olivia who was experiencing developmental and speech delays and enrolled James into a parenting course which helped him to engage with Olivia and respond to her early learning and development needs. We also helped him with his resume so that he could get jobs that were flexible with his own family needs. Unfortunately James' son Jackson was also being bullied at school and so Barnardos also provided him with counselling support.

James' situation has improved greatly since joining the program and he has developed a strong attachment with Olivia, cooking nutritious meals for her and helping her with the alphabet and numbers. Olivia's development has come along leaps and bounds and her future looks bright. James is proud of his children and has worked so hard to change for them and give them a better life. Even though there will come a time when James will no longer need to be in our program, we always ensure that people like James and his children know that we are always here for them.

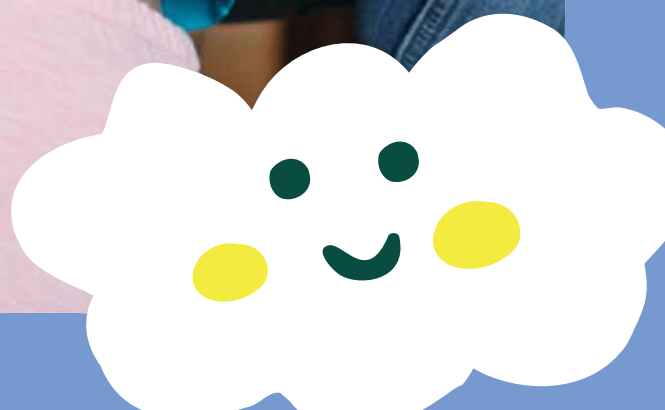
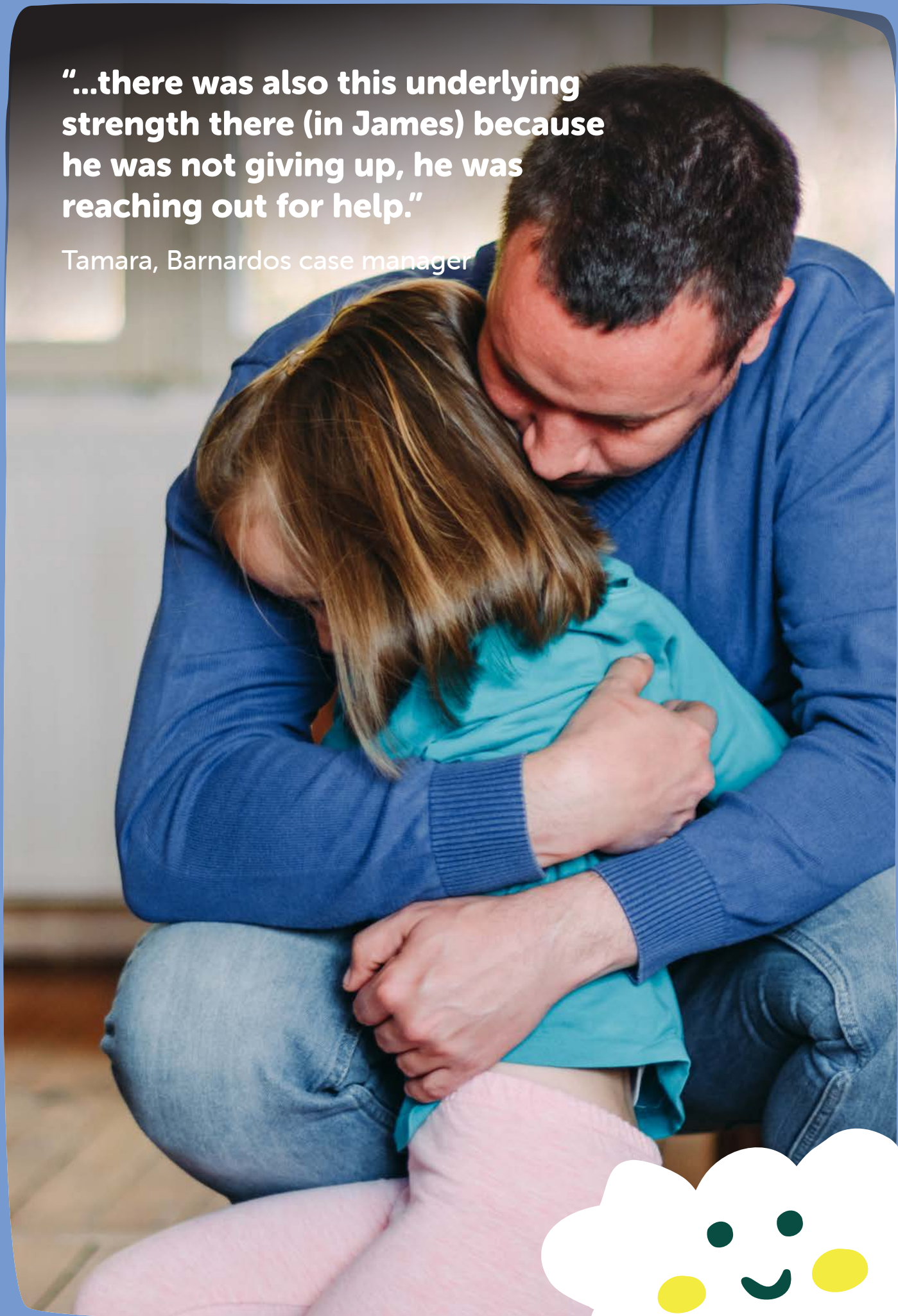
"When I had my last visit with James, he said he's been encouraging his cousin to connect with a program like the one he did at Barnardos because he's got so much out of it. James said it's made such a huge difference to his life," said Tamara, Barnardos case manager.

James, Jackson and Olivia can now look forward to a brighter future together.

*Names changed and stock imagery used for illustrative purposes to protect privacy

"...there was also this underlying strength there (in James) because he was not giving up, he was reaching out for help."

Tamara, Barnardos case manager



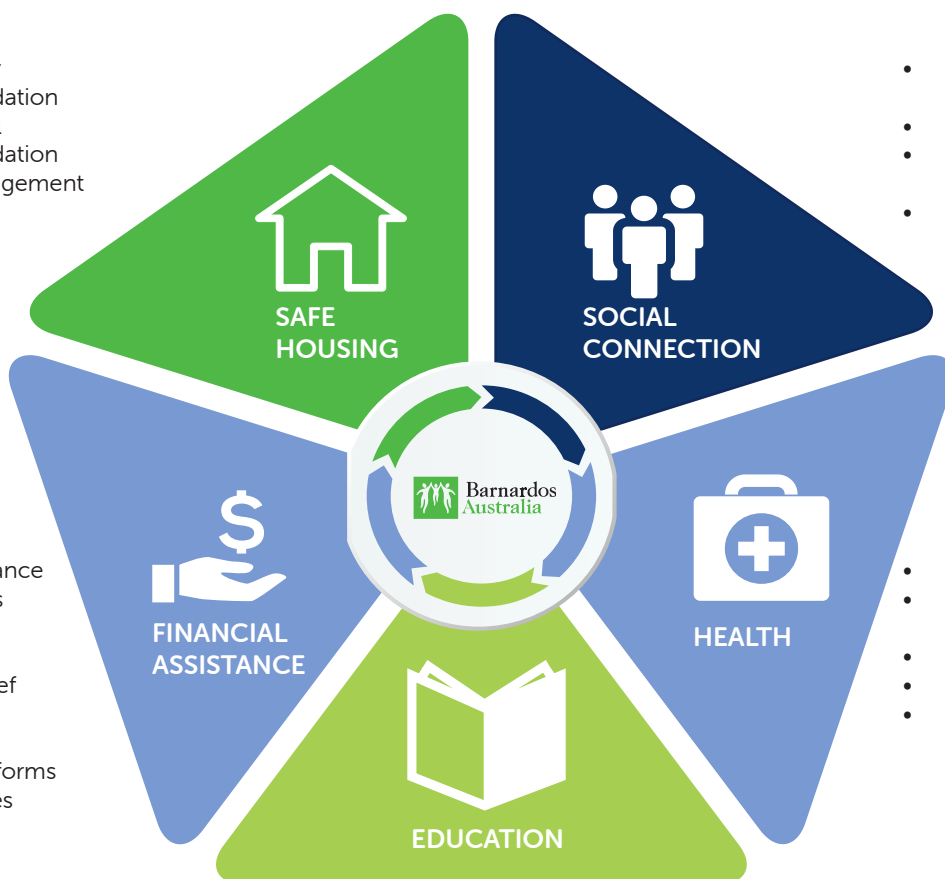
Our integrated support hubs are helping children and families **now.**

Barnardos works with children, young people and families for as long as it takes to create sustainable change and break the cycle of disadvantage with a unique, wholistic approach that envelopes the child and their family in specialised support.

The Barnardos Children's Family Centres are family support hubs that are embedded in local communities and unique to other agency services in that they provide a single point of support for families experiencing poverty. Families only need to tell their story once to receive a range of different programs and services that help them deal with immediate crises but also helps them build resilience and life-long skills. Barnardos is there every step of the way with them, to ensure long-term stability, no matter how long it takes.

- Emergency accommodation
- Transitional accommodation
- Lease arrangement assistance

- Reconnect youth program
- LINKER, DV program
- Learning centres and playgroups
- Youth outreach eg Streetwork and ADAPT Youth Services



- Rent assistance
- Food banks
- Centrelink assistance
- Utilities relief
- Budgeting programs
- School uniforms and supplies

- NDIS support
- Breakfast clubs and nutrition program
- Counselling
- Trauma informed care
- Pre-natal support programs

- HIPPY Program*
- Playgroups
- Aboriginal Learning Centres
- Early Learning Centres
- Parenting programs
- Assistance for children struggling to attend school
- The Reconnect program
- Trauma-informed job readiness programs

*The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters



But we can't do it alone - children and young people need your help

Imagine a world where everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive - a world where poverty is no longer a barrier to a better future.

Your support can turn this vision into reality for thousands of Australian children, young people and families who are in the grips of a desperate cost-of-living crisis.

By donating in support of the children and families we work with, you're not just giving money; you're investing in transformative solutions that tackle poverty at the root causes. Your contribution can fund:

EDUCATION INITIATIVES: We have early childhood education centres, supported playgroups for children aged 2-5 years old, before and after-school programs that provide healthy meals to children and encourage school engagement and provide tutoring assistance.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: We provide help with job training, writing resumes and financial literacy programs to parents needing this support so that families can achieve financial independence. We also provide emergency relief by paying utility bills and rent that is so critical to helping families get back on their feet.

HEALTH: Your support will provide voucher assistance for essentials such as food, utilities, rent and medicine. We currently have two food bank locations at Auburn and Penrith where you can volunteer to help distribute food packs, donate money or food.

SAFE HOUSING: We help families with children find safe, transitional accommodation and provide essential household items so that they can live safely and away from potential harm.

SOCIAL CONNECTION: Our programs and services connect our children and families with counsellors, program managers, referral services, community groups, playgroups and Learning Centres so that families do not feel alone and helpless.

Your generosity can help create sustainable change and uplift local Australian communities. Every dollar you give empowers Australian families to build better futures for their children.

Join us in this crucial fight to disrupt disadvantage for good!

Together, we can help children and young people overcome the impact of poverty through our early intervention programs and specialised support to build an Australia where everyone has the chance to have a brighter future.



For more information on how you can help us fulfil our vision for Australian children contact our Revenue and Giving team:

philanthropy@barnardos.org.au or
partnerships@barnardos.org.au



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