



Brighter Futures

Patrons:

Lady Dalton

The Bailiff of Jersey

Mr Timothy Le Cocq

Registered Charity No: 20

Deputy Louise Doublet

Vice-Chair, Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Lead Member for the Review

By email: a.harris5@gov.je

26th April 2021

Dear Deputy Doublet,

Covid-19 Response: Impact on Children and Young People

As a local registered charity that supports families, children and young people in Jersey we are grateful for the opportunity to provide a written response to the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel in respect of the Covid-19 response and the impact on children and young people.

Brighter Futures supports the Government priority to 'Put Children First' and although Covid-19 has impacted everyone, not all have been impacted equally. Some children and young people have thrived, others, who were already more vulnerable, have barely survived.

In July 2020, the Best Start Partnership produced a briefing paper '42 Days and counting' in which it reviewed the impact of pregnancy in a pandemic, babies born into an uncertain world and starting life in a crisis. The emergent issues identified were concerns around lost opportunities for socialisation, emotional pressures including, but not exclusively, lack of work and financial difficulties leading to stress, anxiety and mental health issues. These issues were further intensified by a lack of universal and support services leading to significant social isolation. Children also reported that when they were told to stay at home many were scared, confused, sad and lonely.

As the pandemic took hold, a number of specialist therapeutic services delivered by the Government were not able to continue to operate due to the workforce being deployed elsewhere in response to Covid. This has had a significant and detrimental impact not only on the children and young people already relying on these services, but also on the children waiting to be seen as waiting lists continue to get longer. This has been particularly so for Speech and Language Therapy, the Early Years Inclusion Team, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy.

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We know from the plethora of international research that early childhood development, and in particular early language development, is key to children's future life chances. It would have been expected therefore, to see additional investment into these services rather than the suspension of such services for months. It is likely that the costs to remediate the adverse effects of this will be significantly higher. A failure to invest in these services post pandemic, will be failing the most vulnerable children who have already been disproportionately disadvantaged and are at significant risk of never catching up with their peers.

Following lockdown, many families expressed their concerns about the transition and return to everyday life including school, early years settings and the work place. Brighter Futures were able to respond strategically and flexibly to these emerging concerns thanks to the flexibility of the team supported by local and UK funders.

Parents have also shared their concerns about the impact that lockdown has had on their children's mental health and how this will affect their children in the long term. The earlier mental health problems manifest, the more likely they are to persist into adulthood. Children and young people cannot progress academically when they have unmet needs. On the less severe end of the scale when considering wellbeing, not mental health problems, having the skills to deal with one's own and others' emotions and navigate relationships successfully is critical to positive outcomes for children and young people. Many children do not recognise, understand or have the emotional vocabulary to express their emotions in relation to their experiences during Covid-19. The Government has invested in school catch up programmes and universal well-being support but whether this effectively matches the needs of all children and young people, not just the majority, remains to be seen. To address this, we have trained a number of our keyworkers to specifically support our clients' vulnerable children and young people to make sense of their experiences and emotions.

The University of Oxford research has shown how parents in the UK struggled during lockdown with stress, anxiety and depression. This is not surprising given the number of parents who were struggling to balance home schooling, employment, or lack thereof, financial stress and exhaustion. This has inevitably had a negative effect on their children, many of whom now feel unable to cope. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the same conclusions can be drawn in relation to families in Jersey who have been under the same pressures.

Many families in Jersey were already struggling to make ends meet due to low paid work, lack of affordable childcare and high living costs. Covid-19 has increased this stress considerably. When combined with unstable housing, food insecurity, social isolation and for some families, no access to government support, it would be of little surprise that the toxic overload of adversities has led to increasing rates of debt, domestic abuse, substance misuse and untreated mental health problems. We must not lose sight of the huge consequences of these threats to the health and development of our most vulnerable children and their families, now and for years to come.

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Brighter Futures has been strategically and operationally responsive to the emerging needs of vulnerable families. We have worked collaboratively and effectively alongside other charities to ensure that we honour the commitment to put children first. As charities we cannot, and should not, have to do this alone. We depend on the Government to demonstrate the same level of commitment and support to ensure that no child is left behind. It is only together that we can ensure that in Jersey we are truly 'Putting Children First.'

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Brunton

Chief Executive Officer

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