

WHAT DOES PUTTING IMPACT FIRST LOOK LIKE?

Javed Khan, CEO, Barnardo's

'Having an impact' is harder than it sounds. It needs thought, it takes time and it costs money; sometimes, it can't be done at all. So why does it matter? It matters because it is the very essence of why charities exist; why we do what we do. People don't dedicate their careers to charity work for the salary, volunteers don't give up their time for the status, and our supporters don't donate their money for the t-shirt they might receive in the post. They do it because they are motivated by their chosen cause, and the opportunity to change something—to have an impact.

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It is the privilege of my lifetime to lead the UK's oldest and largest national children's charity, Barnardo's. I love telling the story of how Barnardo's has grown from Dr Thomas Barnardo's work—helping the street children of East London 150 years ago—to annually supporting over 270,000 children, young people and families across the UK today. That, despite the tough economic challenges, last year we increased the number of services we provide to over 1,000, whilst over the past three years the charity has grown by over 20%.¹

But impressive as these numbers are, they actually tell us nothing about how these children's lives were transformed for the better. On the ground we see the children, young people and families that we work with grow and succeed. This is Barnardo's real 'impact'. But how do we prove it?

To understand it we must look beyond the number of services we run and how many children we support, to understand the role we play in their lives. It is this information that gets our staff out of bed in the morning, drives our volunteers to spend their time with us, and our supporters to reach into their pockets. It is the reason why we have invested in improving our evaluation capacity, so that we learn from our experiences and use it to give children the best support possible. Our first ever Annual Impact Report was published in 2015 and its philosophy has become central to how we design and develop our services.²

Impact matters, more and more

Putting impact first helps us to meet our objective of improving the quality of the services we offer to our children and young people. But it serves other purposes too. As digital technology continues to transform how we as individuals communicate and engage with charitable endeavours, a new generation of time-poor, information-rich donors is emerging.³ Not only do donors expect more information—in particular insights that are specific and traceable—they also expect to receive this information in certain ways. They expect

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¹ Barnardo's (2016) *Annual Impact Report*.

² Barnardo's (2015) *Annual Impact Report*.

³ House of Lords Select Committee on Charities (2017) *Stronger charities for a stronger society*.

communications to be short and arresting. And they react positively to opportunities to give that fit in with their lifestyle—donating through work or raising money from fitness activities for example. As 38 Degrees, change.org and crowdfunding platforms show, timely, personal and tech-savvy methods of gathering and engaging with supporters can be very successful—especially when transparent and insightful data is factored in.

Just as the explosion in digital technology feeds the growing demands and expectations from donors, it also provides a vital means by which to meet these demands. This is particularly true for the children's sector where the common practice of entering handwritten case or meeting notes into computer

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systems cannot meet the demands of this new data-hungry generation, nor deliver the insights we need when we need them. With a growing array of digital tools—not just in the hands of children and young people themselves, but also the professionals that work with them—more and more we are able to bridge the gap between gathering information and proving our impact. Barnardo's is moving to a 'digital by default' way of working and recording information. By doing so, we are better able to provide our donors with the information they want to see, when they want to see it; but better still, understand for ourselves and our practice the true impact we have.

The current commissioning system is working against impact and this needs to change

The growing demand for evidence of impact extends to public service commissioners too. In the years since the global credit crunch, the commissioning and delivery of public services has transformed. Models of outcomes-based commissioning such as 'payment by results' are becoming the norm, as providers are increasingly required to prove their impact and value for money. The 2014 Open public services paper⁴ signalled this step change:

'The old, centralised model of public service delivery was costly and no longer capable of meeting the challenge of delivering the personalised, joined up public services ... We want public services which respond to individual choices ... whilst relentlessly focusing on improvements in quality and doing all of this more efficiently, to give the tax payer the best possible deal.'

Whilst opening up public services to innovation, more transparency and greater accountability are laudable aims, is it working in practice? How has this new approach to public services affected a charity's ability to have an impact?

Any data specialist in the voluntary sector will say that their prime responsibility is generating the data about service performance they need to feed back to those who have commissioned them. This requirement to provide the information the commissioner wants to see constrains the ability of charities to establish the information *they* need to understand if they are affecting the change they know is needed.

To really transform the life chances of the most vulnerable children with whom Barnardo's works, we need sustained interventions over a long period of time. This work simply cannot be 'evidenced' at the end of a 12-month contract. It cannot be achieved through the short-term fixes or 'sticking

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plaster solutions' that short-term contracts incentivise. It took 18 months of intensive one-to-one support from one of our child sexual exploitation services for a 15-year-old girl to reach a point where she understood that the man who had groomed her, exploited her and made her have sex with his friends, was not her boyfriend who loved her, but her abuser. The impact we have made on that child's life is monumental, yet it is also virtually impossible

⁴ The Cabinet Office (2014) [Open public services](#).

to 'measure'. I would go further and argue that, sometimes, we are able to transform the lives of children *in spite* of commissioning arrangements, not because of them.

To tackle this problem we must move away from the time honoured commissioning model of a problem identified by the few and a solution developed behind closed doors by even fewer. This process, at best, misses a vital opportunity to harness the insights, relationships and skills needed to design the services that people actually need. At worst, it has the potential to do real harm.

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Barnardo's wins four out five contracts that we bid for but that does not stop us walking away when the resources and conditions set by the commissioner mean we are not able to do what we know needs to be done. As the demand for vital services for vulnerable children and young people continues to increase⁵ and the resources for a quality response decrease, none of us can afford to simply carry on as we are. The current model of tenders out, a range of bids in, one 'winner' announced, while donors' money is wasted on the process, is simply not sustainable. We need a systemic change to identifying and analysing need. This requires a paradigm shift in the whole approach to commissioning of impact, with the voluntary sector placed firmly at its heart.

We must put charities in the lead, creating impact through strategic partnerships

In a world where the face and complexity of our communities is changing at great speed, the insight of the voluntary sector is needed more than ever. Charities can reach the people that the state can't, with tools that the state simply does not have at its disposal. It is critical that we bring this experience to bear on how services are designed. With our unique insight and trusted relationships in communities, voluntary organisations could and should be working with commissioners right at the start of the journey; helping to identify the challenges within local communities; working together to see what the best solutions could be and designing new services; working together in strategic partnerships.

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The results of trials where we at Barnardo's are putting this new approach into practice speak for themselves. For example, in South Wales, Barnardo's is in a five year programme to run a joint Integrated Family Support Service with Newport Council. Their Head of Children's Services is a Barnardo's employee, as are half the staff, working with our council partners in the same office. Each member of staff offers a different set of skills, a different piece of the jigsaw needed to give each family the right blend of support that they need. So far this strategic partnership is outperforming all of Newport's statistical neighbours⁶—that is impact in action.

More and more we are seeing commissioners starting to appreciate the need for a different way forward, and becoming bolder in their plans. But Barnardo's experience across the country shows that no one size fits all. Strategic partnerships can only be developed on a case-by-case basis, each taking a different form and involving different partners. In some areas it may be that rather than the lead contractor, Barnardo's is the sub-contractor working with partners from other voluntary organisations; in other areas Barnardo's is working with the private sector in order to deliver what is needed in that particular community. Despite their differences, our strategic partnerships are united by the common principle that the specific needs of the local community dictate what form the partnership takes.

⁵ Association of Directors of Children's Services (2016) *Safeguarding Pressures, Phase 5*.

⁶ Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (2014) *Report on the Inspection of Children's and Family Services —Newport City Council*.

Charities and commissioners must take a leap of faith together

Carving out new relationships with commissioners is not without its challenges. As is the case with any effort to bring together partners from different sectors with different cultures and expectations, the age-old problems of bureaucracy and red tape loom large. The most significant and debilitating of these is the challenge of sharing data. Understandable public concern surrounding sharing sensitive data came to the fore last year, with the Supreme Court ruling that the data sharing provisions under the Scottish Government's 'named person' scheme risked breaching rights to privacy under the European Convention on Human Rights.⁷

While there are some examples of collaboration around data between the NHS, local authorities and some providers of social care, these exist in isolation and there is no shared standard.⁸ Some of the children Barnardo's works with may see up to ten different agencies within a year, each recording information in ten different systems. Ten different versions of the truth about that child make designing the right care package for that child near impossible.

If we are to truly recalibrate the relationship between commissioner and provider in the ways we know will have impact on children's lives, we cannot continue to operate in isolation from each other. We need to create a shared standard around data for children's services, and join up our information with information from across the country. This would enable us to look at the measurements and data we have on child sexual exploitation, for example. And in the context of other external data it would help us identify parts of the population that need our help. We would be able to ensure that the work we prioritise, or choose to spend our own resource on, is the work that children and young people actually need, not the work that the commissioners say is necessary. The technology already exists; the hard part is tackling the understandable nervousness that pervades the sector and encouraging partners to take a leap of faith together.

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If we are to achieve the shift in public service commissioning and delivery that is so urgently needed, the government must play its part and throw its weight behind it. Politicians like to talk about strategic partnerships, but we need solid plans to build the capacity of voluntary organisations to deliver this work sustainably. Carrying on with business as usual is no longer an option. To put impact first, we must work together to unleash the potential of the voluntary sector and bring our unique insight, skills and expertise to bear. Only then will we be able to truly transform the lives of the people and communities we are here to serve.

[This essay is part of a series on transformation from the boldest voices in the sector.](#)



About the author

Javed is Chief Executive of Barnardo's, the UK's oldest and largest children's charity, having previously been CEO at Victim Support, which he joined from the Government Office for London. Originally trained as a Maths teacher, he has also served as a Director of Education in local government.

⁷ Scottish Parliament (2016) *Official report session 5, 8 September 2016—Named person policy.*

⁸ HM Government (2013) *Working together to safeguard children.* and Department for Education (2011) *Munro review of child protection: a child-centred system.*

TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy. Over the past 15 years we have worked with charities, funders, philanthropists and others, supporting them to deliver the greatest possible impact for the causes and beneficiaries they exist to serve.

NPC occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

Increasing the impact of funders: NPC's role is to make funders more successful too. We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

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