



Changing childhoods.
Changing lives.

Barnardo's House
Tanners Lane
Barkingside, Ilford
Essex IG6 1QG

Helen Hayes
Education Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By email: educom@parliament.uk

4 March 2026

Dear Helen,

Many thanks for your invitation to give evidence to the Education Select Committee on 24 February 2026. Barnardo's welcomes the opportunity to share our experiences supporting adult adoptees to access their records and process their stories.

We are writing to expand on some points raised during the hearing which we do not feel we adequately addressed. We think it is important to explain that the invitation to attend was sent directly to our Making Connections service, which is focussed on records, archiving, access requests and support. Our pre-briefing confirmed the focus of our evidence was present day record sharing and practice and this is what we had prepared to present on to the select committee. Regrettably, we had not prepared to answer more detailed questions about adoption practice in the mid 20th century and had been advised this would not be in the scope of our evidence. We would like to recognise that we were not therefore fully prepared to speak to a wider scope of enquiry in this session. We have of course reflected on and taken some learning from this.

As you are aware, at Barnardo's we have over 150 years' experience supporting children who cannot live with their birth families, and we recognise the long-term harm caused to children, mothers and families by forced adoptions which took place in the UK during

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
President: Natasha Kaplinsky OBE
Barnardo's (a company limited by guarantee).
Registered Office: Barnardo House, Tanners Lane, Barkingside Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG.
Registered No. 61625 England. Registered Charity Nos. 216250 and SC037605



the 1940s to 1970s. It is clear that many mothers who felt unable to keep their children faced societal and systemic pressures, including but not exclusively related to their marital status and age, and we recognise and respect the testimony of mothers and families which indicates an absence of choice in placing children with adoptive families. The lifelong impact of this, for both mothers and their children, is profound. Barnardo's welcomes open and honest reflection on our role both in caring for children and shaping public attitudes. We have engaged in previous inquiries, extended apologies and committed to redress where it has been the right thing for us to do. We recognise that in providing our evidence, our focus on record keeping led us to outline the information we hold, including consent from parents whose children were placed with adoptive families during this time. We did not mean to convey any insensitivity in so doing. We wish to reiterate that we understand that the question of meaningful consent cannot be separated from the context of the time and the associated pressures, stigma and shame experienced by women.

Barnardo's evidence shows we did not systemically shame mothers who may have felt unable to keep their children, but we also recognise the pervasive societal pressures that formed the backdrop to their experience and our work in this period. In some cases, we supported babies to live in residential care or foster care where mothers were still exploring all options available to them, rather than forcing an irreversible decision about placing their children for adoption. We also supported unmarried mothers to have ongoing contact with their children. While we feel Barnardo's did not perpetuate the societal pressures that led to non-consensual adoptions, we recognise we could have done more to challenge public attitudes and pressures during this time period.

Since then, society has changed and so has Barnardo's. We provide early help to families through a range of services with a focus on prevention, early intervention and targeted support, including through our family hubs. We aim to enable more children to live at home safely with their birth families. Where that is not possible, we support fostered and adopted children to maintain contact with their birth families, recognising the importance this has for children's development. We advocate for and provide mental health and therapeutic support for children living in and having left care, recognising these experiences have a lifelong impact.

I hope this helps to clarify the position of the charity and our commitment to reflection, learning and continuous improvement over more than 150 years.

I would additionally like to take this opportunity to make some points about Barnardo's record keeping to provide more comprehensive insight;

- **Making Connections has a team of 4 that work on adoption.** There are 2 Social Workers, 1 Team Manager and 1 Administrator.
- **Barnardo's holds approx. 10,000 mainly paper-based records** in the Making Connections archive. Whilst some records are held on electronic systems, it is a mainly paper based archive, which makes it difficult to interrogate these records for trends. For example, we cannot easily search through the records to find the number of adoptions made during the time period of the Committee's inquiry or identify any themes in the reasons given for adoption.
- **Since 2006 we have received 4032 requests:** 2933 requests from adopted adults, 866 from birth relatives (birth mothers or siblings) and 233 descendants of an adopted person. Of these, it is significant to note that in 2611 enquiries there were no records at Barnardo's, meaning we are confident we did not facilitate their adoption or those of the family members they enquired about. In such cases we sensitively signpost the enquirer elsewhere, recognising that is a big step to take for many who approach agencies looking for their records.
- Since 2006 we provided a **full service to 1421 people** associated with adoption, (separate to enquirers with requests about fostering and children's homes).
- When people make an enquiry to our team, we acknowledge receipt in 5 days. Within 10 days after this, enquirers will be told either that we do not hold information or will be contacted detailing next steps. We will keep in touch with enquirers as we go about our investigations. The average waiting time for **most enquiries being fully answered is 3-5 months** and all inquiries are prioritised by age, life limiting illness, or a history of abuse.
- Once we have the records, the enquirer is supported by one of the social workers on the team, who will work with them to assess their situation and share the records in an appropriate way. This could be via email, letter, or face to face.
- Where people are found to have no connection to Barnardo's, we signpost them in a sensitive and trauma informed way to other services including local authorities.
- We are not legally permitted to give birth mothers access to their children's records because they are confidential. However, if birth mothers request it, we do provide them with information we hold on themselves, e.g. on the birth, or correspondence between adoptive parents and the birth mother. The birth mother can choose to have that information from their local authority, or face to face at our services in London. We follow the processes set out under Section 98

of the Adoption and Children's Act 2022, setting out to enquirers the legal context and what this means for them. We always do our best to understand the motivation of the birth mother, their situation and wider support structure.

- If we have an adoptee's records on file, and we have been in contact, we may be able to support tracing. Where this happens, we will support both parties through the process, including exchanging letters anonymously, and sometimes facilitating and supporting reunions in person where appropriate and both parties consent.

I hope that this provides you with further detail about our position, the culture of learning and continuous improvement in the charity, and further specificity on the management of records and our approach to access.

We are grateful to the committee for inviting our evidence and to the Chair for inviting further follow up in writing at the close of the hearing. We are satisfied for this letter to be considered part of our submission to the select committee.

Should there be any further clarification or information that would be helpful to the committee please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brenda Farrell", with a small dot at the end.

Brenda Farrell
UK Director Fostering, Adoption & Children In Care