

STAND FOR CHILDREN

THE CHILDREN'S MANIFESTO



SOME PEOPLE SAY...

‘THERE’S NOTHING WE CAN DO’

‘NOTHING MAKES ANY DIFFERENCE’

‘THINGS DON’T CHANGE’

WE SAY...

'YES, WE CAN DO SOMETHING'

'YES, TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE'

'YES, THINGS CAN CHANGE'

WHAT WILL YOU SAY?

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CHILDREN ARE NOT THE PEOPLE OF
TOMORROW, BUT ARE PEOPLE OF TODAY.
THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO BE TAKEN
SERIOUSLY, AND TO BE TREATED WITH
TENDERNESS AND RESPECT. THEY
SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO GROW INTO
WHOEVER THEY WERE MEANT TO BE –
THE UNKNOWN PERSON INSIDE EACH OF
THEM IS OUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

JANUSZ KORCZAK

INTRODUCTION

Children have been set low on the list of political priorities in Ireland for far too long. Too often they have been sidelined and voiceless. Those living in marginalised communities are even further away from the political table. We need to change our approach to tackling issues of poverty, disadvantage and child protection. We must look to systems and services that promote prevention and early intervention that can offset the impact of disadvantage and turn children's lives around.

Change takes vision, courage and leadership. It won't be easy; there are many competing demands on Government. But with the right leadership, significant change is possible. Children are the inspiration and hope for the future of Ireland. Barnardos works with many children whose courage and hope in the face of considerable challenges would put most adults to shame. They are worth fighting for; worth changing for. Our children deserve nothing less than a Government that stands up for them. A Government that gives them a world to wonder at, one full of hope, possibility and opportunity. Barnardos believes in the power of one adult to change a child's life; we see that power at work every day in our projects across the country. Politicians are powerful adults; this election holds the possibility for real and lasting change that can improve countless children's lives. Children don't vote but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be heard. We have one request for politicians in Election 2011: Stand for Children.

January 2011

RE

THINK

WHY?

One thing has been made clear in the past few years; Ireland is not a model of how to treat children. We have promised many changes to children but inaction has made our words cheap. Barnardos believes that Ireland can do better. It will require a complete overhaul of how we view children, their needs, rights and protection. We must re-imagine the way we deliver services to meet their needs across the board. We must re-imagine how we coordinate the various Government departments and services that have such relevance to young lives and shape future policy to suit children rather than bureaucracy. A new Programme for Government provides an opportunity to rethink how we do things and to make children a national priority.

HOW?

A national Programme of Prevention and Early Intervention must be developed to encourage innovation and improve services to provide better outcomes for children and value for money for the State. This programme would underpin a rethinking of our approach to policy development and implementation, where we allocate and focus our resources and how we inform our actions through evaluated programmes and models of practice. This means looking at how we strategise for change, putting our focus, energy and resources into models that aim to prevent difficulties that arise for children and intervene early on when they do. All services for children across education, health, social welfare and social care need to be rethought with this in mind. We can make children's lives better if they get the supports they need as soon as they need them. The dividends that prevention and early intervention models pay to both the individual and society are well proven internationally.



RE

FORM

WHY?

In recent years, the Ryan, Murphy and Roscommon reports have all outlined the shortcomings in the child welfare and protection system in Ireland and the consequences of those shortcomings. Barnardos has welcomed recent changes in the system, particularly the appointment of a new National Director for Children and Family Services in the HSE. However, the lack of clear lines of accountability stretching from services on the ground to the Cabinet remains an issue. Children need a system that is fully accountable to the Dail and to the people of Ireland.

HOW?

A new government Department for Social Care must be established. This Department would have responsibility for child welfare and protection services, family support services and services for other vulnerable groups of people including those with disabilities and the elderly. A Department for Social Care would facilitate accountability for all such services at the highest level of Government and bridge the gap between policy development and implementation.

At present the HSE has full statutory responsibility for social care services in Ireland. It spends around €536m per year on a wide variety of social and community care services and programmes. However, to date its management structures have not focused sufficiently on the effective delivery of these services



Barnardos believes that there are two possible options for the improved delivery of services under a Department for Social Care:

1. The HSE structures are made sufficiently strong and robust to adequately deliver services to children and families in a timely way and to a high quality; or
2. A new agency is established which would take over responsibility for child welfare and protection and family support services.

Whatever the vehicle, Barnardos believes that the work of child welfare and protection services must:

- Be underpinned by a common set of values and principles, clear objectives and evaluation of outcomes to assess how services are performing, where gaps in the system exist and ensure consistency across services throughout Ireland.
- Implement a Resource Allocation Model that is equitable and determined by children's needs with a weighting towards prevention and early intervention.
- Have responsibility for developing and implementing quality standards in service provision.
- Be subject to independent assessment.

REP

RESENT

WHY?

Children must be put at the heart of Irish law. The Constitution represents the bedrock of the social and legal mores of our society; it is the document that should represent the core principles that we as a nation stand for. The conspicuous absence of distinct children's rights in the Constitution represents the ongoing failure of our society to adequately prioritise children. It is time to change this: we must stand up for children and hold a referendum to make sure their rights are enshrined in the Constitution.

HOW?

We must ensure that a wording for the proposed Constitutional amendment on children is not diluted from that agreed by the Joint Oireachtas Committee in 2010. Any wording must at a minimum enshrine the principles of best interest of the child and the voice of the child in keeping with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A Referendum on children's rights must be held in 2011.



**PRO
TECT**

WHY?

Poverty is the root cause of many challenges facing children. The recession has compounded the difficulties for children already living in poverty. Their family incomes have been slashed by cuts to social welfare, increased taxes and increased family debt. At the same time, the public services many of them rely on for support in their education and development have been cut back. Some children have lost vital services that made all the difference to their learning and well-being while others are waiting longer for services already stretched to breaking point. Ireland's most vulnerable children have paid enough for the mistakes of grown-ups; they must not be asked to shoulder any more burdens of recession. We must protect them as we try to rebuild our economy in the interest of protecting their childhoods and futures.

HOW?

Despite our obligations to the IMF and EU, Ireland has a responsibility to protect its most vulnerable citizens and their families. Principles of proportionality and fairness must underpin economic recovery.

The next government must:

- Maintain the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion) commitment "to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016" through a combination of universal and targeted payments coupled with improved service provision for vulnerable children and families.
- Rethink our education system by applying the prevention and early intervention model to education services and frontload resources on early childhood care and education, primary level and transition supports for the early years of secondary level. Children must not be left to fend for themselves at their most crucial developmental stages. We must re-frame the system to suit children, looking particularly at supports for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.



CONCLUSION

Children in Ireland have played second fiddle to the agendas of individuals, institutions and politics for too long. The lasting legacy of the past decade is one of children and communities abandoned to the hangover of other people's party. It is time to redress the balance. Children's childhoods and futures are on the line. Children must be put at the centre of all policy, legislation and practice affecting their young lives. There is an opportunity for a new dawn in Ireland where children are heard and respected.

**OUR CHILDREN DESERVE NO
LESS AND HAVE A RIGHT TO
EXPECT MUCH MORE.**

WHAT WILL YOU DO?



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