

Update on Saving Childhood Ryan/ Saving Childhood

On 20th May 2010, to mark the first anniversary of the Ryan report, Barnardos and seven other organisations working directly with children or adult survivors of child abuse came together to launch the Saving Childhood Ryan campaign. The other organisations are Children at Risk Ireland, Children's Rights Alliance, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, ISPCC, Irish Association of Young People in Care, One in Four and Rape Crisis Network Ireland. The campaign aimed to lobby the Government to implement the Ryan Implementation Plan recommendations which would seriously improve the child protection systems and reduce the risk of harm to children across Ireland. It looked specifically at the progress of ten selected aspects of the Plan, recognising and welcoming where progress has been made while also highlighting the impact of the absence of progress in other areas especially when the agreed timeframes have been passed.

The ten priority issues are:

1. *Children First*: Child Protection Guidelines
2. Voice of the Child
3. Vetting / Information Sharing
4. National Children's Strategy
5. Therapeutic Services
6. Social Work
7. Aftercare
8. Separated Children
9. Homelessness
10. Health Information and Quality Authority

The eight organisations involved in Saving Childhood Ryan came together again in June 2010 to call on the Government to set a date for a referendum on children's rights. Saving Childhood broadened to focus on the need for a Constitutional amendment to strengthen children's rights in the Irish Constitution. Research conducted by Behaviour and Attitudes for the campaign showed that the majority of Irish adults, 62% of adults, would vote in favour of such an amendment. Only 1% would vote against it and 37% said they did not know how they would vote.

Updates

Movements have been made on a number of the issues outlined by the Saving Childhood Ryan campaign. With regards to Children First Child Protection Guidelines, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) is currently devising policy to underpin legislation. They are also establishing an implementation framework to ensure effective implementation of the revised Children First guidelines. The OMCYA have held consultation interviews with 200 children in care to represent the voice of the child in a report which is due to be published in October 2010. The National's Children Strategy 2010- 2020 is currently being progressed although how this is taking place is unclear as yet. Despite recent reports from the HSE that the promised 200 child protection social workers will be in post by the end of the year, only 133 of the posts have been filled to date. The Minister for Children, Barry Andrews, recently indicated that another 23 posts will commence in autumn with another 43 posts accepted.¹ Despite this, the Irish Association of Social Workers recently highlighted the fact that more than 1 in 10 (793) children in care had no social worker assigned to them.² In relation to aftercare, a National Aftercare Policy is currently being drafted by the HSE. However, aftercare still has not been placed on a statutory basis. Little progress has been made with regards to out-of-hours social work services; the HSE is to

¹ Irish Examiner 'Child rights vote 'will not be long-fingered' 17 September 2010

² Irish Examiner 'No social worker for 800 children in care' 15 September 2010

pilot two schemes before year end 2010 but no update has been made public on this. With regards to HIQA, the commencement of provisions in Health Act 2007 to allow the Authority to inspect all children's residential centres and foster carers not happened as yet. Minister Andrews is considering expanding the remit of HIQA into area of child protection and is due to bring plans for this to Cabinet in 2010. The Minister established the Child Death Review Group in March 2010 to examine the cases of children who died in the care of the State and those who died while known to child protection services. The Review is ongoing. The review of Section 5 of the Child Care Act pertaining to homeless children has not happened as yet, although it was due to start in September 2010. The work to close the hostels for separated children in Ireland is ongoing. Two hostels currently remain open but are due to close in December 2010.

Broader progress has been promised in the area of child protection. The HSE management structure for child protection and welfare services is to be reorganised and piloted in September 2010 and a new national director is to be appointed. Outcome of this is unknown as yet. A new template is to be developed to improve the usefulness of Section 8 (Review of Adequacy) reports to improve data collection on children involved with protection services. The HSE and the Irish Youth Justice Service are to roll out a new service to improve multidisciplinary assessments for children in special care and detention