

Barnardos' Children's Declaration Action Plan

Constitutional Amendment

- Call for cross-party commitment to hold a referendum to amend the Irish Constitution to improve the visibility of children in the Constitution early in the life of the new Dail term

Pre-school – Quality Early Childhood Education and Care

- Introduce a one year free quality Early Childhood Education and Care place for every child in the year prior to starting primary school. The roll-out of these places should begin with children experiencing disadvantage
- Provide professional quality training for all those working with pre-school age children
- Ensure quality Early Childhood Education and Care services are affordable to all parents by providing financial support to childcare providers that adhere to national quality standards
- Implement a comprehensive support system for parents; including 26 weeks paid parental leave in addition to the 26 weeks paid maternity leave implemented from 1 March 2007. This will enable a child to have a parent at home with them during their first year of life and remove some of the stress being experienced by parents

Child Protection

- Place the revised Children First child protection guidelines on a statutory basis

- Introduce a range of supports for children who are giving evidence in court to ensure their voice is heard and that they are not exposed to hostile cross examination
- Extend and resource the Guardian Ad Litem service for children involved in both public and private law proceedings
- Undertake a full review of child protection legislation to ensure all loopholes are closed and children are protected by law from all forms of abuse and exploitation
- Help regulate internet use by putting the Internet Advisory Board on a statutory basis so that the board has monitoring and regulatory functions as well as advisory ones

Poverty

- Increase income to families with children living in consistent poverty through increasing the targeted Qualified Child Allowance payment
- Ensure all families with children living in Ireland receive the universal Child Benefit payment regardless of their parental migration status
- Increase the take-up of the Family Income Supplement to ensure that all those families in low paid employment receive all they are entitled to

Education

- Resource and invest in reading initiatives to fulfil the Government's own target of halving the rate of illiteracy among school children
- Roll-out a national school books rental scheme to ensure all pupils get the best start to their education

- Reduce the waiting period for accessing educational assessments by increasing staff levels in National Education Psychological Service
- Increase the number of Education Welfare Officers to ensure at least every county in Ireland has access to their service
- Invest in Out-of-School Time Services so that children have increased opportunities to develop their social, emotional and educational skills
- Targeted adult literacy schemes should be offered to parents with reading and writing difficulties in disadvantaged communities so parents can more fully support their children's education
- Targeted English as a Foreign Language courses should be offered to non-English speaking parents in new communities so they can more fully support their children's education

Health

- Continue to implement the Vision for Change recommendations to improve the primary care services for children and young people with mental health difficulties
- Improve the community based medical services by introducing two multidisciplinary Community Mental Health Teams per 100,000 population; these teams would comprise of child psychiatrists, clinical nurse/community psychiatrist nurse, occupational therapists and psychologists amongst others
- Equip parents, teachers and youth workers with knowledge to recognise the onset of psychological/ psychiatric illness in young people through increased public awareness activities about these illnesses
- Extend the full Medical Card to all those families whose total income is taxed at the standard tax rate (20%). This would ensure coverage for all families on social welfare and those who are in low paid employment

Housing and Homelessness

- Ensure no family with children is housed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation longer than the duration of the emergency – alternative appropriate accommodation and quality services need to be provided for all families in this situation
- A fully-resourced, child-focused, 24 hour flexible response service needs to be developed for children and young people experiencing homelessness
- A 'drop-in' centre type service should be established in urban centres to provide initial advice and support for these vulnerable children
- An NCT model for private rental housing to ensure adherence to minimum standards should be developed with clear timelines and targets included

Alcohol

- Implement the recommendations of the Strategic Taskforce on Alcohol (2004), particularly the main child orientated recommendations such as supporting community based initiatives aimed at reducing underage drinking
- Given the strong connections between alcohol abuse and drug abuse, the National Alcohol Strategy and National Drugs Strategy should be reviewed with the view of identifying key areas where both strategies can be integrated to reinforce each other – both national plans are currently being administered separately
- Introduce warning labels on alcoholic drinks to discourage consumption among young people and also among pregnant women in a bid to reduce the incidences of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Introduce legislation to reduce the exposure of children to alcohol advertising, sponsorship and promotions by establishing a 9pm watershed banning any alcohol related advertising appearing on TV, radio or cinema before that time