Barnardos
50 years working for children in Ireland

Submission into National Children and Young People Policy Framework
June 2012

Introduction

Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to feed into the development of the National Children and Young People Policy Framework 2012-2017. Barnardos believes that the focus of this Framework should be on all 0-18 year olds and for some vulnerable groups of 18-24 year olds such as those leaving the care system, those engaged in criminal activity or who are homeless. The Framework must be visionary striving to improve the lives of children by setting realistic goals to be achieved. Allocation of sufficient resources together with strong leadership at political and local level are essential ingredients to ensure implementation.

What are the 3 best things about life for a child and young person?

- The vast majority of children grow up in a stable family environment and have strong social networks of support. Family structures have remained constant with two parent families being the norm (82% of 9 year olds live in two parent families) and marriage more popular than ever. Family relationships are largely positive, with over 80% of 9 year olds saying they get on 'very well' with their parents and the majority had a least two close friends[1].

- Irish children continue to show high rates of happiness, physical, emotion and mental health. When asked if Ireland is a fun place to be a teenager – 63% agree and 23% disagree but there was a strong difference between social class[2].

- Childhood is largely viewed by society and adults as a precious time where children should be free from exploitation, harm, discrimination and inequality and instead be given plenty of opportunities in all aspects of their lives to realise their full potential.

What are the 3 worse things about life for a child and young person?

- The failing of the child protection and welfare system to adequately protect children from harm or effectively respond to incidences of abuse or neglect. Barnardos recognises the strident steps being taken to reform the child welfare and protection system but for some children it is too late. There has been little emphasis on prevention and early intervention approaches instead favouring a more reactive 'fire fighting' approach.

- The inadequate provision of universal, affordable, accessible, quality childcare and out of school care. As a result, childcare for under 3's remains among the most expensive among the OECD, amounting to 45% of net income of some families and is a key consideration in preventing parents take up low paid employment[3].

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[1] Growing Up in Ireland (2009) *The Lives of 9 Year Olds*, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and ESRI and Trinity College Dublin.
[2] Millward Brown Lansdowne 2009
[3] OECD (2011) Doing Better for Families

- Child poverty remains a persistent problem, blighting the lives of 8.2% of children in Ireland. Families with children are suffering the worst consequences of the recession - many are now going without essentials such as electricity, clothing and food and the Government responses to child poverty are ineffective. The widespread cuts to social welfare rates, coupled with reductions in the availability of public services, continue to exacerbate the impact and scale of child poverty.

What can be done so that children and young people are safe and protected?

By families

- Families/parents can ensure that they raise their children with appropriate supervision, limitations and boundaries to ensure that they are safe and well at all times.

- Parents need to be supported in identifying their child's needs and recognising any developmental, behavioural, educational or social issues as soon as they appear and seeking effective responses when obtaining advice and / or assistance. Likewise, parents must be mindful of the impact of their behaviour and attitudes on children and young people. Children absorb the stresses experienced by parents arising from financial strain, marital breakdown or daily struggles and parents should try to minimise the effects of this stress on children.

By Communities

- Many of the areas that Barnardos works in are characterised by poor local facilities, no safe place to play, anti-social behaviour and poor housing. Some of the most deprived social housing estates in urban areas are still waiting for long-promised regeneration. A number of projects have been scaled back, delayed or cancelled including: Limerick, Waterford, Sligo, Cork, Dundalk, Portlaoise, and a number of estates in Dublin. Such projects are designed to improve the housing conditions and local community amenities such as playgrounds, education, childcare and social facilities and green space. The development of these areas is long overdue and necessary for the health, safety and wellbeing of families living there and to tackle the intergenerational impacts of disadvantage.

- Many of the community fora that have been established to improve community living are very adult driven with little or no opportunity for young people to have their say on how they would like to improve their neighbourhood. Having a safe space to play or hang out with their friends is a priority issue for children and their voices must be listened to in how to achieve that.

By Government

- As a signatory of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children, Ireland must adhere to all articles but especially Article 19 which is that 'all State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.' Barnardos believes this can only be done by investing in prevention and early intervention work with families as well as having sufficient appropriate services to address crises when they arise. As the recent publication of the Independent Child Death Review Group found, some of the incidences experienced by these vulnerable children through their childhood could have been offset or prevented if adequate supports were provided to the families at a much earlier stage. Barnardos is a strong advocate for prevention and early intervention initiatives and believes that a reformed child welfare and protection system must

have a greater emphasis on such services. The benefits of prevention and early intervention services are well documented, leading to greater outcomes for the child, their family and wider society.

- Essentially, Barnardos' vision, to be led by the new Child and Family Support Agency, is to ensure every child has local access to universal or prevention services and interventions like quality health services, education including pre-school and social amenities. Children facing additional challenges such as developmental delays should also have easy access to early intervention services like educational supports, life skills supports and family support programmes. And when prevention and early intervention isn't enough, children should have local access to a range of crisis welfare and protection services including social work, fostering and residential care; aftercare and homeless services; juvenile justice supports and addiction programmes. Essentially the child should move along a continuum of supports, increasing if and when the needs of the child become greater.

- As numerous reports testify, the failings of the current system can be addressed through the new Agency having an effective management system at local and national level that is underpinned by principles of transparency and accountability thereby improving consistency in service delivery. The allocation of sufficient resources distributed on the basis of need through using a comprehensive resource allocation model and improved data gathering systems will be key to its success. Government must ensure the Agency has sufficient human and financial capital to deliver the change needed.

- The importance of improved coordination of information and services across education, health, family support and child welfare and protection cannot be underestimated. Children's lives don't operate along Government Departmental lines so a holistic perspective and collective responsibility is of paramount importance. Strong cooperation between service providers at local level that are following national standards and policies is fundamental to improving the lives of children and families. Such standards must include guidance on information sharing parameters as presently there are a number of information sharing protocols which are being adhered to with no legal basis or national framework to verify them. A balance must be struck between ensuring privacy and anonymity whilst also enabling professionals working with the same families to share information to guarantee the most effective response is offered, at the earliest possible opportunity.

- Linked to this is the need for ongoing training for professionals in their responsibilities and duties under Children First. Being able to identify child abuse in all its forms including domestic violence and knowing how to respond appropriately is crucial and should form part of the core training undertaken by professionals such as teachers, Gardai etc.

- When the State becomes the 'corporate parent' to a child, it is imperative that sufficient and appropriate supports are offered to that child based on their needs and wishes and what is in their best interests. Barnardos acknowledges that some positive improvements have occurred and welcomes both the Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald and the HSE commitment to address the deficiencies identified. At a minimum, this would mean that every child in care and their foster parents would have an allocated social worker, the availability of a nationwide out of hours social work service and the automatic provision of comprehensive aftercare supports.

- Also for some specific groups of children, additional supports are required to protect them from harm as the current provision is inadequate. These include:

  - Services for young homeless children, many of whom are subject to Care Orders, are largely city centre based and insufficient. The hostel system where children are required to

leave at a certain hour and are not permitted to return until late evening has no place in modern child care provision. Other young people can only access hostels via Garda Stations. Arrangements for financial support for these young people are rigid and may not meet their needs. Such hostel provision places young people at increased risk of criminal activity, or exploitation by others, to have their needs met.

- Presently, the suite of alternative care options does not include adoption for children of married parents who are in the care of the State. This prevents these children from the right to belong to a family and means that they end up staying in long-term foster care. Through the insertion of children's rights into the Irish Constitution this option will become a reality and Barnardos welcomes the continuous commitment by Minister Fitzgerald to hold this referendum and hope it will happen in 2012, therefore offering stability to these children. The Minister must publish adoption legislation before the referendum.

- Children are remaining in detention much longer than is necessary largely due to delays in cases being heard and insufficient appropriate care placements on offer. Linked to this are the transitional problems faced when moving a child from a special care setting to high support placement. This transition is not phased over time, nor is any work being done by the special care staff with the child's family so the child returns to the same environmental and familial issues that triggered his / her behaviour. Barnardos agrees with the long term plan to have special care units and high support placements within the same facility to ease the child moving towards a less controlled setting and hopes to see this made a reality soon. Aligned to this is the need for all judges to undertake specialised training to develop their expertise on child welfare and attachment issues to aid their assessment and judgement on the merits and extent of involving children in decision making processes affecting their lives.

- Barnardos welcomed the extension of the Ombudsman for Children's remit to cover young people in St. Patricks and the announcement to cease placing young boys aged 16 and 17 in St Patrick's Institution from May 2012. Barnardos urges the Government to ensure the development of the Oberstown campus be completed promptly. Also, while the allocation of additional therapeutic supports to these vulnerable young people is welcomed it is essential that these supports unpick the reasons behind their behaviour which led to the criminal activity given the strong association between juvenile justice and child welfare and protection issues.

- Child victims of trafficking are a very vulnerable group who require specific interventions to assist them overcome the trauma they have experienced. Given the clandestine nature of trafficking children into and within Ireland for purposes of sexual exploitation or servitude, it is important that these children are correctly identified and offered appropriate supports and reflection periods. Their foster families too should be afforded additional supports to assist these children appropriately and meet their emotional and developmental needs.

- The needs of separated children are often overlooked when upon turning 18 they are transferred into the Direct Provision centres with little regard to how integrated they have become in their local community i.e. their social network, educational achievements etc. These young people should be eligible for aftercare supports like other care leavers. While the equity of care policy has ensured greater care for separated children, there is still a dearth of appropriate supports e.g. language support, therapeutic support etc. for them and their foster families to help them settle into Irish life.

- For families who experience domestic violence, its impact on children is frequently underestimated. Barnardos welcomes that domestic violence is included in the Children First Guidance but there continues to be hesitancy by professionals and others aware of it to

intervene in families where domestic violence is occurring. Children in these situations are rarely asked their views on how domestic violence is affecting them and how to resolve it. For those who avail of refuge services, issues arise on how family friendly the facilities are with restrictions placed on allowing teenage boys to remain with their mother.

- For children whose parents are separating or divorcing, the impact of this on children can be overlooked. Age appropriate supports should be available to those children to deal with this significant change in their lives as they cope with feelings of confusion, blame and uncertainty. The legal system for divorce and separation proceedings should be made more child friendly and the availability of GAL services should be used automatic to ensure children's voices are heard and their best interests prioritised in these very difficult situations.

What can be done so that children and young people can enjoy learning in all aspects of their lives?

By families

- Parents must be valued and supported as the primary educators of their children and can do this through providing tools to enhance their child's learning such as books in the home, parent and toddler clubs, access to internet, where age appropriate, and providing a myriad of positive experiences to them.

- Parents should be encouraged to value education, especially for those who had a negative experience of school and have significant literacy and numeracy issues subsequently. Parents must be empowered to believe that their children can do well. There should be greater links between schools and families to facilitate positive communication on children's education.

By Communities

- Communities can foster a culture of integrating schools and other places of learning into community life to fully utilise these spaces to enhance the opportunities for learning e.g. use school buildings to house a quality afterschool programme. Greater use of community facilities for all could aid integration into the neighbourhood and help ease the transition into primary school and likewise between primary and secondary levels. These transitionary phases are particularly stressful for those vulnerable children who have inadequate support to help them cope with these changes.

By Government

- Focusing on developing the child's social and emotional development is also crucial to their success in learning and settling into school. Encouraging positive behaviour, resolution strategies and ability to be empathetic are essential to boosting the child's confidence, understanding and social skills. Barnardos 'Roots of Empathy' programme runs in a number of schools specifically aimed at first class students (aged 6-7 years) to improve the child's emotional development.

- In continuing Barnardos emphasis on prevention and early intervention, encouraging learning in all settings must be developed from birth. It is known that the formative years are the most influential in terms of brain development with babies being born with 25% of their brains developed and this increases to 80% by age three. Yet policies in supports and services to capitalise on this phase of child development are significantly underdeveloped. Supports, both early childhood care and education (ECCE) outside the home and supports for parents inside the home, can make a huge difference. Quality care within creches, playschools and childminders has shown to make an important contribution to children's early learning and development[4]. However, issues of affordability, varying quality of service, weak workforce development and the non-regulation of most childminders remain ongoing issues.

- The evolution of ECCE services has been piecemeal and is largely available through private providers in response to mothers re-entering the labour market. Consequently, reforms such as professionalisation of the sector, Siolta, (National Quality Framework) and Aistear (curriculum framework) came later and are still being slowly rolled out. Barnardos welcomes the development of an Early Years Strategy and hopes that it will address issues of quality, affordability and availability and lead to the continuation and expansion of the Free Pre-School Year which has proved very successful for children educationally, socially and in improving their 'school readiness'.

[4] K. Sylva et al. (2008) EPPE 3-11, *Final Report from the Primary Phase,* London, Institute of Education

- Likewise, the provision of quality affordable out of school services is underdeveloped across the country. There are no overarching regulations or standards overseeing such services which are widespread in nature covering school age childcare services, homework clubs, dance, sports, youth clubs etc. Barnardos, through its work with QDOSS (Quality Development of Out of School Services) knows that quality Out-of-School Services are crucial to supporting children and young people's development particularly their confidence and self esteem and play a significant role in helping young people stay on in formal education. Barnardos believes that investment in these services, rather than cutbacks which have occurred already in some places, is what is needed to assist young people make a successful transition into adulthood. Barnardos is concerned that proposals to address the shortfall of accessible out of school services for children of lone parent families through a labour market programme such as Community Employment is short sighted and will potentially create a two tier system. The development of quality, accessible out of school services must be focused on meeting the needs of the young people rather than purely to facilitate parents to take up full time work.

- Since 2009, there have been widespread cutbacks and withdrawal of in-school supports to pupils. All children are affected by these cuts, however those children who need extra help are disproportionately affected as these supports are being withdrawn with little or no compensation for their loss and for some this is adversely affecting their ability to succeed in school. Children with special needs, those from the Traveller Community and those for whom Engilsh is not their first language are particularly vulnerable. Children are not being assessed speedily and subsequently have to pay privately for assessments or are waiting too long for appropriate support to be offered to them. There has been an overall reduction in teacher numbers and fewer supports directly to students such as resource teachers, language support teachers, special needs assistants, Visiting Teachers for Travellers and Guidance Teachers. Also, in Budget 2012, supports in DEIS schools (designated disadvantaged 667 primary schools and 203 secondary schools) were particularly targeted with the potential loss of 428 posts. Although this was reduced to 192 posts, the retention of the 236 posts resulted in a greater reduction in the overall capitation funding to each school. If the intention is to improve learning outcomes for children and to encourage learning in all aspects of their lives, provision of supports in schools is a necessary and basic requirement.

- Given the accessibility of different technologies and devices, they are a common learning source and tool for young people. Their widespread usage should be reflected in the school curriculum and assessment systems. Presently the curriculum remains very formulaic and assessment is still largely based on written examinations. Encouraging learning will only be achieved if the curriculum and learning methods can be as interactive as possible.

- Despite all children having a right to education, the costs associated with going to school are prohibitive, sending families into debt or having to without essential items such as food and heat in order to meet the costs. In 2011, the average costs for sending a child to junior infants were €350 rising to €805 for a child entering secondary school. Long term solutions to addressing these costs are needed such as all schools providing the books directly to the pupils as opposed the parents being burdened with the costs.

What can be done so that children and young people are healthy and active?

By families

- Children learn by example therefore parents and families need to be mindful of their behaviour and its impact on children's health e.g. alcohol consumption, drug use, poor diet, sedentary lifestyles etc.
- Promotion of a healthy lifestyle within the family begins with adhering to routines such as making dinner together, eating meals together and being active together. While the use of gaming consoles such as the Wii has increased significantly, parents need to be able to set boundaries around usage.
- For children being raised in smaller spaces such as trailers or apartments there is an onus on parents to ensure their children are not physically underdeveloped by ensuring they avail of sports facilities, playgrounds and leisure amenities.

By Communities

- The importance of play cannot be overstated as it plays a crucial role in the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being of children beginning in early childhood. It is a natural tool for children to develop resilience as they learn to cooperate, overcome challenges, and negotiate with others. Play also allows children to be creative. It provides time for parents to be fully engaged with their children, to bond with their children, and to see the world from the perspective of their child. The implementation of the National Play Policy and National Recreational Policy has been slow with a significant onus on Local Authorities to oversee and develop amenities but with reduced budgets of late its progress has halted. Access to quality free playgrounds and sports facilities is essential as otherwise the costs of participation will continue to be prohibitive for some and result in children from lower income groups being excluded.

- Development and planning of community services must be cognisant of promoting a healthy lifestyle and therefore limit the number of take away restaurants, bookies, off licences etc. Similarly Local Authorities should encourage and promote healthy lifestyles through ensuring their public spaces are utilised to their full advantage and encourage active sports and therefore avoid erecting signs such as 'No Ball Games' or 'No Playing on Grass' which prohibit activities.

- For those Traveller families living on the roadside, there continues to be inadequate facilities provided which has a negative affect on their lifestyle and health.

By Government

- Childhood obesity is a serious concern, The Growing Up in Ireland study highlighted that one quarter of three year olds are either overweight or obese. Children's weight is related to social class with more unhealthy diets associated with lower socio-economic backgrounds. For families living on a meagre budget it is unsurprising that they are forced to buy cheaper poorer quality food. Tackling childhood obesity must include addressing the high costs associated with healthier foods.

- The public rhetoric must focus on children's health rather than weight. Barnardos is concerned that the ongoing coverage of childhood obesity will have a negative and lasting impact on children's self esteem and emotional wellbeing.

- Ireland's public health system is characterised by inadequate resources against a backdrop of increasing demand. Subsequently, not enough focus is on prevention and early intervention approaches leading to many children experiencing lengthy delays in obtaining a diagnosis and appropriate treatment. There are also delays in reviewing cases to assess progress. As childhood is time limited, these delays can have an adverse affect on the child's development impeding them from reaching their potential. Barnardos recommends sufficient resources be allocated to strengthen the provision of medical care in the community through the Primary Care

Teams which play a crucial role in ensuring children are assessed, diagnosed, treated and reviewed in a timely manner.

- Barnardos welcomes the Government's commitment to reform the present two-tier health system through the introduction of a Universal Health Insurance. This reform would mean medical care would be given based on need rather than ability to pay. Again in the interests of tackling medical concerns early and making significant exchequer savings, Barnardos believes that children should be amongst the first group to be eligible for universal health cover.

- The provision of in-patient and out patient mental health services for young people remains underdeveloped despite rising prevalence of mental ill-health among young people. UNICEF's survey of young people found 50% of them reporting that they have felt or suffered from depression in the past, 26% said they had felt or suffered suicidal thoughts in the past[5]. More girls (27%) than boys (16%) reported self harming and again significantly more girls (23%) than boys (2%) reported suffering from anorexia or bulimia. Some subgroups of children are particularly at risk of mental health difficulties particularly those who have been in care and those experiencing homelessness. The progress on the establishment of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has been slow with staff recruitment being a constant issue. Likewise while the provision of inpatient facilities for young people under 18 has risen to 36 with a further 16 to be available by end 2011[6], it falls short of the 109 beds recommended to ensure that all children who need it get the right support at the right time.

- Alcohol and drug misuse remains a persistent worry for young people, both as users themselves but where parents have addiction issues. Children raised by parents who misuse alcohol or drugs often experience chaotic childhoods, characterised by inconsistency and uncertainty. Alcohol addiction was a feature for some of the parents of children identified in the Independent Child Death Review Group. Also, while alcohol consumption amongst young people has reduced according to Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (2010), binge drinking levels are still high. Barnardos believes that as part of implementing the National Substance Misuse Strategy, greater attention must be paid to creating alcohol free venues for young people and improved family supports for parents with addiction issues as presently many addiction services are very adult focused concentrating on addressing the addiction and not holistically examining how it is impacting on their parenting skills and how to support that.

- There are a significant number of children some as young as five being prescribed long term medication such as Ritalin for their behaviour. There is a danger that these children are not being regularly monitored to assess improvement and reduce reliance on medication. Being on long term medication is not satisfactory for anyone but for a child it can undermine their overall development.

- With the establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency to lead the reform of the delivery of child welfare and protection systems, it is imperative that other public services that work directly with children and families such as Public Health Nurse, Speech and Language Services, CAMHS and NEWB be included in the overall structure of the Agency.

[5] UNICEF (2011) Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland
[6] Dail Parliamentary Question 28th September 2011

What do children and young people need to feel economically secure?

By families

- Families will only feel economically secure when they have sufficient resources to be able to meet the physical, emotional, educational and social needs of their children. Many parents are presently unable to provide sufficiently for this as the costs of participation are too high for them resulting in ongoing child poverty and societal inequalities.

- Children and young people can be very perceptive and aware of the financial stress that many parents are under and should be protected from this as much as possible. Our research[7] and experience has shown that children's experiences of poverty are different to adults as many parents try to shield their children from greater exposure to poverty and deprivation by denying themselves instead. While for others they may be unable to adequately protect their children due to a number of reasons including the harsh realities of living on such a meagre budget and their own difficulties coping with the situation.

By Communities

- Communities and neighbourhoods can play a role in reducing expectations and subsequent spending through publicising that active participation does not have to be too expensive. It was heartening to see the costs associated with occasions such as Holy Communion were reduced this year.

- Local Authority amenities and community amenities should be proactive in making their facilities available for free or at reduced prices to enhance participation and eliminate feelings of exclusion by those who cannot afford to partake.

By Government

- For children and young people to feel economically secure, they need to experience a childhood free from poverty. Barnardos believes that child poverty can only be eliminated through a combination of adequate income supports and accessible public services. Such services need to cover the full gamut of health, ECCE, education, social services, youth services etc. Comparing Ireland with the countries that perform best in reducing child poverty shows there is a marked imbalance in Ireland, with a particularly low level of expenditure on public services here. Conversely, those reliant on social welfare support should be guaranteed a minimum standard of living, however recent Budgetary cuts have reduced family incomes significantly resulting in increases in debt, poverty and social exclusion for these families. Budget 2013 must not plunge more families reliant on social welfare into further poverty especially lone parent families who were particularly targeted in Budget 2012 with the changes being rolled to the One Parent Family Payment.

- It is imperative that the poverty traps that exist within the social welfare system are eliminated so that the take up of low paid work yields financial gain for the family. Likewise, the in-work supports should be enhanced to encourage the take up of low paid employment especially for those who are fearful that they will be unable to adequately provide for their family through employment.

[7] Children's Research Centre (2011) All You Need Is, Report Commissioned by Barnardos and Society of St. Vincent de Paul

What can be done so that children and young people have a say in decisions that affect their lives?

By families

- Families/ parents can raise their children in a way which enables children to understand their own feelings, emotions and thoughts; and encourage children to have and express their view and to listen to them.

- Parents should encourage and empower children to make decisions in their daily lives.

By Communities

- Establish effective student councils in schools that are listened to and influence decisions that will affect their school days.

- Community associations such as resident's association, safety and policing taskforces should involve young people in their committees and listen to their views. Presently, majority of community associations are adult led despite their activities targeting young people.

- Foster a culture of celebrating children's achievements and value their role as community members and celebrate success.

- Work with and encourage young people to be able to participate and express their wishes. Barnardos is undertaking an innovative model which supports the youth led participation of seldom heard young people to equip them with the life skills they require to enable them to participate meaningfully. It is being rolled out in Tallaght, Finglas and Mulhuddart.

By Government

- Enshrining children's rights into Ireland's Constitution through a referendum to be held in Autumn 2012 will supplement the cultural shift occurring in society about recognising and valuing the contribution children can make as citizens now as opposed to viewing children as 'becoming adults'. The passing of this long awaited referendum will hopefully ensure that children's voices are heard and decisions are made in their best interests, whilst complementing the other Articles in the Constitution. It will also rectify the present imbalance that exists with regard to differences between children of married and non-married parents.

- Professionals working with children should adopt the concept of 'mature minors' which acknowledges the maturity and capability of the child to be involved in decisions affecting their lives. This reinforces the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission (2011) Children and the Law: Medical Treatment. Unfortunately, the adoption of this concept is diluted given the legal discrepancy that exists given that the age of consent for the Non Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 is 16 years but 18 years under the Mental Health Act 2001. This anomalous position needs to be rectified.

- Barnardos echoes the recommendation of the Independent Child Death Review Group that those children engaged in court proceedings should have an automatic entitlement to a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) to ensure that their wishes and needs are presented to the proceedings. Presently, appointments of GAL is at the discretion of the presiding judge and while more judges are seeing the benefits to the child having an independent advocate it should be open to all children involved in the court system.

- As the Ryan Report (2009) starkly demonstrated, children in care were often unheard and ignored. It is imperative that those in the care system are adequately listened to and supported in having their voices heard. The recent consultation by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011) *Listen to Our Voices* with young people who are in care suggests that participation

in decision making is a key issue for these young people. This needs to become a reality through improved care planning and engagement with social workers.

- Barnardos believes it is advisable for guidelines to be published to advise Government departments on how to undertake effective consultations with children and young people to enhance the authenticity and genuineness of that consultation.

What can be done to help children and young people behave positively and to be good citizens?

By families

- Enhancing the opportunities for the child begins with supporting parents from early on. Parents can be supported to parent effectively with good supervision, limitations and boundaries on their children, good communication to assist children to understand their feelings and learn to control / manage their behaviour constructively which they can carry into adulthood.

- Adopting positive disciplinary strategies and avoiding all forms of corporal punishment.

- Greater access to parenting courses using the myriad of statutory and voluntary agencies offering such supports.

By Communities

- All schools should update, publicise and implement their bullying policy, reinforcing that bullying in any form will be dealt with and is not tolerated. Appropriate supports for victims and perpetrators of bullying should be put in place to help children deal the differences behind the behaviour.

- Value young people and their interests, their need to socialise and hang out together is not an automatic recipe for anti-social behaviour.

- Community degeneration gives children a message that anti-social behaviour is all that is expected of them. Investment in regeneration and of the community amenities should be prioritised in this context.

By Government

- Recognise the value of children and young people as citizens now and as members of society.

- For all children to succeed in their childhood and into adulthood, Barnardos believes that a conscious political shift in focus is required leading to a greater re-orientation of services to tackle issues before they manifest. This emphasis on prevention and early intervention strategies as highlighted previously yields significant benefits as it breaks the intergenerational cycles of poverty, low self esteem and deprivation.

What can be done to help young people move confidently into adulthood?

By families

- A child's future prospects in adulthood are largely shaped by positive educational experiences and opportunities during their early and middle childhood and hugely influenced by familial experiences. Parenting positively is key to enhancing a child's self esteem and resilience and will facilitate them to reach their full potential.

- Families should raise their children with a message of 'you will do well, you can do well'.

By Communities

- Provision of recreational facilities for young people to ensure that young people are exposed to a variety of opportunities and experiences and can learn from each of them thereby helping them reach their potential.

By Government

- Support initiatives which build capacity of children to understand their feelings and consequently manage their behaviour. This fosters strong communication and learning skills as a bedrock for all future learning and achievement socially, culturally and economically.

- Increase access to further education for all hard-to-reach groups such as early school leavers, and care leavers. Education is the proven route out of poverty and will lead to increased employment opportunities, thereby breaking the intergenerational cycles of poverty and deprivation.

- For young people being raised in the care of the State, including separated children, turning 18 can be a very daunting prospect as they can often be left to their own devices with little support to assist them to adjust to independent living. They can lack even the most basic skills such as cooking and budgeting. Barnardos firmly believes that there should be a statutory entitlement to aftercare supports such as financial assistance, appropriate accommodation, access to education / employment opportunities and an assigned worker to be available to them. Without such supports these vulnerable young people are at increased risk of becoming homeless, engaging in criminal activity, having addiction issues and undiagnosed mental health problems. While there has been some progress in the provision of aftercare, it is essential that it be universal, accessible and available when required especially for those who choose not to engage initially but later return seeking help.

- Barnardos commends the establishment of the Jigsaw programme which brings together community services and supports together to better meet young people's mental health needs. An expansion of this programme is advisable to ensure a greater number of young people benefit from it.

- It is important young people are informed and supported to be responsible around their sexual health by schools, health services etc. Appropriate supports must be available to teenage parents to ensure they are able to meet their own and their babies' needs. Additionally, supports such as BELONGTO must be more widespread to assist LGBT young people regardless of their location.

Any other comments or ideas

- Barnardos is concerned that the policy Framework will view children's lives through an adult lens. Key to this is viewing children and young people's lives holistically and ensuring that a child centred approach is pursued to address the poverty, social exclusion and inequality experienced by children and young people.

- Early intervention in addressing structural inequalities experienced by children is necessary to avoid lifelong underachievement and loss of valuable talent.

- It is essential that the ethos that drives the implementation should be what can be done 'with' children and young people to maximise their potential rather than what can be done 'to' and 'for' children and young people. This subtle difference is important as it can be more empowering for those involved and lead to better buy in and achievements.