

10 May 2006

## **NDP 2007-2013 SUBMISSION**

### **1. Introduction**

Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to put in a submission for the 2007—2013 National Development Plan.

Overall the current NDP (2000-2006) has made a significant contribution in a number of areas including:

- Infrastructure development
- Supporting regional development
- Recognising the need to reach marginalized groups in both urban and rural areas.

Social inclusion was one of the four objectives underpinning the current NDP and approximately 40% of investment has been in social inclusion type measures related to employment, health, education, housing, childcare and equality.

### **2. Factors to be included in NDP 2007-2013**

- Barnardos believes the principle of social inclusion should be again paramount to the next NDP. The NDP 2007-2013 needs to be reflective of the current issues in order to make an effective impact. For instance, while the economy has grown substantially and Ireland has become wealthier, there is still 7% of the population in consistent poverty with larger families and lone parent families being particularly at risk. This includes 100,000 children under 18 years bringing the poverty rate amongst children to 9%<sup>1</sup>. Barnardos experience shows that for children who grow up in poverty it can affect every area of their development – social, educational and personal and these effects can last a lifetime.
- The income distribution between the rich and poor has grown significantly creating a very unequal society where access to quality services is largely based on the ability to pay. Barnardos believes that the NESC vision of the Developmental Welfare State, which promotes universalism by enhancing investment in quality and accessible public services to be available to all, should underpin the formation of the NDP. Barnardos calls for the development of this rights based approach where services would be available automatically to the child when needed is required. After all we as a society have a responsibility to provide for our most vulnerable citizens to ensure they get the best start in life regardless of their parent's ability to pay.
- At a national level, co-ordination at policy level is essential. Therefore the NDP must match the objectives, priorities and approaches to be found in existing national policies such as the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the National Spatial Strategy. This would enhance inter-departmental working and lead to more 'joined up government'. It would also facilitate a child's perspective to be heard at all policy formation levels.
- In light of the extensive mid-term evaluations that were undertaken in 2003, key learnings and recommendations from these must feed into the next NDP to ensure that its roll out, processes

---

<sup>1</sup> Central Statistics Office (2006) *EU SILC Poverty Analysis*, Cork

and structures are working as effectively as possible for the benefit of all, particularly children. For instance while the roll out of social inclusion measures at local level assisted in building relationships between agencies, communities and local authorities there was little opportunity to feed into or influence the processes at national level. In fact at national level the co-ordination and integration objective being pursued at local level had little impact to date on agencies and departments<sup>2</sup>. To increase co-ordination and effectiveness the social inclusion measures need to be streamlined as opposed to spread across the different Operational Programmes as is the current system as this lends itself to duplication and inefficiencies.

- Ireland's population profile has changed recently and while the majority of these immigrants are in the labour market, their families and children also need access to quality education, health and housing systems that are reflective of their needs.

### **3 Barnardos specific recommendations:**

#### **3.1 Early Childhood Education and Care**

Under the current NDP, the roll out of the Equal Opportunities for Childcare Programme has made improvements in this area. In comparison to our EU counterparts, Ireland's investment in the provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is near minimal and so far this programme created 24,600 childcare places between 2000 and 2004 in community based playgroups and private crèches. Its successor the new National Childcare Programme 2006-2010 aims to create a further 50,000 new ECEC places across the country. However, these additional places will do little to address issues of affordability and quality. It will also fall far short of the 97, 056 places estimated to be needed for all 3-4 years olds and this excludes ECEC places for younger children and those of school going age<sup>3</sup>.

For the child, the benefits of quality ECEC are far reaching and can assist towards breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Quality pre-school experience appears to be a stronger force in the lives of children from low-income families than those in high-income families. Barnardos believes that the entire ECEC sector needs to be improved and formalised and hopes the NDP will implement the blueprint as mapped out by NESF<sup>4</sup>. In the short-term Barnardos calls for the introduction of a one-year free place for all children in the year prior to attending primary school and for these places to begin with children who are disadvantaged.

#### **3.2 Access to out of school provision**

A significant part of the NDP has been to enhance and create further access to training and employment opportunities for those who have been distanced from the labour market. Barnardos experience shows that for some young people to get the most benefit from these opportunities additional interventions are needed at a younger age so that as children they can get the most from the educational system and are capable of participating in training and employment opportunities. This is particularly true for Traveller children and those with disabilities as they are more likely to leave school with no qualifications at all (i.e. before junior certificate).

Aside from additional resources being required within the school system, Barnardos calls on the NDP to develop an out of school activities infrastructure in Ireland particularly for children who are disadvantaged. Such activities should be available year round and the programme offered should provide academic support as well as meeting the social and developmental needs of the child. At present such provision is very limited with only 1.2% of all six to 12 year olds using this form of

---

<sup>2</sup> NDP/CSF (2003) *Evaluation of Social Inclusion Co-ordination Mechanisms*, Dublin

<sup>3</sup> National Women's Council of Ireland (2005) *An Accessible Model of Childcare*, Dublin

<sup>4</sup> National Economic and Social Forum (2005) *Early Childhood Care and Education*, Dublin

provision in 1999-2000<sup>5</sup>. The new National Childcare Programme only aims to create 5,000 new out of school places.

A child's involvement in out of school activities is beneficial in increasing their self esteem, communication skills, assisting their transition to secondary school and assisting them with their school work. The environment of out of school activities also provides the opportunity for children to have improved adult child relationships as the adult child ratio is low. Overall participation in such programmes can be of social, cultural, psychological and educational benefit to the child<sup>6</sup>.

### 3.3 Eradicating health inequalities

A key objective of the National Health Strategy is to reduce health inequalities. However, Ireland's two-tier health system based mainly on an ability to pay reinforces the correlation between poverty and ill health with the result that:

- Many of those on low incomes cannot afford to bring their child to the doctor, dentist or optician.
- Women from economically poorer backgrounds who are outside the labour market are more than twice as likely to give birth to low birth weight children as women in the higher professional group.<sup>7</sup>

Although children in low-income families have access to a full medical card or a GP only medical card, Barnardos believes that at present many aspects of the health system are failing children. There are lengthy waiting lists for accessing services publicly e.g. speech and language therapists; a shortage of public health doctors with the result that early detection and intervention is being missed and insufficient child appropriate care settings in the community and hospitals. The impact of lengthy delays or inappropriate care can have a detrimental lifelong impact on the child.

Barnardos calls on the new NDP to adequately invest, both in terms of financial and personnel resources, in the hospital and community care system to ensure that all children have access to quality, available and appropriate medical care when needed, regardless of their illness.

### 3.4 Housing and Accommodation

Private ownership continues to be the preferred housing tenure in Ireland. However, with continued increases in house prices along with increases in inflation it is pushing the purchase of a house out of the reach of many. Actions need to be taken to stem the demand side of the housing market and control the escalating prices.

Substantial investment in quality social housing is required because for children living in poverty they are more likely to live in the social housing sector and private rental sectors. Local authority tenants are five times more likely to be living in consistent poverty than people living in other types of accommodation<sup>8</sup>. Poorer children are more likely to live in sub-standard housing and in areas with few shops and amenities, where children have little or no space to play safely. The Children's Research Centre<sup>9</sup> found that 50,000 children were living in accommodation that is overcrowded, damp, in disrepair or in poor neighbourhoods. These problems were more common among children in one-parent families and those living in private rental accommodation.

Investment in quality social housing will improve rural development and should be done in conjunction with the development of other amenities and infrastructure to ensure any housing development is well serviced. Likewise, all housing developments should link with policies such as the National Children's

---

<sup>5</sup> National Women's Council of Ireland (2005) *An Accessible Childcare Model*, Dublin

<sup>6</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2001) *Impact of Study Support*, Scotland.

<sup>7</sup> Public Health Alliance Ireland (2004) *Health in Ireland – An Unequal State*

<sup>8</sup> Combat Poverty Agency (2005) *Mapping Poverty, National, Regional and County Patterns*

<sup>9</sup> Children's Research Centre (2004) *Housing Problems and Irish Children*, Dublin

Strategy - National Play Policy - Ready, Steady, Play, and the National Recreation Policy which examines the infrastructure needed for children and young people such as playgrounds, sports clubs etc.

### **3.5 Child Proof policies**

Barnardos calls for all policies and actions under the NDP to be 'child proofed', regardless of whether such a policy is the extension of infrastructure or a direct social inclusion service. This child proofing exercise should be done at the outset of policy formation and also throughout its implementation and evaluation. The development of appropriate child indicators is necessary to ensure that there is no negative impact on children throughout the implementation of the NDP. This is in line with the National Children's Strategy (2000) that departments would devise child impact statements.

Children are not a homogenous group. Each child has their own distinct set of needs and these vary depending on their family circumstances e.g. children from the Traveller community, children of asylum seekers, children in lone parent families, children with disabilities and those who experience homelessness. Therefore these indicators must be diverse and reflective of different types of need as a one size fits all policy approach is inadequate for children.

## **4 Conclusion**

Children and young people make up over 30% of our population. Every facet of their lives is affected by the actions and decisions we adults take. They are not eligible to vote for policies or parties. We as adults hold those rights and so we hold the responsibility to do right for our children and young people. We cannot be indifferent to the plight children who are disadvantaged and who live in consistent poverty. It is a breach of their right to the material and other resources necessary to allow them to experience a childhood free of poverty and deprivation as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The formation of the next NDP has the opportunity given its large budget to make decisive impact on the lives of children and Barnardos calls on the development of quality, accessible, available and appropriate services for all children.