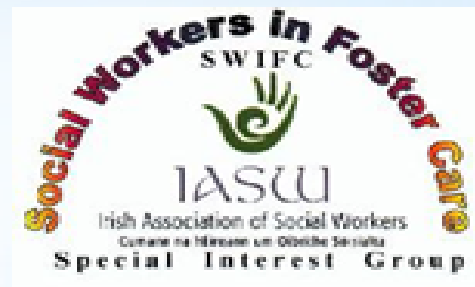


* **LAUNCH OF**

Foster Care: Envisioning the Future.

Dr Valerie O'Brien
&
Mr Cahal McHale

March 2nd 2017
IASW, Dublin



- * On behalf of the IASW Board I, Frank Browne, Chairperson of IASW would like to congratulate the Social Workers in Fostering Care Special Interest Group in producing this timely discussion paper-

"Foster Care: Envisioning the Future"

- * Some of our most vulnerable young people are those who can no longer live with their families for many different reasons and so come into care.
 - * The quality of that care experience can result in long term positive or negative life chances.
- * Social workers can play a **crucial role** if resourced to do so, allowing them to be that important link; befriending a young person, supporting foster carers, monitoring the placement and being there at key times in the young person's life, and crucially as he or she move to independent living.
 - * An effective, **integrated** health care system is key and
 - * **IASW fully supports the call to the Minister for Children and Youth affairs to establish a working party to review the progress and provision of foster care in Ireland.**

 **Message**  from the Chairperson

- * We are urging the Minister to set up of a *Working Party to Review and Further Develop Foster Care* which is the backbone of the alternative / state care system in Ireland
- * Build on positive well established practices that are seen to work, notwithstanding the horrific cases that we are hearing about again.
- * Provision of good foster is imperative and working party is essential to recruit and retain foster carers and social workers in the system
- * We need to have confidence in the system and to work against the stigma that such horrific cases bring
- * Foster Care is the life of many children and we need to continually improve the service
 - * Integration of services is key to optimise outcomes for children
 - * We need to open a space where all voices can be heard and acted upon
- * Professional voice has an important contribution to make
- * It helped to make major contribution in the past, so it is a formula that works

* Overview of Recommendations

- * *Foster Care: Envisioning the Future*, is based as on consultation and discussion with Social Workers involved in front line service provision.
- * Data was collected from 2015 to 2016 on the experience of the foster care service through social workers involved in SWIFC group
 - * Focus groups / Questionnaires
 - * Consultation through circulation of previous drafts

* **Background to the Report**

- * It sets out to be a document, that will spark debate on foster care provision.
- * While the social worker voice is important as a front line service provider- *Foster Care: Envisioning the Future*, has at its core
 - * 'the best interests of the child', and
 - * 'a commitment to the provision of high quality foster care'.

* Purpose and Parameters

*This document provides a comprehensive picture of the current state of foster care provision in Ireland and, while acknowledging progress, points up the challenges to the continued provision of high quality care for the most vulnerable in society

***Overview**

- * Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to set up a
 - * Working Party to review foster care services from the perspectives of legislation, policy, resource allocation, and best practice in the field of foster care provision.

It is contended that the Working Party set up in Oct 1998 resulted in positive change

* Major Recommendation

- * Social Work and Alternative Care
- * A Changing Environment and the Impact of Stressors
- * What is Working Well?
- * What Needs to be Addressed?
- * Envisioning the Future: Recommendations for On-going Discussion.

* Topics Covered in the Document

Total Number of Children in Care in the State = 6,329

Foster Care / General	=	4,133	(65%)
Foster Care /Relatives	=	1,772	(28%)
Residential Care General	=	312	(5%)
Residential Care Special	=	9	(<1%)
Other Care;	=	103	(1.6%)

Source - Tusla Integrated Performance and Activity Report Q3 2016 -

* Profile of Population of Children in Care Sept 2016

- * Foster Care - backbone of the child care services.
- * Ireland : high % of children have access to *family based care*.
- * *Advocacy* for children in care through EPIC
- * Establishment of *Tusla* has potential to create alignment and clarity of purpose.
- * The *Irish Foster Care Association* (IFCA), plays a vital role in influencing the Care System
- * There is greater access to statistical information and evidence of a growing commitment to research.
- * The *Alternative Care Practice Handbook*, a standardised reference has been published (Tusla, 2014).
- * The development of a new *Alternative Care Strategy* is underway in Tusla

* **What is working well**

- * the on-going scarcity and utilisation of resources;
 - * unintended impacts of > standardization of policy and practice /centralization of services;
 - * recruitment and retention of foster carers;
 - * private sector provision;
 - * court proceedings and the law;
 - * the role of the Guardian ad Litem;
 - * preventing family breakdown;
- maintaining social work values and ethics in the midst of the above detailed challenges.

* Current Challenges

* Recommendation : Working Party

Call on the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to set up a *Working Party* to review and progress the provision of foster care in Ireland.

The terms of reference for the Working Party should provide for a review of the current situation in respect of foster care under the following headings -

Law; Policy; Resource Allocation and Utilization and Best Practice.

Law/ Legislative Issues

Revision of Child Care legislation is necessary to take account of the Constitutional insertion in favour of children's rights.

The provision of *after-care services for children* who have grown up in foster care should be placed on a statutory footing.

The after-care service *should be fully integrated with the foster care service*, and should be driven by social work values.

*** Issues that need priority attention**

- * *Relationships* are the cornerstone of an effective foster care system.
- * *Need to balance* family based care against a risk-averse, health and safety culture.
- * A new *service delivery model needs to be developed for managing relative / kinship care* to take account of it's particular characteristics.
- * *Research evidence* should underpin decisions that affect children's wellbeing.

* Policy Priorities

- * National policies should enable *professionals to offer a necessary level of flexibility to meet local needs* and deal with local conditions. A schema of accountability also needed when and if it is used
- * A number of *innovative policies developed at local levels* should be identified and endorsed as interim measures, until such time as centralised policies are developed.
- * Need to set up *support and advocacy services for birth parents of children in care.*

* Policy Priorities

- * *Examine the Arrangements for Undertaking* all aspects of the social work Service.
- * *Examine the Trends of Tusla's Investment* in the support and development of its own foster care services compared with that of the private sector.
- * *Examine Workload Allocation* within the Agency with the aim of reducing stress levels, creating a more effective and supportive working environment in light of incidents of burnout among social workers.
- * Develop complementary *Local and National Foster Recruitment Strategy*, which can meet the requirements of the *National Standards in Foster Care* (D.o.H, 2003).
- * Agency needs to *Establish Protocols* to ensure that necessary *Access to Services* required by the *National Standards in Foster Care* (D.o.H, 2003) are prioritised.

* Resource Priorities

- * *Best interest of the child* crucial
- * *Ethics is core* to the work
- * A more inclusive approach is required as part of a dynamic model of **managing kinship care**.
- * The Agency should *review* ‘*A Call for Change*’ *Discussion Document* published by IASW in 2011.

* **Values and Ethics**

- * We are urging the Minister to set up of a *Working Party to Review and Further Develop Foster Care* which is the backbone of the alternative / state care system in Ireland
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* Conclusion