



An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

STRATEGY 2008-2010

December, 2007



Services For Children

- The vision for Ireland described by The National Children’s Strategy, Our Children - Their Lives (2000) is where all children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.
- **‘Children services in the public sector are service led. The focus now needs to shift to achieve the right outcomes for children’.¹ This can be achieved through evidence based research proven through practice and incorporated into policy.**
- Organisational and policy changes have been made to improve the planning, co-ordination and deployment of services across government agencies to deliver the best possible outcomes for children.

National policies have been developed for ‘at risk’ children taking into account the duty and responsibility of the State to deliver the best co-ordinated services across the key sectors for these children. The population and demography of Ireland is changing with the arrival of people from the new EU States and from non-EU countries. Population changes bring differing cultural, language and service delivery approaches. The challenge for the future is to deliver enough of the right type of services, in the right place and in a timely manner, to address changing needs and to provide excellent outcomes for all children.

The Office of the Minister for Children has a key role and is a key driver of policy change from the centre. Operational responsibility rests with the Health Service Executive, An Garda Síochána, the Irish Youth Justice Service, the Probation Service, the Courts Service and the education sector. Most of these agencies have recently undergone changes to structure, change management and strategy, all focused on delivering on the Child Care Act 1991 and Children Act 2001 and subsequent amendments. The State has agreed to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and proposes to hold a Constitutional Amendment in 2008, to incorporate the rights of the child. Restorative justice practices and community based sanctions have been introduced as alternatives to detention. The National Commission on Restorative Justice is due to report to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform during 2008.

The Children Acts Advisory Board was established as an enhanced enabling organisation which has the capacity to encourage inter-agency co-operation and information sharing and to support the development of services that are evidence based and outcomes focused.



Stakeholders

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- Children and Family*
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- Department of Health and Children
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Department of Education and Science*
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- Office of the Minister for Children
Health Service Executive
Irish Youth Justice Service
The Probation Service
An Garda Síochána
Irish Prison Service
Courts Service
Vocational Education Committees
Youthreach
National Educational Welfare Board
National Educational Psychological Service
Third Level Colleges
Community and Voluntary Sector*
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¹ Director General, Office of the Minister for Children – CAAB National Conference, October 2007.

Vision

Coherent, consistent and effective responses for children who are central to the Children Acts.

Mission

We will work for children.

We will seek significantly better outcomes for vulnerable children through the co-ordinated delivery of services. We will promote stronger inter-agency co-operation and good practice through the provision of advice, guidance and support and base our work on action oriented research, experience and reflective questioning.

Values

CAAB...

- Will act independently in accordance with our statutory remit
- Will be open, accountable and inclusive, dealing with all parties in a respectful manner

Children...

- Have a right to fair access to all State Agencies and the services they provide
- Will have their rights respected at all times
- Will, where possible and appropriate, have services delivered within a family setting
- Will be detained only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period necessary to address the special care needs of each child
- Will be given the opportunity to express their views and influence service development

Service Providers...

- Will have the benefit of facilitated collaboration, good practice guidance and research based advice
- Will be dealt with in a spirit of partnership trust and co-operation

The Ministers...

- The Ministers are entitled to prompt, accurate and quality advice on request

Strategic Objectives

Objective 1: Provide quality advice and guidance to the Ministers and to the child care sector

Strategic Actions

- 1.1** Publish guidance on the qualifications, criteria for appointment, training and role of any guardian *ad litem* appointed for children in proceedings under the Child Care Act 1991
- 1.2** Publish and promote criteria for admission to and discharge from special care units
- 1.3** Present views on case applications by the HSE, forming part of applications to the court for special care orders
- 1.4** Publish reports on child care proceedings in the courts
- 1.5** Publish reports on the level and nature of accommodation in detention schools and special care units
- 1.6** Publish reports on support services in detention schools and special care units
- 1.7** Publish an annual report

Objective 2: Facilitate inter-agency co-operation

Strategic Actions

- 2.1** Establish strong formal links with all agencies engaged in the provision of children's services
- 2.2** Develop 'safe-space' to facilitate inter-agency problem solving
- 2.3** Develop and disseminate protocols for inter-agency working including information sharing
- 2.4** Promote and facilitate inter-agency training opportunities
- 2.5** Provide regular opportunities for engagement and information sharing between agencies at national, regional and local level
- 2.6** Support the identification and transfer of good practice
- 2.7** Support organisations in efforts to effect positive change within the sector

Objective 3: Strengthen the knowledge base of the child care sector

Strategic Actions

- 3.1** Collect, collate and analyse relevant data and make available to the child care sector to support decision making
- 3.2** Develop a research capacity through effective utilisation of internal resources and the creation of strong links with academic institutions and research centres nationally and internationally
- 3.3** Develop initiatives which make research accessible to practitioners, managers and policy makers
- 3.4** Develop the research agenda and ensure appropriate research projects are undertaken
- 3.5** Develop and utilise a wide range of approaches to disseminating research findings
- 3.6** Prioritise action based research which supports practical and pragmatic responses

Priorities 2008

Objective 1: Provide quality advice and guidance to the Ministers and to the child care sector

1. Produce guardian *ad litem* guidance
2. Advise the Minister for Children on guardian *ad litem* policy issues
3. Liaise with the Courts Service in the delivery of GAL guidance and follow-up monitoring
4. Review 2006 Special Care Admission Criteria in consultation with HSE and other parties
5. Provide views on HSE special care applications, based on internal processes, and to report the statistics (and any issues) to the Board
6. Review CAAB processes and procedures, following publication of the new statutory special care scheme
7. Provide a report to the Board on the best option(s) in the preparation of court reports under the 1991 Act
8. Prepare a report for the Board on the usage, capacity and support services in children detention schools & special care units
9. Report on the strategic objectives, and furnish a draft annual 2007 report to the Board

Objective 2: Facilitate inter-agency co-operation

1. Convene inter-agency 'panel meetings' on a monthly basis
2. Host four regional network seminars addressing inter-agency working
3. Publish a journal on inter-agency working with feedback from seminars
4. Develop and publish guidance for good inter-agency working
5. Promote inter-agency training opportunities
6. Promote Children's Services Awards
7. Provide support to individual agencies in developing inter-agency initiatives
8. Host National Conference

Objective 3: Strengthen the knowledge base of the child care sector

1. Prepare a report on existing data sources, findings, key information gaps and areas for data collection
2. Prepare a paper for the Board on the development of a research agenda including effective use of Board resources
3. Develop internal research awareness and capacity
4. Develop methodologies to improve dissemination of research to managers and practitioners
5. Produce a report 'Evaluation of Special Care Applications'
6. Produce a report 'Best practice guidelines for the use and implementation of Therapeutic Interventions for children/young people in residential centres and specialised foster care'
7. Host four research/practice based workshops/seminars
8. Develop library and web based learning opportunities
9. Participate in local, national and international conferences