

**Special Meeting of
Children Acts Advisory Board
Tuesday 8th September 2009
The Probation Service Offices
Haymarket, Dublin 7**

Minutes

Present: Jacinta Stewart(Chair), Cathleen Callanan, Michael Donnellan, Nuala Doherty, Cathal Flynn, Phil Hanna, Roger Killeen, Finbarr Murphy, Gerry O'Neill, Denis O'Sullivan, Michelle Shannon, Dermot Stokes.

In Attendance: Minister for Children, Barry Andrews, TD. (Morning Only)

CAAB: Aidan Browne, Jane Craig, Robert Murphy. (Full Day)

Marion Martin, Grainne McGill, Jim McGuirk, Ciarán Ó Searcaigh, Rose Sweeney. (Morning Only)

Probation Service: Brian Dack. (Morning Only)

Apologies: Finbarr O'Leary

The Chair, Jacinta Stewart opened the morning session of the Special Board Meeting by welcoming the Minister, the Board members, and the executive. She also welcomed the new Board Member Denis O'Sullivan to the Board. She mentioned that the strengths of the CAAB has been in the way that as an independent board the CAAB has been able to stand back and look at the overall sector and interact in new and different ways within that sector. She outlined the complexity involved in achieving agreement in certain areas, particularly the GAL guidance, but that the outcome has been a solid document which will stand up to scrutiny. She also mentioned the Restorative Practices initiative as being an exciting development involving the wider child care sector.

She concluded by thanking the Board members and staff for all the work and dedication over the years and made special mention of Roger Killeen and Cathal Flynn for their tireless efforts over two Board terms.

The Chief Executive, Aidan Browne, thanked the Minister for taking the time to spend the morning with the Board. He explained that the morning session would consist of

presentations by the CAAB executive giving an account of our stewardship, and that the purpose of the special meeting was to take stock and to ask the question following this meeting what happens to the functions of the Board going forward?

The staff of the CAAB presented on various areas of responsibility within the CAAB outlining the achievements, successes and also what needs to be continued to carry the projects forward into the future, after the CAAB has been subsumed. Presentations were made on the following topics and the printout of the presentations is attached.

- Benchmarking Progress-Children Acts Aidan Browne
- Advice and Guidance –
 - a. GAL guidance Jim McGuirk
 - b. Special Care Grainne McGill
- Inter-Agency Co-operation
 - a. 'Safe Space' Aidan Browne
 - b. Networking Marion Martin
 - c. Awards–Good practice Transfer Rose Sweeney
 - d. Guidance on interagency co-operation Ciarán Ó Searcaigh
- Strengthening the knowledge base
 - a. Overview of Research Process Dermot Stokes
 - b. Overview of research findings/outcomes Robert Murphy
 - c. Effecting positive change
 - i. Differential Response Model Aidan Browne
 - ii. Case management Rose Sweeney
 - iii. Restorative Practices Marion Martin

Following each presentation there was an opportunity to ask question or for discussion. A selection of the comments follow:

- The benchmarking slides were very comprehensive with statistics which are generally hard to find.
- The pity is that the latest reliable statistics available are from 2007, everything has changed so much now that the statistics from 2009 will show a very different picture.
- The GAL guidelines are a very welcome addition to the sector. It will be important in the future to build on these guidelines and to put a statutory scheme in place.
- A statutory scheme will require separate legislation in the future as it will be too complex a piece of legislation to be rushed through with other legislation.
- It will be very interesting to see the outcome of the tracking and tracing research project.
- The benefits of interagency working appear to be good for the agencies involved. However there is no research currently available to rigorously measure if outcomes for the child are any better where inter-agency working is adopted.
- The CAAB research project 'Organisational Case Studies in Inter-Agency Working' is due to report by the end of the year.

- The point was made that it is hard to capture the outcomes where cases have been prevented by 'picking up the phone'. How can you measure what doesn't happen.
- The CAAB research programme aims not to replicate but to gather evidence based practice. The research carried out will be rigorous, high-quality and robust, and will avoid naïve correlations.
- The point was made that the CAAB were fortunate to recruit Robert Murphy as Head of Research and Information, with his extensive background in relevant areas of research.
- Dublin South is currently operating a differential response model with the support of the CAAB and is receiving very positive feedback.

The Minister concluded by thanking everyone involved for a most informative morning and for their co-operation. He went on to say that it is the intention to continue the work of the CAAB within the OMCYA, and that there is an evaluation of systems to be undertaken by the OMCYA following the Ryan report.

Aidan Browne replied by stating that the CAAB has a body of work to complete by the end of the year. That the CAAB has always tried to find the space to do the work that nobody else was doing, to add value and to avoid replication. The fact that the CAAB as an independent body was not burdened by 'other tasks' enabled it to function and to succeed in this endeavour.

The meeting broke for lunch and reconvened with the Board members and management of the CAAB.

Declaration of Interest in agenda items, by Board Members

- No conflict of interests were declared.

1. Minutes of last meeting

- The minutes from the previous meeting were adopted and subsequently signed by the Chair, Ms. Jacinta Stewart.

2. Matters Arising

- There were no matters arising.

3. The only topic on the Agenda was the morning's presentations and how the CAAB might advise the Minister on the carrying on of its functions beyond the year end.

- The Board agreed that the morning's presentations had been very impressive, that a lot of information was imparted but was well paced. The Chief Executive was asked to convey the best wishes of the Board to all the staff.
- The Board also expressed their appreciation to Michael Donnellan and his staff for their assistance and support on the day.

The Chief Executive reported:

- That the executive had met with Sylda Langford and Denis O’Sullivan regarding the subsuming of the CAAB and that in principle the 31st of December 2009 has been agreed as the date of closure. A further meeting has been arranged for the 22nd of September.
- The legislation subsuming the CAAB has been published and has yet to go through the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- Allocation of the staff is to be addressed in the meantime. 3 members of staff, Amanda Downes; Bronwyn Conway and Clodagh Thorne, have been seconded to the Adoption Board at EO level until the 31st of December at which point they will either be definitively transferred or will be reassigned within Department of Health and Children if they so wish.
- Another opportunity to transfer at HEO level arose but was not taken up by any of the eligible staff.
- The CAAB has a full but achievable programme of work to the end of the year, including 2 launches on the 3rd of November and the 24th of November. These launches will be made to an invited audience and will be broadcast by webcast nationally. Reports will be circulated to relevant practitioners and policy makers to comment on the reports at the launches.
- Two further Board meetings are planned before the end of the year on the 20th of October and the 1st of December.
- Concerns were raised regarding the loss of further staff before the end of the year and the impact this would have on the ability of the CAAB to complete its programme of work. As it stands we should be able to complete the programme, should the situation change, judgement calls will need to be made.
- The comment was made that the expertise within the CAAB would be a great loss to the sector if staff were transferred to other areas.
- The question was raised with regard to the possibility of CAAB staff filling vacancies in other agencies within the sector, as this would avoid the loss of expertise.
- The point was made that in the co-ordination of the subsuming of the CAAB the most challenging area would be the Admin. Function, with the corporate governance issues, and the fact that two of the staff members who have been seconded were from the administration unit.
- It was agreed that it was unlikely that a team of the CAAB staff would be transferred into the OMCYA to carry on the functions. The OMCYA is being given the responsibility for the functions of the CAAB but are not allowed to lift the staff ceiling. It was stated that it would be the intention to speak with Sylda Langford to make recommendations going forward and how they could be carried out.
- The point was made that a great deal of corporate/professional and sectoral memory/knowledge unfolded this morning. Staff will carry this on to the next stage or environment and if the staff are dispersed how would this memory/knowledge be retained. It was seen as important that this knowledge would be retained.

- An added complication to the subsuming of the CAAB is that under the McCarthy report it is recommended that the Department of Health and Children should reduce its staff levels by 10% over each of the next three years. The business and functions will be executed and transferred in accordance with the legislation. Staff will be transferred by may not know what they will be doing.
- It was agreed that a balance needs to be struck between the needs of the Board, the office and the staff. The person in the best position to make decisions in this regard was the Chief Executive and it was agreed that this responsibility be delegated to the Chief Executive.
- If core issues arose a special meeting of the Board would be called.
- It was agreed that a document would be produced following this meeting documenting the work to be finished by the end of the year and outlining any work to be carried on, as a due diligence exercise.
- If there is nobody in the sector to pull the different areas together and the Evidence to Practice and Network Seminars and conferences are abandoned, the practitioners on the front line will lose out. The education and Health interface will also lose out if there is no one carrying on the CAAB function.
- It was stated that it would be ideal to hold all current staff to the end of the year to complete the programme of work; however the reality could be different. It will be important to recognise that it will be difficult for staff to work in an environment when they do not know the future.

4. AOB

- **There was no other business**

The next Board Meeting will take place in Phoenix House, on October 20th at 2pm.