Delivering integrated policy and services for children

Sylda Langford
Office of the Minister for Children

Children Acts Advisory Board National Conference
‘Sharing the Task’

23rd October, 2007
Ormonde Hotel, Kilkenny
Contents

- Part I: Journey to this point
- Part II: Ambitions for the future of children in Ireland
Background

- Population growth – now 4.2 million up from 3.4 million in 1981
- Births outside marriage now 32% up from 5% in 1980
- Divorce applications increasing steadily
- Immigration and multiculturalism
- Economic success – “Celtic Tiger”
Children in Ireland

- Halfway up (or down?) the international league table – 9\textsuperscript{th} out of 21 OECD countries (UNICEF, 2007)
- Score well on: risk behaviours, subjective well-being, family and peer relationships, educational well-being;
- Score poorly on: health and safety, material well-being (i.e. poverty)
Why focus on children?

Practical reasons

- Ireland’s poor performance at UNCRC hearings, 1998
- Development of National Children’s Strategy (2000-10)
- Role of National Children’s Office
- International evidence: where all services are provided under one body, outcomes are better
Why focus on children?  
**Theoretical rationale**

- **The “whole child” perspective**
  - Child as active participant in own development
  - Importance of family and other relationships
  - Formal and informal supports
- Multiple dimensions of child’s development
- Underpinned by UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Renders certain distinctions redundant – e.g. education/care, learning/recreation etc.
The Office of the Minister for Children (OMC)

- Established by Government Decision (Dec 2005)
- Junior Minister attends Cabinet meetings
- Delegated responsibility in 3 Departments
- Policy involvement in Early Education and Youth Justice – service delivery remains with parent Departments
OMC’s broader remit

- To engage with every Government Department/Agency that can contribute to better outcomes for children

  - 10-year timeframe a key advantage
  - Encourages a collaborative, cross-sectoral approach to social policy
  - Lifecycle approach highlights children
Prevention and early intervention programme (PEI P)

- Government co-funding €36m project with Atlantic Philanthropies (2007-2012)
- 3 locations – Tallaght, Ballymun and Northside Partnership
  - Focused on disadvantaged communities
  - Innovation in service design
  - Rigorously evaluate impact on outcomes
- Challenge will be to transfer learning to mainstream when funding ceases
Using *Towards 2016* to drive implementation

- National Implementation Group – key decision-makers at national level
- Children’s Services Committees – focus on service delivery at local level, with better outcomes for children
- Drivers – Local Health Office (HSE) and Local Authority (CDBs)
- Involve all statutory agencies which have a role in delivering services for children
Understanding Children’s Lives

2. “Growing up in Ireland” – the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (NLSCI)
3. Data Strategy – to harness existing information and identify gaps
4. Capacity building in research
Early Years Care & Education

- Our education spend is lowest where the return on investment has been proven to be highest
- 180 “feeder” childcare services identified serving the most disadvantaged urban primary schools (DEIS)
- “Síolta” – National Quality Framework for Early Childhood developed
- Curricular guidelines for Early Years – due to be published this year
Children’s Participation

- “Children will have a voice in matters that affect them”
- Youth Councils at county level, with linkages to Children’s Service Committees
- Student councils in 2nd level schools
- Consultation on key national policy issues, e.g. age of sexual consent, youth justice, alcohol, mental health etc.
Irish Youth Justice Service

- Est. as result of Youth Justice Review, 2006
- €224m under NDP for Youth Justice
- Children Act, 2001 commenced 1/3/07, 23/07/07
- Additional resources for IYJS, Probation Service, Children’s Courts, extra JLOs, extra Garda Youth Diversion Projects
- Responsibility for management of detention schools transferred from DES to IYJS
Child Welfare & Protection

- Children Act, 2001 commenced 1/3/07
- Strengthened national management structure within HSE for Special Care and High Support Units – more effective liaison with Courts
- Multiple players – Health Service Executive, Police, Courts, Probation Service, Dept. of Justice, Dept. of Health….
- Added value of OMC – parties working together strategically
According to the recent Census, there are 1,036,034 children under 18 living in Ireland.

There are 5,338 children under 18 in the care of the Health Service Executive
- 4,702 in foster care
- 410 in residential care
- 224 in other placements

There are 101 children aged 10-17 years in custody.
Part II

Ambitions for the future

Children must be put at the centre of Policy and Services

- At very early stages of strategic developments for children
- Need common shared _vision_ of aspirations and expectations for children across universal and targeted services
- Create activities and _supports systems_ for all children and families
Create support systems that target children and families who are considered at risk of developing problems

Offer support/treatment to individual children/families experiencing problems
Services should be both horizontal and vertical in outlook, i.e.:

- They engage all relevant agencies and professionals to support children at a particular stage of their childhood (horizontal)

- At the same time ensure that an awareness of the child’s past and future is maintained and informs provision (vertical)
If the systems cannot help children, we have to change the systems.

Success (or otherwise) of supports for children and families demonstrated through quality of outcomes for children.
Inter-agency planning, collaboration and co-operation

- Our work to date has been service-led
- Work must be led by the outcomes we hope to achieve for children
- Policies and services must be developed from there
- All aspects of child well-being are interrelated
Cannot respond to child well-being in single focus, with fragmented actions and interventions.

Need to develop policies and plan services (and in some cases deliver them) with colleagues working in different sections and agencies to our own.

Training required – interpretations can be coloured by specific professional training and agency culture.
How should we work for children?

- Evidence-based research and practice should inform policy

- Services should be:
  - Designed according to clear and appropriate criteria
  - Incorporate evidence based practice
  - Well implemented
  - Subject to rigorous evaluation
  - Able to deliver positive measurable outcomes

- Stop any practices / actions which make no difference or carry the risk of poor / bad outcomes for children
Children’s challenge to us in 2007

- Challenge of leadership and management at all levels
- Challenge to enable and support front line workers to play the key role they should be playing
- Challenge to put the child at the centre of services – must adapt and work together to achieve better outcomes for children
- Benchmark for moving forward – *Agenda for Children’s Services: A Policy Handbook* by end 2007
Delivering integrated policy and services for children

Sylda Langford
Office of the Minister for Children

Children Acts Advisory Board National Conference
‘Sharing the Task’

23rd October, 2007
Ormonde Hotel, Kilkenny