CHILDREN’S RIGHTS ALLIANCE

Young People’s Film on Children’s Rights
Child and Family Agency Bill
UNCRC Optional Protocols

Uniting Voices for Children
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Foreword

Welcome to the Summer 2013 edition of our newsletter. What a summer it is hotting up to be – both in the heat stakes and for children’s rights!

We are now half way through the year and our hard work for children’s rights continues. We hosted a successful AGM in May, an important event giving us a chance to map out our priorities for 2013 and reflect on the work of 2012 – an exciting and historic year given the passage of the Children’s Referendum (see page 3).

We were delighted to welcome Veronica Yates, Director of Child Rights International Network (CRIN) to our AGM as a keynote speaker. Veronica gave us a global perspective on children’s rights, and focused closely on Ireland’s failure to ratify all three Optional Protocols to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Quite simply, Ireland trails behind its international peers on this – the Alliance will continue to campaign for action on this over the coming months.

As future sustainability is critical for the Alliance, and with a view to sustaining and promoting the independence of the organisation, we are exploring and implementing a number of options, including an increase in the membership fee via a tiered structure based on organisational income. We are all working together in a very difficult economic environment. This funding increase will allow the Alliance to work with our members to deliver important changes for children and to begin to increase the range of benefits available to members. We are extremely grateful to our members for their support and encouragement – without which our work could not continue.

The development of the Child and Family Agency is the key focus for us this year (see page 6). On 12 July, we welcomed the publication of the Bill establishing the Agency and we subsequently made an initial submission to Oireachtas members. While there is much to be welcomed, we are disappointed that the Bill does not go far enough to firmly embed the Agency in children’s rights. Thanks to our Working Group members who fed into the development of this submission.

Also during this quarter, we made a submission to the Minister for Justice and Equality on the Courts and Civil Law Bill 2013 (see page 8). We urged the Minister to amend the Bill to ensure that the views of the child are better considered, something the Minister has taken on board and publicly thanked the Alliance for in a Seanad debate on 26 June.

In July, we warmly welcomed the Government decision to close St. Patrick’s Institution for young offenders (see page 8). The continued detention of children and young people in St. Patrick’s has been a major blot on the Government’s human rights record. The Alliance, along with others, have been consistently campaigning for an end to this unacceptable practice for more than a decade.

Our short film on children’s rights has been recorded and is in the final stages of editing (see page 4). From the sneak peeks I’ve had, it’s shaping up to be a fantastic piece of work!

As this is my last newsletter as Acting Chief Executive, I would like to thank you for your support over the last number of months during what has been an exciting time for the Alliance in making Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child.

Best wishes,

Maria Corbett
Acting Chief Executive
The Children’s Rights Alliance’s 17th Annual General Meeting took place on 28 May in the European Parliament, Dublin 2. As always, the AGM provides us with a valuable opportunity to reflect on the work of the previous year and set priorities for the year ahead. This time, we looked back on 2012 – a very exciting and historic year given the successful passage of the Children’s Referendum.

The day also gave us a chance to discuss the next steps needed to fully realise children’s rights in Ireland. The AGM is also a great opportunity for members, old and new, to mingle and get to know each other better. For the second time, we opened up the latter part of the meeting to individuals beyond our membership, hosting a keynote speech from children’s rights expert Veronica Yates, Director of Child Rights International Network (see below) – with great success and to the interest of media.

The Alliance continues its campaign to urge the Irish Government to ratify the second and third Optional Protocols to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Disappointingly, only one of the three Protocols (on children in armed conflict) has been ratified to date. The second Optional Protocol relates to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the third allows children and their advocates to make complaints to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. These are clearly critical children’s rights issues, yet Ireland is trailing behind its international peers – something the Alliance wants to see action on urgently.

The non-ratification of these Protocols was highlighted once again at the Alliance’s AGM, at which Veronica Yates, Director of Child Rights International Network (CRIN), delivered a keynote speech, ‘An International Perspective on the Realisation of Children’s Rights’.

Veronica outlined the children’s rights tools that are available to hold States to account to achieve positive change for children and young people. She said that, “Protecting and empowering children by ratifying all three Optional Protocols [...] is a vital step towards creating global respect for children’s rights. Ireland lags way behind other international States in this regard. I am particularly concerned about the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. 163 countries around the world have seen fit to ratify this important Protocol yet Ireland lags pitifully behind and is one of only two European Union states who have not ratified it.”

The Government has committed to ratifying both Optional Protocols once the necessary legislation and other developments are in place. The Alliance will be hotting up our campaign to ensure the Government prioritises this issue as soon as possible.

Irish State must ratify Optional Protocols

The full text of the three Optional Protocols can be found at the United Nations Treaty Collection website www.treaties.un.org
UNCRC Film Project: Do Children’s Rights Matter?

Made in collaboration with a group of young people, our film project on children’s rights in Ireland is nearing completion. We think it is shaping up very nicely indeed and we can’t wait to see the final product!

The project marks 21 years of Ireland signing up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland in 1992. Nominated by our members and friends, 23 young people have come together to look at the impact the Convention has had in Ireland.

The project kicked off in March with a series of pre-production workshops, during which the young people learned about children’s rights and explored the rights they believe are most relevant to their generation. Mentored by TV professionals Ella McSweeney and Paula Williams, they also learned about film production, discussing different approaches and planning storyboards, re-enactments and running orders. Throughout the process the group was brimming with creative ideas about how to convey their issues on film.

All their hard work came together on two fantastic filming days, shot on location in St. Patrick’s University Hospital, where we were blessed with sunny blue skies.

The film will be launched in Dublin in September, and we believe it will demonstrate that, yes, children’s rights do matter very much! Look out for more information on the launch in our next newsletter.

Thank you to St. Patrick’s Mental Health Services, the Katharine Howard Foundation and all those who contributed through Fund it for generously supporting this project.
My experience working on the film project – Kirsty Nolan

As this is the 21st anniversary of Ireland signing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Children’s Rights Alliance thought it would be a good idea for a group of young people to express their views on this. The aim of the project was to create a short film on children’s rights in Ireland, from the point of view of young people. In the film we wanted to help make a change for young people in Ireland today.

Along with the main film, we made a shorter, ‘behind-the-scenes’ film to show all the work we put into it, step by step, along with all the fun! The whole process of the workshops, film pre-production and actually shooting the film is an experience that I will never forget. We had an amazing time together learning more about children’s rights, deciding on what rights and issues we would use in the film and actually making the sketch board for the film.

During the workshops we did different games and exercises to help us decide what we wanted in our film. The workshops were fun and we learned all the things it takes to create a film, including how to impact on audiences and common words used in the media industry.

There wasn’t a week we didn’t have fun as everyone got along so well and all our volunteers and leaders were truly incredible. Personally I loved the two days we spent filming. Whether you were on camera or off, running through scenes, helping the crew by carrying around the camera or lights or even taking the shoot notes, it was all great.

Not only did we learn about film making, we also learned more about children’s rights. We now know more of our rights than we did before. I was personally amazed at some of the rights, for example: every child has the right to a name. And every child has the right to have their voice heard.

On behalf of all the young people who took part in this project I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who made this project possible. We have all thoroughly enjoyed it and have made so many new friends. It is an experience I will never forget.

The main film together with ‘the behind-the-scenes’ film, will be launched in September. We are all so excited to see the film and hope that it will help to create a change for all the young people in Ireland.

Kirsty is one of the 23 young people who participated in the UNCRC film project.

Advisory Group Viewpoint – Foróige

Foróige was delighted to be part of the Children’s Rights Alliance film project marking the 21st anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We were delighted when two young people from Foróige, Nathan Quirke from Kildare and Rowena Malee from Mayo, were chosen to be part of a team of 23 young people from all over the country.

In addition, three former Foróige members, Michael Kiernan, Jessica Trimble, and Sarah Kearney provided facilitation support in the workshops and brought their valuable experience of volunteering with young people.

Foróige’s Advocacy Youth Officer, Susan Carey, was invited to participate on the Advisory Group to advise on youth participation. Susan highlighted the importance of working in partnership with the young people and ensuring that they were given an equal voice in the process.

The UNCRC Anniversary Film Project provided an excellent opportunity for the Children’s Rights Alliance and Foróige to develop and build on a very positive working relationship and we were thrilled to be part of such an exciting project.
Child and Family Agency Bill 2013: Legal Foundation for Fixing Broken System

The Child and Family Agency Bill 2013, published on 12 July, is a critically important piece of legislation which establishes a dedicated support agency for children and families under the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This Bill sets out the legal basis upon which the Child and Family Agency – and our entire child protection and family support system – will be built.

Why do we need the Bill?
The Bill will lay the foundation for fixing a broken and dysfunctional system. We have known for many years that our child protection and family support systems are deeply flawed – successive reports showing how we have utterly failed children tell us this again and again.

The majority of people in Ireland recently ticked a YES box in the Children’s Referendum. We want to make this real by creating a rights-based Agency that leads to better outcomes for children and families.

The Alliance’s role to date
The Alliance has taken an active role in monitoring the development of the Child and Family Agency and the legislation to underpin it. We co-hosted a massively over-subscribed symposium on the Agency back in February and have since established a Working Group from within our membership.

In June, the Alliance was invited by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to meet with her for a briefing on the Bill, in advance of its publication. During this briefing, representatives from the Alliance’s Working Group on the Agency were updated on the outline of the Bill and had an opportunity to explore areas of concern and to outline our shared vision for the new Agency.

What does the Bill do?
The Bill provides for the establishment of a Child and Family Agency. It will bring together the HSE Child and Family Services, the Family Support Agency, the National Education Welfare Board, the Pre-school Inspection service and services relating to the psychological welfare of children, and to domestic, sexual and gender based violence.
What do we think of the Bill?
The Alliance welcomes many aspects of this Bill but we are concerned that it has not gone far enough to firmly embed the Agency in children’s rights. See our Initial Submission on the Child and Family Agency Bill 2013 available at http://bit.ly/10ZLObL.

A key recommendation is to strengthen the principles underpinning the Agency, in particular, the best interests of the child and listening to the voice of the child. Within each damning report on child protection, a common thread was that the child’s views were invisible and that institutional interests were put before the interests of vulnerable children. It is vital we get this right.

Our submission also makes recommendations on how we can:
- include a requirement to promote equality;
- strengthen the focus on family support and educational welfare;
- reflect the importance of prevention and early intervention;
- clarify the interactions between the Agency and family law;
- ensure strong co-operation and data exchange within the Agency and between the Agency and third parties;
- augment the relationship between the Agency and the voluntary sector;
- specify which professionals are to be included on the Board.

Where is the Bill now?
On 17 July, the Bill was debated at the second stage in the Dáil, just before its summer recess. Our submission was referenced a number of times during this debate. We look forward to engaging in further discussion in September as the Bill progresses through the Oireachtas. We will continue to watch this space very closely.

The Sixth Report of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, published in July outlines sobering findings in relation to Ireland’s child protection landscape and shows that Ireland still has a long way to go to fully uphold children’s rights.

The Alliance commended Dr. Geoffrey Shannon on his report and called for urgent action by Government to implement his recommendations. In particular, we called on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to coordinate Government action on these and the outstanding recommendations from the previous five reports.

Raising a substantial number of red flags that demand Government action, the report contains innovative recommendations, including:
- Consider homophobic and transphobic bullying as a child protection issue and introduce legislation ensuring schools have stronger disciplinary codes
- Provide guardianship rights to step-parents, civil partners, and potentially others acting in loco parentis, who are not the child’s biological parent
- Take children’s rights into account when making Budget decisions
- Introduce new measures to allow the National Education Welfare Board to work more closely with parents and to ensure children under six are attending school
- Establish a child-centred asylum system that is in line with international best practice, and ensure the forthcoming Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill complies with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Develop clear guidelines on the disclosure to third parties of confidential records relating to children in child sexual abuse cases
- Ratify the Optional Protocols to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on a communications/complaints procedure.

Dr. Geoffrey Shannon has been reappointed as Special Rapporteur on Child Protection for a further three years – an announcement that we warmly welcome.
**Alliance Pre-Budget Campaign**

This year’s budget is expected earlier than usual on 15 October. The Alliance published its Pre-Budget 2014 Submission to the Department of Social Protection in early July. This year’s submission focused on the importance of proofing budgetary decisions for their impact on children’s rights, in particular, the right of the child to live free from poverty. The tough economic climate does not relieve the Government from their international commitments on children’s rights.

The Alliance warned that struggling families with children cannot take any further cuts to Child Benefit or other payments such as the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. While significant savings have been made from cuts to such payments over the previous budgets, children themselves have not benefited. We recommended that Government outline clear proposals in Budget 2014 for redirecting resources to ensure better outcomes for children.

This could happen, for example, through the provision of school books, quality-assured childcare or enhanced healthcare. The Alliance, as part of a group of NGOs, met with the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, TD, in relation to child income supports in May. Also in May, the Alliance stated its position on proposed reforms to the Child Benefit payment set out in the Mangan Report to the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection at a briefing with colleagues from the End Child Poverty Coalition. The Alliance welcomes the Mangan Report proposal to retain a universal approach to Child Benefit and in principle supports the introduction of a two-tier child income support system. However, the proposal needs to be carefully considered, in particular in relation to supporting low-income families in employment.

![The Alliance’s Edel Quinn addressing the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection.](image)

**Plans to Close St. Patrick’s Institution**

The Government has announced it will close St. Patrick’s Institution for young offenders within six months, a decision warmly welcomed by the Alliance. The continued detention of children and young people in St. Patrick’s has been a major blot on the Government’s human rights record.

We first highlighted conditions in St. Patrick’s as a critical children’s rights violation to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1998 and with successive government Ministers over the last decade.

In Report Card 2012, we awarded the Government an ‘F grade’ in relation to children in detention. The commitment in April 2012 to end the detention of children under 18 in St. Patrick’s was celebrated in Report Card 2013 with a ‘B+ grade’. We now urge the Government to strive for an ‘A grade’ in Report Card 2014 by completing the move of all under 18s out of the adult prison system.

The promised development of a new child detention facility at the Oberstown campus must happen within the committed timeline of 2014 so that all under 18s are moved from their interim placement at Wheatfield Prison.

![St. Patrick’s Institution](image)

**Submission on the Courts and Civil Law Bill 2013**

In April, the Alliance welcomed the publication of the Courts and Civil Law Bill 2013 and made a submission to Alan Shatter TD, Minister for Justice and Equality. It is vital that this Bill balances openness and transparency in court proceedings with the protection of the privacy of children. Our submission made the following recommendations:

- that judges give consideration to the best interests of the child in decision-making on press access
- that the phrase used in the Bill, “bona fide members of the Press”, be clearly defined
- that clearer guidance be given to restrict press access and the publication or broadcast of evidence during proceedings to preserve the child’s anonymity.
- and critically, to amend the Bill to ensure that the views of the child and parties to the case are considered in the decision-making process on restricting press access and broadcasting.

We are especially pleased that, during a Seanad debate on the Bill on 26 June 2013, Minister Alan Shatter thanked the Alliance for this last recommendation, which he has accepted and included in the Bill. This is a very positive reflection of the Alliance’s work in this area.

In early July, the Alliance wrote to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs urging her to prioritise the submission of the latest State Report under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Due to be submitted to the UN Committee in April 2009, the State Report is now over four years late.

We understand the State Report has recently been finalised by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and has been submitted to Government. Following Cabinet approval, it will be submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. Due to the late submission of the Report and the Committee’s own scheduling, it is likely that the next review of Ireland by the Committee will not take place until 2016 – a full decade since the last review in 2006. The examination process is meant to take place every five years. The Alliance will closely follow this activity and will once again produce a comprehensive alternative or ‘shadow’ report in collaboration with our member organisations.

Crèches Exposé – Blatant Disregard for Children’s Rights

An RTÉ Prime Time exposé on crèches aired on 28 May resulted in a massive national discussion about the treatment of children in early childhood care and education settings. The Alliance condemned the actions depicted in the documentary, emphasising that children have a right to be protected from all forms of ill-treatment and abuse. Focusing on what is needed to improve the system, the Alliance called for a five-point plan of action. This plan is based on recommendations we have made over many years in our Report Card series.

We welcome the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs’ agenda to improve the quality of pre-school services. The State has a clear duty under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to develop services for the care and benefit of children. Much more investment is needed to develop a system that fully supports children’s development and the enjoyment of their childhoods.

Five Point Action Plan:

1. A rights-based National Early Years’ Strategy – children’s rights must be firmly embedded within this strategy, currently being developed.

2. The full rollout of Síolta and Aistear, the standards governing the early years’ sector. Currently, implementation is patchy or non-existent.

3. Urgent inspection by the HSE of childcare settings that have not been inspected in the past year. All inspection reports must be published and action taken on foot of findings. Inspectors must be fully upskilled and their remit expanded beyond health and safety.

4. Upskill the workforce by introducing minimum qualifications. Better management and supervision to support staff in their continuing professional development.

5. An audit to ensure that the care and education children receive is high-quality and having a positive impact.
Foróige is a dynamic youth movement that makes it possible for young people in Ireland, no matter what their social background, to reach their true potential.

The charity works with more than 56,000 young people and 5,500 adult volunteers annually, through a network of more than 600 youth clubs and cafés, 150 targeted projects and national programmes such as Citizenship, Entrepreneurship and Leadership.

We work to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society. At the heart of everything we do is a passionate belief in the awe inspiring potential of every young person. Our vision is simple: an Ireland that believes in every young person.

Foróige is continuing to strive to meet the ever changing needs of young people and our youth work programmes are showing a positive impact on thousands of young people across Ireland.

**Youth Entrepreneurship**
Recent research shows that young people involved in NFTE (Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship) – operated in Ireland by Foróige – found that 70% of all participants have found a job, either as an employee or an entrepreneur. The programme enables young people to develop skills in business and enterprise, and in doing so to unlock their individual talents and potential.

In Ireland, the programme continues to grow. Last year more than 1,500 participants from low-income communities took part in the programme, setting up more than 700 businesses which generated a turnover of €250,000.

**Youth Citizenship**
Foróige has been involved in promoting the value of active citizenship since 1969. Since then, the programme has grown to become one of Foróige’s most important annual initiatives. An out-of-school education programme, it helps young people develop the values and skills to become active citizens. More than 12,000 young people across Ireland voluntarily work to make their communities better places to live and became a force of good for communities as part of the Foróige Citizenship Programme and Awards.

**Youth Leadership**
Foróige runs one of Ireland’s largest youth leadership programmes. It enables young people to develop new skills like self awareness, communication and team building, and to set goals for themselves to be a force for good in their communities.

The ‘Foróige Leadership for Life Programme’ has received formal accreditation and best practice recognition from NUI Galway, through the Foundation Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action, in partnership with UNESCO.

For more on Foróige, please visit our website www.foroige.ie or for all our latest news, events and videos please visit www.facebook.com/foroige.

If you would like your organisation to feature in our next newsletter, email emma@childrensrights.ie
Congratulations to our Mini Marathon team, Rachel Duke and Louise Dromey, who set up fundraising profiles on iDonate and raised a fantastic €575!

Many thanks to everyone who donated in support of our work to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child.

The Alliance was lucky to have three excellent interns working with us over the summer months. We would like to say a big thank you to Laura Scanlan (a second-year law student from University College Dublin), Julie Hildebrand (a law student from the University of Tulsa, USA) and Trina Dzidonu (a first-year student of Economics, Politics and Law in Dublin City University).

The Alliance is very happy to welcome three new members. We look forward to working with all of you!

Irish Premature Babies supports families of premature babies in Ireland, through providing services, information and support.

Mental Health Reform works with people who experience mental health difficulties, their families and friends in promoting a fundamental improvement in mental health services, social inclusion and vindication of rights.

Realt Beag, Ballyfermot STAR Child and Family Centre is part of a larger drugs project, providing full day care, focusing on the wellbeing of the child and linking this care with the wellbeing of the parent who is accessing support for drug/alcohol misuse.

The Alliance would like to congratulate Communications and Development Manager, Emma McKinley and George Rice, who got married last May. We wish them many years of happiness together!
The Children’s Rights Alliance unites over 100 organisations working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We improve the lives of all children and young people by ensuring Ireland’s laws, policies and services comply with the standards set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Members

Alcohol Action Ireland
Amnesty International Ireland
Ana Liffey Drug Project
Arc Adoption
The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
Assoc. for Criminal Justice Research and Development (ACJRD)
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
ATD Fourth World – Ireland Ltd
Barnardos
Barretstown Camp
BeLonG To Youth Services
Bessborough Centre
Border Counties Childhood Network
CARI Foundation
Carr’s Child and Family Services
Catholic Guides of Ireland
Catholic Youth Care
Childhood Development Initiative
Childminding Ireland
Children in Hospital Ireland
City of Dublin YMCA
COPE Galway
Crosscare
DIT – School of Social Sciences & Legal Studies
Doras Luimni
Down Syndrome Ireland
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project
Early Childhood Ireland
Educate Together
School of Education UCD
Enable Ireland
EPIC (formerly JAYPIC)
Focus Ireland
Forbairt Naionra Teoranta
Forbige
GLEN - Gay and Lesbian Equality Network
Headstrong - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health
Home-Start National Office Ireland
Immigrant Council of Ireland
Inclusion Ireland
Inspire Ireland
Institute of Community Health Nursing
Integration Centre
International Adoption Association
Irish Association of Adoption and Social Care Work (IAASC)
Irish Association of Social Workers
Irish Association of Suicidology
Irish Autism Action
Irish Centre for Human Rights, NUI Galway
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)
Irish Foster Care Association
Irish Girl Guides
Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
Irish Penal Reform Trust
Irish Premature Babies
Irish Refugee Council
Irish Second Level Students’ Union (ISSU)
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Irish Traveller Movement
Irish Youth Foundation (IYF)
Jack & Jill Children’s Foundation
Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice
Junglebox Childcare Centre F.D.Y.S.
Kids’ Own Publishing Partnership
Kilbarrack Youth Project
Lifestart National Office
Marriage Equality – Civil Marriage for Gay and Lesbian People
Mary Immaculate College
Matt Talbot Community Trust
Mental Health Reform
Mothers’ Union of Ireland
Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth and Family Project
MyMind
National Association for Parent Support
National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers (NOTA)
National Parents Council Post Primary
National Parents Council Primary
National Youth Council of Ireland
One Family
One in Four
OPEN
Parentline
Parentstop
Pawee Point
Peter McVerry Trust
Psychological Society of Ireland
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
Realt Beag
Saoirse Housing Association
SAOL Beag Children’s Centre
Scouting Ireland
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Sonas Housing Association
SpunOut.ie
St. Nicholas Montessori College
St. Nicholas Montessori Society
St. Patrick’s University Hospital
Start Strong
Step by Step Child & Family Project
Sugradh
The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
Treoir
UNICEF Ireland
Unmarried and Separated Families of Ireland
youngballymun
Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP)
Youth Work Ireland

The Alliance is funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, the One Foundation and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

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