



Friday 4 September 2009

FOR RELEASE ON MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2009

SHANNON SPOTLIGHTS THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN OF IRELAND

'Children need to be recognised as individuals, as opposed to objects of concern' says **Geoffrey Shannon**, a **leading family law expert**, in the latest edition of the **Children's Rights Podcast Series** (launched Monday 7 September), in calling for the strengthening of children's rights in the Constitution. Mr. Shannon, who is also the **Government's Special Rapporteur on Child Protection**, and **Chairperson of the Adoption Board**, believes that an unambiguous, strong statement entitling children to protection in the Constitution is vital for the safety and wellbeing of future generations. Mr. Shannon argues that the Constitution currently does not oblige the State or the Courts to consider the perspective of the child, which has proved devastating in the past. This is clearly evidenced in the recent Ryan Report, resulting in the abuse of 30,000 children. He also believes that the Constitution should be amended to empower the State to intervene when a child is at risk; state intervention 'in a minority of cases is necessary' argues Mr Shannon, pointing to the disturbing Kelly Fitzgerald case, among others.

Mr Shannon also believes that more family support is needed, suggesting that it 'ranks a poor third to child protection and alternative care'. He believes that 'one of the common features of all of the child protection crises in recent times has revolved around the absence of early intervention. Early intervention is about investing in communities at a local level, and ensuring that communities have the requisite resources to solve problems at a local level, which would involve the NGO sector working very closely with Government'. And this should be a priority in these economic times, as **'investing in children now, will yield**

significant benefits into the future, in terms of fewer children in the criminal justice system, and fewer children with emotional or behavioural problems’.

Mr Shannon is critical of the proposals in An Bord Snip Nua, which propose dissolving the Family Support Agency, stating: ‘In an age where we’re experiencing economic difficulties, there’s a tendency to target areas which perhaps aren’t as visible, and sectors which aren’t as vocal as other sectors’.

Jillian van Turnhout, Alliance Chief Executive, says: ‘Geoffrey is a true children’s rights champion, always placing the rights and needs of children at the centre of his thinking and ensuring that their best interests are paramount. He throws a spotlight on the forgotten children of Ireland and provides compelling reasons as to why we need to strengthen children’s rights in our Constitution. We look forward to continuing our work with him to create an Ireland that is one of the best places in the world to be a child.’

___Ends___

For further information, please contact:
Carys Thomas, Communications Director
Tel: (01) 662 9400 / 087-7702845
Fax: (01) 662 9355
Email: carys@childrensrights.ie

Notes to Editor:

1. The Children’s Rights Podcast Series is available at www.childrensrights.ie or iTunes.
2. To send comments or to subscribe, go to: podcast@childrensrights.ie
3. The Children’s Rights Alliance is a designated Social Partner.