

**REQUEST FOR TENDERS dated 13 October 2021
for the development phase of a national service
to support parents of children in the care of the
state.**

Open Tender

Tender deadline: 5pm 3 November 2021

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PART 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and general objectives

The Children's Rights Alliance has been contracted by Tusla – the Child and Family Agency to carry out a scoping exercise of the needs of parents with children in care and to run the tender process to secure a service provider who will deliver and evaluate a model of supports to meet the identified needs. The service that will be provided is intended to be part of a developmental process that once proven effective, will move towards the development of a larger national service.

This tender process is being run independent of Tusla and is being overseen by an Advisory Group of independent experts:

- Dr. Carol Coulter, Executive Director of the Child Care Law Reporting Project
- Jillian van Turnhout, former Senator
- June Tinsley, Head of Advocacy and Communications, National Council for the Blind and Board Member of the Children's Rights Alliance
- Professor Conor O'Mahony, Special Rapporteur on Child Protection and Deputy Dean, School of Law, University College Cork
- Tom Costello, member of the National Advisory Council for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*

The Children's Rights Alliance is now inviting tenders from suitably experienced service providers to provide a service to meet the needs that have been identified in Part 2 of this document. Consortium tenders are welcome.

1.2 Budget

The total budget available for the service is €1.5m over an initial three years with a commitment in principle for €1m over a further two years. The maximum available per year is €500,000 with tenderers permitted to carry over funds from the first year only. Tenderers are responsible for all tax, VAT and other associated liabilities. No further expenses will be payable. The contract for the service will run for a five-year period subject to the successful tenderer adhering to all terms and conditions for the contract with Tusla who will be funding this initiative.

This Request for Tenders (RFT) supersedes and replaces any and all previous documentation, communications and correspondence between the Children's Rights Alliance and the Tenderers and Tenderers should place no reliance on such previous documentation and correspondence. The Contractor does not bind itself to accept the lowest priced or any Tender. This RFT does not constitute an offer or commitment to enter into a Contract for Services. No contractual rights in relation to the Contractor will exist unless and until a formal written Services Contract has been executed by or on behalf of the Contractor. The Contractor may cancel this request for tenders at any time prior to a formal written Services Contract being executed by or on behalf of the Contractor.

1.3 Conflict of Interest

Any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest on the part of a Tenderer, Subcontractor or individual employee(s) or agent(s) of a Tenderer or Subcontractor(s) must be fully disclosed to the Contractor as soon as the conflict or potential conflict is or becomes apparent.

1.4 Publicity

No publicity regarding this Competition or any Services Contract pursuant to this Competition is permitted unless and until the Contractor has given its prior written consent to the relevant communication.

1.5 Confidentiality

All documentation, data, statistics, information, or material disclosed or furnished by the Contractor to Tenderers during the course of this Competition:

- are furnished for the sole purpose of replying to this RFT only;
- may not be used, communicated, reproduced or published for any other purpose without the prior written permission of the Contractor;
- shall be treated as confidential by the Tenderer and by any third parties (including subcontractors) engaged or consulted by the Tenderer; and
- must be returned immediately to the Contractor upon cancellation or completion of this Competition if so requested by the Contractor.

1.6 Service Specification

The service being tendered for is the development of a national service to support the advocacy and information needs of parents with children in care. A comprehensive summary of the needs identified are contained in Appendix 1. These have been assessed and prioritised and are based on the advice of the Advisory Group. The service should be developed along the lines of the following expected outcomes:

- Parents whose children are in care are empowered and supported in the court process and in their interactions with Tusla
- Parents have increased levels of information and a greater knowledge of their rights
- A service is developed that is sustainable and capable of being scaled up into a national model
- There is increased interaction between agencies working with parents who have children in care
- Children and young people in the care system benefit from improved relationships between parents and Tusla

The **scope of the service** being tendered for should provide support to parents or those acting in *loco parentis* (including siblings in a kinship care situation) that have children who are in the care of the State under a care order or in voluntary care.

The three **overarching activities** of the service that is being tendered for are:¹

1. An Advocacy Service for Parents of Children in Care

The advocacy service provided to parents should – without compromising the safety, welfare, and protection of the child or young person – empower parents to participate in the child welfare/protection process from an informed position. Primarily, it should support them in both the court process and engaging with Tusla. It should support and empower parents to speak for themselves wherever possible, and promote good communication, and a positive working relationship between the parents and all those involved in the process of keeping their child in care.² The service should also signpost relevant services to parents generally and, as a secondary part of the Advocacy Service, assist individual parents with accessing tailored services.

2. Information Provision and Communications

The service should provide information that is accessible in multiple formats for parents whose children are in care. This includes information on their rights, on the care process and information on the services available to them provided by the HSE and others and how they can access them.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation

A key activity of this service will be quality control, collection of data and trends and monitoring of the project. The service will need to demonstrate how the approach to delivering the outcomes is sustainable and scalable to a larger national service. The tenderer will need to build in a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for the project. This should include:

- An outcomes evaluation: A monitoring and evaluation framework to test the outcomes of the service
- A process evaluation: An independent evaluation on the effectiveness of the model provided.

****Tenderers must address each of the specification requirements listed below in this part of the RFT and also submit a completed logic model in the template set out in Appendix 2.***

¹ While the need for therapeutic and other supports was identified in the needs scoping exercise, the service being tendered for is not for the direct provision of these services. It is for the provision of the activities set out in this section.

² Lindley B. & Richards M. (2002) Protocol on Advice and Advocacy for Parents (Child Protection). Cambridge, Centre for Family Research, University of Cambridge. <https://frg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/advocacy-protocol.pdf>

PART 2: Instructions to Tenderers

Applications for tenders

There is no application form and instead tenderers are asked to submit a proposal no longer than 20 pages that covers the following headings:

1. Provide a detailed description of the service model that will deliver the three activities (*an advocacy service for parents of children in care; information provision and communications; and, monitoring and evaluation*). Please include the following:

- Detail the expected milestones and outputs broken down by year – this should be informed by the logic model in Appendix 2.
- Describe how parents will be reached by the service and the expected numbers that will be reached by the service each year. As documented in the scoping exercise, the independence of this service is key. Describe how you will maintain and demonstrate **independence** in delivering this service.
- When describing your response under ‘Information Provision and Communications’ describe the **communication and information outputs** that are planned to promote the existence of the service to its target audience. Explain the choice of dissemination and communication channels.
- When covering monitoring and evaluation, please describe the evaluation methods and indicators (quantitative and qualitative) to:
 - a. Monitor Quality: Describe the measures planned to ensure that implementation of the new service is of high quality and clients’ needs are met in a timely fashion. Describe the methods to ensure good quality, monitoring, planning and control.
 - b. Monitor Progress: The indicators proposed to measure progress should be relevant, realistic and measurable.
 - c. Evaluate Impact: Describe the evaluation methods and indicators (quantitative and qualitative) to monitor and verify the outreach and coverage of the activities and results (including unit of measurement, baseline and target values).

2. Justify the **approach and methodology** underpinning the service delivery model that will be used to deliver each activity within the service. Explain why what you are proposing is the most suitable for achieving the outcomes including how the model can be scaled up. Include ethical and safety considerations to ensure that target groups are not subjected to harm in any way.

3. Detail the **project initiation phase** and the timeline for the setup of the delivery of the service.

4. Describe critical **risks**, uncertainties or difficulties related to the implementation of the service, and your measures/ strategy for addressing them. Indicate for each risk (in the description) the impact and likelihood that the risk will materialise (high, medium, low), even after taking account of the mitigation measures.

5. Financial Management: Describe the measures adopted to ensure that the proposed results and objectives will be achieved in the most cost-effective way. Indicate the arrangements adopted for the **financial management** of the project.

6. Consortium bids: If applying as a **consortium**, please outline the participants and explain how they will work together to deliver the service. What governance arrangements will be in place? Who will be legally accountable? How will they bring together the necessary expertise? How will they complement each other? In what way does each of the participants contribute to the service? and how will the Service be governed and managed on a day to day basis? Is an MOU in place between the partners and how will conflict be managed should it arise? Please indicate under financial management how the financial resources will be allocated and managed within the consortium.

Completed tenders should be submitted to jobs@childrensrights.ie by **5pm on Wednesday 3 November**. Late tenders will not be considered. For further information, please contact us through e-tender and Julie Ahern, Legal and Policy Manager by email Julie@childrensrights.ie. Please note responses to any queries for further information or clarification will be circulated to all those participating in the Tender process.

This tender process is being conducted independent of Tusla. The service established will be operationally independent of Tusla. If a Tenderer considers that any of the information supplied in their Tender response is either commercially sensitive or confidential in nature, this should be highlighted and the reasons for its sensitivity specified. In such cases the relevant material will, in response to a request under the FOI Act, be examined in the light of the exceptions provided for in the Act.

PART 3: Selection and Awards Criteria

3.1 Awards Criteria

An evaluation committee will assess all applications.

The award criteria for this RFT are as follows

- **Relevance:** extent to which the proposal matches the outcomes and activities of the RFT as set out in Part 2 above. Clarity and consistency of the service: logical links between the identified needs, activities and outcomes as set out in Part 2 (40 points)
- **Methodology** for delivering the service: feasibility of approach and methodology to meeting the outcomes and activities identified within the proposed time frame; financial feasibility (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; cost-effectiveness (best value for money) (40 points)
- **Impact:** ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups; appropriate strategy for ensuring sustainability and scalability (20 points)

3.2 Organisational Requirements

By submitting the Tender the Tenderers confirm, that if awarded the Services Contract, they will, from the effective date of the services contract have in place the following:

a. Child Protection

Criteria	Minimum Requirement
Child Safeguarding Statement	The Tenderer will be required to have a child safeguarding statement in place that complies with the requirements set out in the Children First Act 2015.
Garda Vetting Procedures	Procedures in place to ensure that staff members engaging with children and young people will be Garda vetted.

b. Quality Assurance Standards

Risk Register

Policy/Procedure	Minimum Standard
Risk Assessment	A formal register must exist that confirms the completion of risk assessments and the areas which were assessed with contingency plans set out.
IT Risk Assessment Register	A formal register must exist that confirms the completion of IT risk assessments and the areas which were assessed.

Policy/Procedure	Minimum Standard
Conflict of Interest Policy and Procedure	A formal written policy must exist setting out how a conflict-of-interest check should be performed. Each matter must have a check verification recorded against the file/client/matter.

Practice and Systems Management

Policy/Procedure	Minimum Standard
Confidentiality Policy	A formal written policy must exist which governs how staff deal with client confidentiality, or in its absence such a policy is included elsewhere within the organisation.
Complaints Policy	A formal complaints policy, or if one does not exist, please outline your plans to develop one.

IT and Knowledge Management

Policy/Procedure	Minimum Standard
Data Protection and Information Security	A formal written policy must exist that governs the collection, handling, processing, storage transportation and destruction of client sensitive and confidential information in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

c. Tax

Tax Clearance Certificate	The service will be required to produce a current Tax Clearance Certificate/ TCRN. Where a Tax Clearance Certificate expires within the course of a contract, the right to seek a renewed certificate is reserved. All payments under the contract will be conditional on the contractor being in possession of a valid certificate as required.
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d. Insurance

Insurance	Tenderers will be required to hold relevant areas of cover including Employers Liability, Public Liability and Professional Indemnity Insurance or a commitment to have same in place for duration of the project.
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e. Sub-Contractors

- Tenderers should note that where a Tenderer is relying on the capacity of other entities (Subcontractors) for the purposes of fulfilling any of the requirements of this section, the Tenderer must submit a declaration from the Subcontractor that they will place the necessary policies, procedures and resources at the disposal of the Tenderer.

3.3 Pricing schedule

*Tenderers are required to complete the pricing schedule below. If there are costs that do not come under the headings in the below pricing schedule tenderers are obliged to include those costs also.

The total Budget available is €500,000 per annum. Tenderers are responsible for all tax, VAT and other associated liabilities. No further expenses will be payable. Please insert your notes to each budget line, explaining assumptions and basis of calculation.

a. Personnel Costs							
<i>(by Staff Role)</i>	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	Notes
	€	€	€	€	€	€	
							1
							2
							3
Sub-total:							
b. Programme Costs <i>(broken down under the three activities set out in the service specification)</i>							
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	Notes
	€	€	€	€	€	€	
Sub-total:							
c. Evaluation Costs <i>(detail below)</i>							
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	Notes
	€	€	€	€	€	€	
Sub-total:							
TOTAL							

Appendix 1: Summary of Need

Introduction:

The Children's Rights Alliance has been contracted by Tusla - the Child and Family Agency to conduct a scoping exercise and carry out consultations on the needs of parents of children in care and tender for a national support service for this cohort. This important development follows a dialogue hosted by the Children's Rights Alliance between our members and Bernard Gloster, the CEO of Tusla in October 2020 where members identified this as a pressing need.

This project is overseen by an advisory group of independent experts:

- Dr Carol Coulter, Executive Director of the Child Care Law Reporting Project;
- Jillian van Turnhout, former Senator;
- June Tinsley, Head of Advocacy and Communications, National Council for the Blind and Board Member of the Children's Rights Alliance;
- Professor Conor O'Mahony, Special Rapporteur on Child Protection and Deputy Dean, School of Law, University College Cork; and
- Tom Costello, member of the National Advisory Council for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

During the period 26 August to 1 October the Alliance engaged in consultations with parents and professionals who work with parents. These were carried out through a mixture of surveys, one-to-one conversations and focus groups. Below is a summary of the needs that parents who have children in care identified through our consultations.

The majority of parents who took part in our consultations and surveys had one child in care (51 per cent), with 43 per cent having two to four children in care and six per cent having five to seven children in care. The age range of children was primarily between seven and 17 years.

Needs of parents

An overriding need identified by the participants was the need for the establishment of an independent, confidential, non-judgemental, professional advocacy service that can support parents with a child in care to understand and meaningfully engage with both Tusla and the court process. It was stressed that an advocacy service needed to be independent of Tusla. It was felt that a service of this nature should help parents to navigate the social work system and help them to understand their rights. It was strongly felt that there was a need for this support to be available to parents within the court system also.

The need for improved communication on the part of social work teams was strongly raised by those who took part in the consultation, including the need for someone to explain the reasons why a parent's child needs to be in care and what steps need to be taken in order for the child to be returned to the parent. This could take the form of a letter to the parent that outlines the reasons for the decision to take a child into care and what is necessary to permit the child to return. Aligned to this the need for consistency in social work was highlighted by a number of professionals. The particular needs of a parent who might have a disability were raised by professionals who felt that there is need for this to be taken into account particularly when communicating with parents.

The need for access to a suite of information supports that could help parents to understand systems and processes was highlighted. The need for somewhere parents should be able to go for

information both about available services and about their rights with many saying that there should be guides and leaflets on both of these. It was also felt that specialist parents' courses should be made available along with a suite of therapeutic supports including family therapy, counselling, grief services and specific mental health services.

Parents also highlighted the importance and need for peer groups. Parents had a number of recommendations for supports they needed in the legal system. These included the need for adequate legal representation, someone to make them aware of their legal rights and shorter waiting lists. Supports around access were mentioned a number of times by those who took part in the process with many parents feeling like that this is a key area where there should be more done both to encourage their access with their children but also their children's access with their siblings.

On a practical level parents expressed the need for financial supports to be put in place for parents to assist with transport, access and buying things for their children.

Other needs identified that will not form part of the service being tendered for included:

- Mental health needs
- Homelessness and housing needs
- Domestic violence
- Understanding and ability to engage with the care process with tusla
- Emotional and therapeutic response and coping mechanisms
- Parenting supports, in particular supports specific to them and what has happened
- Help to form relationships and bonds even if child is in care and how to maintain and nurture relationships if child is in care
- The need to have support to maintain the connection and communication with children as well as regular access where appropriate
- Support to establish and maintain relationships with the foster carers
- The need to have clear pathways to be reunited with their children where appropriate
- Access to good legal advice and support
- Many professionals felt the need for parents did not differ based on the age of their child but however different differentiated based on the needs of the parent involved the needs of the child and the situation.
- Support needs to be proactive with automatic referral to supports at as early a point as possible, preferably before the child comes into care

Barriers to parents accessing supports:

While some parents said there was nothing that stopped them from accessing supports, the main barrier identified was the lack of specific supports and the lack of the right supports being available for parents with children in care. The lack of information and awareness of supports was evident both in the surveys and in the one-to-one conversations. Where parents were accessing supports, a number of them said they were left to find them for themselves. Related to this a number of parents cited a lack of trust in services and a fear that they would be judged for accessing supports as a barrier to engaging with services. Parents perceive that one of their biggest barriers they face is stigma and blame both from within services and also from society as a whole.

Some parents identified issues such as learning difficulties and the impact of seeking supports on their health, mental health, the emotional toll, the time and energy it takes to engage with the various services and the frustration that ensues from the lack of progress.

On a very practical level the lack of transport to different services arose frequently as an issue in both the surveys and the one-to-one conversations. People expressed a need for services to be

where people are and not only be in urban areas that often require people to travel long distances. Aligned to this the lack of financial supports offered to parents arose as a significant barrier to accessing support. The reality of significant waiting lists for therapeutic supports alongside the inability to pay for private supports was a common theme that arose, particularly in the one-to-one conversations.

Specific to the legal system parents cited the complete lack of legal information as a huge barrier and in particular they noted that parents need to know what they are entitled to, what they are entitled to ask and their rights. Parents said that the long waiting lists for civil legal aid had a huge impact on them. Even where parents had access to legal aid, the solicitors often did not come back to parents with answers to questions or meet them in advance of a court hearing. Many parents described feeling completely alone in the courtroom and feeling like they had no one to talk to about court proceedings due to the in-camera rule. They felt that the in-camera rule was one of the biggest barriers to accessing services.

Many obstacles to parents accessing supports were identified by the participants these included:

- The lack of services.
- The need to move away from the adversarial system.
- Other agencies not knowing the care system or the language and there being a huge gap in their knowledge and understanding.
- A service not being independent of Tusla is a big barrier.
- Parents feeling shame and stigma.
- Having to travel long distances to access services.
- Lack of financial support for parents.
- Poor communication from Tusla staff to parents.

Appendix 2: Logic Model

Inputs	Activities <i>Please outline the activities and outputs that will be provided under the following headings</i>	Outputs <i>Within each Activity, the specific outputs proposed (eg service elements, number of clients served, client support numbers, client support hours, materials/publications, peer support, evaluation plans)</i>	Outcomes
	<p>1. Advocacy Service for Parents of Children in Care</p> <p>An advocacy service to empower parents to participate in the child protection process from an informed position, speaking for themselves wherever possible, and promoting good communication, and a positive working relationship, between the parents and the state actors.</p> <p>2. Information Provision and Communications</p> <p>Information and information resources for parents whose children are in care. This includes information on their rights, on the care process and information on the</p>		<p>Parents whose children are in care are empowered and supported in the court process and in their interactions with Tusla.</p> <p>Parents have increased levels of information and knowledge of their rights.</p> <p>A service is developed that is sustainable and capable of being scaled up into a national model.</p> <p>There is increased interaction between agencies working with parents who have children in care.</p> <p>Children and young people in the care system benefit from improved relationships between parents and Tusla.</p>

	<p>services available to them and how they can access them.</p> <p>3. Monitoring and Evaluation A robust evidence-based monitoring and evaluation framework for the project enabling continuous and post-pilot assessment of results and learning .</p> <p>Quality control, collection of data and trends and monitoring of the project.</p>		
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