



# **Children's Rights Alliance**

## ***Strategic Plan***

*(A Transition Strategy for the period from June 2005 to January 2007)*

***June 2005 – January 2007***

## Introduction

The Children's Rights Alliance is a membership organisation working to promote awareness and recognition of children's rights in Ireland. The Alliance has a membership of seventy-nine organisations and employs six staff (four full-time and two part-time). The Alliance membership is made up of a diverse range of groups including child welfare agencies and service providers, child protection groups, youth organisations, human rights organisations, family support groups, disability organisations, Traveller organisations, parent representative bodies, trade unions and professional organisations representing teachers, social workers, psychologists and child care workers. Appendix 1 contains a listing of Alliance member organisations.

The Alliance works in a proactive manner to achieve certain defined goals while retaining the flexibility to respond, within available resources, to relevant events as they occur. One of the distinctive contributions made by the Alliance is that it provides the opportunity for agencies nationwide which are concerned about children's rights and welfare from a variety of perspectives to combine forces to lobby for improvements. Such joint action makes possible a level of impact that would be difficult for a single agency to achieve. This opportunity is most evident in relation to the process for monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Alliance played an active and effective role in representing an NGO perspective during the examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child of Ireland's *First Report* under the Convention. Ireland's *Second Report* to the UN Committee is now due to be submitted. The preparation of a comprehensive *Shadow Report* to the UN Committee, and its submission by January 2006, is therefore a key priority for the Alliance, as is participation in the Pre-Sessional and Plenary Hearings of the UN Committee, which are likely to be held in May and October 2006.

In addition to preparing the *Shadow Report*, there are numerous, and increasing, possibilities for working to promote increased recognition of children's rights and for improvements in policies and services so that Ireland makes continued progress towards meeting the requirements of the UN Convention.

It is considered timely to develop a Work Plan for the Alliance for the eighteen month period, June 2005 to January 2007. This will span the period during which the UN Committee will be preparing for and undertaking the examination of the Irish Government's *Second Report* on the implementation by Ireland of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Transition Plan is being developed within the context of work being undertaken to develop a longer term Strategic Plan; this work will continue, with the involvement of members, on appointment of the new Chief Executive.

This proposed Transition Plan has been developed as a result of identifying current priority areas for the Alliance and, for each of these, specifying objectives that are feasible, supported by members, possible within the timeframe, and achievable in terms of the skills and capacity of the organisation as a whole. Actions to be undertaken have also been identified in order to achieve objectives.

This Transition Plan has been drafted with a view to proposing it to the membership at the Annual General Meeting of the CRA to be held on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2005.

### **Priority Areas**

1. Preparation of a *Shadow Report* providing an NGO perspective on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland from 1998 to 2005.
2. Raising Awareness of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.
3. Participation in Social Partnership to achieve improvements in the situation of children living in Ireland.
4. Working with others to promote the ending of child poverty in Ireland.
5. Promotion of the rights of young people in the youth justice system.
6. Continued support of CADIC (formerly Campaign Against the Deportation of Irish Children).

In pursuing these areas of priority attention will be given to the involvement of members and children.

# 1. Shadow Report

Under Article 44 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, countries that ratify the Convention agree to submit performance reports periodically to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and to attend hearings called by the Committee to review progress in implementing the Convention. Such reports are to be filed two years after initial ratification and every five years thereafter. The Irish State is due to submit its next periodic report (a combined second and third report) to the UN Committee shortly.

Additionally, the Convention and the Committee provide for and encourage alternative reports on country performance to be submitted by the NGO community concerned with the rights and welfare of children.

Following receipt of national and NGO reports by the UN Committee, a preparatory, or pre-sessional, meeting is held. During this pre-sessional meeting, national and international NGOs present information on the situation of children's rights in the country under examination. After the pre-sessional meeting, a 'list of issues' is forwarded to the government concerned, identifying areas where further information is required prior to the formal hearing.

The formal examination of a country's national report takes place during a 'plenary hearing' of the Committee. At this hearing, the Committee scrutinises the country's progress in implementing the Convention by means of questions to and dialogue with representatives of the State Party. The Committee also identifies areas where reform and further legislative and policy developments are required. Following the plenary hearing, the Committee issues its 'Concluding Observations' – a statement of its findings and recommendations for action. These are public documents and the intention is that the government concerned should publicise these widely and that they should form the basis for discussion on how to improve the enforcement of the provisions of the Convention.

The Alliance successfully engaged with this process during the first monitoring and reporting process between 1996 and 1998. The Alliance's *First Shadow Report* to the UN Committee, *Small Voices: Vital Rights*, and its presentation to the UN Committee ensured that many issues of note were included in the UN Committee's findings and recommendations for Ireland. These *Concluding Observations* formed the basis of the National Children's Strategy, launched by Government in 2000.

The Alliance's *Second Shadow Report* will aim to address, in as comprehensive a manner as possible, issues impacting on children and young people in Ireland, including specific sections on for example, health, education, housing, social exclusion and multiculturalism. In addition, four overarching areas have been identified which will be outlined below.

**Phase 1: Drafting and Mandating *Shadow Report*** (May 2005 – Jan. 2006)

*Objective:* To prepare a *Shadow Report* for submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

*Actions:*

- Consult with members on the Final Draft of the State's *Second Report* to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and submit comments to the National Children's Office (already completed);
- Consult with members and key experts through sub-groups on specific topics (for example, education, youth justice, and health);
- Consult with children and young people;
- Draft *Shadow Report*;
- Consult with the statutory sector in relation to preparing the *Shadow Report*, including inviting comments on a draft.
- Submit *Shadow Report* in January 2006.

**Phase 2: Preparing for Pre-Sessional Hearing** (January - May 2006)

*Objective:* To publish and distribute the *Shadow Report* and prepare for the Pre-Sessional Hearing of the UN Committee in Geneva, to be held in May 2006.

*Actions:*

- Print and disseminate *Shadow Report*.
- Produce break-out reports on key topics.
- Prepare for Pre-Sessional Hearing, by, for example:
  - Communicating with members;
  - Ensuring there is a mandate for key issues that it is proposed to raise with the UN Committee;
  - Negotiating with government officials and politicians;
  - Developing a communications strategy for different audiences.

**Phase 3: Pre-Sessional Hearing and Plenary Hearing** (May - Oct. 2006)

*Objective:* To offer clear, evidence-based information to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child at Pre-Sessional and Plenary Hearings in Geneva relating to Ireland and to continue to raise awareness in both the media and within the statutory sector about priority concerns.

*Actions:*

- Respond to the 'List of Issues' which will be prepared by the UN Committee following the Pre-Sessional Hearing;
- Involve children and young people in a meaningful way;
- Negotiate with government officials and politicians;

- Encourage media coverage of the Plenary Hearing and facilitate the media by, for example, providing background information, arranging interviews.
- Organise delegations to attend the Pre-Sessional and Plenary Hearings in Geneva;
- Attend Pre-Sessional and Plenary Hearings.

**Phase 4: Responding to *Concluding Observations*** (Oct. – Dec. 2006)

*Objective:* To raise awareness of the Committee's comments and recommendations following the issuing of their *Concluding Observations* on Ireland's *Second National Report and Hearing* in the media and among the statutory and voluntary sectors.

*Actions:*

- Respond to *Concluding Observations*;
- Disseminate information;
- Organise and hold conference.

## **Overarching Objectives of the Monitoring and Reporting Process to the UN Committee**

Alongside objectives under specific themes such as health, education, welfare, justice and wellbeing, the Alliance has identified four overarching objectives which we hope to achieve within the context of the reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

**Objective 1.1:** To ensure that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child calls for the Constitution of Ireland to be amended to explicitly recognise the rights of the child; that this will be included in the recommendations in its *Concluding Observations* following examination of the Ireland's *Second National Report*.

*Action:* In order to achieve this outcome, within the context of preparations for the *Shadow Report*, the Alliance will articulate the need for an amendment to the Constitution in terms understandable to a number of audiences, including the general public, politicians, members, children and the media. The arguments for change will be set out in coherent, simple, clear terms that anticipate counter-arguments.

**Objective 1.2:** To persuade the Irish Government to make a commitment, and identify specific measures, to move beyond the production of legislation, policies and strategies (in relation to children) to full implementation of these.

*Actions:* In order to achieve this objective, within the context of preparations for the *Shadow Report*, the Alliance will:

- Bring members together to identify specific examples of legislation, policy and strategy that have been produced but remain to be implemented. Examples include the *National Children's Strategy* and the Health Strategy, *Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You*.
- Identify specific commitments and statements of intent, including statements regarding time-lines for implementation, in strategy and policy documents and, where applicable, illustrate concerns regarding the slowness of progress in implementation.

**Objective 1.3:** To ensure that a mechanism is put in place to achieve better coordination of government policies and services concerning children.

*Actions:* In order to achieve this outcome, within the context of preparations for the *Shadow Report*, the Alliance will commission a report on feasible option(s) for effectively co-ordinating Government policies and services relating to children. This report will be written on the basis of a consultation

exercise with members of the Alliance and with representatives of other non-statutory organisations and statutory bodies; it will also be informed by a

knowledge of structures in other jurisdictions. Examples of the effects of lack of co-ordination will be provided. (A particular case in point is early education where the development of coherent national policy is clearly needed.)

**Objective 1.4:** To ensure that a programme of action is developed and is implemented in order that resources deployed on services for children have a demonstrably positive impact on the lives of children.

*Actions:* In order to achieve this outcome, within the context of preparations for the *Shadow Report*, the Alliance will:

- Consult with members and children;
- Review documentation such as reports of All-party Oireachtas Committees and reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General;
- Compile evidence indicating examples of substantial resources being deployed with little or no accountability in terms of the quality of services or outcomes for children;
- Highlight the importance of building the capacity of service providers to become accountable in terms of the impact which their services are having on children.

## 2. Children's Rights Awareness

The Children's Rights Alliance seeks to highlight the rights of children, and the specific requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in every aspect of its work as well as in awareness-raising activities at specific times, such as Universal Children's Day.

### *Objectives:*

- To increase awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child among children and young people, parents, those working with and for children and policy makers.
- As a result of the development of a Charter of Rights for Children in Care, to increase awareness and understanding of their rights among children and young people in care.

### *Actions:*

- Participate in a joint project with Amnesty International (Irish Section), and the Irish Association of Young People in Care on creating a training module on children's rights for children in care.
- In conjunction with the Irish Association of Young People in Care, develop 'Charter of Rights for Children in Care'.
- Respond to requests to address seminars or conferences on children's rights.
- Media work, including issuing news releases, interviews, responding to media queries, writing articles for newspapers and journals.
- Complete web-based Children's Rights Information Centre.
- Maintain Children's Rights Alliance Website.
- Create E-zine Newsletter.
- Participate in Family Diversity Initiative.

### 3. Social Partnership

The Children's Rights Alliance was designated a Social Partner in 2003 and has a seat on the Community and Voluntary Pillar. The Alliance is the only organisation in Social Partnership representing children and young people from birth to eighteen years.

*Objective:* To influence the development of the next social partnership agreement in a manner that reflects children's rights and represents as fully as possible the views of Alliance members

*Actions:* Participation in the social partnership process.

### 4. Child Poverty

Ireland has one of the highest rates of relative income poverty among developed countries, with 237,000 children living in relative poverty in 2001 (23.4 per cent of all children). In addition, 66,000 children in Ireland were living in consistent poverty in 2001 (a measure combining low income and the enforced deprivation of certain goods), representing 6.5 per cent of children.

Significant Government commitments have been made regarding the ending of poverty among children and young people, including the commitment that consistent poverty among children will be reduced to below 2 per cent, and if possible eliminated, by 2007. The Alliance is committed to working for the implementation of Government commitments regarding child poverty and carries out this work through its designation as a National Anti-Poverty Networks, as a member of the End Child Poverty Coalition and as a Social Partner.

*Objectives:*

- Through the Alliance's *Shadow Report* and dialogue with the Committee, to effectively highlight the seriousness and multifaceted nature of child poverty in Ireland, and ensure the inclusion in the *Concluding Observations* of a focus on the rights of children living in poverty and a strong recommendation to the Irish Government to take further action to end child poverty.
- To ensure commitments to address child poverty are included in the next Social Partnership agreement.
- To build the capacity of the Alliance, its member organisations and the End Child Poverty Coalition to contribute effectively to public policy development and debate on the issue of child poverty.
- To ensure that Budget 2006 makes significant progress towards the goal of ending consistent poverty among children.

- To urge the Government to introduce a second tier payment to support children in low income families.

*Actions:*

- Develop the capacity of the Alliance as a National Anti-Poverty Network, its member organisations, and the End Child Poverty Coalition to effectively contribute to the design of policies to reduce child poverty.
- Support and further develop the End Child Poverty Coalition, and work with our Coalition partners to finalise research on the voice of children experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
- Achieve broad support for making the Government's plan to end consistent child poverty by 2007 a high priority for Budgets 2006 and 2007.
- Prepare an annual pre-budget submission and participate in the Department of Social and Family Affairs pre-budget forum.
- Ensure that the Special Initiatives of *Sustaining Progress*, live up to their potential to meet the needs and advance the rights of children in poverty and Press for the inclusion of a commitment on child poverty in the next Social Partnership agreement.
- Work with statutory and non-statutory partners in South Dublin to develop a model of good practice relating to children's participation in public policy-making at a local level.
- Urge the Government to specifically address the needs of young people experiencing poverty in the National Recreation Strategy.
- Establish an active sub-group on child poverty to facilitate the drafting of material for the *Shadow Report*.

## 5. Youth Justice

The work of the Children's Rights Alliance in relation to youth justice is guided by the principle of non-custodial options, rehabilitation, and protection of children's rights within the criminal justice system, enshrined in the UN Convention and international law.

The Alliance advocates for the full and prompt implementation and adequate resourcing of the Children Act 2001, which provides for a range of measures to respond to the needs of young people who come into conflict with the law. It incorporates family and community-based responses to young offending and provides for the involvement of agencies such as the Probation and Welfare Service and the child and family services of the health authorities in addressing the root causes of offending.

### *Objectives:*

- To promote a children's rights perspective in policy, planning and practice in the area of youth justice.
- To lobby for the full implementation and adequate resourcing of the Children Act 2001.
- To provide an effective opposition to the proposed introduction of Anti Social Behaviour Orders, and promote alternative solutions to the problem of anti social behaviour.

### *Actions:*

- Establish active sub-group on youth justice to facilitate the drafting of material for the *Shadow Report*.
- Participate in the Irish Youth Justice Alliance, a coalition of organisations and individuals who have come together to work for the reform of the juvenile justice system. This Alliance comprises among others the Children's Rights Alliance, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the Irish Penal Reform Trust, along with professional workers, academics, human rights activists and concerned individuals
- Coordinate the Coalition Against Anti Social Behaviour Orders. This Coalition, established in early 2005, brings together groups and individuals who are concerned about the proposed introduction of Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) in Ireland. It seeks to publicly highlight the problems associated with ASBOs and the need for alternative ways of tackling anti-social behaviour which do not result in the criminalisation of people for behaviour that is not itself criminal. The Coalition advocates the implementation and adequate resourcing of the Children Act 2001 and calls on the Government to abandon plans to introduce ASBOs.

## 6. CADIC

CADIC (formerly the Coalition Against the Deportation of Irish Children) is a coalition of NGOs, which was founded in July 2003 in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling of January 2003 that non-national parents of Irish children did not have a right to residency in this country. The Court's decision effectively meant the abolition of the procedure whereby migrant parents of Irish children could apply for residency in Ireland; the decision meant also that the new conditions would apply retroactively. CADIC's main objective was to prevent the removal of children born to migrants in Ireland from the State in violation of their rights under national and international instruments, and to campaign for the establishment of a procedure to allow migrant families of Irish children who were already in the country prior to the Supreme Court ruling to apply for residency.

In late 2004, a new procedure was announced. In response to this development, CADIC operated a help line and provided an outreach worker to assist families understand the procedure and complete their applications. Applications are now closed, and the focus of CADIC's work has moved to the issue of family reunification - a condition of the procedure means that, in some cases, Irish children will be denied the right to have other immediate family members join them in Ireland. CADIC is currently in the process of drawing up a strategy to address the issue of family re-unification.

### *Objective:*

- To promote the introduction of a procedure to enable migrant families with Irish children who have residency in Ireland to apply for family reunification.

### *Actions:*

- Contribute to the development of a new CADIC strategy to address the issue of family reunification
- Participate in the management of CADIC
- Manage a children's rights audit in relation to the implications of the Government's policy and procedures affecting Irish children of migrant parents, including the issue of family reunification.

# Appendix 1

## Children's Rights Alliance Member Organisations

ATD Fourth World  
Amnesty International  
The Ark  
Ana Liffey Children's Project  
Arrupe Society  
ASTI  
Barnardos  
Barretstown  
Border Counties Childcare Network  
Boys Hope Girls Hope Ireland  
CARI  
Catholic Guides of Ireland  
Catholic Youth Care  
Children in Hospital Ireland  
Childminding Ireland  
Crosscare Aftercare Unit  
DIT – School of Social Sciences and Legal Studies  
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre  
Dunlaoghaire Refugee Project  
Educate Together  
Education Department UCD  
Enable Ireland  
Focus Ireland  
Forbairt Naionrai Teo  
Foroige National Youth Development  
Home Start National Office Ireland  
Irish Association of Care Workers  
Irish Association of Hospital Play Staff

Irish Association of Social Workers  
Irish Association of Suicidology  
Irish Association of Young People in Care  
Irish Centre for Human Rights  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Irish Council for Civil Liberties  
Irish Foster Care Association  
Irish Refugee Council  
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed  
Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
Irish Pre-School Playgroups Association  
Irish Penal Reform Trust  
ISPCC  
Irish Traveller Movement  
Irish Youth Foundation  
Jack & Jill Children's Foundation  
Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice  
Junglebox  
Kids' Own Publishing Partnership  
Kilbarrack Community Development Project  
Kilbarrack Youth Project  
La Leche League  
Mary Immaculate College  
Matt Talbot Community Trust  
Mothers Union  
Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project  
National Association for Parent Support  
National Youth Council of Ireland  
National Youth Federation  
NAMHI  
National Parents Council (Primary)  
One Family  
OPEN- One Parent Exchange and Network  
Parentline

Pavee Point  
Psychological Society of Ireland  
Resident Manager's Association  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul Youth Clubs  
South West Wexford Community Development  
St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers Association  
St. Nicholas Montessori College  
Step by Step  
Sugradh  
Teenage Parent Support Initiative  
Tallaght Partnership  
Treoir  
UNICEF Ireland  
Youth Initiative in Partnership  
*Affiliated Member Organisations*  
Children's Law Centre (Northern Ireland)  
The Bridge Child Care Dev. Service (UK)