

**Expert Panel for the Children's Fund: Proposal to Department of Children Equality Disability  
Integration and Youth 14.06.2023**

The Expert Panel has been meeting since February 28<sup>th</sup> 2023 and has met on 5 occasions in total.

The panel is chaired by Professor Sheila Greene, Professor Greene is a retired Professor and Fellow Emeritus at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, former Director of the Children's Research Centre and Co-Director of Growing up in Ireland. Membership of the Panel is as follows:

Dr. Karen Smith - Head of Subject for Social Justice, UCD

Professor Robbie Gilligan-Social Work and Social Policy, TCD

Dr. Muireann Ní Raghallaigh- Head of Subject for Social Work, UCD

Professor Saoirse Nic Gabhainn-Professor Health Promotion, NUI Galway

Dr. Noelle Spring-former head of Katherine Howard Foundation

Alice Malone-former Programme Implementation Coordinator of the Genesis Area Based Childhood Programme

Dr. Deirdre Horgan- Vice-Head of Learning and Teaching at the School of Applied Social Studies UCC

The Panel is supported with Secretariat role provided by Ms. Janice Donlon DCEDIY

The Panel was given two functions:

- 1. To guide support and advise the Child Policy and Tusla Governance Division on the design of criteria for determining how and on what the Children's Fund is spent.**

**The Panel has agreed on the list of criteria, as follows:**

- A.) The use of the Fund should resonate with the Mother and Baby Home survivors and with children themselves.
- B.) Any initiative or project supported by the Fund should have an organisational infrastructure that is capable of spending the money granted properly and efficiently.
- C.) Any initiative or project supported by the Fund should be evidence-informed. Evidence should be available in relation to the need for the initiative or intervention and data should be collected on the roll-out of the initiative and its outcomes. Where possible, there should be independent evidence to support the use of the approach applied in the programme.
- D.) The money granted should support a novel extension or development of the existing work, such development not being funded by another source.
- E.) The data collected as a result of the CF grant should add to knowledge and/or understanding of children living with disadvantage. (Consideration should be given by the DCEDIY to compiling a record, available to the public, of the learning accrued as a result of CF support.)
- F.) The initiative supported should have the capacity or potential for scaling-up.
- G.) It should also show the potential for long-term sustainability.
- H.) The focus of the initiative should be inclusive, in terms of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community, as far as is possible within the focus of the particular CF grant.
- I.) The initiative should be rights-orientated fully respectful of the rights of children and adults.
- J.) Recipients of the Fund should show evidence of strong community links and a collaborative approach to other relevant actors in their field.

2. **To provide informed, impartial and independent advice to the Child Policy and Tusla Governance Division concerning the development of the remit of the Fund, in terms of who should benefit from it and what outcomes are being sought for those beneficiaries culminating in concrete proposals for the practical use of the Fund.**

Mindful of the origins of this fund and given the evidence that the children of low-income mothers are particularly at risk of poverty and poor outcomes, (GUI, 2016: CSO, 2023), the Panel recommends that the focus of the first payment from this fund is on the young children (aged 0-7) of lone parents living with economic disadvantage. The Panel considered a range of initiatives relevant to this target group for support, including those based on advocacy and campaigning as well as those working directly with children.

#### **Potential recipients for Children's Fund:**

We propose supporting programmes working directly with children and their families and advocacy groups

#### **1. Supporting Home Visiting Programmes**

Support First 5 action, 'to agree a national approach to home visiting'. We note the evidence for the effectiveness of HV programmes and the formation of the Home Visiting Alliance (HVA) and their goals. We note the alignment of the existing home visiting programmes with our wish to support the children of low-income lone parents. With this in mind, the CF could,

- a) Contribute one year's funding to the HVA to hire researchers to establish common data collection procedures (incorporating basic statistics and methods for assessing impact) for all 5 existing programmes and cost the ongoing use of these measures. (Choices may have to be made eventually about which programmes represent the best value and have the strongest evidence base.)
- b) Support the establishment of National Programme Support Structures for the 5 programmes for a two-year period with a view to securing long-term funding. Encourage links with child and family resource centres.
- c) In line with the commitment to evidence-informed practice, fund the rollout of the 5 programmes in 5 new sites over a three-year period, with these sites using shared agreed data collection procedures, ahead of the commencement of the intervention.

#### **Approximate costings sourced from Home Visiting Alliance:**

- a) €150,000 Year 1

b) @€300,000 per programme 1.5m p.a. Year 1 and 2

c) @€50,000 per 15 children = 1m p.a. Year 2 and 3

Total Year 1= €1,650,000

Year 2=€2,500,000

Year 3 =€1,000,000

## **2. Supporting a strong voice for lone parents and their children**

Effective policy-making, implementation and monitoring/evaluation necessitates engagement with the full range of stakeholders including community service providers and representatives of those directly affected.

The National One Parent Family Alliance (NOPFA) was established in 2020 and comprises nine national organisations who are concerned about issues that cause poverty in one-parent families - Barnardos, Children's Rights Alliance, FLAC, Focus Ireland, National Women's Council, One Family, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, SPARK and Treoir

- a) Grant once-off funding to NOPFA to hire a consultant to establish an agreed model for collaboration between member organisations and a three-year strategy. This strategy should include a strand of activity focused specifically on children of lone parents dealing with poverty and disadvantage.
- b) If successful, in following year support them to hire a communications/campaigns officer to develop publicity materials and a campaign to 1) highlight and publicise goals of NOPFA to the widest possible audience and 2) raise awareness of the particular needs of those lone mothers and their children who are coping with economic and social disadvantage.

### Approximate costings:

a) €150,000 Year 1

b) €300,000 Year 2

Total = €450,000

### **3. Supporting early learning and parental engagement in children's learning**

We recognise the importance of early learning for young disadvantaged children. Supporting early reading and parental engagement is aligned with the Goal C of First 5: Positive play-based early learning and Objective 7 Positive home learning environment. We note the relevance of the existence of the National Literacy Coordinators and their potential to provide support here.

In order to promote this goal we propose supporting libraries and home visiting services to extend existing programmes such as

- a) Support Libraries Ireland to extend programmes such as the 'Right to Read' programme, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown's 'Babies love Books', which works via Heath Centre; Dolly Parton, Imagination Library and existing First Five Book Schemes, to new areas with a high level of need. We recommend supporting Programmes that connect with existing community programmes such as Family Resource Centres or HV programmes/PHNs and that they should be prioritised.

#### Approximate costings:

- Libraries Ireland Programme approximate €20,000 per annum for 3 years per programme. Cost for 4 programmes = €240,000
- Imagination Library scheme as an example for approx. 4340 children, at cost per child of €2.51 euro, over a five-year period = €118.937. (These costs were calculated from the Imagination Library Website <https://imaginationlibrary.com/>)