

The Children's Fund

Expert Panel

Meeting

Wednesday 24th May 2023 10-11.30am

Via Webex

Minutes

Attendance (Expert Panel): Professor Sheila Greene (Chair), Dr. Deirdre Horgan(DH), Professor Saoirse Nic Gabhainn(SnG), , Professor Robbie Gilligan(RG), Dr. Karen Smith(KS), Alice Malone(AM), Dr. Noelle Spring(NS), Dr.Muireann Ní Raghallaigh(MnR)

Secretariat: Janice Donlon, Assistant Principal Officer, Child Rights Policy Unit, DCEDIY

1/2/3 Welcome and Apologies

Professor Greene opened the meeting of the expert panel by welcoming all panel members. No apologies noted but a number of panel members noted they were running late to the meeting, namely Professor Robbie Gilligan, Dr. Muireann Ní Raghallaigh and Dr. Deirdre Horgan. Professor Saoirse Nic Gabhainn noted that she had to leave the meeting by 10.30 and asked if she could present her ideas first.

4. Discussion on proposed plans for each member

It was agreed that all panel members proposed plans will be shared with the entire panel. The Secretariat agreed to circulate these.

SnG provided some information on libraries that she had received. She has had discussions with county librarians from both Galway and Clare libraries. The libraries run a range of different programmes which include the right to read programme. Some of the main issues identified by the librarians were a lack of physical resources for example for sensory play, physical resources such as Lego have to be purchased privately. The Chair noted this as a good example and was keen to link any such work with libraries to local health centres and an example was provided that in some areas the library is where local young mothers groups meet. NS noted that many parent and toddler groups use local libraries to meet. SnG also noted that it may only take small amounts of funding to libraries in areas where it is most needed to make an impact.

The Chair welcomed other members to the meeting and checked that there were no additions/amendments to the minutes of the last meeting. The minutes were agreed by all members. A brief discussion on the criteria for the fund was had and it was agreed that the principles set out in the minutes were accurate but KS requested that the language be altered slightly to use evidence informed instead of evidence based and this was agreed by all. The Chair noted that some further refining in wording may be required. It was agreed that the Secretariat and the Chair would work on refining these and circulate to all for approval.

Dr. Noelle Spring presented her ideas to the panel. She noted that the intention of the fund should be used for the benefit of young people both now and into the future. The intention to create a stable and nurturing environment which includes additional support and wraparound support as required. NS spoke briefly about the potential of the role of a dedicated child health PHN but agreed that this particular fund may not be able to achieve progress here. Supporting Home Visiting was noted and the importance of supporting other voluntary and community organisations that assist with Home Visiting such as the FRCs, the CYPSCs and local libraries. Directing some of the funding to one parent family organisations was also noted which may be achieved via support for either direct services through the main organisations involved in the Alliance or targeting the advocacy role of the Alliance itself.

Alice Malone presented her ideas which included home visiting particularly to areas where there isn't currently a programme in place and where there is an identified need. Home visiting should be available to any parent or any pregnant parent. It was noted that priority should be given to areas of high deprivation and younger parents. Consider funding programmes for 3 years with intention to mainstream the funding within HSE/TUSLA budgets pending the successful implementation of The Home Visiting initiative. As part of the Home Visiting Initiative, a training budget for each Programme should be included and administrative back up.

Professor Sheila Greene presented her ideas to the panel. The Chair noted the origins of the fund and the evidence to support directing funding initiatives toward lone parents. Supporting one of the First 5 actions to agree a national approach to home visiting. The formation of the Home Visiting Alliance and their goals and the alignment of the existing home visiting programmes with the panel's wish to support the children of low -income lone parents. There are various ways that home visiting could be supported and expanded.

Consider contributing one year's funding to the HVA to hire researchers to establish common data collection procedures (incorporating basis statistics and methods for assessing impact) for all 5 existing programmes and cost the ongoing use of these measures.

Consider funding the National Programme Support Structures for the 4 programmes that have rolled them out so far for a three-year period with a view to securing long-term funding.

Potential rollout of the 5 programmes in 5 new sites over a three-year period with new sites using robust data collection methods from day one.

A second area to be considered is to be considered is to support the National One Parent Family Alliance.

Potential once-off funding to NOPFA (National One Parent Family Alliance) to hire a consultant to establish an agreed model for collaboration and a three-year strategy. Possible further funding to support them to hire a communications 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 lone mothers and their children.

Thirdly, there is potential to support Libraries Ireland to extend Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown's 'Babies love Books' programme, which work via Health Centres, to new areas with a high level of need.

Dr. Deirdre Horgan's ideas were discussed these again focused on Home Visiting and the Imagination Library. In relation to Home Visiting DH provided potential costings for the expansion of the service but also noted the potential need to provide services in areas where there is currently understood to be no service. DH noted that she understood there was currently only one programme available in Cork and none in Kerry. NS clarified that there is a Programme in Kerry which is Kerry Community Parents Support Programme and is a part of the CMP and the HVA. It is the only programme that is fully funded currently through the HSE.

DH noted this but reiterated that the funding of home visiting should focus on supporting the development of new services and the opportunity to re-establish some areas that are now without service. The other initiative DH spoke about was the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. This initiative is currently delivered in 2 areas of the country and provides a book a month from birth to 5 years. The merits of this programme were discussed and it was noted it would be strengthened if it were integrated with the home visiting service in some way to encourage support for reading at home.

Dr. Karen Smith provided her thoughts to the panel. She also noted she was keen to support home visiting in some way. Concern regarding long term funding of programmes or initiatives was also brought up. KS noted that the purpose of the fund should be established in terms of whether it was to support direct programmes or interventions or to fund advocacy work. KS also noted a need in the wider system to fund direct anti-poverty work but acknowledged that it may not be possible for this fund to do this now. KS noted she had let to send in a paper but would follow-up after the meeting with this. In terms of supporting advocacy work KS noted the importance of providing funding towards something like the creation of an advocacy tool. The potential to address some needs around shared parenting was discussed but noted that it may not be within the remit of the fund.

Professor Robbie Gilligan provided his thoughts which include providing 50% of the funding towards home visiting which should be used to stimulate further development in the area. 35% of the funding could be used to support the development of a dedicated child PHN service. It was noted by the Chair that there was a previous discussion earlier on in the meeting and the difficulties of providing funding to another government department that has responsibility in this area was noted. The remaining 15% of funding could be directed towards developing the remit of the National One Parent Family Alliance and a library initiative .RG was keen to support NOPFA in developing their strategic thinking in some way.

A further discussion on libraries was had and it was noted by RG that there has been limited evidence of impact in some areas that engaged in a book delivery programme. It was noted by DH that any library or book initiative should be linked in with other supporting services to improve impact.

Dr. Muireann Ní Raghallaigh provided her thoughts on where the fund should be directed. She noted a preference for evidence-informed projects which support young parents of young children, particularly projects that target or include marginalized or disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, care leavers, those with disabilities (e.g. home visiting or family resource centre). AM queried whether the fund should prioritise specific groups such as ethnic minorities. It was noted that any programme should point to the need to include all groups within particular attention to certain groups that are particularly marginalised.

The Chair summed up the discussion and noted that the three main areas which have been discussed for inclusion in the fund are 1. Home Visiting, 2. Advocacy for One Parent Families and 3. Support for libraries/book service for children. The panel agreed that these are the three broad areas to be included.

5/6. Next steps and next meeting dates

It was agreed that the Chair would work on a proposals paper and that all panel members would be able to input into this. MnR agreed to set up a shared google document platform that all members could feed into. A provisional online meeting was scheduled for 8th June at 12pm for all panel members and panel members will organise a Zoom link for this. It was noted that the Secretariat is on leave and will not attend the meeting on 8th June.

The Secretariat agreed to review the proposed paper on 12th June and work with the Chair in providing a PowerPoint presentation for the final meeting on 14th June. The Secretariat noted that representatives from the relevant policy units will be invited to the final panel meeting on 14th June where the panel present their proposals. It was noted that these proposals may require some refining following the final meeting and discussion with Department officials.

Actions

Action	Person
Refining wording on criteria	Secretariat and Chair
Developing paper on proposals	All Panel Members
Issuing a shared Google document to work from	Dr. Muireann NíRaghallaigh