

The Children's Fund

Expert Panel

Meeting

Thursday 30th March 2023

Minutes

Attendance (Expert Panel): Professor Sheila Greene (Chair), Dr. Deirdre Horgan, Professor Saoirse Nic Gabhainn, , Professor Robbie Gilligan, Dr. Muireann Ní Raghallaigh, Alice Malone, Dr. Noelle Spring

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

Apologies: Dr.Karen Smith

1.2.3Welcome, Minutes and Opening Remarks

Professor Greene opened the meeting of the expert panel by welcoming all panel members.

Apologies from Dr.Karen Smith were noted. Minutes from meeting on 28/02 were agreed with a minor amendment, the terms of reference were agreed and signed off.

The Chair remarked on the busy agenda ahead and the challenges that the panel were faced with.

The panel were reminded of the short timeframe to complete their task and the importance of being clear about the feasibility of any proposals they developed.

The Chair also informed the panel of a discussion she had with Laura McGarrigle Assistant Secretary General in DCEDIY with responsibility for Mother and Baby Home Action Plans. Laura reiterated that whilst the survivors group would be kept informed of the work of the panel the panel should be free to develop their own proposals in this regard. The offer was made for further engagement with Laura if the panel felt necessary.

The Chair then welcomed the Secretariat to provide an update on the next National Policy Framework for Children and Young People.

4. Presentation

Janice Donlon gave a presentation on the next National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. Following on from a query at the last meeting there was interest in the work of the newly established Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit in Dept. of An Taoiseach. Janice informed the panel the unit was currently being resourced with staff and was engaging with relevant stakeholders across the public service and civil society. It was noted that the new unit is not being established to replace work already underway but rather it would bring a coordinated focus to areas that could have greatest impact.

5. Discussion #1 Rationale for choice of beneficiary-identifying targeted sub group or groups

It was acknowledged by the panel that the papers circulated by the secretariat provide evidence for the range of complex needs and social exclusion of this group. It was also acknowledged that the wider government and Tusla/HSE provide existing interventions to this group to mitigate some of the negative impacts that exist. The challenge for the panel is to identify a subset of the wider lone parent group and decide on what interventions best fit their needs.

A discussion was then had on establishing that subset which ultimately led to a broad agreement that younger lone parents (under 25) and particularly those with young children (0-7) should be prioritised here. Intersectionality was discussed and it was acknowledged that by defining the sub group by age then other elements of need would be naturally included.

A request to include young people in care was discussed but it was agreed that whilst the needs of this group were significant, the inclusion of them would broaden out the beneficiary group too much. It was agreed to proceed with the subgroup of young lone parents and their children.

6. Discussion #2- Proposed actions or projects?

The panel sought clarity from the Chair and the Secretariat on the tasks at hand and it was reiterated that the panel were to 1) Set the criteria and reach of the fund and 2) Propose specific initiatives'/funding proposals that would support the target beneficiaries and abide by the criteria of the fund

There was a lengthy discussion relating to potential actions/programmes of work that could benefit and provide support to lone parents and their children. A range of existing programmes such as Area Based Childhood Programmes (ABC), Community Mothers/Parents, Parenting Programmes, Home Visiting Programmes and The Imagination Library were discussed as examples of good practice.

The potential use of schools/preschools to provide access to children or the infrastructure to base programmes was discussed. It was noted that schools have been central to the positive integration and coordination of services for Ukrainian refugees.

There were also discussions in relation to the provision of leisure activities to children and linking children into activities they are interested in.

It was noted by the panel that there is substantial evidence that a good preschool experience had a range of benefits to how children experience primary school. The challenges of transitions, from home to preschool and preschool into primary were discussed as potential areas to focus on.

A discussion was had on the advantages of providing funding to scale up existing projects/programmes of work that are established and proven versus developing something new and innovative. It was noted that if existing programmes were to be supported then they should be able to demonstrate sustainability and be embedded in statutory or community partnerships.

The area of advocacy and how the fund could potentially support the initial advocacy activities and awareness in the arena of lone parents was discussed.

7. Information Deficits

It was noted that there was sufficient evidence for the rationale of choice of beneficiary but that the panel may benefit from access to further information on the specific issues facing lone parents. It was felt that the National One Parent Family Alliance which is an alliance of nine NGOs working with lone parents could provide the overview the panel are seeking.

In addition Professor Saoirse nic Gabhainn indicated that she would seek out further international data that may be beneficial. Dr. Noelle Spring also committed to gathering information for the panel in relation to prenatal/child health as it relates to lone parents.

8. Next steps and work of panel between meetings

It was agreed that the panel would hold an additional meeting (online) w/b 17th April to discuss progress on developing criteria and development of proposals.

It was also agreed that the Chair should invite representatives of the National One Parent Family Alliance to this meeting in order to get an overview of the issues at hand and a better understanding of the work of the alliance.

The next in person meeting will be held on Thursday 4th May 11am-1pm.

Actions

| Action | Person |
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| Amend minutes from 28.02.23 and circulate | Secretariat |
| International evidence gathering | Professor Saoirse nic Gabhainn |
| Information in relation to prenatal/child health needs as it relates to lone parents | Dr.Noelle Spring |
| Review of CSO data | Professor Robbie Gilligan |
| Doodle Poll for online meeting to be held w/b 17 th April | Secretariat |
| Invitation to National One Parent Family Alliance to present to panel | Chair |
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