



Submission to the Dept of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on a Policy Framework for Children and Young People

January 2022

Introduction

Le Cheile Mentoring welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the next Government policy framework for children and young people in Ireland.

Who we are

Our Mission: Le Chéile Mentoring is a national, volunteer mentoring and family support service, which works with young people and their families, where the young person is involved in or at risk of offending.

Our Vision: For every young person at risk - the right supports at the right time, to make the most of their lives.

1. What's going well for children and young people in Ireland?

The commitment by Government to the new Youth Justice strategy 2021-2027;

Access to and participation in education for the majority of children and young people;

The commitment by Government to create new pathways for long-term undocumented people and their children and to end the Direct Provision system;

Reform of the early years/childcare provision.

2. What's not going well for children and young people in Ireland?

Outcomes for vulnerable children and young people from areas of socio-economic deprivation;

Outcomes for Traveller children and young people who are over-represented in risky behaviour, youth offending and youth in detention;

Outcomes for young people who have been in care, who are over-represented in risky behaviour, youth offending and youth in detention;

The increase in the number of children and their families experiencing homelessness.

3. What can be done to ensure children and young people are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing?

Family support: We recommend that in all interventions supporting vulnerable children, there should be a family support component offered to parents/carers, which provides a continuum of proven supports including parent mentoring and evidence based parenting programmes.

Expedite the review of CAMHS and implement investment and expertise to ensure the quality of the service and consistent, timely access for children and young people;

End the admission of children to adult psychiatric units;

Ensure positive physical and mental well-being included in primary and second level education;

Ensure effective community based and residential addiction services available to young people who need such services.

4. What can be done to ensure children and young people are achieving their full potential in school and all areas of learning and development?

Educational disadvantage: We welcome actions to address early school leaving and educational disadvantage. In our experience almost all young people who are involved in offending behaviour are not actively engaged in education, training or employment. We recommend the development of a targeted inter-agency initiative for young people on probation, which supports young people to return to education, training or employment.

Educational guarantee: Introduce a guarantee to education and or training, to all young people up to 18 years of age, backed by a key worker system to ensure that young people who leave school early are tracked and supported to return to or gain access to education and or training.

Undertake an independent assessment of the education inclusion by Traveller and Roma children;

Ensure each child with a special educational need has an appropriate school place;

Introduce monitoring and guidelines on reduced timetables.

5. What can be done to ensure children and young people are safe and protected?

Family support: We recommend that in all interventions supporting vulnerable children, there should be a family support component offered to parents/carers, which provides a continuum of proven supports including parent mentoring and evidence based parenting programmes.

Child friendly justice: Le Chéile welcomes commitments in the Youth Justice strategy in relation to the provision of child friendly justice. Criminal proceedings should minimise delays; measures should be put in place to ensure children's voices are heard and respected; and that children understand the charges, court processes and outcomes. All judges and court officials dealing with children and young people should be trained in how to communicate with children.

Reduce the number of homeless families;

Develop a National Youth Homelessness Strategy.

6. What can be done to ensure children and young people have opportunity in life and economic security?

Educational guarantee: Introduce a guarantee to education and or training, to all young people up to 18 years of age, backed by a key worker system to ensure that young people who leave school early are tracked and supported to return to or gain access to education and or training.

Support one parent families to access quality jobs in the labour market. Parent expectations and role modelling is a very significant driver of young people's expectations.

7. What can be done to ensure that children and young people in Ireland are free from poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion?

The needs of children and young people experiencing the highest levels of deprivation needs to be prioritized.

There needs to be a national action plan to tackle child poverty and social exclusion.

Address food poverty in children.

8. What can be done to ensure children and young people are respected and able to contribute to their world?

The voice of the child should be promoted as a value and as part of Government policy;

Government policies across all departments should be 'child-proofed'.

9. What could be done to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people?

Additional mental health supports should be a priority for young people, easier access to in-person services as well as remote /online services;

Mental health issues need to be responded to along a continuum of supports by statutory and community agencies.

Support for young people at risk of early school leaving, including young people with experience of mental health issues, should be prioritised to avoid disruptions in learning having a long-term impact on young people's labour market outcomes and overall well-being;

Across government departments, Community agencies working with vulnerable children and young people should be given time in 2022 to assess the impact of Covid and to identify actions which will address the emerging needs.

Unemployment is a major risk factor for poor mental health: supporting young people in finding, keeping and staying in work must be an economic, social, and public health policy priority. Training line managers in the workplace in mental health can also promote better mental health among young adults already in work.

10. What top five priorities should the new policy framework focus on, to improve the lives of children and young people by 2028?

Implementation of the Youth Justice strategy 2021-2027

Development and implementation of a national action plan on Child poverty;

Invest in community based Family Support services, prevention and early intervention, including volunteer parent mentoring;

Enhance measures to ensure free access and participation in education by the children from low socio-economic backgrounds and vulnerable children;

Ensure effective access to adequate housing.

ENDS

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