

**Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)**

**Response to**

**Big Lottery Fund**

**Northern Ireland Consultation on  
outcomes and suggested priorities**

## **Introduction**

Children in Northern Ireland is the regional umbrella body for the voluntary child care sector in Northern Ireland.

CiNI represents the interests of its 90 member organisations, providing policy, information, training and support services to members' in their work with children and young people. CiNI has a diverse membership ranging from early years organisations to those organisations working with young adolescents across a wide spectrum of need. Many of the children, young people and their families that member organisations work with have benefited from services funded by lottery monies.

CiNI welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Big Lottery Fund's Consultation on Outcomes and Suggested Priorities. We particularly welcome the Big Lottery Fund's outreach to CiNI's members through the consultation workshop held at CiNI and we are keen to maintain and build on this engagement with the Big Lottery Fund in the future. Given that the closing date on this public consultation has now passed, we acknowledge the detailed consideration given to the proposed outcomes and priorities by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). In this response we have therefore focused on the key issues that emerged during CiNI's consultation workshop.

CiNI welcomes the outcomes approach to funding proposed in the consultation document. This approach is in line with that recommended by the Task Force Report on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector and which has been accepted by Government in 'Positive Steps' its response to the Task Force report. In terms of children's policy it is also the approach that has been adopted both by the Children's Services Planning process at Health and Social Services Board level and more recently OFMDFM's Children and Young People's Strategy. CiNI believes that where the outcomes and priorities are targeted at children and young people that there should be alignment of outcomes and priorities in the interests of developing and maintaining a strategic focus that will deliver on the rights and needs of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, CiNI also believes that funders' should develop consistency in their methods of monitoring and evaluation, in the interest of avoiding duplication, and bringing about greater streamlining of processes so as to minimise the administrative burden on the community and voluntary sector.

## **Advocacy and Campaigning**

CiNI is disappointed that the significant role of the voluntary and community sector in advocating and campaigning to seek change as a response to need is not recognised in the Northern Ireland outcomes and suggested priorities.

The community and voluntary sector has a well established history of advocating and campaigning on behalf of service users to influence government policy and legislation. This role has been recognised in the 'Compact between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland'.

CiNI has consistently lobbied for support of this role for the community and voluntary sector. In our response to 'Pathways for Change' the Position Paper by the Task Force

on Resourcing the Community and Voluntary Sector CiNI stated that advocacy must be recognised as a 'core' activity and be assigned funding accordingly.

The subsequent Investing Together Report of the Task Force recognised that the campaigning and advocacy work delivered by the sector in policy areas, including children's policy, has been particularly important in a society emerging from conflict.

CiNI believes that this advocacy and challenge role should be explicitly recognised as a key priority across all of the Northern Ireland outcomes distinct from the role of working in partnership and key to building on the community and voluntary sector's real experience and knowledge of the rights and needs of its service users. In relation to children and young people there is a role for the community and voluntary sector in advocating for Government to deliver effective implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Finally there is an increasing need for recognition and support of the community and voluntary sector's advocacy and campaigning role, particularly in view of the roll-out of Budget and Priorities 2005-08 with its emphasis on efficiency savings which are already, in this first year, being experienced most acutely with cuts to children's services budgets in Northern Ireland.

### **Additionality**

CiNI recognises that one of the values that underpins the work of the Big Lottery Fund is that of 'additional to government' defined as 'making decisions independently and adding value to existing programmes'. We recognise that this is particularly challenging for the Big Lottery Fund in the current financial climate when existing programmes and areas of work which were priorities for Government, no longer appear to be so with the ending of funding to existing programmes and cuts to statutory sector budgets and the adverse impact on children, young people, their families and the professionals who work alongside these individuals.

There are clearly areas identified within the proposed Northern Ireland outcomes and suggested priorities where the Government has statutory obligations e.g. Outcome D – improved physical and mental health for all people. There is a genuine fear that lottery money would be used to attempt to stem the crisis emerging in areas where the Government has statutory obligations. CiNI advocates strongly that lottery money for the community and voluntary sector must be targeted at innovative preventative, early intervention work and that such work must be valued and therefore recognised explicitly in the values of the Big Lottery Fund.

CiNI recognises that the Big Lottery Fund cannot fund existing programmes where other funding is coming to an end, however we welcome the Big Lottery Fund's commitment to supporting the development and learning that emerges from these programmes where there has been a positive impact on outcomes, and believes there is scope for considering how this development and learning can be taken forward as models of good practice with the principles incorporated into new programme development. Furthermore where evaluation of existing programmes reveals unmet needs and gaps in provision we welcome the Big Lottery Fund's openness to considering programme development in these areas.

## **Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations**

CiNI recognises that the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations across all of the outcomes and priorities is a key concern of the Big Lottery Fund.

CiNI believes this objective will be particularly important where Government legislation and policy does appear to contravene Northern Ireland's equality provisions provided in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has recently upheld a complaint lodged by a number of children's sector organisations that the NIO failed to comply with its statutory equality scheme in introducing the Anti-Social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004. The Equality Commission has recommended that the NIO undertake an Equality Impact Assessment of the Anti-Social Behaviour Order policy and legislation in relation to its potential impact on children and young people.

Clearly this judgement has cast doubt on the credibility of the Anti-Social Behaviour legislation. If, however, this legislation were to remain in operation CiNI believes that the Big Lottery Fund should consider supporting a mechanism to monitor and review the legislation which would collect information, disaggregated in relation to section 75 groupings, on individual ASBO cases, combining this with more in-depth qualitative research on the impact of the Anti-social Behaviour legislation on both communities and the recipients of anti-social behaviour orders, to provide an independent analysis on whether the legislation is effective in addressing the issue of anti-social behaviour in communities.

Also CiNI believes there remains a role for the Big Lottery Fund in relation to priority 12 'improve community facilities, access and services' and priority 13 'contribute to safer communities through a reduction in anti-social behaviour and crime'. The Big Lottery Fund should look to support evidence based multi-agency programmes that address the reasons why young people engage in problem behaviour and also look to provide age appropriate accessible youth spaces in communities.

CiNI would be keen to discuss in more detail with the Big Lottery Fund these proposals around anti-social behaviour.

## **Conclusion**

CiNI looks forward to hearing of the outcome of this public consultation and the final outcomes and priorities for Northern Ireland and would advocate that information and guidance on the Big Lottery Fund is provided in a timely and accessible manner.