

**ALL PARTY GROUP ON
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES FUNDING
REPORT**

JUNE 2006

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2006 the All Party Group on Children and Young People, chaired by Patricia Lewsley MLA, requested that Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) compile information on the funding difficulties being experienced by the children's voluntary and community sector in their delivery of services to children, young people and their families.

The purpose of compiling the information was to inform representations made by the All Party Group to the Secretary of State and Minister for Children with regard to concerns in relation to the funding of children's services.

On 6 March 2006 Secretary of State Peter Hain announced a £14.6 million investment in voluntary children's projects as 'additional funding' to provide for the continuation for another two years of projects whose funding was coming to an end. On 7 March 2006 actions and activities to be supported under the £61 million Children and Young People Funding Package were announced. On 22 March 2006, as a result of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget, the Secretary of State announced an additional £26 million over the next two years, mostly going directly to schools, to be channelled through the Children and Young People Fund. Thus bringing the total value of investment in children and young people to over £100 million.

It is now in light of these recent funding announcements that we will consider the responses to the funding survey and examine the extent to which the funding packages can address the funding crisis which the children's sector has been living with over the last eighteen months. Also highlighting where there are still deficits in funding provision for children's services, as well as identifying the lessons to be learned for the future funding of children's services in Northern Ireland.

The funding questionnaire was disseminated to the All Party Group on Children and Young People and the CiNI membership, a total of 99 organisations. NICVA's Fourth State of the Sector Report (2005) identified that there were 960 voluntary and community organisations working with children and young people in Northern Ireland. As a snap-shot exercise this survey targeted 10% of those voluntary and community organisations working with children and young people and therefore it is not in anyway a comprehensive survey of the entire children and young people's sector.

FINDINGS

Name of organisation and Name of Project, Programme, Activity

A total of 31 organisations responded to the questionnaire, giving a response rate to the survey of almost a third (31%).

The 31 organisations represented a total of 52 services. 10 organisations (32%) had 2 or more services whose funding was coming to an end and which were facing imminent closure. Corner House Community Family Centre, Contact Youth, NICMA and the Play Resource Centre had as many as 4 services with funding streams all coming to an end.

Description of Project

Over a fifth (21%) of those services whose funding was coming to an end and that were facing imminent closure were after-school and out-of-school provision, including homework clubs and summer schemes.

Early years services figured prominently amongst those services whose funding was coming to an end; taken together after/out of schools provision; play-group provision; and crèche provision amounted to 38% of the services whose funding was coming to an end. In addition 11% of the provision under threat was training services for early years service providers. The remainder consisted of 13% counselling services; 15% were child and parent/family support services; 8% were youth provision and 6% were contact centres. There was also an information service and a resources service.

Many of the services (42%) were not accompanied by a description of the nature of the service provided, in these cases the name of the service itself was self-descriptive i.e. crèches, play-groups, homework clubs, counselling services etc.

Of those services where a description of the service was provided over a quarter (26%) described providing support to parents and families. Another common descriptor was that of 'partnership'; services were provided in partnership with children and families, as well as in partnership with statutory service providers.

The 'partnership' with statutory service providers was regarded as supportive and complimentary to the work done by statutory service providers. For example counselling services provided by New Life Counselling and Contact Youth are provided in schools, and Mood Matters Depression Awareness works through schools.

Funding Stream

In relation to the funding streams which organisations are reliant on, and which are coming to an end, the survey revealed an immensely disparate picture of funding to the children's sector.

Government and the public sector were the single biggest funder of the children's voluntary and community sector, providing funding to 60% of those organisations that responded to the survey, with the Executive Programme Fund for Children and funding from Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts identified as being the main funding sources which were coming to an end. This was followed by European funding, providing funding to 23% of the organisations that responded to the survey, with PEACE II and specifically the Childhood Fund being identified as the main funding sources coming to an end.

A number of organisations were reliant on between 4-8 different funding sources which were all coming to an end within a short time period. One particular organisation was running a service where statutory funding provision had been reduced and the 4 other funding sources which it was reliant on would end by June 2006.

Where funding was provided to organisations by statutory service providers such as HSS Boards and Trusts, it is notable that funding had either been cut, in some instances

by as much as 50%, and in other cases provision had only been for part of the service, therefore, forcing the organisations to look elsewhere for funding to support the full costs of the service. A similar experience was reported in relation to funding provided by the Education and Library Boards where funding provision was reduced.

However it should also be noted that two organisations did indicate that they had received notification that they would receive continuation funding to keep their services running.

End Date

Alarminglly there were organisations who responded stating that the funding for the service which it provided had already ended, for one particular organisation funding had ended three months previously, in December 2005. In these circumstances organisations stated that they were only 'running on a shoe-string'. It would appear that some are only surviving on the knife edge of finite organisational reserves. It is testament to the commitment of these organisations to the children and families they work with that they are resiliently keeping their doors open.

Where the end date for funding provision had not yet passed the majority of the remaining funding sources were due to end in the remaining months of 2006 with only 3 funding streams running into 2007, thus indicating the absolute urgency and immediacy of the funding crisis facing these organisations.

Number of Children

Respondents to the survey responded to the question on number of children in one of two ways: either providing the numbers of children using the service at a particular point in time, or alternatively, providing information of on the numbers of children accessing their service(s) per annum.

The 31 organisations that responded, encompassing a total of 52 services, delivered provision to 1,518 children. This figure does not include the number of parents/families who would also have benefited through their children accessing the services provided.

Over the course of a year services, such as Aware Defeat Depression – Mood Matters Depression Awareness Programme were providing for approximately 5000-6000 children through their outreach service in schools and youth settings. Central Belfast Contact Centre had provided its service to 1,358 children in 2005. NIACRO provided its services to 380 children and families in a year. New Life Counselling provided its services to 275 children in a year. Ulster Quaker Service Committee provided its service to 40-50 children per annum. In addition NICMA provided training and development opportunities to a total of 810 adults, estimating that this would potentially benefit 2,250 children. The Play Resource Warehouse has a membership of over 2,500 groups, providing a service to 200,000 children and young people.

In fact a number of organisations were operating services at full capacity and had children on waiting lists to access their services. New Life Counselling had 65 children on waiting lists which ranged in length from 3-7 months. Naiscoil an Ionnain had a waiting list up to 2008.

Number of Staff

The 31 organisations and 52 services were provided by a total of 162 staff in a mix of full-time and part-time positions. Over and above employed staff there were an additional 65% (246 volunteers) involved in the provision of services, indicating the enormous contribution and importance of volunteers to the provision of children's services.

Current Impact and Impact should project/programme/activity end/close

Clearly there are a number of fairly evident impacts associated with the end of funding or with a reduction of funding and possible closure of services. From our analysis of the responses we have identified a number of themes:

- **Loss of services for children and young people in need**

Clearly a loss of funding or a reduction in funding carries with it the clear implication of a complete closure of services, or at the very least, a reduction in the level of service provided. Over two-thirds (65%) of the organisations that responded explicitly referred to the 'loss' or 'shortage' of services. However, it should also be noted that organisations elaborated on this indicating that the services under threat were 'much needed ... in an already deprived' area; and described the services as providing for 'very vulnerable children'; and as being 'vital' to 'less well off children'. One organisation commented that faced with a loss of funding and possible closure of its service, there was simply 'no alternative provision' in the locality.

One organisation did indicate that it had just received mainstream funding so its service would be able to continue.

- **Impact of loss of provision on children and young people themselves**

Clearly the primary and most significant impact of a loss of service or reduction in service levels will be experienced by the children and young people who avail of the services on a day-to-day basis. The impact on children and young people will obviously be different depending on the nature/type of the service and to a certain degree on the age and understanding of the children and young people. Also it must be remembered that the impact on children and young people captured through the survey is that perceived by adults, children themselves were not surveyed for the purposes of this survey.

Of those early years providers who specifically described the current/future impact on children and young people of a loss or reduction in service provision, two organisations raised safety issues that would arise with an absence of high quality play/care provision, which in turn would force children out onto the streets, with all of the associated dangers. Others reported that children would lose out on the opportunity to access a 'stimulating environment' and the possibility of 'social interaction'.

From the descriptions of services provided by respondents, as well as the descriptions of the impact which a loss of provision would have on children and young people a common theme was the 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' which children had or

were at risk of experiencing. 3 organisations referred specifically to these problems while 2 other services reported of the 'educational difficulties' and issues around 'school attendance and attainment'.

One organisation that had children on waiting lists for counselling places highlighted that the problems experienced by these children were likely to develop into 'serious' problems before the children received counselling places and their problems were addressed. Another organisation reported that if it was not able to continue provision of its service children who had been identified for follow-up help and support would be denied access to this help and support.

Two organisations were provided services for socially excluded young people who were involved in or at risk of becoming involved in offending behaviour.

Clearly all of these services were providing early intervention and preventative services to children and young people, and the result of a loss of funding and end of provision would result in the problems being experienced escalating to the point where more costly crisis management services would be required to address the needs of these children and young people.

It is also important to note that these services are making a contribution toward the attainment of Government targets, for example, in working with children and young people at risk of offending and working with children and young people with difficulties around school attendance and attainment.

- **Impact on parents, families and communities**

Many of the organisations that responded reported on the impact which a loss of funding and service provision would have on parents, families and communities.

Of the 17 organisations that reported an impact on parents, families and communities, 6 noted the impact on parents work commitments, stating that parents would either have to leave their employment or reduce their working hours to return to caring for their children.

It was noted that a loss of funding and service provision would increase the isolation and vulnerability of parents and families. The absence of or lack of parent support was commonly identified, including support to parents in accessing training and education. The type of support which would be impacted included parenting education programmes, including home-based programmes, and one organisation noted that the parents accessing its service would no longer have support in dealing with challenging teenage behaviour.

From the point of view of parents, families and communities as a whole the real impact of a loss of funding and services was identified as the loss of locally based high quality services, provided by trained and experienced staff. These services and the facilities in which they were provided were recognised as 'valuable community resources'.

- **Impact on staff employed to deliver services to children and young people and on organisations as a whole**

Clearly for staff employed to deliver services to children and young people, the most obvious and immediate impact which was reported was that of job losses, however, as well as increasing the rate of unemployment, job losses encompass a loss of staff experience, expertise and good practice. It was also noted that when staff lose their jobs this then has a devastating impact on their own families.

For organisations as a whole loss of funding in one service area would have a negative impact on other areas of the organisation's provision, for example one organisation will be forced to withdraw from important regional work, which means that the voice of the marginalised children it represents will not be at the policy planning table. One organisation identified the 'uncertainty' created by the current funding situation which made it impossible to plan for the future which must clearly have an impact on services for children.

Clearly where organisations are facing a reduction in their funding and therefore forced to reduce the level of service delivered it has been noted that this makes it hard to maintain staff. For one particular organisation that delivers support to staff providing services to children these staff will no longer have support and this clearly impacts on the quality of the service which the staff can deliver to the children and young people in their care.

- **Impact on relationship between statutory sector and voluntary and community service providers**

The survey identified HSS Boards and Trusts as the most common funder of the organisations that responded to the survey. Funding from Trusts had either been reduced or only a proportion of the funding necessary to run a service was provided, yet these organisations continued to receive referrals from their local Trusts. The impact of a loss or reduction in funding from Trusts simply means that the organisations will not be able to pick up referrals as the Trusts are not providing the necessary funding. One organisation stated that it had 'stopped taking referrals from health trusts as they are not providing funding'. Another organisation commented that 'as referrals rise, resources decrease'.

In addition the loss of funding and possible closure of organisations/services was identified as likely to cause the breakdown of established working partnerships between the statutory sector and these organisations. It was highlighted that this would mean that statutory agencies would lose the link provided by these organisations to vulnerable, hard to reach children and families, which ultimately would mean a 'lack of co-ordination in services and support leaving many families slipping through the net'.

ANALYSIS/RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the survey findings and the recent funding announcements it is now possible to provide some analysis as to the extent that the funding packages will address the issues identified in this survey and to highlight where gaps remain, and make some suggestions for the future funding of children's services in Northern Ireland.

The survey has indicated that the majority of services (38%) under threat as a result of funding coming to an end are those targeted specifically at children in their early years. While the investment in extended schools and early years provision through the Children

and Young People's Package must be welcomed, the concern is that in targeting certain services the Funding Package does not provide for the entirety of early years provision and in fact appears to give preference to group based childcare and makes no provision, for example, for childminding and home-based childcare. It will be important that the full range of universal and targeted childcare options are included as part of the roll out of the extended schools initiative and beyond this Government should look to develop a holistic strategic vision for universal and targeted childcare services in Northern Ireland.

As was noted in the survey findings a significant theme was the impact of a loss of funding and service provision for parents and families. Yet it is this area of parenting and family support, with its emphasis on early intervention and preventative support, that was amongst those least well provided for in the Children and Young People Funding Package. There must be a greater recognition of the value and role of early intervention and preventative work and the role of parents and families must be recognised and supported. We would advocate that flowing from and informed by the over-arching 10 year Children and Young People's Strategy and Strategic Framework for Children, Young People and Families, a Parenting and Family Action Plan should be developed. Furthermore parenting and family support should be included amongst those services that will support and contribute to the extended schools model to be supported by the Children and Young People Fund.

It is important to note that the Children and Young People Funding Package and the Secretary of State's continuation funding for voluntary projects are both two year funding commitments. Given the short-term nature of this funding we would urge Government to ensure that a similar funding crisis does not develop in eighteen months time when funding end dates again loom. We would highlight the commitments that Government has made in Positive Steps its Response to the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector in NI (March 2005). We would urge Government to implement the commitment it made in Positive Steps to longer-term (7-10 year) outcome focused approach to funding and would highlight that with the imminent publication of the Government's 10 year Strategic Vision for all Children and Young People in NI this presents a unique opportunity to deliver on commitments to long term funding of children's services by anchoring it to the delivery of this 10 year strategic vision for all children and young people in NI.

A significant concern identified through the survey was the nature of the funding relationship between the children's voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector, particularly funding from Health and Social Service Boards and Trusts, where funding has been significantly reduced and/or only partial provision has been made for delivery of services, while Trusts continue to make referrals to these services. This situation must be addressed urgently by the DHSSPS with Boards and Trusts. There are concerns at the impact which the structural changes currently being brought forward as a result of the Review of Public Administration recommendations will have on funding relationships. Core funding and service level agreements must be fully met and protected during the transition to new arrangements.

This survey has flagged up the disparate picture of funding sources being accessed by the children's sector. Clearly the ring-fencing and mainstreaming of monies through the Children and Young People Funding Package is welcome and a number of those organisations who have responded to the survey indicated that they have received continuation funding for their services as a result of the funding announcements in early

March. However there remains much uncertainty in the children's voluntary and community sector arising from a lack of information from Government regarding how it intends to deliver the overall package and indeed to what timeframe it is working, given that monies identified for this year have not yet reached frontline services. Greater transparency could be achieved by anchoring the Funding Package to actions to be taken forward under the 10 year Children and Young People's Strategy Action Plan. In addition this would also enable the identification of gaps in funding provision and indicate where supplementary funding support is required to meet the needs of all children and young people.

WAY FORWARD – NEXT STEPS

It is proposed that the All Party Group presents this report to the Minister for Children requesting a specific meeting to discuss plans for delivery of the Children and Young People's Funding Package.

List of Organisations who responded

1. Armagh Child Contact Centre
2. Aware Defeat Depression
3. Carrickfergus Child Contact Centre
4. Central Belfast Contact Centre
5. Child Brain Injury Trust
6. Contact Youth Counselling Services
7. Corner House Community Family Centre
8. Cumann Iarscoile An Lonnain
9. Cumann Iarscoile Na Mona
10. Dairy Farm Training
11. Divis Play Project
12. First Housing Aid and Support Services
13. First Steps Play Group
14. Forthspring Inter Community Group
15. Glenbank Community Association
16. Gort Kids After-School Club
17. Hobby Horse Play Group
18. Homefirst Community Health Trust and NI Association for Mental Health
19. Lifestart
20. Link After School Club
21. Naiscoil an Ionnain
22. NCH NI
23. New Life Counselling
24. NIACRO
25. NICMA
26. Play Resource Warehouse
27. Shankill Women's Centre
28. St Oliver Plunkett Pre-School Play Group
29. Star Neighbourhood Centre
30. Ulster Quaker Service Committee
31. Vine Centre
32. Voypic