



Annual
Report

2007





The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of over 80 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working to secure the rights and needs of children in Ireland, by campaigning for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It aims to improve the lives of all children under 18, through securing the necessary changes in Ireland's laws, policies and services.

Membership

The Alliance was formally established in March 1995. Its membership, from which Board Members are elected at the Alliance's AGM, consists of a diverse range of groups, including child welfare agencies and service providers; child protection groups; academics; youth organisations; family support groups; human rights organisations; disability organisations; parent representative organisations; community groups and other organisations interested in children's rights. The Alliance's policies, projects and activities are developed through ongoing collaboration and consultation with its member organisations.

Vision

Ireland will be one of the best places in the world to be a child

Mission

To realise the rights of children in Ireland through securing the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Strategic Aims

- Bringing about a shared vision that will realise and protect children's rights in Ireland
- Securing legislative and policy changes to give meaningful effect to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Securing the effective implementation of Government policies relating to children

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Introduction



As Chair of the Children's Rights Alliance, it gives me great pleasure to introduce our Annual Report for 2007. This report provides evidence of a very successful year for the Alliance and documents the ways in which we worked with members, colleagues and policy makers to engage with the political process in delivering change for children living in Ireland.

2007 was always going to be a challenging and busy year for the Alliance, following the Government's announcement in November 2006 of its intention to hold a referendum to amend the Constitution in respect of children's rights. I believe that the subsequent commitments, found in the *Programme for Government* and the opposition parties' General Election manifestos for 2007, will, in time, prove to be a significant milestone on our path towards securing the biggest and most positive change for children's rights in Irish law for generations.

It somehow seems fitting that 2007 was also the year when we celebrated the 15th anniversary of Ireland ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Alliance has seen enormous change since its establishment in 1995, most notably the fact that children's rights are now firmly on the political agenda in Ireland. Throughout our history, we have sought to promote more child and family centred policies and practice, placing rights at the heart of child and family policy.

As I look forward, I am optimistic. This is the best opportunity we have had to work for real change. In working with others, we must continue to build the political will and commitment to deliver a better chance for all children living in Ireland – an Ireland that embraces the rights of each and every child.

In 2008, I would like the Alliance to build on the successes of 2007 and to see a genuine shift in gear in the drive to deliver change in the lives of all children the length and breadth of Ireland. Our bottom line is to ensure that children's rights are at the forefront of all policy agendas in Ireland. I am confident that, working together, we can take influential positive actions to make this happen.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank fellow board members for their hard work, dedication and support in 2007 and to acknowledge the high level of commitment and capability offered by the Chief Executive and her staff in all that they do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Nóirín Hayes". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr. Nóirín Hayes
Chairperson

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Overview of the Chief Executive



The Children's Rights Alliance had an exceptionally busy year in 2007, both externally, in terms of the work surrounding the proposed referendum on children's rights and the General Election, and internally, as we recruited new members of staff to help deliver our mission, namely, to realise the rights of children in Ireland through securing the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

While 2007 was very much a transition year for Ireland, particularly with the General Election, this was also true of the internal dynamics within the Alliance, most notably in the way we developed our internal capacity to deliver change for the children of Ireland. The events of this year, particularly in relation to the potential of a constitutional referendum, remind me of the words of Victor Hugo: 'nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come'. The practical concept of children's rights is now a key topic of debate on the political agenda in Ireland – something that the Alliance warmly welcomes.

While the constitutional amendment obviously stood out in our work programme in 2007, this annual report reflects an organisation that has actively engaged in a wide range of issues affecting children in Ireland. A new departure for the Alliance was to hold a public conference for parents, which proved extremely successful. To hear a parent say "this [event] clearly demonstrates that parents' and children's rights advocates are on the same side of this debate" was, for me, encouraging and gratifying.

The Alliance also worked in 2007 to highlight the wide-ranging issues facing some of our most vulnerable children in Ireland. To my mind, this was best exemplified during my first meeting with the Minister for Children, Brendan Smith TD, in September, when the agenda included, among other items, the process towards a constitutional amendment; Budget 2008; corporal punishment; the harmful effects of alcohol; the detention of young offenders; separated children and the need to implement recommendations emanating from the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. We also took the opportunity to follow up on the implementation of *Towards 2016* commitments, such as providing mental health services specifically designed to meet the needs of children and adolescents, and providing social work services to families and children at risk on a seven day, 24-hour basis.

As Chief Executive of the Alliance I am keen that we operate strategically. Consequently, highlights of our programme of work have been documented in this annual report under the headings of our three key strategic aims.

I would like to say a very special thank you to our Board, staff, member organisations, funders and friends.

I very much hope that you enjoy reading our *Eleventh Annual Report* and I look forward to working with you in 2008.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jillian van Turnhout".

Jillian van Turnhout
Chief Executive Officer

Work of the Alliance 2007



Aim 1: Bringing About a Shared Vision that Will Realise and Protect Children's Rights in Ireland

To bring about a shared vision that Ireland will become one of the best places in the world to be a child, the Children's Rights Alliance needs to engage with key policy makers and influencers. This requires advocacy work that will call on the Government, government departments, political parties, statutory agencies and other key bodies to frame and implement policies in relation to children on the basis of a rights-based approach. Through deepening its own national and international relationships, the Alliance will assist the Government and other bodies to recognise the benefits of fostering a rights-based approach in Ireland. This will certainly go some way to ensure that every child in Ireland is afforded the childhood that they deserve.

Social Partnership

As a designated Social Partner, the Alliance used its position to advocate on behalf of children and to highlight the *Concluding Observations* of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child at the highest level. The Alliance takes this responsibility seriously and has been actively involved throughout the year in partnership processes. The organisation participated in meetings of the Community and Voluntary Pillar, in Partnership Plenary Meetings and in bi-lateral meetings with the Department of An Taoiseach and other government departments.

The current social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006–2015*, adopts a lifecycle approach to social development and identifies 'childhood' as one of four lifecycle stages. In 2007, the Alliance used both formal and informal mechanisms to press for consistent progress in the implementation of the social partnership commitments in relation to children, in the particular areas of:

- Early childhood development and care ;
- Improving education outcomes for children;
- Improving health outcomes for children;
- Promoting recreation, sport, arts and culture in the lives of our children;
- Income support; and
- Children and their families.

As part of the Alliance's work with the Community and Voluntary Pillar of Social Partnership, the following three appointments were also made:

- Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive, was appointed to the Management Committee of the National Economic and Social Forum;
- Candy Murphy, a member of the Board of the Alliance, was elected as one of the four representatives of the Social Partnership Community and Voluntary Pillar on the Labour Market Issues Group; and
- Carys Thomas, Communications Director, was appointed as the representative of the Community and Voluntary Pillar on the Ireland Wales Programme Monitoring Committee.

This work will continue in 2008.

Children's Rights are Parents' Rights



Jillian van Turnhout, David Coleman and Dr. Nóirín Hayes

While the Alliance is aware that it must engage with key influencers to successfully realise the rights of children in Ireland, it also felt that it was vital that it engage with parents. The Alliance was therefore delighted when a large number of parents gathered in Dublin's Gresham Hotel on Saturday 1 December 2007 to attend its *Children's Rights – Are they a Parent's Nightmare?* event to air their views about childcare, children's rights and the evolving responsibilities of teenagers. Attendees heard from a panel of experts, including David Coleman, child psychologist and presenter of the critically acclaimed RTE One TV series *Families in Trouble*; Children's Rights Alliance founder and current chair Dr. Nóirín Hayes; Youth Work Ireland's Michael McLoughlin; and Kate Holmquist, columnist with *The Irish Times*, broadcaster and author.

This was an important opportunity for the Alliance to engage with parents ahead of the proposed referendum on children's rights and to listen to their experiences and views on issues that affect them as parents. The meeting drew attention to many examples of how parents' lives would be easier if the State honoured the rights of children, for it would mean fewer of the exhausting battles which parents face on behalf of their children. During the week following the event, Kate Holmquist highlighted — in her *Irish Times* column,



Kate Holmquist

entitled *A great time to be a child? Open your eyes — the ways in which children's rights and parents' rights are intrinsically linked.*

David Coleman told the audience: 'Parents should not fear children's rights; they should embrace them. They are certainly not the *nightmare* portrayed by some. In fact, it is an opportunity to secure more and better quality services for their children. It is high-time that parents were given the space to explore children's rights and to realise a great many of them are already upholding the rights of their child. Children's rights in our Constitution will only serve to strengthen families.'

And this is a great country in which to be a child? No way. If Ireland is to become one of the best places in the world to be a child, as the Children's Rights Alliance hopes, we have to change radically the way we view childhood. Maybe this will put parents' rights and children's rights in conflict in a few cases where parents deserve a wake-up call. But in so many situations where parents cannot cope, supporting children's rights can actually help parents do what's right by their children.

Kate Holmquist, *The Irish Times*
4 December 2007

The invaluable discussion threw up some very interesting issues, all of which will be detailed in a report on the event which will be published on the Alliance web site in 2008. Most importantly for the Alliance, it illustrated that parents share its view that children's rights can only be a positive development for parents and families in general. One parent commented: 'this [event] clearly demonstrates that parents and children's rights advocates are on the same side of this debate'.

Building an International Reputation

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights' visit to Ireland

The Alliance took the opportunity to build on its national and international reputation when the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, visited Ireland for five days in late November. The Alliance, along with several other key NGOs, met the Commissioner at the start of his

visit. At this meeting, the Alliance drew attention to a range of issues relating to children's rights in the following areas: youth justice, social support services, mental health, multi-denominational education, Traveller children, separated children and corporal punishment.

At the conclusion of his visit, Mr Hammarberg held a press conference to outline his five priorities for Ireland. These included three issues that had been raised by the Alliance: the need to develop alternatives to detention for young offenders, to introduce a ban on corporal punishment and to reduce the time spent awaiting decisions on asylum claims. In addition, Mr Hammarberg called for the proposed children's rights referendum to be formulated in a way that would reflect the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, stating: 'it is essential to establish that the principle of the best interests of the child [...] be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting children'.

Eurochild

Both the Chief Executive, Jillian van Turnhout, and Maria Corbett, Policy Director, participated in the Eurochild network throughout 2007, including a Eurochild Policy Working Group in Brussels and a Eurochild–Euronet event in the European Parliament on mainstreaming children's rights. Jillian and Maria also deepened the Alliance's relationship with Eurochild when they met with Catriona Williams, Chief Executive of Children in Wales and Chair of Eurochild.

The Lisbon Treaty

In June, the Alliance wrote to the Taoiseach urging him to ensure that the references to children's rights in the existing text of the European Union Constitutional Treaty were maintained in any newly agreed text (Article 1-3). The letter also stressed the importance of ensuring that the Charter of Fundamental Rights was included in its entirety in any revised text for the Constitutional Treaty.

The response from the Office of An Taoiseach gave the following assurance: 'The Taoiseach has throughout the negotiations on the new Reform Treaty been strongly supportive of making the rights of Union citizens, including the rights of the child, more visible. It was agreed at the European Council Meeting that the references to children's rights as one of the Union's objectives contained in Article 1-3 of the Constitutional Treaty will be maintained in the new Treaty'.

Alcohol and Children

The consumption of alcohol affects and directly impacts on the lives of children. As well as the harmful effects of their own consumption patterns, children are also affected by the widespread harmful use of alcohol by parents, other family members and other drinkers. Growing up in a household where alcohol is a dominant feature has a negative impact on children.

In 2007, the Alliance had the opportunity to work extensively on the issue of alcohol misuse when the Chief Executive, Jillian van Turnhout, was appointed as Rapporteur of an Opinion by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in response to the EU Commission's Communication, *Towards an EU Strategy to Support Member States in Reducing Alcohol Related Harm*. Preparation of the Opinion began in early 2007 and Jillian was expertly assisted by Dr. Ann Hope, of the School of Social Work and Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin. Margaret Burns, the Alliance's Vice Chairperson and Policy Officer with the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, also provided input. The draft Opinion, presented by Jillian, was adopted by the EESC plenary in May.

Later in the year, Jillian was given an opportunity to build on this work when *The Irish Times* asked her to provide an opinion piece in response to the drinks' industry's campaign to dispel 'myths' about alcohol and fitness. The article, *Benefits of Calling Time on Ads for Alcohol*, was published in October and attracted considerable attention.

Aim 2: Securing Legislative and Policy Changes to Give Meaningful Effect to The UN Convention on The Rights of The Child

The Children's Rights Alliance must seek to ensure that its own policies, be they in relation to child poverty or children in armed conflict, are reflected in legislative change, national strategy documents and Government policy. The Irish State ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and, as such, commitments to implement the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child should become increasingly reflected in key official documents, such as the agreed *Programme for Government*. This requires the Alliance to deliver comprehensive policy proposals in key areas affecting children, a strategic vision to its campaigns, including regular engagement with all political parties and intensifying involvement with its member organisations.

Constitutional Referendum

Since its establishment in 1995, the Alliance has continuously voiced its concerns about the State's ability to protect children, given the present status of children's rights in the Irish Constitution. In its Second Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *From Rhetoric to Rights* (2006), the Alliance singled out constitutional change as the key reform required to enable Ireland to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On 3 November 2006, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, announced the Government's intention to hold a referendum to strengthen children's rights in the Constitution. The Alliance was invited by the then Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan TD, to undertake a consultation process with the NGO sector. This was conducted during November and December 2006. The findings of the consultation were brought together in a report, entitled *The Constitution and Children: A Position Paper on the Proposed Referendum on Children's Rights*, which was presented to the Minister for Children in January 2007.



Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive, presents *The Constitution and Children: A Position Paper on the Proposed Referendum on Children's Rights* to the Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan TD, in January 2007

The Position Paper was formulated in the light of the discussion at a consultation meeting with member organisations, as well as further discussions with experts in the area and other interested individuals. The document, which attracted considerable publicity, advocated significant strengthening of children's rights in the Constitution and outlined 14 key principles that should inform the proposed constitutional amendment, including equality and non-discrimination, best interests of the child, respect for the views of the child, protection from abuse and the right to identity.

During the first few months of 2007, work in this area intensified, as the Alliance developed its own thinking and analysis in regard to the emerging issues and met with a wide range of individuals and organisations to discuss key aspects of these issues. Of particular significance, were several meetings with the Minister for Children, as well as meetings with representatives of all the opposition parties, and with Ireland's MEPs.

In February, the Alliance cautiously welcomed the publication of the Government's Twenty-Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2007 as a step in the right direction. Later in the month, Jillian van Turnhout was invited to speak at a conference, organised by the School of Law, Trinity College Dublin, entitled: *Children's Rights and the Constitution: A Conference on Recent Developments and Future Reforms*. Other speakers included Emily Logan, the Ombudsman for Children; Geoffrey Shannon, Senior

Lecturer in Child and Family Law at the Law Society of Ireland; Prof. William Binchy, Regius Professor of Law at Trinity College Dublin; and Eoin Carolan, lecturer in Constitutional Law, Trinity College Dublin. Jillian was asked to give an NGO perspective on the formulation of the constitutional amendment.

In March, the Alliance organised a further consultation and information meeting for members to discuss the proposed constitutional amendment. It also had some further meetings with the Minister for Children. By late spring, it became apparent that the Government had come to the view that it would not be feasible to hold the referendum in advance of the General Election which was by then imminent. That said, the new *Programme for Government*, as well as each of the opposition parties' manifestos, included a commitment to amend the Constitution in respect of children's rights.

Consequently, in late 2007, the Government established the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children, which is chaired by Mary O'Rourke TD and which will make recommendations regarding the wording of a constitutional amendment on children's rights. The Alliance warmly welcomed the establishment of the Committee.

The Alliance strives for transparency in its work and therefore took time, throughout 2007, to consult (both formally and informally) with its member organisations on their experiences and concerns surrounding the need for a constitutional amendment. This approach enabled the Alliance to facilitate constructive debate and to find common ground. Work in relation to the constitutional amendment is likely to dominate the Alliance's agenda again in 2008.

End Child Poverty Coalition

Throughout 2007, the Alliance continued to play an active role in the *End Child Poverty Coalition* (ECPC), which works for the eradication of child poverty in Ireland. The ECPC comprises six other leading NGOs, each of which is also a member of the Alliance, namely Barnardos, Focus Ireland, National Youth Council of Ireland, OPEN-One Parent Exchange Network, Pavee Point and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. ECPC had another busy year in 2007 and the Alliance provided communications and policy support to help ensure that it seized every opportunity to lobby the Government throughout the year.

Despite more than a decade of unprecedented economic prosperity, Ireland has one of the worst records on child poverty in the EU. In this context, the ECPC campaigned for more targeted income supports and services for children and families and for greater overall commitment to ending child poverty.

In the run up to the General Election, the ECPC produced an election manifesto which was sent to each of the political parties. The manifesto identified key policy commitments in the areas of health, family and child support, education, and housing that the group felt should be included in the Programme for Government of the incoming administration.

The ECPC also developed a pre-budget submission, which set out recommendations that the Government should address in Budget 2008. In the accompanying press release, John-Mark McCafferty of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was quoted as saying: 'when sitting down with their calculators, [the Government] should remember that 111,129 children – enough children to fill Croke Park nearly one-and-a-half times over – are relying on them not to let this opportunity pass them by.' The submission is available at www.endchildpoverty.ie.

Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child includes an Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. Ireland ratified the Protocol in 2002 and submitted its first report in December 2006.

Member organisations were involved in developing the Alliance's Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in relation to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which was subsequently presented to the UN Committee in Geneva by the Alliance policy team (Policy Director, Maria Corbett and Legal Policy Officer, Róisín Webb).

In its Report, the Alliance urged that the Irish Government should adopt the age of 18 as the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces. It also urged that there should be an examination (with a view to its removal) of the exclusion of the defence forces from the remit of the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002. A further recommendation was that psychological and other supports be put in place for former child soldiers who are now living in Ireland, many of whom may be in the asylum process.



Action for Separated Children in Ireland: Dr Siobhán Mullaly, (Irish Refugee Council); Fergus Finlay (Barnardos); Jyothi Kanics (Irish Refugee Council); Mary Nicholson (ISPCC); and Maria Corbett (Children's Rights Alliance)

Copies of the Alliance submission and of its presentation to the Pre-Sessional Working Group of the UN Committee are both available on the Alliance web site, at www.childrensrights.ie.

Separated Children / Aged Out Minors

Separated children are children who no longer live in their country of origin and are separated from their parents or caregivers. Many have experienced war or violence, death of family members or have been victims of trafficking. Alarmingly, between 2001 and 2005, 328 such children who had come to Ireland went missing from their care placements.

In response to the evidence of the inadequate levels of care and protection afforded to these very vulnerable children, the Alliance joined forces with the Irish Refugee Council, Barnardos and the ISPCC during 2007 to form a consortium called *Action for Separated Children in Ireland*.

It is believed that approximately 230 separated children are currently in the care of the HSE. Throughout 2007, the Alliance, on its own and as part of the consortium, campaigned for the HSE to provide separated children with supports on a par with those provided for other children in care. This is a matter of great urgency as media reports and research suggest strongly that some of these children are trafficked into Ireland for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude or as forced brides.

Throughout 2007, the Alliance lobbied on these important issues, both as part of the *Action for Separated Children in Ireland* consortium and along with other member organisations, such as UNICEF. The Alliance coordinated a meeting on behalf of the consortium with the Minister for Children, Brendan Smith TD, as well as a meeting with Alan Shatter TD, the Fine Gael Spokesperson on Children. In preparation for these meetings, the Alliance prepared an information note on separated children. This work will continue in 2008.

CADIC

The CADIC Coalition (formerly known as the Coalition Against the Deportation of Irish Children) completed its work at the end of 2007, with the launch in Dublin of its research report, *Looking Forward, Looking Back: Experiences of Irish Citizen Child Families*. The research highlighted the ways in which immigration policy led thousands of families into disadvantage. The Coalition's mission was successfully completed and any remaining pieces of work were distributed among its relevant members.

Guardian ad Litem

Children need to be supported in the courts. In 2007, the Alliance was represented on the Consultative Group of the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) by its Legal Policy Officer, Róisín Webb. The Consultative Group was created to assist CAAB in undertaking its role of issuing guidelines in relation to the qualifications, criteria for appointment, training and role of any guardian *ad litem* appointed for children in proceedings under the Child Care Act 1991. The work of the Consultative Group involved consideration of draft text for the guidelines and providing comments and suggestions for amendments. A sub-committee of the CAAB Board has since formed and work will be ongoing in 2008.

Other Advocacy Work

A regular feature of the Alliance's campaigning work in 2007 was the marking of international days of activism. These, two of which are detailed below, provide a much needed hook to draw in the media and to raise awareness of a particular issue in Ireland, constituting another small step towards securing the necessary legislative or policy commitments to effect change.

World Day for the Prevention of Child Abuse

In November, the Alliance marked the World Day for the Prevention of Child Abuse by publicly urging the Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. This Protocol came into force in January 2002 and has now been ratified by 124 states, but there is as yet no indication as to when Ireland will ratify it.

Implementing the Protocol in domestic legislation would require the State to strengthen Ireland's laws in relation to: offences of child trafficking for sexual exploitation; the sale of organs; forced labour; the illegal adoption of children; child prostitution and child pornography; and the extradition and prosecution of a national who engages in child sex tourism and other child-abuse related offences outside of the State.

During 2008, the Alliance will continue to press for the ratification of the Protocol.

Universal Children's Day

On the occasion of Universal Children's Day (20 November), the Alliance joined forces with FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres), the Vincentian Refugee Centre, Barnardos, the Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland (MRCI), OPEN and the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) to highlight the fact that children are going without basic necessities, such as medicine, food and adequate clothing, as a result of the imposition by the Department of Family and Social Affairs of the Habitual Residence Condition for receipt of the child benefit payment.

Aim 3: Securing the Effective Implementation of Government Policies Relating to Children

The Children's Rights Alliance must ensure that the Government is held to account over its existing and/or future commitments relating to the rights and needs of children in Ireland. This requires the Alliance to monitor the work of the Government and all other bodies carefully – drawing attention to any shortfalls or contradictions in policy implementation, but also congratulating substantial progress where it is deserved. In this regard, the Alliance needs to develop its reputation as an independent, expert and valued commentator among policy-makers, politicians, media, key stakeholders and other key influencers.

Budget 2008

In the week that also commemorated the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October) the Alliance published its submission in relation to Budget 2008. The Alliance saw this as an opportune time to highlight the fact that one child in nine in Ireland lives in consistent poverty – despite the country having one of the best performing economies in the EU. Pointing to the failure of the Government to fulfil its promise to eliminate consistent child poverty by 2007, the Alliance urged that the December Budget should include sufficient measures to enable the commitment to be honoured in 2008. The submission is available at www.childrensrights.ie.

What is needed to help end consistent child poverty?:

- *a new child income support measure for children in low-income families;*
- *an increase in the Qualified Child Allowance to €35 per week; and*
- *the need to restore the Child Benefit payment as a universal payment to all children regardless of their parent's residency status.*

Unfortunately, the Budget measures fell far short of what would be required to eliminate child poverty and the Alliance issued a statement expressing its disappointment. In its lobbying of the Government in relation to this issue, the Alliance also contributed to the End Child Poverty Coalition's (ECPC) advocacy work, including its Budget Analysis Paper, which argued that there had been a failure to deal with the needs of children living in low income families.

Together, the various submissions and statements garnered some good media coverage and the Alliance will continue to hold the Government to account in 2008.

Youth Justice

Detention of Young Offenders

During 2007, the Alliance raised its grave concerns about the detention of children under 18 in St Patrick's Institution, a detention centre for young people under 21 years, which operates a regime similar to that of an adult prison. Similar concerns were expressed in the report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), issued in October, following its visit to Ireland the previous year. The CPT report documented 'worrying' inter-prisoner intimidation and violence, lack of adequate prison and medical staff, easy access to drugs and a lack of purposeful activity, such as educational classes or workshops. The CPT confirmed the Alliance's concerns when it deemed St Patrick's to be unsafe for both inmates and prison staff.

In September 2007, the Alliance was alerted to the fact that the Government had formulated plans to build a temporary facility to detain children under the age of 18 at Thornton Hall – a new prison complex for adults which is being developed by the Irish Prison Service on a green field site in north County Dublin. The Alliance immediately raised this issue in a meeting with the then newly-appointed Minister for Children, Brendan Smith TD, and pointed out that any plan to locate a detention centre for children in Thornton Hall would be in breach of Ireland's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Alliance called a members' meeting in November to discuss the proposed facility at Thornton Hall. Member organisations represented at the meeting agreed that the Alliance should lobby the Government to abandon the planned facility and to keep its promise to remove all under 18-year-olds from St. Patrick's Institution by 2010. It was also agreed that the Alliance strongly advocate that all 16 and 17-years-olds (ordered by the courts to be detained) should be accommodated in a children detention school run on the same model as Oberstown Schools/Trinity House, under the auspices of the Youth Justice Service.

In December, the Alliance wrote to the Minister for Children reiterating its opposition to the proposed detention of children at Thornton Hall, even on an interim basis, and pointing out that the inclusion in the complex of a facility for 16 and 17-year-olds could serve to lessen the sense of urgency regarding the building of a children detention school.

The Alliance is committed to continuing its campaign to ensure that no child will be detained at Thornton Hall.

ASBOs

In March, the Alliance initiated www.asbowatch.ie to monitor the implementation of Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), which came into law for children and young people (12-18 year-olds) on 1 March 2007. This initiative was supported by Youth Work Ireland, The National Youth Council of Ireland and Catholic Youth Care. Media attention on this issue was widespread and intense. The Alliance would like to thank Michael McLoughlin for his time and support in assisting with media interviews at the time of the web site's launch.

Child Protection

Throughout 2007, it has been necessary for the Alliance to issue strongly worded statements in relation to child protection issues that have hit the headlines. Two such cases included the McElwee Inquiry and the Romanian Roma families living on the roundabout in Ballymun.

McElwee Inquiry

In July, the Minister for Children, Brendan Smith TD, ordered an urgent HSE Inquiry into the events that followed the conviction in 2005 of Dr Niall McElwee (Lecturer in Child Care in Athlone Institute of Technology) on two counts of attempted indecent assault against two young girls in a hotel in the Netherlands in 2004. Despite these convictions, Dr McElwee had remained in his post until July 2007.

In response to the publication of the Inquiry's terms of reference, the Alliance issued a statement querying why these did not focus on establishing the full facts surrounding the McElwee case, in particular the information given to the HSE in relation to Dr McElwee and, importantly, the actions that followed. Furthermore, the Alliance expressed disappointment that the Inquiry's terms of reference included the outlining of a 'comparison of the Irish system with comparable foreign states' as it felt this would delay its outcome. The Alliance also urged the HSE to ensure that the Department of Health's Child Protection Guidelines, *Children First*, were part of the Inquiry. The Inquiry is due to publish its findings in 2008.

Romanian Roma Families and the Ballymun Roundabout

The plight of 32 Roma adults and 22 children, who were living in horrific conditions on one of the busiest road junctions in the country, the M50, was the subject of considerable media coverage during the summer. As the crisis worsened on a daily basis, with no running water, rubbish collection, heat or adequate shelter, the Alliance added its voice to a growing number of organisations that came together to seek immediate humanitarian intervention to avert a public health crisis and/or road accident. As the

roundabout had become infested with rubbish and vermin, and due to its location, a statement was issued pointing to the HSE's statutory responsibility to protect and promote the welfare of all children living in Ireland.

A further statement was also issued by the Alliance to commend the work of Pavee Point, a member organisation, in relation to its support of the Roma families living on the M50 roundabout. It should be noted that Pavee Point played a supportive and critical role in highlighting the appalling living conditions faced by the Roma families.

Education

In August, the Alliance was dismayed when the Government failed to comply with its obligations under Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to respect and promote the rights of all children living in Ireland to receive an education, when it transpired that the education system in Balbriggan, North Dublin had failed to find school places for a large number of children in the area. The Alliance issued a press statement to bring attention to this contradiction and to also commend the prompt work of its member organisation, Educate Together, to accommodate 106 children, the majority of whom were from minority ethnic families.

Communications

Following the recruitment of Carys Thomas to the position of Communications Director in September, work began on the three-year Communications Strategy – a key component in the Alliance's Strategic Plan to successfully deliver its three aims. An outline of the Communications Strategy was presented to the final Board meeting in 2007. The overall approach proposed was accepted by the Board, as was the suggested structure, which would sub-divide the communications section into three key areas:

- media and public relations;
- campaigns and public affairs; and
- marketing and corporate affairs.

The Communications Strategy will be finalised in 2008, following further research and the identification of future policy priorities. Key developments, already in place, are given in detail below.

Media and Public Relations

In 2007, the Alliance issued a number of press releases and statements, where appropriate, in relation to its key strategic aims and, as a result, the organisation received a steady stream of media queries, from both broadcast and print media. All press releases and press statements are archived on the Alliance web site at www.childrensrights.ie

In terms of print media coverage, the Alliance generated nearly 100 press articles throughout the year. In broadcast media, Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive, and Maria Corbett, Policy Director, gave a substantial number of interviews on a wide range of issues, and appeared on RTE 1 television and radio news, Newstalk, 2FM, Today FM, and several local radio stations.

In developing its media relations, the Alliance is keen that it utilises and develops member organisations' expertise in specific areas of work and has, therefore, developed a process in which interview bids are passed on to the most appropriate member organisation, as and when required.

New Initiative: Podcast

The launch of the Children's Rights Podcast Series in September 2007 was an important initiative in developing new, innovative ways of engaging with Alliance member organisations and others interested in children's rights in Ireland.



A copy of the podcast was given to the new Minister for Children, Brendan Smith TD by Margaret Burns, Alliance Vice Chairperson and Jillian van Turnhout, Alliance Chief Executive

Podcasts will be published quarterly. The release of the first in the series marked the 15th anniversary of Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the first anniversary of the issuing by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child of its *Concluding Observations* on Ireland's Second Report.

The podcast featured two of the founder members of the Alliance – Dr Nóirín Hayes, Chairperson of the Children's Rights Alliance and Margaret Burns, the Alliance's Vice Chairperson – and Melanie Verwoerd, Executive Director of UNICEF Ireland. It featured recollections of the events leading up to Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention, and to the establishment of the Alliance three years later. It also included reflections on why

campaigning for children's rights is as important today as it was in the early 1990s and on children's rights from a global perspective.

The second podcast was published in December 2007 and featured Fr. Peter McVerry, a member of the Board of the Alliance, who was interviewed about his work, spanning more than 30 years, with Dublin's homeless young people. The Alliance was delighted that this was listed as the second most popular podcast in the *Government and Organisations* category on iTunes over the Christmas period.

Both podcasts, and all other future podcasts, can be downloaded from www.childrensrights.ie or iTunes. Transcripts are also available on the Alliance's web site.

Corporate Identity

As part of the outline of the forthcoming Communications Strategy, it was agreed by the Board that the Alliance should retain its current corporate identity, including the logo and cartoon graphics. Subsequently, new materials including exhibition stands and other corporate merchandise were acquired to improve and provide consistency in branding of Alliance events.

Information Support

While the Alliance is not a public information service, and does not advertise itself as such, it regularly receives queries from members of the public, individuals from other organisations, and from Alliance member organisations. The Alliance maintains a database of these queries.

Alliance staff members will normally refer enquirers on to statutory organisations and NGO service providers that can assist the enquirer, or, if appropriate, assist the enquirer to resolve the issue. Most of the queries relate to a perceived failure of the State to provide adequately for a child and include enquiries into the mechanisms that are available to secure the best interests of children. The Alliance has begun analysing these queries to help inform decisions on future policy work.

Other Policy and Representational Work

European Economic and Social Committee

Jillian van Turnhout, the Alliance's Chief Executive, was elected Vice President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in 2006 and travels to Brussels with her work on a regular basis. The EESC represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society in the European Union. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome and its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the decision-making process of the EU.

While in Brussels, Jillian has the opportunity to engage in work on advancing the rights of children. In January, she attended a meeting of the Action Group on the EU Commission's Communication, *Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child*. This Action Group brings together a number of European children's rights organisations, including Eurochild, Save the Children, UNICEF, Plan Europe, Euronet, Marie Stopes Foundation, Sophie's Alliance, Terre des Hommes, SOS Children's Villages International, PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants) and World Vision.

In March, Jillian attended the European Youth Summit on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. At the opening, Jillian gave a short speech in relation to both her work with the Alliance and her role in the EESC. Other speakers included: Commissioner Wallström; Commissioner Figel; Mr Pöttering, President of the European Parliament; and Mr Carrara, President of the Italian National Youth Council.

In April, Jillian was invited, by the European Commission, to chair a 'Mock Council Meeting' for transition students in the Mansion House, Dublin. In May, Jillian attended, and gave the keynote address, to the MOVE Conference in Brussels on mutual recognition of skills and competences learned through volunteering.

In June, Jillian, who had been appointed to the steering group of the European Forum on the Rights of the Child, attended its first meeting in Berlin. The meeting of the Forum, which aims to share EU-wide experiences and information to inform the EU's Strategy on Children's Rights, focused on law enforcement procedures and the abuse of children within juvenile justice systems.

In October, the Alliance supported the work of the EESC, the National Forum on Europe and the National Youth Council of Ireland in their organisation of a youth forum, *Your Europe: Your Say* held in Dublin. Irish young people were given an opportunity to voice their opinion on the Commission's *Communication on European policies concerning youth* and were able to debate the future Lisbon Treaty, active citizenship as well as employment and education.



Jillian van Turnhout, Alliance Chief Executive, and Sean Haughey TD, Minister for Youth Affairs, with participants at *Your Europe: Your Say*

Other Engagements and Activities

During the year, the Chief Executive, Jillian van Turnhout, met with the Ombudsman for Children, Emily Logan, on two occasions to exchange information about ongoing work and to discuss possibilities for co-operation.

In November, Jillian was asked, as she had been in previous years, to be a member of the jury for the Eurojeune poster competition, which is organised by the ISPC on behalf of the European Commission Representation Office in Dublin. The aim of the competition is to encourage children and teenagers from 12 to 18 years of age to create a poster which illustrates the idea of protecting, respecting and promoting children's rights within the European Union.

Among other engagements, Jillian attended the *Stereotyping of Young People Working Group*, organised by the NYCI and the Equality Authority; chaired the Combat Poverty Agency conference, *Welfare Policy and Poverty* in Dublin; and met with the Turkish Human Rights Presidency and human rights boards to talk about the work of the Alliance.

In January, the Alliance also made a submission to the Irish Human Rights Commission Strategic Plan for its Second Term (2007–2010).

Alliance Administration



Board Members

At the Eleventh Annual General Meeting of the Children's Rights Alliance, held on 29 May 2006, the following members were elected to the Board of Directors, with the exception of Caroline O'Sullivan, who was co-opted on to the Board in November 2007.

Chairperson	Dr. Nóirín Hayes	School of Social Science and Legal Studies, DIT
Vice-Chairperson	Margaret Burns	Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice
Honorary Secretary	Mary O'Connor	Children in Hospital Ireland
Honorary Treasurer	Michael McLoughlin	Youth Work Ireland
Director	Fr. Peter McVerry, S.J.	Peter McVerry Trust
Director	Caroline O'Sullivan	ISPCC
Director	Áine Lynch	National Parents Council (Primary)
Director	Candy Murphy	One Family

There were eight meetings of the Board during 2007. The Alliance extends its thanks to all Board members for their work during the year and for their continuing involvement and support.

Staff Members

The Alliance was sorry to say goodbye to Kirsty Callander, who left the organisation to return to her native Scotland to work for the Children's Hospice Association. As a first step to implement its new Strategic Plan, the Alliance built internal capacity and recruited four new members of staff, mainly in the latter part of 2007. Current staff members of the Alliance are listed below, together with their length of time with the organisation:

Chief Executive	Jillian van Turnhout	Since 2005	Full-time
Policy Director	Maria Corbett	Since 2001	Full-time
Communications Director	Carys Thomas	Since September 2007	Full-time
Office Manager	Mairéad Gallagher	Since May 2007	Full-time
Legal Policy Officer	Róisín Webb	Since September 2007	Full-time
Information Officer	Ken Reid	Since June 2007	Full-time
Administrator	Ciara Murphy	Since 2001	Part-time



Staff members: Mairéad Gallagher, Carys Thomas, Niamh Gallagher, Ken Reid, Jillian van Turnhout, Maria Corbett, Ciara Murphy and Róisín Webb

Internships and work experience

During 2007, the Alliance was fortunate to benefit from the work of some very dedicated students who were keen to develop their knowledge and understanding of children's rights. The Alliance greatly benefited from the work of Kathleen Seymour, an intern from the American College in Dublin, and Diya Uberoi, who volunteered while studying law at Trinity College.

The Alliance was delighted that Robért Kayitare, who had helped prepare the Children's Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2006, decided to work with the organisation during his school summer holidays. The Alliance was also happy to provide short placements for two transition year students, namely Aoife Campbell, from Loreto College, Balbriggan, and Ciarán Garafalo from St Nessian's Community School, Baldoye, both of whom provided excellent support to the administrative team.

The Alliance would like to formally thank each of them for their support and hard work.

Membership

The member organisations of the Alliance consist of a diverse range of groups, including child welfare agencies and service providers; child protection groups; academics; youth organisations; family support groups; human rights organisations; disability organisations; parent representative organisations; community groups and other organisations interested in children's rights. The Alliance welcomed the following new members in 2007:

- Association for Criminal Justice Research and Development Ltd;
- Irish Autism Action;
- Irish Foster Care Association;
- Miss Carr's Children's Home;
- PLANET – The Partnerships Network;
- SAOL Project Beag Children's Centre;
- Sparks (Support Project for Adolescent Refugee Kids); and
- Teen Counselling Mater Dei.

At the close of 2007, the Alliance had 87 member organisations.

The Alliance's policies, projects and activities are, of course, developed through ongoing collaboration and consultation with its member organisations. In 2007, the Alliance worked in partnership with member organisations to further policy development in the areas of youth justice, child poverty and migrant children and also organised a number of consultation meetings, particularly in relation to the proposed constitutional amendment on children's rights.

With the addition of new staff members facilitating greater internal capacity, the Alliance began the process of strengthening its links and increasing its channels of communication with its member organisations. Throughout 2007, the Alliance took time to support some of its member organisations, both publicly and privately, including public statements and letters to relevant officials – some examples of this work are outlined in preceding sections of this report. The Alliance will continue to foster closer ties with its member organisations in 2008.

Funding

The Alliance receives funding from three main sources: The Atlantic Philanthropies, the ONE Foundation and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA). Since December 2006, the ONE Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies have provided joint funding to the Alliance for its five-year Strategic Plan. Throughout 2007, the Alliance worked with its funders to develop suitable evaluation criteria.

Member Organisations

Amnesty International
 Ana Liffey Children's Project
 The Ark, a cultural centre for children
 Association for Criminal Justice Research & Development
 Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
 ATD Fourth World
 Barnardos
 Barretstown
 Border Counties Childcare Network
 CARI
 Catholic Guides of Ireland
 Catholic Youth Care
 Childminding Ireland
 Children in Hospital Ireland
 City of Dublin YMCA
 CityArts
 Crosscare Aftercare Unit
 Crosscare Drug Awareness Programme
 DIT – School of Social Sciences & Legal Studies
 Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
 Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project
 Educate Together
 Education Department UCD
 Enable Ireland
 Focus Ireland
 Forbairt Naíonraí Teo
 Foróige
 Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN)
 Home Start National Office Ireland
 Hope Voluntary Housing Association
 IAYPIC
 Inclusion Ireland
 Integrating Ireland
 IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation
 Irish Autism Action
 Irish Association of Hospital Play Staff
 Irish Association of Social Workers
 Irish Association of Suicidology
 Irish Centre for Human Rights, Galway
 Irish Congress of Trade Unions
 Irish Council for Civil Liberties
 Irish Foster Care Association
 Irish Girl Guides
 Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
 Irish National Teachers Organisation
 Irish Penal Reform Trust
 Irish Refugee Council
 Irish Traveller Movement
 Irish Youth Foundation
 ISPPC
 Jack & Jill Children's Foundation
 Jesuit Centre for Faith & Justice
 Junglebox FDYS
 Kids' Own Publishing Partnership
 Kilbarrack Youth Project
 La Leche League of Ireland
 Lifestart National Office
 Mary Immaculate College
 Matt Talbot Community Trust
 Miss Carr's Children's Home
 Mothers Union
 Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project
 National Association for Parent Support
 National Children's Nurseries Association
 National Parents Council (Post-Primary)
 National Parents Council (Primary)
 National Youth Council of Ireland
 O.P.E.N.
 One Family
 One in Four
 Parentline
 Pavee Point
 Peter McVerry Trust
 PLANET— The Partnership Network
 Psychological Society of Ireland
 SAOL Project – SAOL Beag Children's Centre
 Society of St. Vincent de Paul
 South West Wexford Community Development
 SPARKS (Support Project for Adolescent Refugee Kids)
 St. Nicholas Montessori College
 St. Nicholas Montessori Society
 Step by Step Child & Family Project
 Sugradh
 Teen Counselling Mater Dei
 Treoir
 UNICEF Ireland
 Youth Initiative in Partnership
 Youth Work Ireland



The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of over 80 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working to secure the rights and needs of children in Ireland, by campaigning for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It aims to improve the lives of all children under 18, through securing the necessary changes in Ireland's laws, policies and services.

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