

Children's Rights Now

CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS
ALLIANCE
Uniting Voices For Children

NEWSLETTER 2023 ISSUE 3



Dear Members and Alliance friends,

Over the past few months, the Children's Rights Alliance, alongside our members, have been fully engaged in building the momentum behind our issue-based campaigns and member dialogues to ensure the best possible outcomes for children leading into this year's Budget and the final Quarter of 2023. I am delighted to bring you the latest news of our impacts and some key upcoming opportunities for our members and stakeholders.

In July, our primary focus was on education and in particular the significant reforms currently being developed and rolled out by the Department. On 11 July, we convened a Future of Education event with a keynote by the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, and inputs from our members the National Parents Council Primary and The Irish Second Level Students Union. At the event, members and stakeholders got insights from the Minister on her priority areas of focus including senior cycle reform and measures to address educational inequality.

In August, our attention turned to online safety. With Ireland's first Online Safety Commissioner in place in early 2023, it was very positive to see her focused approach in implementing some of the key objectives of the new Commission of making the online world a safer space for children. One aspect of this is the development of binding Online Safety Codes the first of which is expected to be in place by the end of the year. We convened a briefing with the Commissioner which gave members insight on the consultation process on the Code and following this, we prepared a submission. You can read our proposal [here](#).

There were also significant developments in the child protection space during this time that demanded our attention. Two HIQA reports were published that revealed the significant challenges Tusla is experiencing responding to the increased numbers of separated children and unaccompanied minors arriving in the State. We raised our concerns publicly and scaled up our engagements with members and Tusla in order to respond to these emerging issues. More details about our ongoing work in this space are included below.

Over the summer months, the team worked with our End Child Poverty campaign advisory group to ensure momentum continued behind delivering a budget that worked to break the cycle of poverty for children and young people. Key stakeholder engagements were part of this strategy, with the Alliance attending the Pre-Budget Forum and the National Economic Dialogue. Over the summer, planning was underway for our second End Child Poverty Week - the final touchstone in our pre budget work that sees five consecutive days of events media and digital outputs to place a spotlight on child poverty ahead of budget negotiations. End Child Poverty Week 2023 took place between the 11-15 September with more detail included below and more to come in a special campaign update for our members. The collective advocacy and messaging as part of our End Child Poverty campaign was evident in the budget announced on 10 October which included a clear focus on child poverty and some important measures that we sought.

It has been a very exciting few months at the Alliance and we are fortunate enough to be expanding our team, with new roles focused on our strategic priorities and campaigns.

I also hope to see many of you in the coming weeks with several member briefings and events on the horizon:

- **28 November** – Member Meeting with Secretary General of DCEDIY (in person at The Richmond Centre, Dublin)
- **01 December** – HSE Dialogue (online)
- **4 December** – Ending Direct Provision Conference, The Morrison Hotel Dublin

Thank you, as always, for your continued and greatly valued support.



Tanya Ward
Chief Executive



1. Fostering Children's Rights

Children's Rights Alliance Helpline

Children's Rights Alliance Helpline

01 902 0494

Mondays 10am – 4pm
Wednesdays 10am – 4pm
Fridays 10am – 12 noon



Our Helpline and Legal Advice Clinics provide legal information specifically on children's rights and **free one to one legal advice**. We have a few remaining spots for our free legal advice clinic until the end of the year. You can email the helpline team *anytime* at help@childrensrights.ie

The Second Child Summit – 21 November

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth hosted the Second Child Summit on 21 November. Earlier this year the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) published its concluding observations for Ireland. This event explored how the concluding observations of the Committee can be implemented. The event follows on from the highly successful First Child Summit held in 2016 after the last UN Committee on the Rights of the Child examination, which was the first of its kind in bringing together the main policy and decision-makers across Government to help forge positive change for children in Ireland.

The event included keynote addresses from national and international experts and a series of panel discussions. At the event, the Department launched the next National Children and Young People's Strategy, 2023 - 2028: Young Ireland. You can read the strategy and explore its three spotlight areas on Child Poverty, Mental Health and Disability, [here](#).

2. Children's Rights in Law, Policies and Practice

Children's Mental Health Services

The Mental Health Commission published its [Independent Review](#) of the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) at the end of July you can read our response to the final report [here](#).

In May and June, we led consultations with parents/guardians for the National Subgroup of HSE Mental Health Engagement and Recovery, on how young people and their parents/guardians would like to give feedback on their experiences of CAMHS and how best CAMHS can collect this feedback to help inform and make improvements to their service engagement. 11 parents were consulted through 2 focus groups and 288 parents of a child with experience in CAMHS were consulted by online survey. The key findings included that parents/guardians want: 1. A Variety of Engagement Mechanisms and to Ensure all Voices are Heard 2. Open Communication, a Proactive Feedback Loop and Implementation 3. Anonymity and Independence in engagement mechanisms.

Stakeholder Engagement on Separated Children

In July, HIQA published two investigative reports that revealed serious issues in our child protection system for some of the most vulnerable children in the state, including separated children. You can read our press release in response to the reports [here](#). On

foot of this, the Alliance convened a members' meeting in August to discuss these issues

foot of this, the Alliance convened a members' meeting in August to discuss these issues and what action should be taken to address them. A letter was sent to the Taoiseach

raising our shared concerns.

Tusla – the Child and Family Agency approached us to establish a stakeholder meeting on the issues facing separated children and unaccompanied minors. Our first meeting was held with over 40 stakeholders on 4 October with the second engagement taking place on 25 October. With several reports in recent months pointing to the significant challenges facing separated children and unaccompanied minors arriving into the State, the purpose of this stakeholder engagement is to focus on the best interest of children and young people when responding to the demand for services and developing appropriate solutions. If you have any queries regarding the engagement, please contact [Tanya](#).

Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online

In August, we held a member consultation with the Online Safety Commissioner to inform submissions on the development of Ireland's first binding Online Safety Code. The consultation was a prime opportunity for the Alliance and our members to shape the development of this Online Safety Code and consult with Ireland's new Online Safety Commissioner on what should be included in the Code. You can read our submission [here](#). Following this, we engaged with our wider network on the opportunity for young people to have their voices heard on an ongoing basis through the Media Commission's new Youth Advisory Panel. The Alliance sent on four expressions of interest from our membership (the ISSU, Foroige, the Irish Heart Foundation and Pavee Point) which were accepted. We look forward to ongoing engagement with the Online Safety Commissioner as they establish this panel and finalise the Code, which is expected by the end of the year. Looking ahead, we are gearing up to build on the success of our 1,2,3 Online Safety Campaign with an exciting new phase of campaign work through a new partnership with The Oak Foundation.

>> Future Focus: Report Card 2024

As we approach the end of the year, we are already looking ahead to the launch of Report Card 2024. The Report Card is an essential advocacy tool in our campaign work and a great opportunity for members to raise the most pertinent issues facing the children, young people and families they work with. This year's Report Card is the fourth edition examining the current Programme for Government. Member feedback is a critical part of the drafting process and encourages as much engagement as possible. Members have been emailed a Report Card update and feedback form. If you have a question about Report Card 2024, please contact [Margaret](#).

Children's Rights Alliance Submissions:

- [Submission to Department of Children \(DCEDIY\) on Youth Services](#)
- [Submission to Coimisiún na Meán – Online Safety Code](#)

3. Understanding the Impact of Covid-19

Building Children's Futures - Using Children's Rights to Recover from the Global Pandemic

The 'Building Children's Futures' project, funded by the European Commission, examines the effect of pandemic public health measures on services for children and young people, with a particular focus on groups of children who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The project is led by the Children's Rights Alliance, with partners Foróige and the University of Galway. The project is well underway, with the

partners Fledge and the University of Galway. The project is well underway, with the youth advisory group conducting their interviews with high-profile decision-makers over the last few months, in order to draft their final Children's Report. The aim of the research is to propose recommendations on how children's rights can be protected in times of emergency.

>> **Future Focus**

We are working to launch the Children's Report early in the new year! The project is also developing ways to mainstream and embed children's rights in emergency situations by developing Child Right Impact Assessments (CRIAs), with the support of the Child and Young People Services Committees (CYPSCs), who will lead this work. The CRIA report is expected to be finalised in Quarter 1 2024.

4. Poverty and Social Exclusion



End Child Poverty Week 2023

End Child Poverty Week 2023 took place between **Monday 11 - Friday 15 September**, focusing on key thematic areas of child poverty including early years, education, income, national action and local plans and, child welfare and alternative care. The Week focused on key priorities for this year's budget to ensure it considered measures to break the cycle of poverty for children and young people. The Week succeeded in keeping child poverty on top of the agenda during what many consider to be the crunch time for budget negotiations. With national media coverage across all five days, two Dublin events, one Cork event and two online discussions, we built momentum behind our call for a Children's Budget and showcased the weight of support behind the campaign. We were delighted to bring members, stakeholders, experts and department officials together as part of the panel discussions, including a keynote address and opportunity for questions with the Government's Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit. A full summary of the events, recordings and press releases will be available on our website. We will also be issuing a detailed impact report to members and friends shortly – watch this space!

[End Child Poverty Week 2023 Video](#)



Buswells Drop In Day

Following End Child Poverty Week, we were joined by seven of our members to facilitate

a Drop In Day for TDs and Senators on the call for a Children's Budget – (One Family; SVP Ireland; Mental Health Reform; Irish Refugee Council; Foróige and Good Shepherd Cork). It was a great opportunity to brief politicians and decision makers on our budget priorities and highlight the multi-faceted nature of child poverty and the cross-departmental work that is needed to address the systemic issues. We were joined by Minister Anne Rabbitte, Minister Joe O'Brien and others including Deputy Eoin O Broin, Senator Eileen Flynn, Deputy Bríd Smith and Deputy Patrick Costello.

A Children's Budget

As part of our ongoing End Child Poverty campaign work, the Alliance has been calling for Budget 2024 to be a Children's Budget – one designed to break the cycle of poverty. This would include investment across areas such as early childhood education and care, child welfare services, income supports for children and young people, education and housing. Budget 2024 was announced on 10 October 2024. The highs include the announcement of free school books at Junior Cycle and the expansion of the hot school meals programme to a further 900 primary schools. While we welcome the increases to social welfare payments for children (Qualified Child Increase), the extra €4 a week is not sufficient to break the cycle of poverty.

A Children's Budget – [Our Asks](#)

Budget 2024 – [Our Response](#)

Budget 2024 – [Our Analysis](#)

A New Equal Participation Model

In April, we ran a series of consultations on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on the development of a new Equal Participation Model. The new model aims to promote equal participation and access for all children to early learning and care/school aged childcare services. Access to these services plays a critically important role in breaking the cycle of poverty as early as possible in a child's life. Yet we know, that for many families experiencing the highest levels of deprivation, there are often barriers to accessing these opportunities.

We held five consultations that collected the views of parents, particularly those who are marginalised, migrant and refugee parents, one-parent families, and parents from Traveller and Roma communities. A report was submitted to the Department in May following these consultations. We were delighted to see further progress in the Budget 2024 announcement, with an allocation of €4.5 million to begin work on a DEIS-style model for early years, the first phase of the Department's new Equal Participation Model. We published a Literature Review with University College Cork in the lead up to Budget Day, that clearly demonstrates the positive impact of programmes that apply this approach to deliver wraparound supports for young children. You can read the review [here](#).

First 5 Implementation Plan 2023 - 2025

On World Children's Day, our Chief Executive Tanya Ward spoke at the launch of the First 5 Implementation Plan. The three-year plan builds on the progress that has been made to deliver on the First 5 commitments between 2019 - 2022 and sets out the next steps to ensure that children have the necessary supports in life to develop to their full potential. Over this phase of implementation, 125 actions will be delivered across 10 Government Departments, the HSE and Tusla as well as 31 delivery partners. Key actions under Phase 2 include: extending the individual entitlement to Parent's Leave and Benefit from 7 weeks to 9 weeks; introducing measures to address food poverty, specifically the provision of targeted funding for the provision of meals to children in early

learning and care and school-age childcare settings. You can read the Plan [here](#).

Save the Date:

Second Conference on the Implementation of the White Paper to End Direct

Provision

Following on from our first conference in December 2022 and our online launch of new research on the inadequacy of income supports for children and families in Direct Provision in May 2023, we are organising an in-person event focusing on the issues facing children and young people who are growing up in Direct Provision. On **4 December**, you are invited to join us for an event that will look at the changed context for the White Paper's recommendations for children, how Budget 2024 will impact children and families in Direct Provision and what needs to happen next. The event will include a special address by Minister for Children (DECDIY), Roderic O Gorman TD, and a keynote address by Dr Catherine Day.

Register to attend [here](#).

5. Educational Reform

Future of Education Event

In July, we joined forces with The Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) and the National Parents Council forces to organise a public event focused on the '**Future of Education**'. The event focused on the many developments that are currently taking place in the education sector. Minister for Education, Norma Foley delivered a keynote address in which she outlined her plans for the Future of Education including important reforms taking place in the Senior Cycle, the development of a new youth participation unit and the new Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. You can read the joint press release [here](#).

Senior Cycle Reform

As part of the redevelopment of Senior Cycle, the Minister for Education established the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Partners' Forum. Children's Rights Alliance have been appointed to the Partners' Forum and held two briefing meetings with Members earlier in the summer on how we can best maximize this opportunity. Since then, the Alliance has attended four forum meetings. Earlier this month, the Forum produced its inaugural report to the Minister on progress to date. On 20 September, the Minister announced an acceleration to the program for Senior Cycle Development with nine new and revised subjects to be introduced nationally in 2025. If you have any questions regarding our work on educational reform please contact [Julie](#).

Alternative Education

Through our position on the Working Group to oversee the work on the Review of Out of Hours School Provision, the Children's Rights Alliance continues to place a heightened focus on the need to expand and fund out-of-school education provision to ensure a child-centred approach to education by providing alternatives that are best suited to the individual child. The Department of Education has run consultations with children and young people, service providers and principals which will inform the work of the Working Group in the coming months.

Many of our members working in alternative education settings provide a safe haven for many children who have often times had very negative experiences in mainstream education. For members looking to engage with us in our work in this area, please contact

[Julie.](#)

6. National Movement for Children and Young People

Membership



As an Alliance, we are proud to use our collective voices to work together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We are delighted to have recently welcomed two new members to the Alliance's movement for children and young people: **Citywise Education and Laois Domestic Abuse Service**. Our membership now stands at 150 not-for-profit organisations from all across Ireland! We always love to hear from our members. If you have any feedback on any aspect of your membership or if you are interested in becoming a member, please get in touch with us at members@childrensrights.ie

Membership Spotlight/ Testimony

"Membership of the Children's Rights Alliance is hugely beneficial to the social justice team at SVP. Working together and sharing expertise on collective issues of concern particularly in the areas of child poverty and educational disadvantage allows us to maximise our impact. The high-quality outputs and campaigns of the Alliance provide us with a range of advocacy tools that we utilise in our daily social justice activities." -

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Tusla Dialogue

Our ongoing dialogue meetings with Tusla-the Child and Family Agency remain an engaging opportunity for our member organisations to participate in constructive discussion with senior decision members in Tusla. The purpose of the dialogue is to ensure a consistent line of communication between the national child protection service and the organisations and staff on the ground working with vulnerable children and young people. They provide a critical forum for Alliance members to raise their key concerns and discuss emerging issues for the children they work with, to inform the decision-making and responses from Tusla and its support services.

HSE dialogue

Our HSE dialogue is new this year and seeks to establish ongoing communication with Alliance members and the Health Service Executive (HSE) and CEO Bernard Gloster. It is also an effective way to advocate for, and progress, changes in the provision of public health and social care services to children and young people. We hope the new dialogue will enhance communication and information exchange, as well as fostering a long-term relationship with a key stakeholder to the Alliance, our members and our wider network. The next dialogue meeting will take place online on 01 December. Please RSVP asap to members@childrensrights.ie

[Annual Members' Meeting](#)

28 November (10.30 – 2pm, Richmond Centre) Members' Meeting with Secretary General of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Kevin McCarthy

Following on from our members' meeting in June, we are pleased to announce that we will hold an in-person members' meeting with the Secretary General of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Kevin McCarthy this November. Kevin will speak to the current work and priorities of the Department and will be happy to take questions from members. Dr Anne Marie Brooks (Assistant Secretary, DCEDIY) will also provide a briefing on the First 5 Strategy. This is a great opportunity for our members to be advised of the work the Department has planned. The Children's Rights Alliance team will also present on our 2024 workplan. This meeting will be followed by a lunch and members networking opportunity. RSVP to members@childrensrights.ie

Organisational News

The Alliance Team is growing!

We are delighted to introduce three new members of the Children's Rights Alliance team – Olivia Colborn joins us as our new Child Poverty – Campaigns Assistant, Clíodhna Ní Pheadair has just started as our new Food Poverty Officer and Christina Nagma Thom joined as our Administrative Officer.

We are in the final stages of a recruitment drive for a new Online Safety Campaign Coordinator who will lead out on a new phase of our online safety work thanks to the generous support and an exciting new campaign partnership with The Oak Foundation.

Jobs and Opportunities

Jobs

- Barnardos - [Various roles](#)
- Crosscare - [Various roles](#)
- Ombudsman for Children's Office - [Various roles](#)
- National Parents Council - [Helpline Officer](#)
- Focus Ireland - [Fundraising Officer](#)
- DCEDIY: [What Works Ireland Evidence Hub](#)

Research and Resources

Non-Governmental

Ombudsman for Children's Office - [Special Report on Direct Provision](#)

Children in Hospital - [Information Hub](#)

Care Experiences - [Website](#)

Governmental

Budget 2024

**Thank you to all of our funders, members and friends for your
continued solidarity and support.**

**Visit us at childrensrights.ie
RCN 20031909**



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Children's Rights Alliance
7 Red Cow Lane
Smithfield
Dublin, Dublin 7
IE

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