

Regional Meetings

The association's executive decided earlier this year to begin a process of establishing regional sub groups of the IASCW. An inaugural meeting for the Munster area was held in Cork at the end of June.

A small, enthusiastic group met and a number of relevant issues were discussed. The status of social care workers, current crisis in social care, registration, merging of IASCE, RMA and IASCW into Social Care Ireland, HIQA and HETAC standards were among areas covered.

It was agreed that a further meeting would take place in the autumn to establish a regional executive. That meeting will be in Jury's Inn, Andersons Quay, Cork at 2:30 on Wednesday, November 10th next. Jury's Inn is next to Cork Bus station.

Votes at 16 & Ministerial Meeting

Four members of the IASCW executive met with the Programme Manager of the Green Party recently to outline the association's opposition to the proposed lowering of the voting age to sixteen. The points made in the editorial of the summer edition of CURAM were emphasised. This issue is part of the programme for government agreed by Fianna Fail and the Green party and presumably will be up for debate in the Dail in the next twelve to eighteen months if the government lasts.

An executive group also met with Minister Andrews in late July. The meeting was productive and the following issues were raised with the minister and his officials:

Children's Rights Referendum; recent high profile cases of children in the care system; concerns around over regulation; votes at 16 proposal; development of Oberstown campus, Registration and Aftercare.

Referendum Delay

Minister for Children, Barry Andrews told the health and children Oireachtas committee on September 16th that the government has not put the Children's Rights referendum on the long finger.

Mr Andrews said that a number of complex questions arise from the cross party group's agreed wording earlier

in the year. Some of the difficulties are around rights of the child to care and protection, continuity of care, child's voice in legal and administrative proceedings, the duty of the state to defend individual citizens' rights and issues around the deportation of foreign nationals.

Given the delay already around the holding of the referendum it is highly unlikely it will be held this year. Added to the uncertainty is a call to have the three pending bye elections and the Dublin mayoral election held on the same day.

Monitoring Children's On Line Activity

In June of this year an Irish company launched a software package that enables children's online activity to be monitored by parents and those responsible for them.

Apparently, only 7% of Irish computers have such a monitoring facility because adults believe it to be too complicated. The new software blocks children's access to pornography and illegal file sharing and prohibits children from using illegal peer-to-peer software to download music and films. The software costs €49.00. See www.reassureme.com

Change of Address?

Please contact the association if the postal address given on your membership application has changed.

Articles, opinions, comments are welcome for consideration to nh99@eircom.net; iascw@hotmail.com or by post to IASCW, 12 Manorfield's Walk, Clonee, Dublin 15.



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THE LINK

*Better to Light a Candle than
to Curse the Darkness*

Annual Conference 2011

Arrangements for the 2011 conference are at an advanced stage. The conference will be the first to be organised and hosted by Social Care Ireland and will be held in Athlone on March 9th & 10th next year.

Where in previous years each constituent association, now under the Social Care Ireland umbrella, had their own conference, amalgamation means that members are not in the awkward position of trying to decide which, if any, conference to attend. The new move also means that there is less of a financial drain on individuals and organisations.

Last year's dry run in Athlone proved very successful and much was learned. The theme for conference 2011 is Bringing Back Innovation and Creativity to Social Care Work and this theme surely encapsulates what many individuals and organisations have been advocating for in recent years. The conference working group believes this theme offers delegates an opportunity to take a long hard look at where we currently are and put forward some ideas to counteract the growing sense that social care in education, practice and management reflects, in many instances, a dilution of two vital ingredients – innovation and creativity.

The enclosed flyer gives details of how to put your ideas forward for workshops and note again that abstracts must be in by November 26th.

Further details on IASCW website from November 1st and in winter edition of CURAM due out on week of January 3rd.

Social Care Ireland

The amalgamation of IASCE (Irish Association of Social Care Educators), RMA (Resident Managers Association) and the IASCW into Social Care Ireland was announced in Athlone on February 25th of this year at the IASCW annual conference.

Since then, meetings have been taking place to put a structure on the new organisation and prepare for a formal launch in 2011. Practical details such as address, bank account, website, email etc. are nearly complete and a draft constitution will be considered at the next meeting in early November. As members are aware, your IASCW membership will automatically mean you are a member of Social Care Ireland. Further details will be made available as they become known.

Galway Free Seminar

Following on the success of previous free seminars in Dublin and Cork the IASCW will hold another one in the Clayton Hotel Galway on Tuesday, October 19th from 2:00 to 4:45 p.m. In response to the general doom and gloom feeling of the past two years the executive decided to concentrate on more positive aspects in the work social care workers do. The theme of these seminars is Working Positively in Difficult Circumstances. The enclosed flyer has the details and we look forward to a large attendance.

Topics will cover areas such as mental health and young people, engaging positively with local communities and a keynote talk on reflective practice.

To register, contact any of the following :Leon @ 087-3294210, Michelle@ 087-9164879, IASCW 087-9708426 or iascw@hotmail.com



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At Last... Common Sense?

Imagine this: an airline stewardess asks a man to move from his seat beside his children because, as she explained, a man (not a woman note) was not allowed to sit with children; a father bringing his child to a scout event could be fined £5000 if he had not submitted to a check under the UK vetting and barring scheme; a worker who collects a child for a community project rings in sick and the child's mother says she will bring her child to the project instead but cannot because she has not been vetted. Stories like these abound in Britain about how the labour government of Tony Blair and later Gordon Brown sought to introduce draconian vetting procedures in the naïve belief that such a move would protect children. This ill advised scheme created the notion of "stranger danger" – every adult becoming a potential danger to children with child/adult trust becoming something to be scared of rather than encouraged.

We referred to this situation in the October 2009 edition of *The Link* where one of Britain's leading children's authors, Philip Pullman, said he would not be subjected to vetting in order to visit schools and talk about his books. His point was that the system was turning every adult into being perceived as a potential child abuser and damaging the natural trust that should exist between children and adults.

One of the brighter pieces of news to emerge from the new Conservative / Lib Dem government shortly after its formation over the summer was an announcement by the Home Secretary, Theresa May, that plans to vet millions of people working with children and vulnerable adults would be scaled back to "commonsense" levels. Nine million adults were due to undergo checks by the Independent Safeguarding Authority by July 26th this year. The Labour party introduced the plan in the aftermath of the Holly Wells and Jessica Wells murders by Ian Huntley. The knee jerk plan got out of hand and clearly proved how wary the state needs to be of drafting populist legislation to give an impression, once again, that throwing the baby out with the bathwater was the answer to helping protect children.

The action of Theresa May, after so short a time in her new job, proves after all that occasionally there are people (interestingly in this case a Conservative minister) who are not afraid make a decision and to pull back from what was glaringly a harebrained scheme.

The question for us here in Ireland is have we too moved in the direction the Blair/ Brown government did in England so as to give ourselves a smug sense of satisfaction that we are "doing something"? It's a question worth asking.

Care Leavers Ireland

Care Leavers Ireland was launched in two years ago and much work has been done in that time to establish the trust as a viable organisation that can benefit those for whom it was set up – care leavers from the Irish care system. The aim is to make small grants, up to €400.00 available to those, formerly in care, aged between 16 and 23 who apply on a standard application form. Consideration will be given to some who may be on either side of the 16-23 age range.

Further information / application forms from Brenda Kneafsey at IAYPIC (01-8727661); Noel Howard IASCW (087-9708426) or Susan Crowley (087-7807084).

New National Standards

A consultation document was the recent result of deliberations carried out over a number of months by representatives of various relevant groups in relation to drafting a new set of national standards for residential centres, detention schools, foster carers and the disability sector. Interested parties were offered an opportunity to respond to the draft document and a further meeting was held on September 2nd to consider matters further.

Some dissatisfaction was expressed at the deadline announced at this meeting for further submissions. Our understanding is that the next step in the process is submission of the draft to the HIQA board for approval and then the seeking of ministerial approval prior to the official launch of the new standards. It may well be into 2011 before the launch and an announced date for implementation.

Curam 2011

Next Edition due out on week of January 3rd, 2011

Ryan Report Implementation Plan

The Children's Rights alliance (of which the IASCW is a member) recently issued a press release on the OMCYA's office "First Progress Report" on the Ryan Report Implementation Plan.



On the brighter side the Alliance adverted to some positive results:

- Commencement of a consultation project with children in a range of care settings;
- Progress toward ensuring equity of care for separated children;
- Secondment of specialist to the OMCYA in the area of child welfare and protection;
- Establishment by the HSE of a group to drive forward implementation and compliance with the Children First Guidelines;
- The Minister's intention to extend the remit of HIQA to the area of child protection.

However, on the negative side the Alliance pointed to areas where little if any of the promised progress is evident:

- No information on how the €15m from Budget 2010 has been spent to progress the Implementation Plan;
- No update on the crucial commitment to recruit 200 social workers by 2010;
- No word on legislation to put Children First on statutory footing;
- No update on proposed legislation to secure strong child protection procedures relating to vetting and soft information;

- No review of the State's response to homeless children promised for completion in December 2009;
- No tracking mechanism to ensure improvement of services for children in care / aftercare.

When the Implementation Plan was published a year ago one of the questions posed by the IASCW was "is this plan realistic or just wildly optimistic?" At the time it appeared that the 99 points outlined for completion were just too many. Perhaps fewer, but of a more pressing nature, might have been singled out for immediate attention. The Alliance report highlights some serious areas of concern and the government faces one more credibility gap in relation to promises not kept in relation to children and their needs in the wake of the Ryan Report.

Relevant Publications

Creative Studies for the Caring Professions (Gill & Macmillan) is edited by Denise Lyons, a social care worker, art therapist and lecturer. The book is described as a new Irish text providing an introduction to the theory underpinning the practice of using the creative arts as a tool or intervention in social care and community scenarios. The book introduces the theory behind using the creative arts, describes creative arts' practical use and details creative activities for use in practice.

The Best Interests of the Child – Interpreting Irish Child Legislation (Gill & Macmillan) is a new Irish text consolidating all child centred legislation from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to Irish legislation on children. The book is aimed at students on childcare courses and those working with children in any capacity. The author is Eileen McPartland who is a lecturer at Liberties College, Dublin.

Registration

The progress on registration is frustratingly slow. It is now over 5 years since the Health & Social Care Professionals Act was passed and the anticipation was that at least some of the bodies affected would be registered by now; unfortunately that hasn't happened. We hope to have updated details in next edition of Curam.