

## **Impact of Care Proceedings on Sibling Relationships**

### **Irish based research:**

***(1) Listen to our voices the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and published in July 2011***

Key questions posed to the children as the basis for the consultation:

- What are the most important issues for young people in care
- Of the services and supports in place what works well and what doesn't
- What recommendations do the young people have

Interviews, took place with children in foster care, residential care detention schools, separated children seeking asylum and young people who had recently left the care system

Key findings:

- Access with Siblings pivotal for young people in care
- Significant bond between siblings
- Overwhelming desire to be placed together in care
- Source of considerable sadness to be separated from their siblings
- Many did not know their siblings or where they lived

Recommendations:

- Reasonable access to birth family and siblings
- Every avenue of care explored before being taken into care

**Do these recommendations go far enough?**

***(2) Lives In Foster Care: The Educational and Social Support Experiences of Young People ages 13 to 14 in long-term foster care. Department of Children and Youth Affairs – 2012***

Key Findings:

- They were less likely to be bullied at school
- Positive Educational experience more likely when placed with a sibling
- They were more likely to have gained good social support from their friendships
- They were significantly less likely to have low level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities
- They were more likely to have contact with birth family members
- Being placed with a sibling was a potentially protective factor for children in foster care

Recommendations:

- where possible, birth siblings should be placed together
- plans should be made to place siblings together given the apparent positive aspects of sibling placements
- efforts to be made to maintain strong relationships between siblings in circumstances where they cannot be placed together.

**Why do we separate Siblings?**

Broadly speaking – Two reasons

1. When it has been deemed in the child's best interests to do so, i.e. there are welfare concerns attached and being placed separately is seen as a protective factor for the sibling group
2. The lack of availability of suitable foster carer's to take on a sibling group

## HIQA Inspection Reports of Fostering Areas:

- 29 fostering areas – 11 inspected so far
- Mixed reviews in terms of commitment to ensuring siblings are placed together

### Dublin South East

- social workers actively promoted siblings remaining together unless this did not meet their needs
- these instances were rare and were obvious exceptions to the overall practice
- In this region 20 sibling groups were placed together

### Kerry

- Many Children lived with relative foster carers – reduced impact on children of being in care

### Dublin North West

- Sibling groups were not always placed together and that the decision making process in this regard was not transparent or consistent
- Sibling groups had not been placed together even though this had been recommended in their social work assessment
- Not always possible to place large sibling groups together because of the unavailability of suitable placements
- region insufficiently resourced to enable larger groups of siblings together and this resulted in siblings being separated
- 44 sibling groups (56%) = placed together
- 35 sibling groups (44%) = not
- Inspectors did not find sufficient documented evidence to show that the decision to separate siblings was being adequately or regularly reviewed

## Recommendations:

- that every effort be made to place siblings together where appropriate to their individual needs
- that the existing panel of foster carers be increased to facilitate the placement of siblings
- that sibling placements be added to the register of children in care by the fostering team leader

## Reform

### **Current Standard in Ireland:**

National Standards for Foster Care 2003

Section 1.3: states that priority should be given to place siblings together unless this is inappropriate given their assessed needs

Section 2.2: Siblings are placed together where possible, taking account of their wishes. If they are not accommodated together, arrangements are made for them to have high levels of contact, including holidays together, provided this in their best interests.

Action 72 of Ryan Implementation Plan: referred to National Alternative Care Co-Ordination Group to design a National Protocol on Sibling Placements in 2011 – **This is still outstanding**

### **Do we need legislation?**

- Stronger level of commitment
- Easier to litigate
- Legislation In UK, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as UN Guidelines
- Need to adequately protect what should be lifelong relationships

