

**7th National
Child Protection and
Welfare Social
Work Conference**

Friday 25th October 2019

University College Cork

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DISAPPOINTMENT

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**Child Protection and
Welfare Social Work Practice:
What's Your Vision?**



PRACTICE MASTERCLASS

Thursday 24th October

**The Resilient Practitioner:
Self-Care, Burnout, and Resilience
for Professionals**

Professor Thomas Skovholt,
University of Minnesota, USA

<http://swconf.ucc.ie>

TÚSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

IASW
Irish Association of Social Workers
Comann na hÉireann um Oibríocht Sóisialta

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***Please note all presenters are speaking on their own behalf or that of their organisations, and not on behalf of the Conference Organising Committee.**

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For login to the guest WIFI please use the following username and password on the day –

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SWCONF19 PROGRAMME

7th National Child Protection and Welfare Social Work Conference
Friday 25th October 2019, Student Centre, University College Cork

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-
- 08.30-9.15 **REGISTRATION & LIVE JAZZ**, STUDENT CENTRE, University College Cork
-
- 9.20-9.30 **OPENING**, Suzanne Dooley, Social Work Team Leader, Tusla & SWCONF19 committee member
9.30-9.40 **WELCOME TO UCC**, President Patrick G. O'Shea, University College Cork
9.40-9.50 **INSTANT CARTOON ART AND SOCIAL WORK**, Harry Venning (Clare in the Community)
9.55-10.25 **KEYNOTE 1**, Professor John Devaney, University of Edinburgh, Scotland
[Making a Difference for Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse](#)
-
- 10.25-10.45 **COFFEE BREAK**, STUDENT CENTRE, University College Cork
-
- 11.00-12.45 **PARALLEL SESSIONS**, Various venues (see your name badge and map)
-
- 1.00-1.45 **LUNCH BREAK, LIVE JAZZ AND NETWORKING**, STUDENT CENTRE, University College Cork
-
- 1.45-2.05 **KEYNOTE 2**, Young Persons' Website Development Team
[Changing Futures: New Child-Friendly Tusla Website - https://changingfutures.ie](https://changingfutures.ie)
2.10-2.40 **KEYNOTE 3**, Professor Caroline McGregor, National University of Ireland, Galway
[A Vision for the Future of Child Protection and Welfare in Ireland](#)
2.50-3.20 **KEYNOTE 4**, Dorothy Soye, Senior Social Worker & Cormac Quinlan, Director of Transformation and Policy, Tusla, Child and Family Agency
[From Vision to Reality: Reclaiming our Practice](#)
3.30-4.00 **KEYNOTE 5**, Professor Thomas Skovholt, University of Minnesota, United States
[The Resilient Practitioner: Self-Care, Burnout and Resilience for Professionals](#)
-
- 4.00-4.15 **DELEGATE PRIZE DRAW**
4.15-4.25 **CLOSING COMMENTS**, Jacinta Downing, Principal Social Worker, Tusla & SWCONF19 committee member
4.30-late **CORK JAZZ FESTIVAL**, 24th-28th October
-



Keynote Presentations

Keynote 1 - Professor John Devaney, University of Edinburgh

Making a difference for children experiencing domestic violence

It is estimated that approximately 4% of all children in economically developed countries are exposed to severe domestic violence within their family, with research highlighting the strong association between domestic violence and child maltreatment. In the context of the new Domestic Violence Act 2018 this presentation will explore our developing understanding of the impact of domestic violence on children in its various forms, including coercive control. The presentation will provide examples of the ways in which professionals can assess and support children, while also working with parents. While dealing with domestic violence can be complex, there are ways of working with both child and adult victims, and the person whose behaviour is a concern which seek to address the trauma of abuse and coercive control, and to improve safety in both the immediate and longer term.

Keynote 2 - Young Persons' Website Development Team

Changing Futures: New Child-Friendly Tusla Website

Presentation from the Young People who were behind the development of the Changing Futures - a website for Young People made by Young People who have experience of Tusla services.

<https://changingfutures.ie>

Keynote 3 – Professor Caroline McGregor, National University of Ireland, Galway

A Vision for the Future of Child Protection and Welfare in Ireland

Ireland's child protection and welfare system, responsible for the promotion of the safety and welfare of children, has undergone major change in recent years and the potential for transformative change is palpable. Many new models, theories and approaches have emerged which emphasise social child protection, engagement in partnership working with children and families, prevention and early intervention and working from a strengths based approach. But the same system is also under major pressure from many dimensions, still carrying unreasonable burdens with regard to demand on time and resources and mostly misunderstood within media and public discourses. This paper presents a vision for the future of child protection and welfare in Ireland based on a critical consideration of research and practice developments relating to five core themes from the present. These are: socio-legal child welfare practice; the relationship between child protection and family support; the wider system within which child protection operates; extrinsic and Intrinsic factors that impact on child harm; and service user and public engagement. Some obstacles caused by present unreliable and warped relationships with the complex, contradictory history of child protection and welfare in Ireland will be illuminated in relation to these themes. Following

this, possibilities for a solution oriented vision for future practice, policy, research and education will be identified. This will include commentary about the scope of the system; the need for more in-depth differentiation of the business of child protection and welfare and the need for front-line practitioners to lead future reform and transformation. In the conclusion, it will be argued that a strategy that emerges from the vision outlined needs to be informed by honest interrogation of our past, a critical realist appraisal of present possibilities and a commitment to transformative policy, practice and procedure into the future.

Keynote 4 - Professor Thomas Skovholt, University of Minnesota, USA

Mountains of Joy and Valleys of Despair: Developing Resilient Practitioners in Child Protection and Welfare

The excitement of climbing Mt. Idealistic where a social worker can use powerful methods to help those in pain and distress gives abundant oxygen even in the thin air of exams and the demands of professional preparation. Yet, the view from the top can suddenly become disappointing when the mind's eye takes in the whole landscape. Despair Valley is suddenly visible. The social worker loses strength as she slowly falls; the circle of not know grows as fast as the circle of knowing and the impostor syndrome can grab her. Intense work with children, parents and families in crisis can bring a movie to her mind of vicarious trauma. Critical or indifferent supervision can hasten a faster fall into Despair Valley. Regulations, procedures and unending computer documentation may blunt optimism for meaningful work. She may start planning an early professional exit.

Near the bottom of Despair Valley a reassessment can occur with the help of wise senior practitioners and understanding peers. They encourage climbing up Mt. Realistic. Slowly with less innocence about career and human realities, she climbs up using the term 'boundaried generosity' to regain her strength as she goes up. Having a happy, loving and fulfilling personal life gives her strength for the climb. She realizes that success in social work is often ambiguous and hard to define although a core is her ability to establish one-way caring relationships with those in need. She is learning when to intensively climb, when to go slow and when to rest. Mt. Realistic is being climbed. Work is more rewarding.

On the top of Mt. Realistic, the Existential Valley appears. Slipping down this valley can come fast when she is suddenly engulfed in personal life grief and loss. It steals her vitality needed for the intensity of the work. At the same time, there is a sadness of the soul from so much exposure to human cruelty, inequality and abuse. The Existential Valley also produces a "Is this all there is?" and also boredom with repeated tasks, funding cuts and more work without more money.

The social worker is now more mindful of her inner experience. The descent down Existential Valley is cut short by the assertive use of self-care and practitioner resiliency methods. Back up Mt. Realistic, the social worker hikes. More satisfaction occurs in part because all her professional experience has produced an internal expertise in role and working style. Years of effort has also produced its own compassion satisfaction as the climb up Mt. Realistic occurs aided by hiking boots made by Practitioner Resiliency.

Keynote 5 - Dorothy Soye, Senior Social Worker and Cormac Quinlan, Director of Transformation and Policy, Tusla Child and Family Agency

From Vision to Reality: Reclaiming our Practice

Social work as a profession has always been concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems. In addition to its broad knowledge and skill base to support what we practice, it has always been our ethics and values that have fundamentally informed how we have engaged with children, families and communities. In 2017, Tusla launched its vision and strategy for child protection welfare service development for the next 5 years. At the heart of the Strategy is recognition of the challenges and opportunities we face as a profession in leading good ethical and value based practice in an environment that is characterised by high demand, high levels of uncertainty, low appetite for error and limited public awareness for the complexity or successes in our work. As managers and practitioners we have seen the profession be subjected to high level of criticism and recognition that if we don't lead for change then change will be demanded from others. We also know from international experience that this type of change may not be to the benefit of the profession or the children and families we serve. But leading for change is hard and challenging and there are many parallels between leading for organisational change within Tusla as there are for social work practice leading change within families and communities. This presentation will explore some of these parallels by discussing both organisational change themes alongside similar themes in a case example with the ultimate aim of showing how the strategy is aiming to take a vision for keeping good ethical and value based principles and behaviours at the heart of organisational culture and land it in the reality of our day-to-day practice.

Harry Venning, Writer and Cartoonist will be with us throughout the day providing instant cartoon art "to enliven, inform and energise" our conference.

Symposiums and Parallel Sessions

Symposium A

Using a Children's Rights Lens in Social Work

Dr Carmel Corrigan and Colm Leonard, Ombudsman for Children's Office

Abstract

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) has a statutory remit to promote the rights of children in Ireland and to increase awareness of children's rights among children, adults and the general public. This includes professionals working with children. Social workers are key professionals who can impact on the achievement of children's rights. For the past number of years the OCO has worked with third level institutions to increase the awareness of student social workers of children's rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the role and of the OCO and how all of this is relevant to their role in working with children.

This symposium aims to both inform and learn from social workers in relation to children's rights and social work education and practice. It will provide an overview of the work of the OCO to contextualise what we do and how we do it, look at the ways that we currently engage with social workers and the public bodies that employ them and invite participant's to identify and discuss how we can better promote and support the incorporation of a children's rights lens in social work training and practice. The symposium will be opened with a short presentation and Q&A on children's rights and the work of the OCO. This will be followed by activities and discussions that will explore the following questions: how relevant are children's rights to social work and social work practice? What is the current interface between children's rights and social work practice? What are the key challenges to using a children's rights approach in social work? Are there ways that the OCO can support the further adoption of a children's rights approach in social work?

Symposium B

Evidence and Evaluation for Change in the Irish Child Welfare System: Possibilities for Future Re-orientation of Child Welfare towards Early Intervention, Partnership, Prevention and Family Support

Dr Carmel Devaney, Professor Caroline McGregor, Dr John Canavan, Dr Danielle Kennan, Dr Bernadine Brady, Dr Cormac Forkan, Dr Leonor Rodriguez, Dr Rosemary Crosse and Dr Aileen Shaw, National University of Ireland Galway

Abstract

Since the creation of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) in 2014 there has been a major change process underway in the protection and welfare systems in Ireland, going from a more interventionist approach to one which emphasizes Prevention and Early Intervention. In 2015 the Atlantic Philanthropies, Ireland, funded a major programme of investment in parenting, prevention, and family support services which formed part of the overall early development of Tusla, the newly established independent Child and Family Agency. The project is formally referred to as the Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS). The programme seeks to embed prevention and early intervention into the culture and operation of Tusla.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway has undertaken a 4 year evaluation study focusing on the implementation of and the outcomes from the PPFS Programme (2014 -2018). The study's overall research question is:

Is the organisational culture and practice of Tusla and its partners changing such that services are more integrated, preventative, evidence-informed and inclusive of children and parents? If so, is this contributing to improved outcomes for children and their families?

The evaluation study has adopted a Work Package approach reflecting the key components of the PPFS programme. The five Work Packages are: Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks, Children's Participation, Parenting Support and Parental Participation, Public Awareness, and Commissioning. While stand-alone studies in their own right, each Work Package contributes to the overall assessment of the programme.

The findings of the research and evaluation on the five individual packages are presented in this symposium along with findings on the overall system change which draws the learning from the five strands together. The implications of the outcome of PPFS for the future of child welfare in Ireland will be discussed and debated.

Parallel Session 1

How Adults Tell: Messages for Society and Policy Makers Regarding Adult Disclosures of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Dr Joe Mooney, University College Dublin

Abstract

Objectives: This paper presents the substantive findings of a PhD study examining adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services in the Republic of Ireland.

Rationale: Despite a paucity of research regarding adult disclosures to social work services the author's research, as well as some recent Irish State body reports, have shown that adults can have negative experiences when disclosing childhood abuse to child protection services in the Republic of Ireland. This is primarily due to a lack of training, policy and guidance for practitioners (Mooney, 2014, 2017; HIQA, 2017; Office of the Ombudsman, 2017).

Methods: This study utilised a Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology (BNIM) to gather the lived experiences of adults who engaged with our child protection services and findings were analysed using both BNIM panel analysis and broader thematic analysis.

Results: The substantive findings of this study are presented under three main themes regarding experiences of disclosure to child protection services. (1) *The System as a Barrier*: presents the various influences that acted as barriers for adults attempting to come forward to disclose. (2) *Power*: examines the influence of power from the time of abuse throughout the adults' life-course and their interactions with services. (3) *The System as a Facilitator*: presents practice and policy recommendations based on the lived experiences of the adults who participated and the wider research literature.

Conclusion: Implications for child protection practice, policy and law, in this extremely sensitive and sometimes controversial area, are considered. In conclusion, this paper presents an open question to the audience of '*why do we treat adult retrospective allegations so differently in practice to current allegations concerning children?*'

An Econometric Analysis of the Use of Legal Services by Tusla Child Protection and Welfare Social Workers: Recommendations arising from the SEALS Research

Dr Edel Walsh, Dr Aileen Murphy, Dr Carmel Halton and Dr Gill Harold, University College Cork

Abstract

This paper is based on research being funded by the Irish Research Council, which constitutes a social and economic analysis of the use of legal services (SEALS) by social work and educational welfare professionals working for Tusla. Our research set out specifically to ascertain the legal, social and economic variables that influence decision making practices of social workers around their use of legal services in court hearings.

Against a backdrop of austerity measures in recent years, public expenditure in Ireland has come under intense scrutiny. Social work practitioners in Tusla work in a public service

context where procurement requirements and systems of accountability need to comply with regulatory controls that are set down by legislation and operated by financial controllers. While Tusla social workers are vested with responsibility to protect the welfare of children in their care, nonetheless, the work they carry out is significantly influenced by their organisation's approach to resource allocation. Examining the economic variables that guide the use of legal services by social work professionals working for Tusla provides a focus for this paper.

The findings to be presented are the result of an econometric analysis of the financial spend on legal services by Tusla. The researchers undertook an economic analysis of geographical and legal considerations influencing variations in legal spend by Tusla. The paper presents the findings of the econometric analysis and makes recommendations that might help to contribute to the future development of financial systems that could positively impact on the legal spend by Tusla and delivery of more cost efficient social work services in Tusla in 21st Century.

Developing the Framework for the Regulation of Children's Social Services in Ireland

Dr Sadhbh Whelan, Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Abstract

In June 2018 the *Report of the investigation into the management of allegations of child sexual abuse against adults of concern by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) upon the direction of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs* was published by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).

The report recommended that: *'The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, with the assistance of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), should undertake an international review of best practice in the regulation of children's social services in order to inform the development of a regulatory framework for these services in Ireland'*.

To progress this recommendation the Department compiled a briefing paper on the regulation and inspection of children's social services in Ireland and internationally. The purpose of this paper was to provide insights into the regulation of children's social services in other countries to prompt discussion and policy consideration regarding the regulatory framework of children's social services in Ireland. A number of sources of information were used to inform the paper: a survey of twenty-four EU and non-EU countries; data and literature sources relating to regulation and inspection in the UK; direct contact with personnel working in inspection bodies in other countries and a roundtable discussion with personnel working in the regulation sector in Ireland.

Findings show the model of one national body with overall responsibility for regulation as the exception rather than the rule and a move towards inspection models which emphasise partnership approaches, proportionality, a focus on outcome and the experience of children and young people and self-evaluation.

This presentation will report on the main findings from the briefing paper and on subsequent progress made regarding the development of the regulation and inspection of children's social services in Ireland.

A Comprehensive Policy analysis of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools: The Special Education Lens

Barry Morrissey, Dublin City University

Abstract

The *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* were published in December 2017, and by March 2018 all schools were required to be fully compliant with their stipulations. This paper will present a comprehensive policy analysis of those Procedures using a hybrid analytical tool premised on Walt and Gilson's (1994) *Policy Analysis Triangle*, with a selection of Riddell's (2003) *Models of Administrative Justice* acting as lenses to aid interpretation. The policy context, content, actors and processes will be examined to illustrate the multi-agency approach to child protection in Ireland. Particular emphasis will be placed on the experience of special schools, interacting with the Procedures. The impact of the new Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections in schools and their potential to promote best practice, as well as teacher performativity, will also be scrutinised.

References

- Riddell, S. (2003) 'Procedural justice and special educational needs assessments in England and Scotland', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 7(3), pp. 201–222. doi: 10.1080/1360311032000108849.
- Walt, G. and Gilson, L. (1994) 'Reforming the health sector in developing countries: the central role of policy analysis', *Health Policy and Planning*, 9(4), pp. 353–370. doi: 10.1093/heapol/9.4.353.

Parallel Session 2

Putting Adverse Childhood Experiences Research into Child Welfare Social Work Practice: The Family Life Stories Initiative

Dr Suzanne Mooney, Dr Lisa Bunting and Dr Stephen Coulter, Queens University Belfast

Abstract

Background

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) research demonstrates a strong graded relationship between childhood adversities and negative outcomes across multiple domains over the life course (Felitti et al., 1998; Bellis et al., 2015). Many parents/caregivers involved with child welfare services are known to have experienced multiple childhood adversities themselves (Bunting et al., 2017). ACE-awareness offers different ways to understand parent/caregiver behaviours, consider how childhood experiences have influenced their evolving life story, the impact on their current situation, and their wishes for their own children.

While ACE-awareness has potential benefits, it is not without dangers for statutory practitioners where their involvement may be uninvited and unwelcome (Atwool, 2019). Identified risks include an over-attention to deficits, insufficient attention to socio-economic circumstances and structural inequalities, and knowledge of parental/caregiver adversity used to predict poor parenting. This can lead to re-stigmatising parent/caregivers, exacerbating feelings of shame and blame, and accentuating power differentials.

Main points of the presentation

Based on systemic practice and narrative therapy principles, the Family Life Stories workbook and guidance was developed in Northern Ireland (Mooney et al., 2019), and delivered to over 800 social workers as part of a regional ACE initiative. The workbook uses participatory mapping activities to assist practitioners to have purposeful conversations about childhood experiences with parents/caregivers in ways that promote engagement, increase awareness of the impact of adversities and maximise the benefit for child, parent/caregiver, and whole family wellbeing while maintaining a focus on child safety. Practitioner feedback was collated during training and implementation.

Conclusions

When used in a reductionist manner in child welfare contexts, ACE-informed practice risks amplifying parental/caregiver powerlessness and may inadvertently contribute to detrimental outcomes. Practice initiatives are required to support child welfare practitioners hold the tensions of parent/caregiver and child wellbeing, and use ACE research in a manner which promotes social justice and human rights for both.

Future Vision: Meeting the Challenge of Working with Unborn Babies and Risk in Pregnancy

Dr Ariane Critchley, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland

Abstract

Assessing and intervening in the lives of unborn babies perceived to be at risk has become an established social work activity. Pre-birth child protection processes may be instigated in pregnancy to plan for the care and protection of vulnerable babies post-delivery. Parents are asked to participate voluntarily in planning for their baby's well-being but may not share the perspective of professionals on the risks to their baby.

'I can't see how they keep getting at there's grave concerns for this baby's gonna be in danger. She's in danger of nothing except too much kisses and cuddles. That's it.'

(Tracy, expectant mother).

Recent research has demonstrated trends of increasingly proactive responses to current or future risk to newborn and very young infants (Broadhurst *et al.* 2018; Woods and Henderson, 2018). Yet there has not always been a clear policy directive discernible that supports this work, leaving complex questions of infant vulnerability and family unity to be worked through in child protection practice (Critchley, 2018). There has been a similar lack of theorisation of this work within the social work academy, despite the particular challenges of child protection assessment and intervention with families during pregnancy (Hodson and Deery, 2014).

This paper draws closely on data from doctoral research conducted in an urban Scottish local authority over one year between 2014 and 2015. The ethnographic fieldwork combined non participant observations, mobile research methods, and interviews with social workers, child protection case conference chair persons and expectant parents. The study included 41 participants and created rich data about the nature and meaning of pre-birth child protection work. This paper will reflect on the challenges of this complex work for practitioners and managers, and make clear suggestions for positive ways forwards based on research findings.

Developing and Embedding Implementation Support to Build Workforce Capacity to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families

Catherine Maguire and Katherine Harford, Young Knocknaheeny Area Based Childhood Programme <http://youngknocknaheeny.ie/>

Abstract

Young Knocknaheeny (YK) supports all children's earliest development, relationships and environments. Interagency workforce capacity changes practice, services and systems. Deeply integrated in YK's mission is a training and workforce capacity model, which is underpinned by an infant mental health framework to ensure there are standards and fidelity to the science and practice of infant mental health. Sustainable workforce capacity requires the implementation support of modelling, coaching, mentoring and reflective practice. YK has documented the processes involved in developing workforce capacity,

embedding implementation supports; its value to practitioners and services and a recommended requirement. This will ultimately bring about children's services that are resilient, attuned, evidence informed, high skilled and scaffolded on a sustainable basis.

Ways of Seeing Childhood in the Social Construction of Child Welfare

Professor Fred Powell, University College Cork

Abstract

In his ground-breaking book *Centuries of Childhood* Philippe Aries 'discovered' childhood as a modern idea located in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the welfare of the child became a central preoccupation of family life. His vision of childhood was inspired by *seeing* the changing representation of childhood in art. His task was to explain what it meant for society. Aries' vision is arguably a revelatory act, in which the *where* and *when* of childhood is explained as a process of social construction - shaping *what* we see. Aries vision suggests that we need a distinct language and narrative to explain child welfare. That language and narrative has been attempted in historic child abuse reports. Of course, historic child abuse reports only look at the past. Yet they are visions of adult-child relations that raise profound public issues devolving on social guilt and public denial. These historic abuse reports offer a vision of dystopian childhoods that challenge basic decency and human rights. Some social scientists now argue that in a digital age childhood has been 'disappeared'? This argument suggests there is no longer a coherent vision of childhood in post-modern society. What it does tell us is that childhood comes in multiple and fragmented experiences that are mediated by the idea of child welfare. Contemporary child abuse reports provide the language and narratives to explain the diversity of childhood experience and its variation from normative versions of reality. These reports enable present-day society to *see* the challenges of child welfare, if it is prepared to look at the *real* real. How can these competing visions of childhood be reconciled with sustainable policies of child welfare in the future? We need to search for the answers as the world's number one priority: its future.

Parallel Session 3

A Realist Synthesis of Signs of Safety

Dr Louise Caffrey, Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

In 2017 Ireland introduced Signs of Safety, an integrated framework for doing children's services work, as the national child protection practice framework. While Ireland is the first country to adopt Signs of Safety on a national level, the approach has previously been implemented in more than 100 jurisdictions across North America, Europe and Australasia. There is a growing body of evidence on Signs of Safety but the need to continue to develop this evidence-base is broadly acknowledged. At the same time, Signs of Safety is a complex intervention operating in complex children's services systems, making it difficult to effectively evaluate using traditional evaluation methodologies. This presentation will offer initial findings from a Realist Synthesis of Signs of Safety. Realist Synthesis complements more established approaches to systematic review, which have been developed and used mainly for simpler interventions like clinical treatments or therapies. The study aims to provide an explanatory analysis of how and why Signs of Safety might work (or not) in particular contexts or settings. To do so it will use a broad array of literature and wider evidence to identify and test Signs of Safety's underlying causal mechanisms and to explore how those mechanisms might operate under varying conditions.

How Social Workers and Families can have a Shared Vision using the Signs of Safety Approach

Lavina Temple and Debbie O'Shea, Tusla Child and Family Agency

Abstract

In 2017 the new Tusla Child Protection and Welfare Strategy (2017-2022) was launched and as part of the strategy, Signs of Safety was adopted as Tusla's National Approach to Practice. Under this strategy Tusla's vision is "to provide an appropriate, proportionate, timely response to children at risk/in need, sharing responsibility and control with families and communities through co-created solutions and interagency collaboration".

We are now in year two of a 5 year implementation plan. As part of the transformation of the Agency, 4 Regional Learning and Development Practice Lead posts were created to support Social Work teams in their learning, development and application of Signs of Safety in their day to day work with children and families.

Our role as LDPLs is core to the successful implementation of the Signs of Safety approach at the frontline of child protection Social Work practice. Through a variety of learning methods such as group supervision, workshops and coaching we help Social Workers and their managers to imagine a context where families and their networks harness the strengths, safety and resources that already exist in their family system that can keep children safe from danger. Our vision is that this will help families involved with Social Work imagine an alternative future for their children.

We propose to interview frontline Social Workers about the impact that our support and guidance has on their learning and their adoption of the Signs of Safety approach with a focus on how it changes their vision for their practice, for the children and families and how that vision is now shared with families rather than being held solely by the professional organisations.

We propose to use video recording, interviews and reported commentary with frontline practitioners with whom we have worked over the past year in our role of LDPL.

Decision Making in Child Protection and Welfare Intake (Duty) and Initial Assessment: Two Studies Examining Influences within the Ecological Framework

Donna O’Leary, Cheryl McCormack and Marie Gibbons, Tusla Child and Family Agency
Professor Ivan Perry & Professor Alastair Christie, University College Cork, and Professor Caroline McGregor, National University of Ireland Galway

Abstract

This paper explores the factors that influenced decisions at two stages in the continuum of social work practice: Intake and Initial Assessment. Each stage has thresholds for decisions required and options for case pathways. The ecological framework is presented as a means to understand influences on decisions in each context. The paper presents findings from the two studies.

The Intake study (McCormack et al.,) examined factors that influenced team leader decision-making processes on pathways for duty/intake referrals in one Tusla region. It involved a partnership between Tusla and the NUIG social work programme. It utilised a mixed methods research approach. The qualitative phase of the study consisted of 15 respondents and the quantitative phase comprised 7 participants, all of whom were duty/intake team leaders. While modest in size and scope, the findings make an important contribution to existing understandings and theories relating to decision making.

The Initial Assessment study (O’Leary et al.,) is a prospective, longitudinal study of assessment, decisions for on-going service and re-occurrence at 18 months. It involves approx. 520 children, 325 families, 120 social workers, team leaders and principal social workers in seven social work departments. This mixed method, multi-level study combines social workers written records and administrative data to identify case and organisational factors associated with preferences for case pathways and their outcomes. This paper focuses on the baseline results.

While different in design, both studies engage the ecological framework to dis-aggregate case, social worker, organisational and policy factors associated with decisions whether to progress cases along the continuum of care.

The discussion considers the contribution these studies make to the evidence base on assessment and decision making in Ireland at a time when policy is rapidly evolving. It examines their contribution to the existing international literature relating to decision making in child protection and welfare.

The Irish Child Protection System: Can We Emulate Research Lessons from Canada?

Olive Lyons, University of Toronto, Canada

Abstract

The Irish Child Protection system, in its current configuration, lacks adequate quantitative data in relation to child protection investigations and subsequent rates of confirmation of child abuse. Tusla provide figures for the referrals they receive every year, with the most recent figures indicating that 53,755 referrals were received in 2017 (Tusla, 2018) which reflects an increase of 10,000 new referrals since 2014. This is an alarmingly high referral rate and is not explained by mandatory reporting as it did not come into legal effect until December of 2017. As the referrals to services increase, it is imperative that we better understand the confirmation and incidence rates and how best to provide child protection services to children and families.

This presentation will draw on research from Canada, both the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (OIS) and the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS). The Ontario Incidence study is a representative study which started in 1993 and occurs every five years with the most recent cycle taking place in 2018, with results available in 2020.

The Canadian studies provide rates of investigated and substantiated child maltreatment along with the severity and duration of maltreatment both at a provincial level with the OIS and a country level with the CIS. The findings from the OIS and CIS have informed practice and policy in child protection services in Canada and these will be discussed further in the presentation.

Ireland lacks a comprehensive method of data collection of child protection assessments at present and this absence of data, results in a knowledge gap in our child protection system. This presentation will seek to examine whether the Ontario and Canadian Incidence Studies can be replicated in the Irish context and if so, how this can be achieved.

Parallel Session 4

Kinship Care: A Relative Experience

Caitriona Nic Mhuiris, Kinship Care Ireland <http://www.kinshipcare.ie/>

Abstract

Methods: Literature review & personal testimonies from Kinship Carers

Aims : To raise awareness of Kinship Care, a much over-looked area of alternative care and family support; to highlight positive outcomes for children in Kinship care; to examine implications for policy and practice.

Kinship Care is the full-time parenting of children by relatives or close friends of the family. It occurs for many reasons; parental substance misuse, death of a parent, abandonment, illness or imprisonment. The UN Guidelines for the Alternative care of children recognises Kinship care as "family-based care within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature." Despite the increasing number of children in both formal and informal Kinship care arrangements, there is currently no policy on Kinship care in the Republic of Ireland. The number of children in Kinship care in the Republic of Ireland is estimated to be in excess of 10,000 children. Formal Kinship care accounts for 27% of all children in care, with 1,661 children in the care of relative foster carers. However, thousands of children in informal kinship care are invisible to the system and face many challenges due to the lack of specialised supports and information. Recent international studies confirm the positive contributions that Kinship care makes to the well-being and placement permanence for children without parental care. This evidence could be used to inform future policy and practice developments in Ireland and provide the case for increased supports, especially for those in informal kinship care arrangements. Social work practice with children at the edge of care is in a special position to support Kinship Care families. Through understanding the complexities of these arrangements Social Workers are best placed to support and direct Kinship families to services and family support.

Voluntary Care in Ireland

Dr Rebekah Brennan, Dr Kenneth Burns and Dr Conor O'Mahony, University College Cork

Abstract

Voluntary care arrangements under section 4 of the Child Care Act 1991 are a crucial component of Ireland's child protection system. They account for the majority of admissions to the care system, with the figures holding steady at around 60% in recent years. At the end of 2016, almost a third of the children in the care system were thereon a voluntary basis. However, while there is a growing volume of published research analysing District Court child care proceedings, there has been no empirical research to date of voluntary care arrangements.

The "Voluntary Care in Ireland" project at University College Cork is the first known study to examine voluntary care systems and to provide empirical data on this topic. A mixed methods approach utilising a national survey of social workers, interviews with solicitors for both Tusla and the Legal Aid Board and focus groups with social workers was taken to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of voluntary care from the perspectives of professionals. A final phase of interviews with parents and children was then conducted. Key themes emerging from the research include challenges around ensuring free and informed consent by parents; participation by children in the decision-making process; and independent oversight of voluntary care arrangements to ensure that the best interests of the child are given priority.

This presentation will present findings from this research as they relate to the rights of parents and children; recommendations for reform of the voluntary care process and system as it currently exists, and suggested amendments to the Child Care Act 1991.

The Right to Independent Advocacy for all Children in Care

John Murphy, EPIC - Empowering People in Care <https://www.epiconline.ie/>

Abstract

Advocacy

The importance of independent advocacy was confirmed by the **Report into the Commission into Child Abuse when it stated that:**

"The HSE and IYJS will ensure that all young people in care and detention are made aware of the work of IAYPIC and will support children should they wish to contact or become involved with the service."

The Report followed on regarding the need for advocacy: "Children in care are often isolated with their concerns, without an adult to whom they can talk. Children communicate best when they feel they have a protective figure in whom they can confide. The Department of Health and Children must examine international best practice to establish the most appropriate method of giving effect to this recommendation."

Future

Advocates are needed because not every child in care can understand their choices or clearly express what they want. There may often be barriers that prevent them from speaking out. Providing independent advocacy to all children and young people in care will increase their levels of engagement and participation and this, in turn, will actively support social work professionals in care planning and delivering effective services.

Collaborating and working closely with social workers through statutory meetings and other professional meetings where the child is central will benefit both the child in care and all those working with them.

Amplifying the voice of the child does not necessarily mean that the child will get what they want. It's encouraging the young person to be fully engaged in the decision making and when that decision is made they fully understand the reasoning behind it.

We have recommended that the right for advocacy is enshrined in the Child Care Act 1991 and that independent advocacy is made accessible to every child and young person who can benefit from it.

‘The Road Less Travelled’? An Exploration of the Reunification Process Following Out-of-Home Care in Ireland

Susan Funcheon, Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

The Irish Child Protection and Welfare system has seen much change, reform and development in the past decade. Our current Child Protection and Welfare Strategy has been described as ‘the most transformative our country as ever seen’ (McBride, 2017). However the area of reunification of children living in out-of-home care with their parents has received little attention. There is a dearth of data, research, policy and guidance in this area.

This study aimed to explore the current process of reunification practice in modern day Ireland. The research was carried out using a qualitative approach and included twelve semi-structured interviews with multi-disciplinary professionals who hold key positions when considering options around reunification. The findings revealed that there is a lack of clarity and a limited focus on the process of reunification for children in care in Ireland. A national framework and a specialised reunification service which would promote increased emphasis on working with birth parents, timely comprehensive assessments, greater clarity regarding change required, needs based services and a holistic and inclusive foster care system would strengthen the process of reunification in Ireland and ensure children and families are given every opportunity to safely reunify.

In recognition of the underlying premise of the Irish statute and the UNCRC that when possible the best place for children to grow up is within their family home, it is my vision that our child protection and welfare system would pursue every opportunity to explore the ‘road less travelled’ and support family unity when in the best interest of children to do so, in pursuit of better long term outcomes for children and families.

Parallel Session 5

Bringing “Ourselves” Back into Child Protection Practice

Dorothy Soye and Debbie O’Shea, Tusla Child and Family Agency

Abstract

This presentation will look at two social workers’ transformative experience of using Signs of Safety and systemic ideas in a complex case, through first person accounts of the impact of this work on them as people and practitioners.

The main goal of this presentation will be to illustrate how our guiding approach, which was grounded in curiosity, questioning, collaboration, our use of ourselves added meaning to the methods and techniques in the Signs of Safety approach.

We also want to emphasise the value in taking a reflective stance, in considering our position as ‘experts’, our inherent power and our anxieties and insecurities. We want to give a sense of the messiness of this work at times, and to offer a vision of how through embracing uncertainty and our own humanity and vulnerability we can loosen our grip on knowing what is right and what is wrong and create more space for conversation, collaboration and creativity in statutory child protection work.

Taking a Fresh Look at ‘Outcomes’ in Child Care and Protection: Learning from Family Group Conferencing

Dr Mary Mitchell, The University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Abstract

Arguing for a more nuanced and broader understanding of outcomes in child care and protection this paper begins to explore, and challenge, the manner in which outcomes are currently identified and valued in child welfare. This paper will discuss a qualitative study, which sought to retrospectively understand the contribution Family Group Conferencing (FGC) makes to longer-term outcomes for children at risk of entering State care, and their families. Eleven case examples of FGC were studied from five local government areas across Scotland. Each example included the perspectives of different stakeholders in the process: children in State care, their parents and extended family (n=32), and professionals (n=28) involved with them. The study found a number of interconnecting issues in relation to FGC outcome contribution and identification. Firstly, the personal experience of process matters to the service user and his/her opinion of the outcomes they achieve. Secondly, what professionals do and how they do it can impact the outcomes of people requiring support. Thus, the relationship between professionals and services users is central to understanding why and how families achieve longer term outcomes. Finally, who defines outcomes and to what purpose is significant when understanding outcomes. This paper reports on two sets of FGC outcomes identified within the study: personal and professional. The paper argues that outcomes identified by family members be considered alongside those conceptualised by

professionals. These findings have implications not only for the measuring and recording of outcomes for Family Group Conferencing but more broadly in child welfare services, as it adds to the international debates about: the outcomes the child welfare system is seeking to achieve; the importance of generating evidence to help us understand what outcomes might be from different perspectives; and how we might gauge whether such outcomes are achieved.

Home Works: Educational Access and Participation for Children Experiencing Homelessness

Grainne McKenna and Dr Geraldine Scanlon, Dublin City University Institute of Education

Abstract

In March 2019, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government recorded an unprecedented figure of 10,000 homeless people in Ireland. Children and their families account for over 60% of the total homeless population and the number of children experiencing homelessness in Ireland has tripled in the last four years, from 938 children in February 2015 to a total of 3,784 children February 2019 (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2015; 2019).

School principals, teachers, public health nurses, social workers and paediatricians have all reported the devastating impact of homelessness on children's physical health, psychological wellbeing and educational development (IPPN, 2019; INTO, 2018; Leahy, 2018; Temple Street Children's University Hospital, 2019). Despite growing public concern, there is limited literature and evidence in relation to the immediate and longer-term impacts of homelessness and housing insecurity on children in an Irish context.

'Home Works: A study on the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness', commissioned by the Children's Rights Alliance, and supported by the Community Foundation for Ireland, explored educational access and participation for 38 children from 19 families who were living in homeless accommodation in the greater Dublin region. The study provides insights into how homelessness disrupts children's lives and describes the challenges faced by children and families living in homeless accommodation. The study also explores the efforts of schools and the commitment of teachers and early childhood educators in responding to children's needs and ensuring children's opportunities to access and fully participate in education.

Participation for Protection

Dr Danielle Kennan, Dr Cormac Forkan and Dr Bernadine Brady, National University of Ireland Galway

Abstract

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre is a research partner on a European Commission funded project, 'Participation for Protection', being led by Queens University Belfast. It is a two year funded project ending in December 2019. There are five other

research partners from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Romania and England. Under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence and harm. The aim of the Participation for Protection project is to elevate the voices and experiences of children and young people on how best to respond to children and young people who experience violence. This paper will present the key findings from this project focusing on children and young people's knowledge and understanding of violence, where they would go to seek help if they experienced harm or violence and what they think are the best ways to help children and young people. Bringing to the fore the views of children and young people is the innovative and central aim of this project. This was achieved through: a Children and Young Person's Advisory Group who are informing and guiding the research methodologies and outputs from the project; the completion of over 1,000 questionnaires by children and young people between 9-12 years and 14-16 years across the partner countries; and the facilitation of working groups with children and young people statistically more likely to have experienced violence, including for example, children and young people in conflict with the law and migrant children. This oral paper will present a vision entirely informed by the views of children and young people on how practitioners can better protect them from violence and harm and if they experience harm how practitioners can better respond.

Parallel Session 6

Realising the Right of the Child to be Heard in the Child Care Decision Making Process

Eamonn Carroll, Noonan Linehan Carroll Coffey Solicitors <https://www.nlcc.ie/>

Abstract

The paper to be presented will critically examine the degree to which the child is heard in the child care decision-making process, within the Social Work Department and in the court. 36 years after the ratification by this state of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and five years after the Irish electorate amended our Constitution to recognise the general constitutional rights of children and the specific right to be heard in legal proceedings, the paper will measure the extent to which the right to be heard, the right to participate, is today afforded to the child, through various mechanisms, in the child care decision-making process.

The paper will identify and examine continuing obstacles, whether legal, practical or psychological, and from this analysis proceed to recommend immediate steps and longer term reforms necessary to achieve the convention and constitutional standards.

The writer is a child care and family law solicitor of 30 years' experience who represents and advises both children and Guardians ad Litem in childcare proceedings. The writer has litigated High Court proceedings on the constitutional and other rights arising in respect of child representation.

Child Protection Social Workers and Guardians ad Litem: A Presentation of Preliminary Findings on the Interface of these Two Professions in the Republic of Ireland

Lisa Garavin, University College Dublin

Abstract

Child protection social workers are spending a high proportion of their time on a small amount of their caseload in Irish courts. They share this arena with the guardian ad litem who is an independent advocate for the child. This role emerged from the UNCRC and the Child Care Act 1991. These two professions work very closely together and yet their professional interface has been largely neglected in research literature.

Method

This research study began with a literature review of both national and international literature and of policy documents relevant to the research area. This revealed a number of themes relating to their experiences of working together. A qualitative methodology was used to elicit the richest data from the participants and allow for and embrace the insider status of the researcher.

The findings from the literature review informed the design of questions to be used in semi-structured interviews with both professions. The interviews are being triangulated by in camera court room observation.

Findings

This presentation will explore the preliminary findings identified in the initial analysis of the interviews and court observations that have been conducted with the professionals to date and their relevance in the Republic of Ireland. These preliminary findings will be explored in the context of the five themes that emerged in the literature review - differences in professional profiles, professional threat, inter-agency and inter-disciplinary working, differences in regulation, and the guardian ad litem as a compensation for an overburdened social work service.

Conclusion

By highlighting the implications of the research for social workers, Gals and policy makers the paper will conclude with an appeal to policy makers to ensure that the important practice interfaces between these groups are clarified in order that the rights of children and parents are better protected in the Republic of Ireland.

An Examination of How Child Protection and Welfare Social Workers Experience the Contested Nature of the Courtroom Space in the Performance of their Role

Dr Carmel Halton, Dr Gill Harold, Dr Edel Walsh and Dr Aileen Murphy, University College Cork

Abstract

This presentation will focus on findings from a research project entitled *A Social and Economic Analysis of the Use of Legal Services (SEALS) in the Child and Family Agency (Tusla)*.

In 2016 the SEALS research team undertook courtroom observations. They attended over 100 in-camera child welfare hearings across 10 court districts in Ireland. During these court sittings, applications by Tusla were heard for care orders and supervision orders in respect of children for whom child protection and welfare concerns had been identified.

While child welfare proceedings are held in camera, there is nonetheless a public dimension to the manner in which social workers are asked to speak to sections of their court reports which, necessarily towards meeting evidentiary thresholds, can be negative about the capacity of parents to care for their children. Reconciling the tensions that exist between conflicting roles is challenging in child protection social work, which arguably comes into sharpest focus in the court environment.

Mulcahy (2007) asserts that the subject of space 'is a particularly interesting one for legal systems which rely on oral testimony and adversarial procedure. In these jurisdictions performance is all. The courtroom is converted into a stage in which space, sight lines and acoustics are critical in assessments about the credibility of the speaker and the statement they are making.' The child welfare hearings observed by the researchers constitute a space in which individual social workers' practice is exposed to intense scrutiny. It is a space which is laden with tensions between individual, private, professional and family identities and the

public setting in which they are performed. This paper will examine social workers' experiences of the court space, as informed by the researchers' observations.

Use of the Moot Court Room in the Legal Training of Social Work Students: Reducing the Fear Factor and Bolstering a Confident Approach in Facing the Court System in Practice

Katie Power, University College Cork

Abstract

This paper examines the need for social work students to be introduced to the court environment at an early stage of their training. The learning environment of students has an impact on the depth of their learning experience and this is particularly true for social workers who need to be prepared for potential interaction with the court system in their professional lives. Bringing students to the Moot Court Room provides many opportunities for authentic learning, including - an understanding of the layout of the court, the role that physical space plays in the learning journey of the student, the formality of the space and allowing students to embody the different personalities within a court by sitting at multiple positions.

A case study analysis of learning spaces at the School of Law, UCC, was conducted and includes a specific examination of the use of the Moot Court Room. This qualitative research highlights the views of teaching staff on methods of teaching engaged, positives and negatives of the learning space and opportunities for transforming teaching within these spaces. This analysis highlights how powerful the Moot Court Room can be in shaping the experiential learning of students.

Social work students have been brought to the Moot Court Room as part of their law module and they have remarked on this experience as being a stand out moment in their education. It was revealed to be an 'aha' moment when all the threads of learning came together in a symbolic space. This immersion of students in a legal space is crucial in informing them of their own personal need to come to grips with an environment and legal process that may be part of their future careers.

Parallel Session 7

"Why is This Happening to Me?" Betrayal Trauma in Children of 'Dysfunctional Family Systems'

Theodora Niopa, Initiative for the Child, Greece

Abstract

The Betrayal Trauma in Children of Dysfunctional Families model offers a new perspective in understanding the long term adversities which children suffer within the context of the dysfunctional family. It describes the evolution of parent-child relationship through dysfunctional forms of communication and attachment, which triggers emotionally traumatic responses in these children when connecting to others. The issues covered in this workshop are intended to offer knowledge to professionals who work in the child protection field by introducing and expanding on the points above. This objective is achieved by using photographs which have been selected and taken by the children themselves while attempting to abstractly describe their situation in their families, as well as by using excerpts of their responses in the qualitative research that has taken place for study purposes.

Children who experience long term adversities in their families often ask practitioners: "Why is this happening to me?". In an attempt to help them draw conclusions from their need to get answers in this question, we have used Jennifer Freyd's theory on Betrayal Trauma (Freyd, 2010) and the model of Chan (2009) which is a step by step attribution-based typology of betrayal. The attribution based typology of betrayal is depicting the cognitive process through which a recipient of a harmful potential "betrayal" act (abuse, neglect, etc) will lead the victim - child to make sense of whether the harmful act constitutes a betrayal, as well as the type of betrayal incurred. The victim's sense-making process will be influenced by his or her own characteristics, the perpetrator's social account and the history of betrayals between himself or herself and the perpetrator.

Putting the Hope back into Social Work: Achieving Better Outcomes for Children in Care Via Trauma-informed Foster Care

Maria Lotty, University College Cork and Tusla Child and Family Agency

Abstract

This presentation seeks to bring a vision of hope to social work practice through the application of trauma-informed care in foster care. The presentation will describe the key components of Trauma-informed foster care and the supporting evidence base that supports its effectiveness. Drawing from a current PhD study (Lotty, forthcoming), the theoretical framework of Trauma-informed foster care will be presented. This framework was developed through systematic review methods and a qualitative study that involved foster carer and multidisciplinary practitioners. Thus, this framework is an application of the Trauma-informed care model that reflects the needs of foster carers and current practices in foster care in Ireland locating it specifically in the Irish experience of foster care whilst also incorporating international research.

Drawing from mixed methods research which involved a pre-test-post test case controlled quasi-experimental study (n=79) and post-intervention qualitative study using focus groups (n=21) findings be presented. *Fostering Connections* is an evidence-based programme, effective in equipping foster carers to provide trauma-informed care to children who have experienced trauma. It is effective in increasing foster carers' tolerance of child challenging behaviour, confidence in caring for children who have experienced trauma and their sense of hopefulness about the children's future. *Fostering Connections* is also effective in improving child trauma related emotional and behavioural difficulties over the 15 month study period.

This research suggests that Trauma-informed foster care is an effective approach that provides a vision for hope in social work practice in achieving better outcomes for children in foster care. This approach is likely to make a contribution to placement stability and thus support children in achieving enduring life-long relationships (permanence), whether that is being reunification with birth family, long term foster care or adoption from care, that facilitate healing from trauma.

Small Steps to New Horizons

Ms Angela Coleman, New Ways Safeguarding & Ms Roisin Fitzgerald, Tusla Child and Family Agency <https://www.newwayssafeguarding.com/>

Abstract

Sally has had four placements and she must move again. Jack has engaged in challenging behaviours and needs to go to respite. Tori can no longer stay with his siblings and is moving to a residential home.

All these transitions echo the realities of the world of social work and present a myriad of complex challenges for children in care.

Small Steps to New Horizons is a concept that has grown out of working with multi agency partners and carers to communicate such transitions to children in a psychologically informed and child centred way. Moving beyond words and pictures and/or social stories, in a four-step approach, a customised story book is created for the child to explain their transition from one placement to another. This story book aims to minimise the impact of attachment disruptions and reduce the sense of loss that transitions can bring about for children in care.

Angela Coleman, Senior Assistant Psychologist, New Ways Safeguarding and Roisin Fitzgerald, Senior Social Worker share their multi-agency collaboration and detail the process and techniques that were used to create the story books. To illustrate this process, examples of storybooks designed specifically for the presentation will be presented, drawing on common themes and issues that became apparent in their making.

*All names used in the above scenarios and/or presentation are fictional

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Foster Carers: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Maria Daniels, University College Cork

Abstract

This study is exploring the lived experiences of foster carers by employing an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) through a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with approved foster carers. The study is examining motivation to foster, formative life experiences that influence the approach to the task of fostering and continuity of care. The study is also inquiring into the participants' experience of the fostering assessment. The aim of the study is to explore lived experiences from foster carers' experiential perspectives. Two main objectives are to inform the current discourse on the recruitment and retention of foster carers in Ireland, and raise awareness of the complex nature of foster care in line with current national policy. The foster carers participating in the study are all interviewed twice – couples are interviewed together. Two interviews are for the purpose of gleaning a more in-depth understanding, and for rigour when applying the methodology.

Qualitative methods utilise verbal data, but sometimes words alone are insufficient to describe the complex nature of fostering. To examine if visual imagery can facilitate discussions, enhance communication or stimulate emotional responses, the participants in the study are also asked to provide an image or symbol that reflects the meaning of fostering to them. These images or symbols are then used as a catalyst for discussion. Some of the themes emerging from the study include the importance of identity for foster carers, recognition from family, friends and agency, trying to positively make a difference, the significance of loss, the importance of acceptance, fear of failure and resilience. The analysis will elaborate on foster carers' interpretation of their lived experiences and emphasise the importance of professional awareness and matching considerations for foster carers and the children placed with them.

Parallel Session 8

Standing Strong in Solidarity – Promoting the Rights of Parents and Children when Children Use Abusive/ Violent behaviour at Home

Dr Declan Coogan, National University of Ireland Galway

Abstract

Some teenage and younger girls and boys use physical, psychological and/ or emotional abuse/ violence at home so much that parents/carers live in fear of their child. Parents of children who use abusive and/ or violent behaviour against them often live with stress, worry, shame and guilt. Parents can see no way out of a sense of helplessness and hopelessness when living with these and other problems. They can also fear that asking for help could lead to child protection assessments and the possibility of losing their child/ children to the care system.

Does a focus on the child's rights as the first and paramount consideration (Child Care Act 1991) mean we lose sight of the rights of parents and siblings? This paper envisions approaches to child protection and welfare work that balances and promotes the protection of all members of the family. Based on the insights from practitioners involved in action research projects and on continuing therapeutic practice with Non Violent Resistance, this presentation outlines how practitioners in statutory/ voluntary children and families services can develop approaches to practice that adopt a clear focus on promoting the human rights of parents and of children. There will be stories and strategies of hope that portray a vision of child protection and welfare practice where practitioners can stand strong together with parents and children to end the trauma of abusive/ violent behaviour within families.

Social Workers, Addiction Counsellors and Community Based Project Workers' Experiences of Training, Implementation and Accreditation in Evidence-Based Interventions for Problem Substance Misuse

Robert O'Driscoll, University College Cork

Abstract

The *adolescent community reinforcement approach* and the *community reinforcement approach with family training* were implemented as evidence-based treatments (EBT) in addiction and health and social care services in Cork and Kerry, Ireland. This research to examined how social workers, addiction counsellors and community based drugs project workers experienced the implementation process and generated knowledge in relation to their experiences as they implemented EBT as part of routine practice.

Seventeen qualitative interviews were conducted, followed by four change laboratory workshops informed by cultural historical activity theory and the theory of expansive learning. Practitioners systematically reflected on and analysed the previously unidentified and unprocessed practice tensions that arose because of the EBT implementation.

There were three main phases to data analysis. Firstly using cultural historical activity theory concepts, then data from each change laboratory workshop was analysed to track the expansive learning cycle, and finally the entire data corpus was analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings indicated that the new clinical practices were eventually discontinued in favour of more traditional embedded practices, treatment as usual and the status quo. The training experience, the characteristics of the practice, leadership and management knowledge and skills were found to be important during each stage of the implementation. This research identified the actual developmental level for practice and the thematic findings were theoretically synthesised to propose the content and parameters of the organisational zone of proximal development.

A *Community of Practice* was identified as needed in the field to so practitioners could develop their own practice agency. The change laboratories facilitated one small cycle of expansive learning and can be used to empower the system to transform itself in response to changing societal and service user needs, to promote workforce development and to facilitate organisational and systemic change more broadly.

The Value of Peer Support and a Strengths-based Approach in Groupwork with Fathers in a Family Support Setting

Hilary Jenkinson, University College Cork

Abstract

This paper seeks to highlight the importance of employing a strengths based approach and the value of peer learning in engaging with fathers in practice. In particular the presentation will share and critically explore the learning gained through the genesis, realisation, and facilitation process of Just for Dads, a groupwork programme for fathers, run in a family support setting in Cork. It highlights the importance of and challenges involved in engaging men in practice, and in groupwork aimed at fathers in particular. It recounts the significance of using a strengths perspective as a framework for engaging fathers in groupwork and highlights its value as experienced by participants and facilitators. The dynamic of peer learning which developed as a key part of the groupwork process is discussed, both in relation to how it was experienced by participants and also the degree to which the facilitators were part of that dynamic. Overall the paper aims to document and air key issues arising in this relatively unexplored arena of groupwork and family support practice.

Bystander Intervention in Secondary Schools: The Genesis and Objectives of a Cork City and County Pilot Programme

Dr. Louise Crowley, University College Cork

Abstract

Social misconduct, ranging from inappropriate language to sexual violence is a regrettably prevalent aspect of modern society and is unfortunately no less evident amongst 2nd level students. In light of the positive outcome of the pilot Bystander Intervention programme in UCC and the Cork Life Centre, modelled on the work of Dr Fenton, the UCC Bystander Intervention programme has been modified to create an adapted, age appropriate Bystander Intervention Programme for Transition Year students. This programme seeks to address issues of sexual and relationship violence amongst students, by introducing to the student conversation and understanding, the dangers of the social normalisation of abusive behaviour and the related capacity of a bystander to intervene. The material addresses not only aspects of unacceptable sexual behaviour but also more broadly, issues such as personal assertiveness and social responsibility and seeks to empower young people to safely speak up against unacceptable behaviour. It presents students with a safe environment to better understand appropriate social interactions and the unacceptability of abusive behaviour, whilst supporting the development of a visible institutional culture which stands against unacceptable behaviour and abuse, and cultivates a culture of positivity and support. Through the use of social norms questionnaires the programme seeks to allow students to recognise their shared abhorrence of sexual harassment and abuse and create an awareness of shared values and promote collective demand for zero tolerance.

The pilot was created in collaboration with 2nd level teachers from 10 schools across Cork. In anticipation of the delivery of the TY pilot programme, and with reference to the third level experience, this paper will present an overview of the programme development, the overarching objectives in delivering the programme at second level. and the challenges presented in delivering the challenging but much need material to a younger age group.

Parallel Session 9

Problematizing Parenting: The Involvement of Reception Centre Staff in the Parenting Practices of Syrian Refugees Living in Collective Accommodation

Dr Muireann Ní Raghallaigh, Dr Karen Smith and Dr Jennifer Scholtz, University College Dublin

Abstract

This paper explores how reception centre staff intervene in the parenting practices of Syrian asylum seeking and refugee parents who had recently arrived in the Republic of Ireland and who are living in Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres. The paper draws on interviews and focus groups conducted with reception centre staff, refugee parents, refugee young people and other stakeholders. It draws attention to the problematization of parenting by those managing and staffing these reception centres (individuals who did not have social work, social care or related qualifications) and their subsequent involvement in parenting practices in a number of different ways: by 'informing and warning', 'watching and regulating', 'usurping the parental role' and 'referring'. The findings suggest that centre residents are subject to intrusive observations and intervention as regards their parenting practices. It was noteworthy that in identifying the causes of the concerns in relation to parenting practices, the factors identified by reception centre staff all related to the parents and to their previous experiences, without any consideration given to the challenges posed by the collective accommodation in which the parenting was taking place. The research points to the important role that professions such as social work can play, not only in providing parents with information and support in an appropriate way but also in challenging existing systems and practices, thus furthering its social justice remit.

Working in a Culturally Competent Way? Exploring the Perceptions of Child Protection and Welfare Social Workers Engaging with Children and Families from Minority Ethnic Groups

Edwina Flavin, Tusla Child and Family Agency, Dr Gloria Kirwan, Maynooth University and Dr Julie Byrne, Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

Ireland has experienced significant changes in population size and demographic make-up in recent decades, resulting in an increasingly diverse and multi-cultural population. Figures from the Central Statistics Office (2016)^[1] indicate that there were 535,475 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland in April 2016, coming from 200 different nations. This generates an increased need for those in the caring professions to exhibit cultural sensitivity and competence in their practice. However, despite this long-term trend towards population diversity, services with statutory responsibility for child protection and welfare have not always developed in concert with these shifts in demographics. For example, the Logan Report (2014)^[2] highlighted a deficit of cultural competence across state agencies interacting with minority communities and called for training to raise the cultural competence of staff in the public services.

This paper reports on findings from a study with child protection and welfare social workers which aimed to ascertain their understanding of cultural competence and to explore their views on the importance and possibilities of cultural competence in their work with children and families from minority ethnic groups^[3]. Based on findings from semi-structured interviews, the paper illuminates important information for child protection and welfare social workers about social work practice in a multi-cultural context. As we look to the future of child protection and welfare, this topic is certain to grow in importance as Irish society becomes increasingly diverse.

[1] CSO 2016-Profile 7 Migration and Diversity

[2] Garda Síochána Act (section 42) (special Inquiries relating to Garda Síochána) Order 2013. Report of Ms Emily Logan (2014)

[3] This definition taken from the Cambridge English Dictionary used describes ethnic minority as ‘a group of people of a particular race or nationality living in a country or area where most people are from a different race or nationality’.

Child Trafficking: Responding to the Silence

John O’Sullivan, MECPATHS (Mercy Efforts for Child Protection Against Trafficking with the Hospitality Sector) <https://mecpaths.ie/>

Abstract

As international trends flare and as international agencies including Europol, Interpol and The US State Department shine glaring spotlights on Ireland to highlight the nations under-preparedness and under-responsiveness in relation to Human Trafficking, Ireland remains fixed; “it is something that happens elsewhere and does not happen in Ireland” (MECPATHS, 2018). Statistical realities suggest that 7% of victims of Human Trafficking in Ireland are children, moved and transported for sexual exploitation all around the country.

Front-line services for victims of Human Trafficking operate in relative isolation; practical collaboration is absent; funding is shy and the scale of the challenge remains under-reported. Child Trafficking continues to extract one child every 30-seconds from their childhood realities of expected-innocence today. Unrecorded accounts in Ireland suggest that children are trafficked into the country on a 6-week-cyclical basis for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Access to children continues to be the “most sought after sexual service” that female adult prostitutes are asked for (MECPATHS, 2018).

Front-line professional education is absent; legislation remains challenging and Ireland’s official responsiveness sits alongside countries including India, recognised as “the most dangerous place in the world to be born a girl”.

A challenge for Social Workers, Medics, educators and service-industry employees rests in the identification of at-risk children. An industry that generates 151 Billion Dollars per year operates within the island of Ireland, is growing in its nature of exploitation and those who traffick remain ahead of the curve. Ireland has a responsibility to educate professionals and those who come into contact with children with a knowledge to convert the traditional “gut-feeling” that something isn’t right into a reporting and rescue of vulnerable children.

Format: 8 slides + audio file from a survivor of Child Trafficking (UK) [permission granted] who attributes her experience to social service interventions which failed her.

Child Friendly Justice within the Irish Refugee Determination Procedure: An Idealism or a Concept Worthy of Practical Implementation?

Jessica Brennan, University College Cork

Abstract

The aim of this study and indeed the purpose of this presentation is to assess whether the concept of Child Friendly Justice, when applied to the Irish international protection process would provide more appropriate safeguards and better outcomes for child asylum seekers from a policy, procedural and practical viewpoint in Ireland. When children become involved in legal proceedings, a protectionist stance can be adopted whereby children have little or no opportunity to become involved. Alternatively, children can be expected to participate like adults. Arguably, children, given their age and maturity are not in a position to exercise their rights and claim asylum in a similar manner to adults. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to analyse and evaluate the type of protections and procedural adaptations which must be made to the international protection process in Ireland in order to empower children as independent legal agents. The Child Friendly Justice Guidelines, a soft law instrument published by the Council of Europe, will be the medium through which the international protection framework will be interrogated.

This socio-legal project will involve a doctrinal examination of the Irish International Protection Act 2015 and the Common European Asylum instruments from a Child Friendly Justice perspective. To gain an insight into accompanied and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children's experience of the Irish refugee status determination procedure and to understand the practical operation of the process from a children's rights perspective; an empirical component of a qualitative nature will be included. Child research participants from seven – 17 years of age will be invited to contribute their unique perspectives. This minimum age is based on the third of Piaget's four stages of child cognitive development where he considered "the concrete stage a major turning point in the child's cognitive development because it marks the beginning of logical or operational thought". (Piaget, 1954). Professional perspectives will be invited from legal practitioners, social workers and immigration officials to assess knowledge of children's rights and gain insights.

Map of Venues

Map of venues for @swoonfuoo



- 01 - Compass Room, Donovan's Road (3 mins)
- 03 - Devere Hall, Aras naMac Leinn = Main Hall (0 mins),
- 03 - Aras naMac Leinn = 3rd floor, Béarra, Dúthalla, Scellig + Múscraí Rooms (2 mins)
- 11 - Creative Zone = ground floor, Boole library (4 mins)
- 31 - Crossleagh Computer Lab (3 mins.)
- 100 - Cork Education Centre (8 mins.)
- 62 - O'Rahilly Building (ORB), CACSSS Mary Ryan Room
(5 mins. - enter building, stay on ground floor, turn left down long hall, at communal area, turn left, turn left again for room)