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Who we are

The Dublin Inner City Community Co-operative Society Limited ('the Co-op') was established in November 2014. We are a membership organisation of 13 grassroots Dublin inner city community development organisations which have come together to ensure the continued development and delivery of social, economic and cultural services within our communities.

The Co-op's member organisations are operational in all or parts of Dublin 1,3,7 & 8 as well as disadvantaged city areas in Dublin 2 and 4. The Co-op operates to community development principles and a social inclusion ethos forms the basis for all communication with stakeholders. Advocacy on issues of social justice and poverty forms a key component of our collective work.

There is a need to be cognisant of the range and level of difficulties affecting disadvantaged communities; they are often facing multiple issues that are interacting, such as unemployment, educational disadvantage, intergenerational poverty, poor quality accommodation, poor health status, addiction, social exclusion and marginalisation. It is the concentration and combination of the factors that has the most impact.

National and International commitments to children and young people

Ireland has made numerous commitments to the wellbeing of the nation's children.

In January of 1919 the first Dáil of Ireland declared that no child in Ireland would go hungry, be denied shelter, or lack the means to gain an education.

In 1992 Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The rights endowed upon all children following its ratification include the right to shelter, nutrition, education, and protection from neglect and abuse.

In 2014 the Irish government introduced the first overarching national policy framework for children and young people. *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF)*, contained within it numerous positive and

progressive commitments to the children and young people of this country.

The six transformational goals and five national outcomes remain highly relevant for the succeeding policy framework. However, there is an implementation gap that must be prioritized going forward.

The introduction of the EU Child Guarantee in 2021 is another positive step towards the elimination of child poverty and exclusion. The recommendations, so pertinent to this submission, are for member states to:

- A. Guarantee effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day and healthcare and
- B. Guarantee for children in need effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing

Despite these commitments child poverty pervades our society. In 2016 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child acknowledged the ‘significant increase in the number of children living in consistent poverty’. Poverty has continued to rise with the enforced deprivation rate rising from 15.1% in 2018 to 17.8% in 2019 (CSO, 2020). Children are most at risk of experiencing poverty. This is indicated by the findings of the 2019 Survey on Income and Living Conditions which found that 8.1% of children are living in consistent poverty and 15.3% are at risk of poverty.

In February 2022 the Children's Rights Alliance expressed disappointment at the rising number of children in emergency accommodation. According to its annual ‘Report Card’ the CRA stated there were nearly 300 more children and young people in emergency accommodation at the end of 2021 compared to January 2021.¹

The Inner City

When looking at deprivation across the Electoral Divisions the deprivation experienced in the inner city is masked due to high levels of inequality (wealth and poverty side by side). Small area figures portray a more accurate picture. The Co-op works within an area which contains 41 Electoral Divisions (EDs). Based on the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index (latest available data) all 41 EDs were above average (meaning less deprivation). Within the 41 Electoral Divisions there are 619 small areas of which 71 are disadvantaged and 72 are marginally below average culminating in 143 small areas which are below average, disadvantaged and very disadvantaged. There are also many more vulnerable people and families living in areas that are considered average or even affluent and residing in private housing subsidized by the state via HAP and RA. In this way poverty is masked and often hidden from sight.

The effects of poverty and deprivation can be lost through figures and statistics but the effects on children and young people are very real. Some of these effects were captured in the *No Child Shall Suffer* report released by the Co-op late last year and formally launched by Minister for Children, Youth, Integration, Disability & Integration, Mr. Roderic O’Gorman TD, on 9th December 2021, in which member organizations relayed their experiences of working with disadvantaged families, children and young people. These 14 stories illuminate the lived experience of poverty and the interconnection between it, mental health, education, housing and access to adequate community amenities. Moreover, it

¹ [Govt given 'E' grade over child homelessness \(rte.ie\)](https://www.rte.ie/news/2022/02/09/govt-given-e-grade-over-child-homelessness/)

highlighted the invaluable role that early childhood education (ECE) and services for school aged children (SAC) play in the lives of children and young people in disadvantaged areas of the inner city. The report is available at [The Co-op's No Child Shall Suffer report – Dublin City Community Co-Op \(dublincitycommunitycoop.ie\)](https://www.dublincitycommunitycoop.ie) and also included with this submission as an Appendix.

Our Services

The Co-op provides ECE, afterschool services, youth clubs and educational courses to young people who are not engaged in other training, education or employment. They work towards the progressive realization of the commitments made in *BOBF* and the EU Child Guarantee by providing quality services that are accessible, affordable and inclusive to children that need them. As can be observed in the stories contained in the *No Child Shall Suffer* report, our work effectuates the transformational goals outlined in *BOBF* by supporting parents through interventions such as home visits, delivery of food to food insecure households and provision of information around adult education programmes and assistance in making applications for housing, employment, health and welfare supports. The stories therein also portray the way in which these organisations achieve the goal of early intervention and prevention in a variety of ways by recommending and securing therapy for children in several cases and making child welfare reports when necessary. The stories shed light on the efforts made by staff to ensure the children in their care achieve the outcomes outlined in *BOBF* by providing for their physical and mental health, striving for them to be safe and mitigating against the harms of economic insecurity. The organisations do their utmost to fulfil the national outcomes while working within contexts plagued by intergenerational disadvantage.

BOBF acknowledges the critical role played by ECE and services to SAC in disadvantaged areas. This is echoed by our members. Those in ECE stress that their services provide a critical component of the education spectrum delivering the national curriculum Aistear, in line with Siolta's quality framework. For many children ECE services and services for SAC may be their only access to educational support and developmental activities. As such they are crucial to reducing educational inequality. ECE and services to SAC are not childminding services. *BOBF* asserts that health and social planners, commissioners and funding programmes should prioritize community-based programmes for those most at risk and experiencing greatest disparities. Our services fulfil these qualities, however, policy developments since the introduction of *BOBF* have not indicated prioritization.

The National Childcare Scheme

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) severely threatened the financial viability of our ECE and SAC projects as well as our ability to provide these services to the inner city's most disadvantaged children. The allocation of standard hours and enhanced hours based on the status of parents contradicted the government's stated goal of equal access to services for disadvantaged children. Binding children's entitlements to the parent's status refutes the framework's child centered underpinnings. The amendment that terminates the practice of deducting school hours from entitled hours is welcomed. However, differentiation based on the parent's status remains. Moreover, concerns around funding persist primarily due to a lack of clarity. In April 2022 the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), which has been keeping many services afloat, will be discontinued. There is uncertainty with regards to how the Transition Fund provided between April and August 2022 will work. Despite this uncertainty, providers are expected to plan, implement and provide a service. Increased clarity around funding is

urgently needed. Any credible national childcare scheme will have at its heart the best interests of the child. Its *raison d'être* cannot be the pursuance of other political agendas such as employment activation.

Administrative Issues

It has been stated that the NCS is bureaucratic by nature with services facing significant difficulty in accessing assistance for administrative issues such as those relating to delayed CHICK numbers. The application process has proved difficult, confusing and cumbersome for parents and caregivers, many of whom are grandparents to the children concerned. This has led to staff providing administrative support to parents and caregivers. This is an area which needs to be considered as staff are reporting spending significant amounts of time supporting caregivers in applying for the NCS. Moreover, all children will have to be reregistered in April which will be a huge administrative burden. Digital poverty and digital literacy issues prevail amongst many of the communities and families the Co-op works with.

Staffing

Staffing is one area of concern. Our members have articulated that a lack of recognition for their staff's professionalism coupled with low pay renders the retention of highly qualified and expert staff vulnerable. The retention of such staff is of course fundamental to the provision of quality services. It is essential that in the NCS this area of concern is addressed explicitly and at length with the promise of a rehaul of the childcare sector, the career and progression pathways therein.

A major feature of the NCS and *Nurturing skills* is the intention of upskilling staff of ECE and SAC services, both to ensure optimal care is provided and to increase recognition and regard for staff. It is positive that a roadmap for the upskilling of staff is outlined within *Nurturing Skills*. We would like to stress the importance of following through with the commitments made relating to the funding of flexible education programmes and supporting staff to upskill while continuing to work. As an example, within the Co-op a staff member's qualification was funded under the North East Inner City Initiative. These types of funding streams are crucial to ensuring services are enabled to continue operating while staff members are in training. Moreover, the *Nurturing Skills* document makes commitments that services will be supported financially while staff members are on study leave/placements. We would like to reaffirm the salience of such support and the importance of its implementation.

As part of the Employment Regulation Order of the NCS, services will be awarded funding under the new core funding stream following the agreement that they will not raise parents' fees.

As community-based service providers, our members are charging minimal if any fees to ensure that their services are affordable and accessible to disadvantaged children. Raising wages as part of increasing the attractiveness of the sector and maintaining affordability for parents are two fundamental aspects of the NCS. Community-based childcare providers are in a unique position in the sector as they are continually striving for affordability and despite clear wishes to raise wages for workers, they are already facing financial uncertainty. Funding must ensure that community-based services are enabled to fulfil the Employment Regulation Order.

It has been proposed that the government consider implementing a DEIS style model regarding ECE and services working with SAC. Such a model would see grants awarded to services based on level of

disadvantage in the areas they operate in. This would help ensure that services for children and young people are genuinely accessible and affordable while maintaining the financial sustainability of community-based services. It is illogical that an area can have DEIS status for its primary and secondary schools while at the same time have no DEIS type supports for ECE and SAC services. As a result, children from disadvantaged backgrounds experience an irreparable deficit at a critical period of their education development.

Feedback

As has been alluded to above, services providing ECE and services to SAC face a lack of recognition, understanding and appreciation for the critical work they do. It has been suggested that this could be alleviated with the introduction of a well-designed, appropriately informed and collectively agreed measurement system. Such a system would see participants evaluate the efficacy of the service they receive and assess their own progress. In the case of children accessing ECE, parents could complete this piece of work. For young people this could be done as a reflective exercise which places value on their thoughts and feelings. Moreover, such a system could help to improve the sectors perceived validity.

Access

Lack of spaces in ECE and services for SAC has emerged as a prominent issue. The lack of space is observable in the long waiting lists for ECE services in the inner city. Existing services are unable to meet the need due to a lack of funding, facilities and statutory obligations on the child to staff ratio. The issue of limited spaces clearly undermines the goal of service accessibility. The numbers of children denied access to ECE due the dearth of spaces is concerning especially given its role in reducing educational disadvantage and providing early identification of children with additional needs. Lack of access to youth clubs in the inner city has also been highlighted. In the Southwest Inner City there is a Garda Youth Diversion Project but no mainstream youth project despite demand and need. The significance of access to youth clubs especially in areas with high levels of economic disadvantage, the presence of drugs and criminality cannot be overstated. Such services provide a safe place where young people are respected and enabled to engage in activities which are beneficial to their development. The upcoming national policy framework should address these gaps to ensure that children and young people have access to services in their communities via targeted funding.

Additional Needs

BOBF makes commitments to provide timely assessments and provision of support services/therapies for children with additional needs. We would like to corroborate this commitment and reaffirm the importance of prioritizing its implementation in the upcoming national policy framework. As an example, the implementation gap can be observed in the difficulty experienced by one of our members in accessing support under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) grant. It was recognised that twin boys accessing the service needed additional support, as such an application was made. While an allowance of 15 hours of support is usually granted per child, in this case the 15 hours were divided between the two children because they were twins, an egregious example of 'system' inefficiency, insensitivity and bureaucracy. This issue was eventually resolved but only following months of waiting. In addition, the twins are still awaiting an assessment to establish the exact nature of their needs. This highlights the need to prioritize the implementation of commitments made in *BOBF* around providing timely access to assessments and treatment.

Wrap around services

The need for wrap-around services has also been highlighted. There is a lack of access to mental health services. CAMHS are only available to children and young people who have reached the threshold for a diagnosis of moderate to severe mental health disorders. Even still it has recently been reported there are close to 2,300 people on waiting lists for initial assessment by CAMHS (Meskill, 2022). Waiting lists of this magnitude are unacceptable and raise legitimate questions around aspirational policy documents such as *BOBF* and reality on the ground.

In line with early intervention and prevention, mental health services should be made available and affordable to all children and young people in a timely manner. Staff on the frontline working with children and young people have recommended that mental health support be made available in schools to maximise accessibility. The need for such has likely intensified due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Additional wraparound services that would be of benefit to children, families and communities include counselling, family support, advice, advocacy, adult education & guidance on issues such as: homelessness, mental health issues, literacy & accessing services.

Participation of Children and Young People

A positive theme that has been discovered through consultation with our member organisations is an increasing awareness amongst young people of their rights. This is a huge accomplishment within the sector and for government policy which has been increasingly geared towards the rights of the child. However, while there appears to be greater awareness of rights, the need to meaningfully implement them remains. This section is concerned with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the right of children and young people to have their voice heard. Our members working with young people in various capacities have raised this. It has been suggested that the meaningful engagement of young people in civic decision-making processes could be achieved through an education project properly funded and resourced. A strengthened relationship between schools and community development projects could enable collaboration around the development of a participative democracy and participative budgeting programme to be delivered in schools. Such a programme would be a practical approach to achieving the fifth national outcome in *BOBF*, that children and young people are connected, respected and contributing to their worlds. It has also been suggested that education around poverty and exclusion be provided; such an education could motivate children and young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to engage with decision making processes with a greater awareness of context and significance. It is crucial that consultation is done meaningfully; engagement will be lost if consultation practices are tokenistic.

Housing

An omnipresent issue in the inner city (as well as nationally) is housing. The housing crisis is referenced elsewhere in this submission therefore it will not be discussed at length here. However, it is salient to highlight how this multifaceted issue impacts the lives and development of the country's children and young people, principally those who are disadvantaged. Without providing adequate, secure, quality housing, services are forced to fire fight against the problems which arise from lack thereof as opposed to supporting children and young people to reach their full potential. The housing issues referred to are wide ranging; as can be observed from our *No Child Shall Suffer* report, children and young people are living in accommodation (both private and social), which is damp, grossly overcrowded with multiple

generations in one dwelling and whole families constricted to one room in homeless accommodations. Our report highlights the shared struggle of families working and those who are not, in affording accommodation even with the HAP. In some of these cases the children are also living in food poverty conveying the interplay of housing with other facets of deprivation. The report tells the stories of children whose mental health was impacted so severely by their living conditions that they required counselling. One story depicts uncertainty around the interpretation of a young child's behavior as signs of autism or symptoms of his overcrowded living environment. Another story describes a family facing overcrowding and related concerns for the children's educational and emotional wellbeing. A staff member working with them stated that they have tried to give the family all the support they can but "without accommodation very little can change." These snippets highlight the detrimental impact that the lack of appropriate housing can have on the development and mental health of children and young people. Considering the profound impact that housing can have on the child, the provision of adequate, secure and affordable housing must be at the forefront of the upcoming national policy framework.

Community Infrastructure

The lack of green spaces and community facilities in the inner city are major issues impacting children and young people. The limited green space available is often inaccessible and unsafe for children to use due to anti-social behavior. There is a need for more facilities for young people and improvement of existing facilities across the inner city. Without these facilities services are impeded from delivering much needed services; such is the case in the South West inner city where there is no space to deliver a youth club. Within this context the loss of key infrastructure like the Dublin City Council swimming pool on Sean Mac Diarmada Street (closed for two years and likely to remain so for all of 2022) and the TU Dublin Kevin Street pool are sorely felt. It has also been highlighted that the cost of renting outdoor Astro pitches and indoor football and basketball pitches render them inaccessible to students and under 18s. This could be an area to target funding/subsidies in the interim. Access to sport, recreation and leisure facilities is increasingly linked to socio-economic status.

The necessity of community infrastructure has been recognised by the government. In chapter five of the Dublin City Development Plan a proposal of support for the development of effective, fit for purpose and well-designed city play infrastructure is made. *BOBF* also recognizes the importance of play for emotional regulation and development. It states that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have low levels of participation in play, recreation, sports, arts and culture and therefore should be prioritized in policy (pg 56). Ensuring that commitments made by the government regarding the provision of community facilities and space to play are fulfilled should be a priority for the upcoming national policy framework. In areas such as the inner-city space is a finite and valuable resource, the zoning and rezoning of which is not straightforward in the face of competing interests and needs. While it is certainly imperative for more housing and accommodation to be built, we must ensure that such developments are not at the expense of community facilities and green space, essential to social cohesion and positive engagement of young people with their environment. The allocation of an adequate ratio of this space to community needs should be prioritized to ensure the realization of a youth friendly city. Meaningful consultation with and participation of children and young people around community infrastructure would help to ensure that future developments meet their needs.

Conclusion

From Dublin City Community Co-op's experience of working in Dublin's inner city it is clear that the Covid 19 epidemic both highlighted and deepened the extent to which children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and growing up in disadvantaged communities experience deep-seated inequalities in their living environment and in their access to adequate income and essential services and opportunities. This seriously undermines their health and well-being and puts at risk their development and future welfare. In the light of this, combating poverty and exclusion among children and young people should be put at the heart of the next Government Policy Framework for Children and Young People. In particular, it should prioritise building on the commitment of the European Child Guarantee to guarantee for children in need effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day and effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing. Especial emphasis should be given to ensure that key services are truly inclusive and reach out to those children experiencing specific disadvantages such as children in precarious family situations, children from a migrant or ethnic minority background (especially Roma and Traveller children) and children with a disability. The Child Guarantee National Action Plan should be an integral part of the Policy Framework.

This submission was prepared by **Dublin City Community Co-operative** with contributions from seven of our member organisations:

- Robert Emmet Community Development Project-South West Inner City
- CASPr-North East Inner City
- SICCCA-South West Inner City
- SWICN-South West Inner City
- North Wall Community Development Project-North East Inner City
- Daughters of Charity Community Services-North West Inner City
- LYCS-North East Inner City

Further information on Dublin City Community Co-operative is available at:

Co-op website: www.dublincitycommunitycoop.ie

Co-op YouTube Channel (16 videos uploaded to-date): [Dublin City Community Co-op - YouTube](#)

Co-op Facebook page: [Dublin City Community Coop | Facebook](#)

Co-op Instagram: [Dublin City Community Co-op \(@dublincitycommunitycoop\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

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Appendix

No Child Shall Suffer-Dublin City Community Co-operative, December 2021