

DRAFT

Saving Childhood Ryan; Campaign Launch 20th May 2010

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For many years, thousands of survivors of rape and childhood sexual abuse have come through the doors of the various services like the DRCC, One in Four, CARI, the RCCs around the country and other agencies, where they have told their stories and had their stories believed. Through the therapy and counselling that they received, they were able, over time, to be healed and to get on with their lives. However the scars will never go away. Their stories were harrowing and are harrowing. As a society we were very slow to acknowledge that these atrocities were happening in our midst and far too often the victims of these crimes were treated as outcasts and as troublemakers.

With the publication of the Ryan and the Murphy Reports in 2009 their stories were validated publicly for the first time. This all important public acknowledgment had the effect of removing the isolation, stigma and shame and survivors have since come forward in unprecedented numbers and are seeking the support of the various frontline services. For example at the DRCC in 2009, the 24 hour national helpline first time callers were up by 42% from 2008. At One in Four where survivors of institutional abuse in particular, have had the support of its advocacy services, the number of new clients was double that of 2008.

After the fallout from the Ryan Report the shock waves felt throughout the country were somewhat calmed by the report that followed from the Minister for Children's office, promising to implement the recommendations of the Ryan Report. There was a 99 point implementation plan drawn up by his office, which was welcomed by all. However to date one year later, hardly any of the recommendations have been implemented. While promises were made to survivors to provide extra resources to respond to their needs, the reality is that funding has been further cut to agencies at the frontline and many survivors are languishing on waiting lists as we speak. This is completely unacceptable.

While we are acutely aware that the survivors of past sexual abuse are being let down by the cut backs to services, it is alarming that children who are currently being abused are also being let down and betrayed. Allegations of childhood sexual abuse are not always even investigated as was shown in the 2008 HSE Review of Adequacy where almost one third of allegations were not investigated. The disarray of child protection services was also highlighted in the damning report by the Ombudsman for Children Emily Logan's Investigation into the Implementation of Children First across the HSE, only last week.

In 2010 children who are sexually abused in Ireland do not have access to counselling services nationally. CARI, the only NGO providing such services across the country had to close down a number of its services due to cut backs. We were promised that this area would not suffer the cuts back. We requested that our grants be left as they were but no the cut backs came and are having a detrimental effect on the services ability to respond to the demands that are there. Is this acceptable in 2010 in Ireland? Do we want to see another Ryan Report in 30 years time?

The most meaningful monument to the survivors who have suffered so much would be to enshrine the rights of children in the Irish Constitution. We call on the Government to run this referendum now and to run it on its own, separate to any by election. Surely we owe this to the 21st century children of Ireland!

Irish society will never be the same after these reports. There can be no doubt in any of our minds that Irish society has not 'cherish(ed) all its children equally' (1916 Proclamation) and we have a big task ahead of us to make sure that we educate ourselves appropriately, have adequate laws in place and work towards making absolutely sure that what happened in 20th century Ireland to our children, will never be repeated.