

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **“NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY IN CHILD WELFARE AND PROTECTION”:**

#### **SAVING CHILDHOOD GROUP MARKS 2ND ANNIVERSARY OF RYAN REPORT**

**Dublin, 20 May 2011** – Marking the second anniversary of the Ryan report publication, The Saving Childhood group today called on the Government to maintain its commitment to closing the gaps in the child welfare and protection system. The group comprising Barnardos, CARI, Children’s Rights Alliance, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Irish Association of Young People in Care, ISPCC and One in Four said that Ireland stands on the precipice of momentous change in the area of child protection but that much remained to be done to make that change a reality.

In particular the group pointed to the need for progression on key legislation to place the revised Children First national child protection guidelines on a statutory basis. Norah Gibbons, Barnardos’ Director of Advocacy said: “We very much welcome the changes underway in the child welfare and protection system and the planned establishment of the Child Welfare and Protection Agency. It is crucial that the revised guidelines are published as a matter of urgency and that the legislation is progressed in 2011 and we welcome Minister for Children, Frances Fitzgerald’s commitment to doing this. Statutory provision for the implementation of child protection standards is fundamental to ensuring a fully accountable, transparent and consistent system of practice in child welfare and protection services.”

The Ryan Implementation report, published in 2009, made a number of commitments to improve the situation for children in the Irish care system. The Saving Childhood group said that while some of these measures had been progressed, it was disappointed that two years down the line the provision of aftercare has not been placed on a statutory footing. Jennifer Gargan, Director, Irish Association of Young People in Care, said: “Young people leaving the care system continue to need support as they move from adolescence to young adulthood. It is deeply concerning that Ireland still lacks adequate legal provision for the care of children once they turn 18. It results in inconsistent practice across the country where a child’s future depends largely on whether an aftercare service is operating in their area. It is wholly unacceptable that a young person’s life chances are decided by geographical location. The Child Care (Amendment) Bill must be amended to include statutory provision of aftercare before it is passed into law.”

The Saving Childhood group also reiterated calls for the publication of a revised wording for the proposed Referendum on children’s rights and an indication from Government of when the Referendum will be called. Ashley Balbirnie, CEO, ISPCC said: “We wholly understand the need to ensure that a number of items, including legislation, are addressed before the Referendum can be called. However, we have now been through several versions of the wording and several postponed dates. It is time for Ireland as a nation to stand up for children’s rights. Any proposed

wording must include the principles of best interest and voice of the child and the Referendum must be prioritised and called as soon as is practicable.”

The group finally called on the new Government to maintain its commitment to the implementation of the Ryan report recommendations despite the ongoing economic crisis and its impact on resources. Ellen O’Malley Dunlop, CEO, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre concluded: “The publication of the Ryan report shocked and appalled Ireland. It called into question our vision of our nation as a society where childhood is revered, respected and protected. As time passes, it is easy for us to lose the impact of that initial shock. We cannot let complacency slip in to the area of child welfare and protection. Progress is being made but that does not mean we should slow down. We must be vigorous in our ongoing moves towards building a system that does what we failed to do in the past: protect children.”

## **ENDS**

### **For further information, please contact:**

Norah Gibbons, Barnardos: 087 419 1944/ 086 398 0441

Mary Flaherty, CARI: 087 958 2250

Maria Corbett, Children’s Rights Alliance: 087 233 3784

Ellen O’Malley-Dunlop, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre: 086 809 9618

Ashley Balbirnie, ISPCC: 087 989 0620

Jennifer Gargan, the Irish Association of Young People in Care: 086 607 3866

Maeve Lewis, One in Four: 087 758 4080

Cliona Saidlear, Rape Crisis Network Ireland: 087 219 6447

### **Notes to Editor**

#### **Some useful statistics to supplement the press release**

- 200 social workers were recruited in 2010, with an additional 60 to be recruited in 2011. As of January 2011 there were 5,682 children in care, the majority placed in foster families. 9% of children in care still do not have an allocated social worker.
- There were 2,164 confirmed incidents of child abuse reported to HSE in 2008 (latest year for which statistics are available), this was an increase from 1,978 in 2007 and 1,797 in 2006.

- 80% of children are abused by someone known to them – abusers are fathers, mothers, male relatives or family friends or those in authority (i.e. teacher, coach, priest, etc)
- Over 3,500 crimes against children on average are being reported to Gardaí every year, but less than a fifth of these result in a court prosecution, and just one in ten of all cases have ended in a conviction to date.