



# Cúram

Issue No. 44



IRISH ASSOCIATION  
OF SOCIAL CARE  
WORKERS

Autumn/Winter  
2011

2011  
2012  
2013  
2014  
2015  
2016

**NEW  
DAWN  
OR  
FALSE  
DAWN?**

*“... cherishing all of the  
children of the nation  
equally...”*

(1916 Proclamation)



Orchard  
Children's  
Services Ltd.

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## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Some of you whose membership has or is about to expire will find membership renewal forms with this edition of CURAM. We appreciate that at this time of year and the budget cutback kicking in for lots of people money is scarcer than ever.

With that said, we believe that the €15.00 administrative fee to cover membership is a modest one and hope that you use the stamped addressed envelope provided to renew your membership.

Your continued support is appreciated.

## EDITORIAL

### NEW DAWN OR FALSE DAWN?

*In 1945 Henry A. McCarthy wrote “When considering this question of new legislation to deal with existing difficulties and new situations, we should not overlook the immense importance of child welfare in relation to the state. In this country, similar problems (with children) where they are the concern of anybody at all, are dealt with by several different Department of State, with a resulting conclusion which is, of course, inevitable. The whole law relating to children should be reviewed and brought under one comprehensive statute, which would simplify the procedure concerning delinquent and neglected children.”*

*(Henry A McCarthy in Some Problems of Child Welfare*

*B.G. McCarthy (Ed) Cork University Press, 1945.)*

*This logical call is among many made since the lofty aspiration about children was proclaimed nearly one hundred years ago in 1916. This quote and the quote on the cover from the 1916 Proclamation give us some idea of how long the call has gone out for an integrated, workable child welfare and protection system.*

*Now to another quote. Your last edition of CURAM earlier this year had on its cover the caption 2011 Cautious Optimism? The words stood out against a background of the years going back to 2000, all of which saw failures and scandals characterise the Irish child care scene.*

*CURAM’s editorial elaborated on the cover’s question and pointed out that any optimism for the future in relation to the work social care workers do might well be misplaced because of political uncertainty, dire economic warnings in general, cutbacks in staffing and a rigid moratorium on recruitment.*

*However, the editorial went on to argue the opposite and essentially outlined a number of reasons why 2011 might not, after all, be a bad year.*

*The sometimes overlapping approach of three organisations closely involved with social care was being tackled and a launch date of mid 2011 was indicated despite some work yet to be done. The educators (Irish Association of Social Care Educators), managers (Residential Managers Association) and practitioners (Irish Association of Social Care Workers) did amalgamate after many years of the idea being mooted. On June 20th last a new association –Social Care Ireland- incorporating the three organisations mentioned was launched by the new Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald. The launch was an unqualified success and very well attended. Feedback has been extremely positive. Minister Fitzgerald announced at the launch that the legislation setting up the new ministry for Children was to be completed that week thus giving effect to one of the major commitments given by the new government when it took up office on March 10th.*

*Since taking up office the new minister has set her sights on tackling a number of major issues and there is a sense that, at last, there may be the political will to make progress where up to now there have been broken promises, obfuscation and prevarication. The publication of the Cloyne Report in mid July has given an added impetus to the minister’s commitment.*

*In response to that report the government acted swiftly with three legislative proposals. The non disclosure of information about serious offences against a child will become a criminal offence with a penalty of up to five years in jail. This is, essentially, mandatory reporting and while many have argued for it there does appear to be evidence elsewhere that mandatory reporting has overloaded the system to the extent that genuine cases of abuse may often be neglected or put down the queue. The only exception to the new legislation will be if the victim asks that the information not be disclosed. This raises certain questions around confidentiality for professionals who are in receipt of allegations. Another angle is the seal of confession for Catholics which got much media coverage over the summer and featured for a full hour on RTE’s Frontline programme on September 12th.*

*The second piece of legislation, in the pipeline for some time now, will be legislation allowing for the collection and exchange of “soft” and “hard information.” Calls for “soft” information began after the Soham case in the UK. We await with interest the delicate balances to be struck in this area to ensure that it does not become a charter for cranks, personal begrudgers and outright liars. The assurance is that the legislation will protect against such time wasting and damaging possibilities.*

*The third move, long promised by previous governments, is placing the 1999 Children First Guidelines on a statutory footing. On the day the Cloyne report was published (July 13th) the National Director of Children & Family services, Gordon Jeyes, briefed executive members of Social Care Ireland on this. Two days later, on July 15th Minister Fitzgerald launched Children First: National Guidance for the Protection & Welfare of Children. This will be supported by a Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook to be published shortly by the Health Service Executive.*

*At the launch of the new guidance, Minister Fitzgerald referred to the Cloyne report and said that this was “a week where problems of the past were proven to exist in the present” and “where we learned that shame alone does not change behaviour.” She further said that the report from Cloyne “showed us that child abuse and endangerment is not something that happened back in the 50’s or 60’s or 70’s or 80’s.”*

*She reiterated that money ringfenced for the implementation of the Ryan Report (2009) recommendations would not be touched even under government austerity measures. Gordon Jeyes again said that “all staff in Children and Family Services have my unconditional support” while stressing that he was stringently pursuing the lifting of the moratorium on recruiting social care workers for community and residential settings. Nine Aftercare workers are currently being recruited to work regionally. The Assistant Garda Commissioner, Derek Byrne, outlined the levels of support and integration which all involved can expect from the gardai.*

*Another area about which cautious optimism was expressed at the beginning of the year was that of statutory registration for social care workers which is seen as a vital and important additional safeguard toward protecting those in receipt of social care services. Social Care Ireland met the former Minister for Health & Children and got a sense that social care workers may be in the second tranche of professions to be registered. A step further in this area was taken when new social work graduates, the first of the Health and Social Care Professionals 12 bodies, were registered in May. This sets in motion the whole registration process, the beginning of which has been long awaited. So there is hope there on that front that was not evident at the beginning of 2011.*

*A further note of optimism was indicated at year’s beginning with the appointment of Mr Gordon Jeyes as National Director of Children & Family Services in the HSE (Health Service Executive) which is responsible by statute for the delivery of health and social services throughout Ireland. Mr Jeyes was previously the UK’s first Director of Children’s Services. The CURAM editorial welcomed this appointment and Mr Jeyes briefly outlined his vision for an effective service when he opened the Social Care Ireland conference on March 10th, the day Ireland’s new government took office.*

*The HSE has been heavily criticised for its large, unwieldy, bureaucratic structure to which child welfare and protection is seen simply as an adjunct. Children and family services have seldom been scandal or controversy free and Mr. Jeyes’ appointment was seen by many as an unenviable one in a sector that has defied reform. Fortuitously, his hand may have been strengthened when Minister Fitzgerald announced in March that child welfare and protection was to be removed from the HSE to within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. While few would argue against this move its outcomes, obviously, will be judged on results but those results can hardly be more negative than up to now.*

*With the publication of the Cloyne report, the week of July 11th 2011 in Ireland was a sad but significant one. Hopefully, it was a week reflective of the old adage that out of evil can come good. Certainly, the government’s commitment to children in that week, allied to the promise of a Children’s Rights referendum early in 2012, brought together a number of strands that the previous government appeared to be tinkering endlessly with and finding problems with any proposed solutions. This is of course not to say the implementation of all promised will not be fraught with some difficulties but a clear, unequivocal beginning appears to have been made.*

*Some sceptics will point to so many other false dawns in the past when much was promised and little subsequently delivered. That scepticism may be understandable. Yet, if the government’s legislative response to what has gone wrong in the past is carried through, then we may be on a more clear, integrated, accountable path toward protecting vulnerable children and going some way toward realising the aspiration set out in the 1916 Proclamation.*

*This then is a new beginning. There will be difficulties. New legislation and constitutional change of themselves do not guarantee success and there are many examples of where this is the case. Those who work with children in the community or in residential centres in Ireland will face particular difficulties in a system which is more regulated and suffering from long shadows from the past and not so distant past. We cannot forget this. That particular cause and others, in the context of all that happened in the week of July 18th 2011 in Ireland, are ones to wait for another day.*

*So, the cautious optimism suggested in your last edition of CURAM has been bolstered by events on a number of fronts as we head towards the last months of 2011. As always, only time will tell.*

## LESSONS FOR IRELAND?

*The following insightful and thought provoking article appeared in The Sunday Times following the riots in London and other English cities in August this year. Harriet Sergeant has spent years talking to gang members like those who rioted. They tell her only two things will stop a recurrence: jobs and discipline. Are there lessons in this for what is fast becoming a multi ethnic, multi cultural Ireland with the youngest population in Europe and with many of the problems she identifies?*

### **FIXING BROKEN BRITAIN**

Last Tuesday, at the height of the riots, I got a call from Mash, an 18 year old member of a Brixton gang whom I had befriended three years ago. Three of the gang are now in prison. But Mash, Lips and Bulldog, the only white member of the gang were out on the streets last week.

Mash was watching the mob storm an electrical store in Clapham, south London. I could hear screams and the crash of broken glass. I assumed he had followed the others inside. Instead he was staring around in wonder. "It's the funniest thing, Harri, man," he confided. "There's all these people I don't know and it doesn't matter. The only people we worry is the Feds. Today I can go anywhere I like in London." It took me a moment to understand. Gang rivalry usually confines Mash to a couple of streets around his estate. What the riots represented for him was a sudden explosion of freedom. He was mixing with strangers without the fear of being stabbed or shot. Something we take for granted had left him stunned.

Lips, a small 17 year old with a pinched face, pointed out that the looters "were not dressed for it. You can see their faces and they don't care." He, on the other hand, wore an oversize jacket with a hood. He gave an exclamation. Two mini-cabs had drawn up packed with looters. Only in London do you go to a riot in a mini-cab. Bulldog, tall and thin with jittery hands, seized Mash's phone. I told them to go home. "but you don't get to do this every day, Harri. It's wild and exciting. You can do it and you don't get arrested." There was not a police car in sight.

Hours later they rang me again. Things had got "scary." Mash did not mind "hitting a jewellery shop," but now he was calling it a night; "these are places my mum goes to." Bulldog too, was turning in. The couple of laptops he had "found" turned out to be broken and then were stolen by other looters. "They just pinch your stuff," he said in astonishment.

From another part of south London Lips was also disillusioned. He had just watched helplessly as the pawn shop holding his gold chain was burned down.

Last week we saw the unprecedented destruction and mob rule in London. We witnessed a civil war without a cause. We watched terrifying individuals, hoods up, scarves across their faces, burn, loot and kill. With their ferocity and alien values they seem to come from another planet.

As the mess gets cleared and the courts start their process, we are left with troubling questions. What forces have created such a gulf between the mob and us, the broom brandishing majority? How have we come to live in the same society?

Surely the welfare state was meant to protect us from the angry rapaciousness. Something has gone very wrong with our young people when even Colonel Gadaffi is offering us advice. What can we do about it?

I spent a year interviewing black Caribbean and white working-class boys – the very people who have siezed our streets – for a think tank report. During my investigation I met some terrifying individuals.

Sweets, for example, with whom I had tea, was a large man in a track suit and a multitude of platinum chains. As he lumbered across the room to help himself to a box of Maltesers, he explained that no policeman would dare approach him without calling for armed back-up – even for the parking offence he had just committed. Sweets, thankfully, is now in jail.

Men like Sweets are rare. The majority, black or white, live lives similar to Mash, Bulldog and Lips either in their council flats with their single mothers or on their own in a hostel. In his small and dingy room, Lips keeps his clothes in a black rubbish bag. Apart from his mobile phones he has no other possessions other than a towel and a framed photograph, both of which I had given him. Their family lives are disjointed; a father shot, a mother who took too many drugs – "and don't give me no love and affection," mourned Bulldog – or had abusive boyfriends. They are always hungry and steal to eat. Lips and Bulldog live off takeaways. No one cooks for them and their hostels lack cooking facilities. Our friendship began when I took them to a restaurant.

Far from the excitement enjoyed by criminals in films, their days are aimless and dull. "It's boring on the street, doin' nothing all day" Mash said. A friend had got stabbed the week before. "If we had something to do," Lips said, "it would not have happened." They never leave their estate and the streets around it. Bulldog cannot catch a bus because he cannot read the destinations. They could not attend the holiday activities I found for them two summers ago. Lips explained: "there is bare (a lot of) people out on the road lookin' for us." They never go to

the cinema, let alone the theatre. Until I took them, they had never visited a museum or an art gallery. They do not dare use public transport and do not know what an Oyster (travel) card is. When I want to see them I have to drive to their area. They dropped out of school at 13 or 14 and can barely use a computer apart from Facebook. They have a strong moral framework – it just does not happen to be ours. They are only too aware of their situation and it fills them with despair. “I may be out of prison,” Lips said after his gang’s leader had been arrested, “but there is no way out for me.”

None of this is, of course, any excuse for the violence that has set our streets ablaze. Nor is hugging a hoodie an answer. But to set our country to rights we must understand what drives young men like Mash, Lips and Bulldog to crime and mob rule.

Ken Livingstone, the former mayor of London, last week blamed coalition cuts for the riots. He forgot that Mash, Lips and Bulldog grew up under Labour. They are Blair’s babes and the left’s handiwork. It is not poverty that has stunted their lives but the policies of the previous government in three key areas: schools, work and home.

To get an insight into the rage that fuelled the riots, look no further than the statistics on illiteracy that came out the week before. At the age of 14, 63% of white working-class (a euphemism since most of them are jobless like Bulldog) and more than half of the black Caribbean boys have a reading age of seven or less. Almost half of the 16 year olds marauding our streets lack basic qualification in English or maths.

Illiteracy is a powerful driver of bad behaviour. The US Department of Justice concluded that failing to learn to read at school “meets all the requirements for bringing about and maintaining the frustration level that frequently leads to delinquency.” This “sustained frustration” causes “aggressive antisocial behaviour.”

When he was 15, Lips told me: “I feel bad. I don’t feel good in myself. I got no pride in myself. I am angry over every single little thing. It doesn’t take a lot to set me off.”

Illiteracy is a life sentence. Half the prison population has a reading age below that of an 11 year old. Two other members of the gang are semi-literate and are now in prison.

Being clever is almost as much a handicap. Bigs, who was good at science, started truanting when his school abolished streaming as “elitist.” He said: “I got bored. I was given no aspirations.” At 16 he was behind bars for dealing heroin to Oxford students; “other people go from school to university. We go from school to prison.”

It is not difficult nor expensive to teach a child to read. Countries a lot poorer than ours manage. But they use traditional methods shunned by our educational establishment.

Reading failure is just one example of how ideology comes first in our schools – the child is a very poor second. What teenage boys need, according to the headmaster of one of our public schools, is hierarchy, drill, plenty of exercise, competition and discipline (why boys like Mash, Bulldog and Lips join a gang).

Unfortunately, what is well understood by private schools is dismissed by progressive educationists. No teacher should act, said John Dewey, the influential pedagogue and philosopher, as an “external boss or dictator.”

Faced with a fidgety boy like Bulldog or Lips, teachers question what is wrong with the child or blame his background, never their teaching. Bored and frustrated, the majority of boys I interviewed had dropped out of school and into trouble by the age of 14. As Mash said, “School shatters your dreams before you get anywhere.” Even with such dismal educational results, the previous government put the interests of teaching unions above those of the poorest pupils. Just 12 teachers out of a workforce of 450,000 have been suspended for incompetence in the past nine years.

Lips saw it as a conspiracy: “All them little jobs – special needs, social workers, police, prison officers - at the end of the day depend on black boys like us failing. If we don’t keep on failing what would happen to all those high salaries?”

The second factor is the change in the job market. Forty years ago the young men out looting on a weekday would have been at work. They would have left school at 16 and got a job in manufacturing. Now those jobs have gone. Instead, immigration soared under Labour. Young men like Mash, Bulldog and Lips find themselves in competition with skilled and capable immigrants ready to work long hours for low pay. They lose out every time. According to the Office for National Statistics, of the 1.8m jobs created under Labour 99% were taken by immigrants.

Mash briefly moved to Brighton to try to get a job. The local employment agency told him he had no chance because “I was English.” As for motivation, he shrugged. He had seen on television what immigrants could buy for their money back home: “If I could get me a nice little house in south London, three bedrooms, a nice garden on a minimum wage, I’d be motivated too.”

The situation is compounded by the benefits system. Far from lifting these young men out of poverty, it bolts them down for good. I went to court with Mash for council tax arrears after he got laid off from his temporary agency job. The next time he found work, the adviser in the jobcentre told him not to take it. He would be £30.00 a week worse off than if he stayed on benefits.. After that he gave up.

The third place where previous government policy has been a failure is the home. Politicians are demanding that parents control their children. What planet are they living on? Certainly not the same as Mash, Bulldog and

Lips. These young men have left to scramble up any old how. At home and in school, grown-ups are absent or ineffectual. Before going to prison, Tuggy Tug, the gang's leader, said of his friends: "I get more from them that ever I did from my family." His first experience of spending time with adult males had been in jail.

Nearly every one of the young men I interviewed had a young single mother. Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe. Despite the huge amount of evidence of the harm this causes (mothers of children on the "at risk" register, for example, are five times more likely to be single mothers) the Labour government made single motherhood an attractive proposition. Since 1997 a single mother of two children has seen her benefits increase by 85%. We watched the effects of that policy play out on our streets every night last week. To accuse these young girls of being feckless is unjust. They are merely responding to the economics of the situation. They are as much victims of the crisis in our school and the perverse influence of benefits as teenage boys. What future is there for a girl who leaves school without a qualification? Whereas boys take to crime, girls get pregnant. Ministers talk of family breakdown but there is no family to breakdown. More than half of single mothers have never lived with a boyfriend. The state has taken over the role of both husband and employer.

How can the issues that caused the devastating scenes last week be fixed? There are plenty of practical things to be done. Here are just a few examples.

School is where young people spend most of their time and encounter the majority of adults in their life. They are our one opportunity to make a difference to boys like Mash, Bulldog and Lips. This is not going to happen while heads and teachers believe Dewey's dictum that "they are not in school to impose certain ideas or form certain habits in the child". This attitude has had a disastrous effect on boys from a disadvantaged background. One teacher from an inner-city school complained to me: "I have really gifted black boys who can't communicate. You see them struggling. It is quite often the reason they get really upset and frustrated. Yet, he thought it "patronising" to try to correct them. If we want young boys to share our beliefs then we must have the confidence of those beliefs with authority. Unfortunately, too many individuals and institutions have lost that confidence. The young men I interviewed interpreted this failure by authority as a failure to care. Mash recalled: "We got away with making drug deals in class. They knew what we were doing but they did nothing."

Lips said bitterly: "Not one teacher cared about me. You know when someone cares for you because they are on your case". Bulldog summed it up: "They didn't have a lot of respect for us and we didn't respect them."

Apart from school, the one thing that would transform the lives of these young men and stop them taking to our streets is a job. They talk about it all the time: "one hundred per cent in my heart, I want to get working. That's the bottom line," Lips sighed. But a job for them even before the recession and the riots, is as distant a proposition as going to the moon for the rest of us – and they know it. If those young men are to have a stake in our society then we have to create jobs. It really is that simple. Many of the problems over which we wring our hands – drugs, gangs not to mention an awful lot of crime – would melt away. Take one example: single mothers. Mash's older sister, a single mother of 22, admitted she would love to get married: "but all the men I know are in prison or deal drugs. I don't know one man with a job."

We cannot continue to warehouse generation after generation of young men without a repetition of the scenes we saw last week. Nor can we continue to indulge the failing institutions that deal with these young men. Seeing jobcentres and social services from the point of view of Mash, Lips and Bulldog is an eye opener. We wonder why these boys do not buy into our society. It is because their only experience of these civic institutions are places such as jobcentres whose complexity, indifference and incompetence would have made them at home in Stalin's Russia. After three days of trying to get Mash, Lips and Bulldog a job, of queuing, form filling and getting nowhere, I finally exploded. The boys led me out. Lips said: "I told you this place fair gives you a headache. That's why me and the others do the robbin' innit. We don't like coming here."

Recently I met an official from the Department of Work and Pensions. How did it judge the individual jobcentres, I asked. She looked puzzled. "Well they are always very enthusiastic when we visit," she said. I suggested she go with the boys. She looked pained. Finally she admitted the department had no idea which jobcentres actually found jobs or how many. It did not even have an internal league table.

We saw scenes of terrible violence last week. There are always going to be men like Sweets shocking us with their brutality. The tragedy is, we are turning a large number of potentially decent young people into misfits and criminals. Of the six boys I met three years ago, three are already in prison. They are only 18. All are costing us money.

It does not have to be like that. Their lives have been wasted for no good reason. Mash recalled how in primary school "I got all them little reports saying how well I was doing." His mother kept every single one. He sighed: "Those days are gone."

*The Sunday Times and Harriet Sergeant have given permission to publish this article. Harriet Sergeant's book, Wasted – The Betrayal of White Working Class and Black Caribbean Boys is published by the Centre for Policy Studies.*

## WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO SET THE DATE?

*SOMETHING IMPORTANT HAS GONE MISSING.*

*BY CAITRINA CODY*

The trouble is, not many people are looking for it, because not many people know that much about it. But you do. And the people you work with do. And all of you have probably been wondering where this missing thing has gone.

There was a time not too long ago when a lot of people were making a big fuss about it. But lately, with so many competing concerns – the global financial crisis, rising unemployment, the presidential campaigns – questions have been asked about whether it might be better to just let this missing thing go for a while. After all, there are more important things to worry about, aren't there?

Except there aren't. Because what's missing from this year's political calendar is the Children's Referendum, a long-awaited vote that will allow the people of Ireland to change the Constitution to strengthen children's rights. In 2006, the Government made a promise to hold this referendum as a matter of political priority. Five years on it's now 2011, and there are two referenda looming on the horizon. Unfortunately for everyone, but most of all for Irish children, neither of those is the Children's Referendum.

Instead, this October 27th, the Irish people will be asked if they wish to see the wages of judges cut, and the powers of Oireachtas committees extended when it comes to conducting public inquiries. They will also be asked who they want to see represent this country as president. Three worthy issues obviously, but can anyone really claim they are more urgent than the enshrining of children's rights in the Constitution? Clearly not.

But why exactly is it so crucial that this long-awaited referendum is held without further delay? Why are we urging Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald to publish the wording of the amendment and announce a date as soon as possible?

As many people working in the social care sector will know, it's so important that the rights of children, described as "relatively invisible in the Constitution" by children's rights expert Dr. Ursula Kilkelly, are made more secure. The specific protection currently given to the institutions of family and marriage mean that children are left vulnerable in many situations.

Many social care workers will also be aware of the massive barriers that currently prevent the children of married parents from being adopted. This means far too many children spending their entire childhood years in foster care, without the right to be adopted into families and given the security and stability they deserve.

Numerous reports into the abuse of children while in State or institutional care have been published. Thousands of children have been damaged for life, and that's just the abuse survivors who've gone public with their stories. Millions of Euros worth of compensation has been paid out to abuse survivors. What will it take to make the Government name a date?

One vocal supporter of the Children's Referendum is John Lonergan, former Governor of Mountjoy Prison, one of many public figures calling on the Government to get their act together.

*"We were first promised a referendum on children's rights in 2006. This delay is unacceptable. Every day, children in this country are at risk, unheard and unprotected. If we as a nation really do value childhood and children, we have to stand up and be counted, and demand a Children's Referendum now."*

Given his experiences as governor of the biggest prison in Ireland, Mr Lonergan knows better than most people exactly how important it is to give children the best start in life.

*"Childhood is a short and precious time, and this government shouldn't waste any more time in putting the Children's Referendum to the people. It's all very well to say 'times are difficult' or to talk about competing priorities for the government, but what can be more important and more urgent than protecting our children and their future?"*

Now Campaign for Children is asking for your help. You and your colleagues are probably already aware of the failure of the Constitution to adequately protect the rights of children. You're probably already eager for the Government to follow through on their promises and finally set a date for the Children's Referendum.

But we need you to help us spread the word. If we as a country truly care about our children it's time we got this job done. We need the Children's Referendum, and we need it soon. Ask everyone you know to email [signup@campaignforchildren.ie](mailto:signup@campaignforchildren.ie) to join the campaign asking Minister Frances Fitzgerald to finally set a date.

By joining our campaign, you'll be showing the Government that you want the chance to do everything in your power to make Ireland a better place for children. Let's prove once and for all, that as a society, we have learned a painful lesson from the failures of our past.

For more information on the Campaign for Children, contact us: [signup@campaignforchildren.ie](mailto:signup@campaignforchildren.ie)

## ***SOCIAL CARE IRELAND LAUNCH JUNE 20TH 2011***

After months of preparation the amalgamation of the IASCW (practitioners), RMA (managers) and IASCE (educators) as Social Care Ireland was made official on June 20th last when Minister Frances Fitzgerald launched the new association in Dublin. The editorial in this edition of CURAM makes reference to this and the Minister's views as expressed. David Williams, SCI President opened proceedings by briefly outlining the origins and development of the new association and its relevance in today's social care scene with its many challenges and opportunities. Ginny Hanrahan, CORU CEO, spoke on Statutory Registration and Gordon Jeyes, HSE Children & Family National Director contributed with a talk on the concept of public service.

About 70 people of those invited packed into Buswells Hotel in Dublin from all parts of the country. Some present had played their part over many years in the individual organisations and without them SCI would not now be a reality. It was fitting that the day's event was chaired by Professor Pat Dolan of NUIG who for many years was a progressive force in the IASCW and at one stage was its President.

There is a view that no other discipline, in education or social care provision, has managed to integrate three essential and complementary components and this augurs well for the future.

### ***WHERE TO FROM NOW?***

The executive of SCI has now committed itself to consolidating the gains already made by amalgamation by

- Providing a consistent and cohesive voice both privately and publicly to key issues relevant to social care and education;
- Helping bring elements of social care education, management and practice closer together;
- Aiding consultation for outside agencies on the development of the social care profession;
- Following the successes of other professions in providing a common voice for different views of the same discipline.

Practically speaking, a number of initiatives are already underway. These include

Writing to Minister Reilly to advance the registration process;

- Expediting the outcome of the equivalencies working group with CORU and the Department of Health;
- Submitting practical, workable suggestions to the Department of Justice and Law Reform on the National Vetting Bureau Bill 2011;
- Seeking an answer from the HSE Human Resources section on concerns raised regarding the ability of one of its new recruiting agencies to provide the mentoring, supervision, upskilling and oversight necessary for its staff to work effectively with vulnerable clients;
- Working toward ensuring that by the end of its current term in September 2012 all is place to allow for a smooth transition when a new executive takes over.

Please note that membership of any of the three organisations automatically gives membership of Social Care Ireland.

***Current executive of Social Care Ireland: David Power, David Williams, Noel Howard from the IASCW; Kevin Lalor, Denise Lyons, Pat McGarty from IASCE; John Molloy, Sean O'Callaghan, Kieran Campbell from the RMA.***

See [www.socialcareireland.ie](http://www.socialcareireland.ie) Ph 085-8454380 email [info@socialcareireland.ie](mailto:info@socialcareireland.ie)



Social Care Ireland Executive at the 20th of June Launch.

*L-R front: Noel Howard (IASCW), Denise Lyons (IASCE), Minister Fitzgerald, David Williams (IASCW), Kevin Lalor (IASCE).*

*L-R back: Pat McGarty (IASCE), Kieran Campbell (RMA), John Molloy (RMA), David Power (IASCW)*

*Absent: Sean O'Callaghan (RMA)*

# ***UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO SELF INJURE IN SOCIAL CARE SETTINGS***

***BY DAVID WILLIAMS***

This article provides a brief discussion on the issue of young people who self injure in social care settings. The discussion identifies this issue to be extremely challenging for social care workers caring for clients presenting with self injurious behaviour. The article focuses on providing some key definitions of self injury, identifies some key concepts in helping professionals understand the functions and reasons for self injurious behaviour and finally suggests some practical guidelines for social care workers in responding to young people in their care who harm themselves. The underlying ethos of these guidelines being the importance of using a listening, practical and supportive approach in attempting to understand self injury and care for young people who engage in self injurious behaviour.

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The issue of self injury is one that has moved more centrally into the public eye within the last decade with increased media focus on celebrities such as Princess Diana, Amy Winehouse and actress Christina Ricci who have all admitted to intentionally harming themselves (Best, 2006). Often due to a lack of knowledge of the issue, television, radio, magazines and newspapers portray people who self injure as 'freaks' (Levenkron, 1998). This may be attributed to the lack of real understanding of the behaviour being presented.

My interest in the topic of young people in residential care and self injury arose some years when I was, for the first time in my career, faced with the challenge of managing incidents of self injury being displayed by a young person in my care. With over fifteen year's experience of working with young people, I would undoubtedly identify managing these incidents as the most challenging aspect of my social care career to date.

From liaising with some colleagues in the social care field, it seemed they too were facing the challenging issues of managing incidents of young people self injuring and vocalised their struggles in supporting and meeting the needs of the young people in their care during these episodes. The immediate issues for social care staff in working with young people who present with self injurious behaviour seemed to centre on a lack of understanding of the behaviour and also a need for guidance in supporting young people who self injure. This brief article provides an overview of the definitions, functions and causes of self injurious behaviour and also provides some guidelines for workers supporting young people in their care who may be engaging in self injurious behaviour

## ***DEFINING SELF INJURY***

Connors (1996) and Inkle (2007) recognise the complications in attempting to define self injury due to the often interlinking motivations and intentions of the behaviour being exhibited and its' close relationship to other social issues such as body modification and para-suicide. Para-suicide is often confused with self injury, and describes repeated, unsuccessful attempts to commit suicide (Babiker and Arnold, 1997). Self harm and self injury might be seen as the opposite of suicide, as it is often a way of coping with life rather than giving up on it (Health Services Executive, 2007). The Health Services Executive (2007) identify self injury has also been referred to as self harm, deliberate self harm or self mutilation and refers to occasions when a person harm or injures themselves on purpose.

The term self harm describes a wide range of behaviours which have a negative impact on a person's well being (Babiker and Arnold, 1997). These behaviours can be categorised into behaviours which are socially acceptable such as smoking or drinking alcohol, behaviours which have more pathologised motivations such as eating disorders and unsafe drug use or behaviours which can be directly identified as self injury (Inckle, 2007). Babiker and Arnold (1997a) differentiate between self harm and self injury in that with self harming behaviours, the damage is indirect and not the main motivation of the behaviour e.g body piercing or tattooing.

Self injury may be defined as

*'a compulsion or impulse to inflict physical wounds on one's body, motivated by a need to cope with unbearable psychological distress or regain a sense of emotional balance. This act is usually carried out without suicidal, sexual or decorative intent' (Sutton, 2005).*

Aggleton et al. (2000) believes that the deliberate self harmer believes their behaviour will not result in death but is intended to damage body tissues. Self injury or deliberate self harm may also be seen as a way for people to make a statement they find it too difficult to verbalise (Bagley and Ramsay, 1997).

Many writers and researchers appear to use the terms self harm and self injury interchangeably despite Babiker and Arnold's (1997) and Inckle's (2007) distinct differentiation between the two actions. Therefore it is important to clarify that the focus of this discussion lies in the subject of self injury.

### *UNDERSTANDING SELF INJURIOUS BEHAVIOUR*

The understanding of self injury is a very complex and requires much discussion to identify the possible causes for any one individual. The issues are further complicated by the fact that many young people who self injure often do not understand the reasons for such episodes or cannot verbalise the reasons for their behaviours (Sutton, 2005). Levenkron (1998), a psychotherapist with over 20 years experience working with people who self injure, identifies two characteristics which he has witnessed in all the self injurers he has met, a feeling of mental disintegration or inability to think and a rage that can't be expressed or perceived towards a powerful figure(s) in their life, usually a parent. Young people who self injure often have painful experiences in their lives including, bullying, loss of a person close to them, lack of love or affection, neglect by parents/carers, physical or sexual abuse or a serious illnesses which affects how the young person feels about themselves (Lawless, 2008).

Selekman (2006), drawing on his clinical experiences as a family therapist, recognises the most common reasons for young people self injuring being the:

- Quality of attachments between parents and their children i.e. lack of limits/boundaries or too much emotional distance
- Young person's ability to self regulate i.e. their inability to soothe themselves or manage their moods during period of emotional distress
- Inability of young person to 'fit in' with peers or affiliate with negative peer groups. Many teenagers learn to cut or burn themselves from peers and feel compelled to engage in the behaviour to feel accepted by their peer group. (Selekman, 2006: ix)

Strong (2000) notes that some self injure as a cry for help.

'The first time I cut I just wanted people to see how much pain I was in'

(*Melanie, a 16 year old self injurer as quoted in Strong, 2000: 3*)

The Health Services Executive (2007) outlines the following reasons for young people self injuring:

- Cutting makes the blood take away the bad feelings.
- Punishing oneself relieves feelings of guilt and shame.
- Pain can make someone feel more alive if feeling numb inside.
- Self control may provide a sense of control which is not evident in other areas of the young person's life.
- Self injury acts as a form of communication when unable to talk to anyone else or a way of communicating a cry for help.
- Self injury acts as a safety valve, way of relieving tension when emotional pressure becomes too much.

Self injury can sometimes be a hidden secret as young people feel guilt or shame about the behaviour and may be reluctant to wear short sleeve clothes or take off clothing for sports (Lawless, 2008). Some researchers associate self injurious behaviour with depressed feelings where the pain of the injuring acts as a relief and coping mechanism (Spirito and Overholse, 2003). Heatherton and Baumeister (1991) argue the behaviour blocks the trauma of unbearable emotions and acts as a coping mechanism. It is easier for people who self injure to manage the physical pain than the emotional pain they are experiencing and for some this brings comfort and pleasure. This seems to contribute to the addictive nature of self injury of the behaviour. In fact many young people have identified the low feelings following the euphoric high experienced after the episode of self injury. Some identified feeling empty, guilty or angry for not being able to control their impulses so often resort again to self injury for comfort (Selekman, 2006).

### *SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO SELF INJURE*

Carers can provide immediate support to young people who self injure in the following ways

- Recognising signs of distress and finding ways to talk to the young person about their feelings
- Offering sympathy and understanding
- Helping solve problems
- Staying calm and in control of feelings
- Listening to the young person's worries and feelings and taking them seriously
- Accessing professional supports as soon as possible
- Being clear about the risks of self injury and assuring the young person that they will be able to stop self injuring once the underlying problems have been resolved. (HSE, 2007).

Selekman (2006) offers the following guides to professionals or parents responding to young people during incidents of self injury

- Avoid becoming angry and emotionally reactive as this anxiety will further overwhelm the young person.
- Soothe and provide emotional support following incident of self injury. Invite the young person to talk while maintaining eye contact and being a respectful listener.
- Carers should try to understand the precipitants prior to the incident and ask questions such as what does injuring yourself mean to you?, how does it help you?, is there anything stressful in your life at the moment I might be able to help you with?
- Assure the young person that it is ok not to talk but you are available if they need
- Carers should recognise young people may have slips on the road to recovery and following such incidents carers should support the young person getting back on track.
- Carers should recognise outside stressors in the young person's life such as school issues or difficulties with teachers and act as advocates for the young person during this difficult time.
- Carers should celebrate the young person's short and long term successes on managing their self injurious behaviours with perhaps trips to a favourite restaurant or a special privilege.

(Selekman, 2006: xvi)

Practical Guidelines for carers in responding to people who self injure

- Reflect on the range of skills you have to overcome feelings of powerlessness
- Use de-escalation techniques, life space interviews and Individual behaviour management plans to help young people talk about self injury and to provide consistent responses to a young person who is self injuring.
- Use your inter personal, communication and listening skills.
- Be empathetic
- Be clear by your behaviour that they don't need to self injure to be cared for
- Do believe you and your colleagues can deal with crisis incidents
- Do avoid labelling the person
- Help them describe their feelings after the incident and in general
- Avoid blaming
- Do not pressurise the client to stop the behaviour as may drive them to secrecy
- Self injurious behaviour is only one aspect of the person
- Work with person to promote alternative behaviours
- Seek to develop rapport and empathy with the person
- Help person see a future without self injury
- Access relevant professional services if needed

### *CONCLUSION*

This article has provided a brief discussion on the topic of self injury and recognises the extreme importance of social care practitioners striving to fully understand the functions of self injury in order to fully support young people who engage in self injurious behaviour. The discussion outlines the some of the key debates in defining the term self injury and progresses to identify some of the functions and causes of self injurious behaviour. The discussion highlights the importance of workers using a supportive and listening approach in attempting to support young people who use self injury as a coping mechanism and/or in attempt to have their needs met. This is important as it can help young people understand the reasons for using self injurious behaviour and also help them explore more constructive ways in which to manage difficult aspects and stressors in their life.

**David Williams is a former social care worker who currently lectures in social care in D.I.T.**

*Some beautiful memory preserved since childhood is perhaps the best education of all. If a man carries many such memories into life with him he is saved for the rest of his days. Fyodor Dostoyevsky*

## ***SOCIAL CARE GRADUATES IN THE DRUG AND ALCOHOL SECTOR***

Working in the drug and alcohol sector in Ireland is an inspiring, challenging and rewarding experience. Those within the sector provide services to, and work to ensure the rights of people who were once described by the Elizabethan Poor Laws as the ‘undeserving’ poor – a notion which is long dismissed as archaic and unfair, but to this day affects public perceptions and public discourse about people in addiction or people experiencing homelessness. In this sector, among staff and service users, a strong sense of social justice pervades. A belief in the rights of all people to health and well-being, regardless of the source or cause of their ill-health or economic difficulties underlines the provision of these services.

The Ana Liffey Drug Project provides services to people in addiction who are often at their lowest ebb. Support, advice, safe space and clean injecting equipment are just some of the services provided. Progression Routes is the Ana Liffey Drug Projects ‘policy to practice’ initiative. We work on a peer-to-peer basis, supporting other drug and alcohol services across the country by providing a structured support programme to work towards a quality standards framework. This includes policy-writing, facilitating information, training and seminars, as well as on-going support to service managers by phone or email. We also respond to need in the sector and bridge higher policy to practice through the development of new and innovative pilot initiatives such as the Community Detox Initiative (a structured out-patient detoxification process), and supporting the development of the National Care and Case Management pilot.

Altogether there are 26 people employed in the Ana Liffey, with around 25% of these being Social Care graduates who are represented at all levels in the organisation. This is by no means unique. Within the sector and across Ireland, social-care graduates are employed in drug-treatment, drop-in centres, needle-exchanges, detox services, rehabilitation services, along with a variety of other services.

The large number of social care graduates in the sector who are highly respected in their profession is testament to the great foundation that their degree has given them. The increased emphasis on professional practice across the lifespan of the individual and across all areas of social care work in social care education means that employers in the drug sector are increasingly looking to graduates of relevant degrees, with social care as a major feeder degree programme into the sector. However for those of us who were excited and passionate about working in this sector, many of us experienced a sense of mild frustration and isolation when we were at college. Course material, lecturers and theory to practice anecdotes rarely referred to people in addiction, homelessness, prison or whatever group we hoped to work with. The care of children, people with disabilities and elderly people was not part of our plan after graduation, and yet by virtue of course content and delivery we felt we were expected to travel one of these paths.

It is very encouraging to see the new “Drug Problems, Policies and Approaches” module included in the degree programme in DIT Mountjoy Square. In the future, targeted modules within the degree which relate specifically to the development of skills around drug/alcohol interventions and interagency working would be hugely beneficial to students who wish to follow this career path. Where the paths of graduates continue to shape the face of social care degree programmes both the caring sector and the educational environment will benefit.

### ***NOTE:***

For those students considering placement in the drug sector or similar, Progression Routes have developed a resource which could be invaluable. A comprehensive policy library ([www.progressionroutes.ie](http://www.progressionroutes.ie) - in the QuADS section) provides guidelines to staff teams on a range of issues from Health and Safety, Child Protection, Needle Exchange Provision to Staff Supervision procedures. All of the policies have been developed by the Progression Routes team (2/3rd's of whom are Social Care graduates) and reviewed by experts in the field.

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*Twenty years from now you will regret more the things you didn't do than those you did do. Mark Twain*

## ***A GOOD NEWS STORY: FOUNDATIONS***

***BY JACQUI DURNIN, SOCIAL CARE TEAM LEADER***

We have all heard of cases such as Baby P and ask ourselves how such horrendous things like this can happen in this day and age to our most vulnerable in society when we as both the adults and workers are meant to ensure that they are protected and safeguarded at all times. From this case, Foundations decided to look into some statistics in relation to child protection and children in the care of the state in Ireland.

From the most recent figures compiled by the HSE in the supplementary data in June 2011, there were:

- 6,175 young people in the care of the state.
- 1,051 child protection cases of abuse reported
- 64 children placed with an Emergency Out of Hours placement service
- 7,466 families were also in receipt of a family support service.

These figures highlight the need for services in this country at whatever cost to the state. As the Child Care Act 1991, states that 'the welfare of the child is paramount'. Because of the recent economic downturn I ask you are we still upholding this principle?

Peter Connolly was just a 17-month old boy who died in London after suffering more than 50 injuries over an eight-month period, during which he was repeatedly seen by Haringey Children's services and NHS health professionals. There are many questions to be asked here but the most important are how do we stop things like this happening in the future? And is it just a matter of time before we see a case like that in this country?

In interviews conducted on August 29th 2011 by The Irish Times, social work teams in several parts of the State said they were being forced to ignore potentially serious reports of suspected abuse or neglect because of heavy workloads and under-staffing. Social work files as seen by Carl O'Brien from The Irish Times in August show that hundreds of urgent child protection reports are not being assessed or followed up, leaving many young people at high risk of abuse or neglect. Ineke Durville of the Irish Association of Social Workers stated in the same article "cuts to early intervention services like family support – which may have helped vulnerable parents to cope – increase the risk of children presenting as "emergency" cases."

So how do we manage this economic situation and prevent cases like Baby P? Through early intervention and support for Mothers.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce Foundations Young Mothers Unit, an exciting early intervention and preventative service for young mothers and their children. Foundations caters for up to six, 12-23 year old expectant or young mothers and their children on an emergency short term or medium to long term basis. The aim and motivation for establishing this new service came from having worked in social care for many years and coming across many cases where perhaps if there had of been an earlier intervention there may have been better outcomes for our young people. We aim to strike a balance between supporting young mothers and helping them reach their potential; while continuing to protect the welfare of their young children. We also see this as a preventative service where it will combat very young children being separated from their mothers and being taken into care. Foundations recognises the difficulties that come with becoming a new parent and also the difficulties that our young mothers may also have from their own lives and therefore strives to empower them to realise their own potential as positive parents to their child's life in a supportive and safe environment in order to achieve independence and stability as a family unit.

In 2005, there were 2,427 births to girls aged from 15-19 years of age which accounted for 3.9% of all births for that year which is significantly high, this trend has continued with a recent study completed by EPIC, 14% of young girls in care were expecting or already had a child. We feel that there is a gap in this area and realise that social workers are already over stretched and feel that we can offer something very different which focuses on the importance of family and empowering young mothers who are struggling in their current circumstances in a cost effective manner.

Foundations consists of 6 private self-contained, semi-independent suites each with its own kitchenette/dining/living space and a separate bedroom with an en suite bathroom. We also have one unit which is fully wheelchair accessible. This will allow for staff to support the young mothers to become fully self-reliant and develop independent living skills in a dignified and private manner. Private space allows for the opportunity to re-establish relationships in a safe home-like environment. We acknowledge that there are many variations to a family and for this reason we want to promote the inclusion of all people involved in both the young mother's and child's life, this may include the child's father, grandmother and wider extended family. To allow the young mothers the space and opportunity for peer support, there is a wider part of the house which consists of a large communal living/dining area, and an indoor baby development and toddler play room. There is a room dedicated to private family access and any necessary professional meetings. At the rear we have a private garden and play area. There are also laundry facilities and private parking.

We are situated in the Drumcondra area so it is extremely accessible to educational, health, religious and leisure

facilities.

Our service takes on an individualised multi-dimensional approach to include many different aspects of each young mother and their child's life.

The main aspects of this includes our assessment. The assessment we have chosen to use is called **"ASSESSING FAMILIES IN COMPLEX CHILDCARE CASES USING THE FAMILY ASSESSMENT"** which was developed in the Greater Ormond Street Hospital in the UK . The assessment focuses on three areas which include assessing the child's needs, assessing the mother's capacity to respond to those needs while taking into consideration the wider family environment. From this we will complete a plan and review in conjunction with the mother and all key people in the family's life.

Our main focus during this time will be to focus on supporting our young mothers through their journey by developing and implementing individual programmes with them. Foundations programmes include parenting programmes in order to help them cope and learn new skills. We also focus on other programmes including sexual health (to include 'Delay training', Teenage Health Initiative, Squashy Couch Programme), Child Development, Independent Life Skills, Self- Esteem (Deborah Plummer Programme), Anger Management, Diet and Nutrition, Copping On Programme.

Foundations places an emphasis on integrating the young mother back into society alongside the importance of their attendance in education or possible employment. Foundations will be providing practical child care support for the young mothers during the day to facilitate their attendance.

Foundations also recognise that moving on from our service does not mean the end of care and therefore offers aftercare to ensure stability while our young mothers settle into their new lives.

When it is not deemed necessary or appropriate for a young mother and her child to have residential placement with Foundations we can offer Outreach Support. This involves a member of our qualified and experienced team identifying needs and working with young mothers within their own home.

We chose the name 'Foundations' because we see ourselves as the basis for the groundwork needed to achieve something far greater, it also stands for strength and accomplishment which we believe all our young mothers can achieve once guided in the right direction.

We will be having an open day on September 29th from 12-4pm to allow people to come and have a look around and get some more information. If this is something that you are interested in please contact us for details of our address or if you would just like some more information on our service, please do not hesitate to contact us on 0851300397 or foundationsymu@gmail.com

## ***NEWS & VIEWS***

### ***IAYPIC BECOMES EPIC***

In June the Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) changed its title to Empowering People In Care. (EPIC). This followed wide ranging consultation after it was found the title IAYPIC had a number of disadvantages. The organisation is now over ten years old and at a time of much discussion and debate about children in care it plays a vital role in advocacy, research and consultation.

EPIC is located at 7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7. Phone 01-8727661 Email is info@epiconline.com and website is www.epiconline.ie

### ***MEDICAL CONSENT 16-18 YEAR OLDS***

Social care workers occasionally have to deal with the sensitive and acute area of consent when dealing with young people under 18.

In July the Law Reform Commission issued recommendations on treatment and consent for those aged between 16 and 18 years. The most common area that gives rise to discussion for this age group is in the area of contraception. However, the commission's recommendations go much further and deal with consent to accept or decline healthcare and treatment and also medical confidentiality. On occasion, young people under 18 may have different views and conviction than their parents or guardians about how they would want to be treated in the case of serious or life threatening illnesses. The report recommends that 16-18 year olds be allowed to make decisions in this area but refusal to accept lifesaving treatment would involve an application to the High Court to seek a ruling on the validity of such a refusal.

Regarding children under 16 the commission suggests that while such children's views should be taken into consideration, they would not be considered capable of giving or withholding consent. In exceptional cases however the commission did envisage circumstances where children under 16 may have the maturity to give consent and be guaranteed confidentiality. It advises on areas of consideration that doctors should take account of in deciding the capacity of under 16s to make such decisions.

Further details on The Law Reform Commission website.

### ***DISTURBING VIEWS ON MENTAL HEALTH***

Since the 1970s the number of children with mental health problems in Britain has doubled. More than one million children now have a clinically recognisable disorder such as depression or anorexia.

A survey by the online therapy service Mentaline.com has found in a survey of over 1000 children between 12 and 17 that a third of the respondents admitted faking a serious disorder to emulate celebrities. 1 in 10 thought mental illness was “trendy” and half thought it made people “unique.” 16 per cent thought celebrity sufferers made mental illness conditions “fashionable.”

The top five faked problems were – eating disorders (22%), self harming (17%), addiction (13%), depression (12%) and bipolar disorder (9%).

*See article by David Williams on Self Harm elsewhere in this edition of CURAM.*

### ***SUMMER SCHOOL DISCUSSES REFERENDUM ON CHILDREN’S RIGHTS***

The Merriman Summer School in August heard a number of speakers being highly critical of the new government’s failure to set a date for a constitutional amendment referendum. Referring to the fact that no date had yet been set, former TD, Mary O’Rourke, who chaired the all party Oireachtas committee on the constitutional amendment, said that “Until we do it, to my mind all the rest is just talk.” Carl O’Brien of The Irish Times and Maria Corbett of the Children’s Rights Alliance also spoke of how the constitutional change would positively affect the lives of children. Mr. O’Brien stated that the amendment “could change the way politicians, public servants and judges think about children’s rights, because they would have to apply those principles in their decision making.”

*See article Campaign for Children by Caitrina Cody elsewhere in this edition of CURAM.*

### ***REGULATING REHAB AND ADDICTION CLINICS***

“There are people out there practising who would not get to first base with our organisation.” Thus did Donal Kiernan, spokesperson for the Irish Association of Alcohol and Addiction Counsellors (IAAAC), refer to the lack of regulation applying to his profession. It appears that practically anyone can call themselves a psychotherapist or counsellor and practise as such in Ireland without being answerable to any regulatory body. He points to the clear message of recent years that regulation in so many aspects of Irish life was of the light touch variety which led to scandals and bad practice. It also appears that different clinics are regulated by different accrediting bodies which suggests different standards apply. Moves are afoot in the UK to have all who call themselves counsellors or psychotherapists registered by next year. We could do worse than follow suit here.

### ***INSPECTION (UNANNOUNCED!) 1883 STYLE***

Under the chairmanship of Lord Aberdare, The Reformatory and Industrial Schools Commission heard evidence from a number of relevant individuals in the early 1880s in London and Dublin. The following extract refers to the Inspector of the schools in Ireland, Mr John Lenatigne’s reply in a session at Dublin Castle in 1883 when asked if he gave notice of his inspections and what procedure he used when he carried out his inspections.

*My visits are always by surprise, unless I wish to see some particular officer, or to make some inquiry. I frequently go by train after office hours and visit the schools on the following morning, so as to return home that evening.*

*My usual course of proceeding when I visit is first to see whether any of the defects pointed out in my previous inspection have been remedied. I ascertain whether the buildings are properly heated, and the inmates clean, tidy and their hair nicely kept and their general appearance showing signs of good health.*

*I examine the food supplied to the children and I see that the clothing is warm and sufficient. I examine the beds, closets, the baths and other appliances and the general sanitary arrangements and ventilation of the buildings. I visit the infirmary and see the inmates are well looked after.*

*... Consumption still continues to be the main scourge of these institutions, which I attribute to the low vitality of the children, caused by the misery and destitution they endure before they enter the schools.*

*I examine the trades workshops, the laundry, bakehouse, gas house if there is one; and being aware of all the faults of each school, I try to have them remedied; but I have unfortunately no statutable power to compel the manager to incur expense so that the worst schools receive equal allowances from the Treasury with the best. I can only resort in extreme cases to the measure of recommending the school to be closed. I have not hesitated to adopt this measure where necessary; five schools have been gazetted as closed on my recommendation since I came into office, and the manager of another has resigned the certificate he had for boys and one for girls.*

*To leave the world a bit better...to know that one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded. Ralph Waldo Emerson*

**FILM REVIEW:*****N.E.D.S. (NON EDUCATED DELINQUENTS) (18 CERT)******REVIEW BY RACHEL SHEEHY & DAVID O'BRIEN***

The subject of developing social services is a significantly topical issue nowadays in practically every country. The importance of this is evident in maintaining a sense of stability in society and, likewise, the underdevelopment of these services therefore may lead to societal breakdown as portrayed in the hard-hitting drama NEDS based in 1970s Glasgow. The film chronicles the life of John McGill, a “wee lad” who makes the transition from a studious, high achieving teenager into a thug who becomes heavily involved in extreme delinquent behaviour, particularly gangland violence. Conor McCarron depicts the character of John McGill with a fierce sense of intensity and depth, and commands a new found respect after establishing himself as a promising up and coming talent.

The central themes explored throughout highlight the absence of social supports and services in the lives of the youths of Glasgow that contribute to their refusal to conform to societal norms which leads them to resort to delinquency. The educational system is displayed in an extremely negative light which leads to young John McGill abandoning his consistent work ethic up to this point. John’s teacher himself accurately portrays a figure who exploits his position of authority to dominate the class and discourage John from striving to achieve his full potential. An example would include when he singles John out as “a swot” in front of the entire class, thereby inciting self-consciousness and perhaps paving the way for John’s eventual spiral into more violent ways. Any factors which may counteract this are absent, such as a supportive family or positive peer relationships, making for an extremely realistic interpretation of a youth “gone wrong”.

NEDS is, as a whole, a controversial picture, not only due to the subject matter but for the countless scenes and depictions of graphic acts of gangland violence. Scenes include clear detail of a youth dropping a stone slab on another youth’s head, beatings with various weapons and stabbings. As a consequence, universal appreciation will not be guaranteed, however, these illustrations bring the work a definitive substance that provides the base for some hard-hitting realism that is achieved throughout. Alongside this, there are moments where the violence dissipates and yet the atmosphere of societal unrest remains as portrayed by peripheral characters. A scene which in particular captures the ongoing sense of threat felt by law abiding members of society is one that involves John seeking refuge from a rival gang in the area. The female resident who accommodates John states that the area was not always like this and admits she fears leaving the confinements of her house after dark.

Overall, NEDS perseveres as a dark and sinister drama that approaches its subject matter at an angle that will not appeal to everyone but that manages to capture an in-depth sense of realism that will pose a challenge to those with even the strongest of stomachs. A worthwhile picture that will particularly interest anyone linked with the field of social services, it is carried well by a solid cast and a powerful storyline which may not be for the faint-hearted. Although on occasion quite graphic and extremely violent, it manages to pull off a realistic representation of the detrimental impact that inadequate social services may have on a society.

***Rachel & David are third year social care students in D.I.T.***

***BOOK REVIEW “THE GODLESS BOYS” (PICADOR 2011)******BY NAOMI WOOD      REVIEW BY RICHIE HAYES***

In this uneven and somewhat disappointing debut novel by Naomi Wood there is a short but chilling scene reminiscent of the recent violent scenes from Britain where a group of menacing teenagers taunt a woman before striking her in the face with a rock. The backdrop to this violent event is a banished island community struggling with a gang of marauding youths who have taken control.

The Godless Boys is a dystopian tale about a young girl’s search for her long-lost mother. 17 year old Sarah Wicks had long believed her mother mysteriously disappeared ten years ago following an adulteress affair but lately learns that this may not be the truth. The year is 1989, the country is England and there has been four decades of discrimination and persecution by religious zealots of its secular minority. In retaliation, some non-believers form the Secular Movement who are responsible for successive waves of bombings and church burning throughout the 50’s and 70’s. This culminated in the Sunday Agreement which banished all non-believers from the mainland to an (unnamed) island to the north of the country. The island is bleak and forlorn and controlled by a teenage gang who call themselves the Malades. This group of thugs (not dissimilar to the drooges of “A Clockwork Orange”) terrorize locals suspected of holding beliefs in God which they refer to as ‘Gots’.

Meanwhile, its close-knit inhabitants rely on weekly boatloads of alms from the mainland and a diet of locally-caught fish for survival. It is on one such boat that the stowaway Englander Sarah Wicks arrives on the island in

search of her mother. However, it is not long before she comes to the attention of teenager Nathaniel Malraux, one of the founding leaders of the Malades whose initial suspicions of this outsider become tempered as he becomes sympathetic to Sarah's tale. Over the following days Nathaniel finds himself falling in love but no sooner is their relationship blossoming than news of his clandestine meetings with Sarah find the ear of his fellow Malade Jake. And so, as we see the victim becoming the aggressor and as the ordinary islanders struggle for meaning in their miserable existences, the book asks the question "if you were forced to live with faith or without, which would you choose?"

If you find it implausible that post-war England suddenly descended into an ultra-fundamentalist theocracy and manages to remain so by 1986 then you are not alone. You may also wonder how this island of refugees manages to evolve this curious northern English in such a short space of time. That said, Wood is a good writer with serious intent and she has a good ear for the nuances of how real communities function. Her portrayal of the teenage gang mind-set and its fragile dynamic of codes, loyalties and rivalries is insightful on a number of levels. For instance, the companionship between Nathaniel and Jake starts to disintegrate not simply because he is in the company of a 'Got' but envious that Nathaniel has the girl. In the scene where the woman is cruelly taunted and struck Wood manages to describe in a short few paragraphs how gangs can exercise their enjoyment of power and engage in casual sadistic fun. Nathaniel's mother's blissful denial of wrongdoings hints to a hidden societal problems while the the author's general descriptions of deprivation and isolation reflects the inevitable societal woes.

However, disappointingly, the the novel's central and much trumpeted question of what one would choose if being forced to live with or without faith is ( if the question makes any sense at all) a non-runner. We only learn about what life is like on the islands and life there is crap indeed. It is therefore not surprising that some of the inhabitants would choose to leave (as some would like to do). Are we to imply that they might 'choose' to do so on account of the non-belief imposed upon them by the gang of youths? Their motivation does appear to be, to coin a cliché, more to do with socio-economic pressures than anything else. If the author had something else in mind, (perhaps that the rabidly theocratic England is a somewhat more spiritually or morally enlightened place to be) it fails to reach the reader. Certainly, this one anyway.

Naomi Wood is a promising writer and the Godless boys is a brave first novel. There are moments of true descriptive brilliance in her writing and if you are happy to suspend belief ( excuse the pun) and buy-into this rather implausible dystopian tale you might just manage to enjoy it. I couldn't and I didn't.

*Richie Hayes is a social care worker in St. Joseph's School, Ferryhouse, Clonmel.*

## **BOOK REVIEW: 'ROOM' (PICADOR 2010)**

**BY EMMA DONOGHUE REVIEW BY DENISE LYONS**

Jack is a five year old boy imprisoned with his 'Ma', in an eleven foot square, garden shed with a skylight window. Jack was born in this 'Room', and it is his entire world. To Jack, nothing else exists on the outside, and to him, the images he see's on TV are not real. The story is portrayed through Jack's eyes, and begins by presenting us with a picture of daily living in this room. We are given the impression that life is essentially solitary, with the very basic rations provided by 'Old Nick', on his random visits to the room. Even within the horror of this situation the simple acts of love and kindness between Mother and Son are evident. Although fictional, this book touches on the impact of deprivation on the physical, emotional, and social needs of children living in limited environments. The author also explores the range of possible emotions experienced by a young woman imprisoned, threatened and sexually abused. A central theme she explores is the protectiveness of this Mum towards her child, over her own needs and survival. Room also explores the immense challenge of returning to a normal life after captivity, for both the Mum who remembers life before, and a five year old boy arriving in this alien world called 'outside'. Interestingly, we are able to see our world from his fresh and unique perspective.

Unfortunately similar real life stories do exist, for example Elizabeth Fritzl's was kept in a secret basement for eight years with three of the seven children she conceived. Fusako San, a Japanese woman, was kidnapped at the age of ten, and held in captivity from 1990 until the year 2000. Natascha Kampusch was imprisoned for more than eight years, until she escaped on the 23rd of August 2006. Although Room is a fictional story, it was difficult not to imagine the possible life experiences of these real women and their children.

Overall, a remarkable and thought provoking read, and it is not surprising that Room was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize in 2010.

*Denise Lyons is a former social care worker who currently lectures in Social Care in Blanchardstown I.T.*

*There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle. Albert Einstein*



Above: Photo shows Margaret Gilmore, Social Care Lecturer at Sligo IT who received the Orcard Childrens Services award at the Social Care Ireland Annual Conference in Athlone. in March this year. The award was given to Margaret because of her outstanding contribution to Social Care in Ireland over many years. The award was presented by Pat McGarty, President of IASCE.



Above: At the Social Care Ireland Launch on June 20th, 2011.

L - R: Professor Pat Dolan, NUIG; Ginny Hanrahan, CEO of CORU; Gordon Jeyes, HSE National Director of Child and Family Services; David Williams, President Social Care Ireland.



Left: David Williams, President of Social Care Ireland and Francis Fitzgerald, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, at the Social Care Ireland Launch on June 20th.

# “Social Care in 2012 - Taking Stock”

## *Social Care Ireland 2012 Annual Conference*

*Kilkenny*

*Wednesday/Thursday,  
March 28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup>, 2012*

Abstracts of less than 300 words for workshop presentations related generally to above theme should reach Ann Marie Shier at [annmarie.shier@ittdublin.ie](mailto:annmarie.shier@ittdublin.ie) or Vicky Anderson at [ANDERSOV@itcarlow.ie](mailto:ANDERSOV@itcarlow.ie) by Friday, December 2nd 2011.

Further details will be posted when available on Social Care Ireland website and brochure and booking form will accompany IASCW newsletter in late January 2012.

Conference Committee; Ann Morahan & Noel Howard (IASCW), Ann Marie Shier & Vicky Anderson (IASCE) and David Durney & Bernadette Manning (RMA).