

Issued by The Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB)

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INTERNATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE EXPERT EXPLAINS HOW TO HALVE ARRESTS

A proven approach to halving arrests of young offenders was highlighted today at a conference *More than Rhetoric: Improving Outcomes for Children and their Families through Inter-agency Working*, organised by the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB).

The conference included national and international experts discussing how inter-agency co-operation can affect better outcomes for children at risk.

A juvenile justice expert outlined how implementing an inter-agency model in a region in Florida, USA, led to a decrease in juvenile arrests by 41% from 1998 to 2007 and reduced the number of re-offenders by 78%.

The Miami-Dade County Juvenile Services Department in Florida changed the juvenile arrest facility into a Juvenile Services Department (JSD). This enabled the County to use successful juvenile justice tools and systems to help children at risk.

Director of the Juvenile Services Department, Wansley Walters, explained, "The ultimate objective was to reform an active, functioning system. With this reform, juvenile arrests decreased to almost half from 1995, re-arrest has dropped 71% in ten years, and population in the detention centre for detained juveniles has dropped from over 300 a day to around 100. Miami-Dade County is the only major urban area in the United States to have a consistent reduction in juvenile arrests since 2001.

Ms Walters explained that the policy and politics of changing a way that a community works with at risk children was a key element to the process.

"In a time of limited resources, it is possible to provide an alternative to the way of dealing with an entire population of juvenile offenders. We did not just want to process arrested kids.

"We wanted to be a research centre and create a new system to keep these children out of the old systems, the ones that were not working. So we kept proposing ways to do something different with certain juveniles to the work group, and if it involved the schools and the judges and the prosecutors, we would work out the details and processes with them. At the end of the day, it is critical to have "buy-in" and consensus when you have a symbiotic system which is what we must all achieve".

The Chief Executive of CAAB, Aidan Browne welcomed Ms Walters approach to juvenile justice and explained how lessons can be learned in Ireland. "This is a key example of how children benefit from the enhanced and integrated

services available as a result of inter-agency working, bringing various services together to achieve better outcomes for at risk children”.

Also speaking at the conference, International Child and Youth Care Consultant working with Foster Care Associates, Leon Fulcher, highlighted the challenges of the State’s health and social service professionals who place children in out-of-home care.

Mr. Fulcher explained, “Personalised care that is wrapped around each looked after child or young person is required if quality standards are to be improved. Irish children need just as much personalised care as children living anywhere else in Europe. Compliance with policy standards is not enough. Irish HR practices requiring the appointment of temporary staff and the transfer of state-service employees without due regard for carer performance records require a significant re-think.

“What may work satisfactorily across a range of civil servants occupations simply does not work in the care of troubled and troublesome children. Personnel managers and service managers – as well as policy makers – in Ireland need to wake up to the ways in which contemporary practices leave them vulnerable to legal action directed at vicarious liability for breaches in their duty of care.

“Local solutions achieved through meaningful private-public partnerships in different parts of Ireland offer some scope for remedy. It is in this sense that the CAAB is strategically well placed to articulate issues such as these using more than rhetoric to influence inter-agency working and care quality benchmarking. Developmental outcomes should not be driven by civil servants – no matter how well-meaning – who shape care policies without regard for the realities of out-of-home care with looked after children on a day-to-day basis”.

Notes to the editor:

- The Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) advises the Minister for Children in the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC), on policy issues relating to the effective delivery of services to children under the Child Care Act 1991 and Children Act 2001.
- The Child Care (Amendment) Act, 2007 changed the name of the Special Residential Services Board to the Children Acts Advisory Board and broadened the functions of the Board to that of an overall advisory body.
- The Board’s functions include providing advice to the Ministers for Children on policy issues relating to the co-ordinated delivery of services (and effectiveness) to at risk children and young people, specifically under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Children Act 2001.

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