

RNIB NI's response to the Children's Services Co-operation Bill

RNIB Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the clauses as outlined in the Children's Services Co-operation Bill.

RNIB NI works to support children and adults with sight loss and enable them to live full and independent lives in an inclusive and fair society. We provide a range of services for people living with sight loss including a benefits advice service and practical support to people who have recently been diagnosed with sight loss, specialised IT support and activity programmes. In addition to our services we campaign for the promotion and improvement of the rights of blind and partially sighted people. We have 72 staff working for blind and partially sighted people across Northern Ireland and 272 volunteers engaged in supporting our work.

The estimated total of blind and partially sighted children aged 0-18 in Northern Ireland is 1708 (NI Census 2011). RNIB NI currently supports 800 blind and partially sighted children and young people and their families across Northern Ireland through Family Support, Transition & Youth Services. Our vision is that children and young people with sight loss will have the same rights and opportunities to fulfil their potential as their sighted peers (please see Appendix for more detail on RNIB NI's Children and Families Services and our Youth Service).

- RNIB NI concurs that integrated working in relation to the development and implementation of children's services in Northern Ireland is paramount to ensure effectiveness in practice and better outcomes.
- We support Clause 1 of the Bill which makes it a statutory duty for Government departments to co-operate and work together effectively in devising and implementing cross cutting strategies.

Royal National Institute of Blind People

Patron Her Majesty The Queen • **President** Dame Gail Ronson DBE

Chairman David Mann • **Director** David Galloway

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- While it is fundamental that Government Departments work together to further achieve the six high level outcomes from its children's strategy (A ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016), we would also stress the importance of such departments working with voluntary organisations, such as RNIB particularly in light of the children services we deliver (see Appendix). It is important to note that RNIB NI is represented on the Disability and Transition sub-group within the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.
- Clause 2: RNIB NI supports the need for the production and publishing of a co-operation report.
- Clause 3: Considering the current economic climate and the severe cuts a number of Government departments are facing over the next number of years, RNIB NI support the enabling power to pool budgets and share resources. Such an approach will create opportunities for early intervention and preventative spending.
- Clause 4: RNIB NI supports the need to amend the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to reflect the clauses within the Bill.
- Clause 5: RNIB NI agree that the Bill should align its definition of children and young people in accordance with the meaning as prescribed in The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.
- In conclusion, RNIB NI would welcome the opportunity to present our views and potential involvement in the outworking of this legislation as well as to discuss in more detail the children services we deliver in Northern Ireland.

Appendix

Children and Families Service: supports children and young people from birth to adulthood. They receive the majority of referrals from the Eye Care Liaison Officers based in all eye clinics across Northern Ireland. They also take self referrals and referrals from other agencies such as Social Workers, Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired and other voluntary organisations.

When a family is referred they make contact with the parents/carers and carry out a full assessment of need. They provide advice and onward referral to both statutory and voluntary agencies. They also provide the family with a range of events from parents and tots groups, family fun days, family weekends, confidence and skills building activities for children including one to one tuition or music therapy for children with sight loss and complex needs/additional disabilities. These are regular events across Northern Ireland and are organised in partnership with a range of organisations including Angel Eyes NI, SureStart, Mencap and the National Deaf Children's Society.

In 2014 RNIB NI updated the "Looking Ahead: A Parent's Guide" booklet. The booklet is a roadmap of services for children and young people with sight loss and their families across Northern Ireland and both statutory and voluntary organisations provided their input. Topics covered include; registration, the eye clinic, statutory services and voluntary organisations.

As children reach school age they provide events focusing on education. They hold parent advice workshops with speakers from the Special Educational Needs Advice Centre (SENAC) and the Children's Law Centre. These events are held in partnership with Angel Eyes NI.

The Realise Project: supports children and young people aged 8-20 years old at key transition points in their lives; primary to post primary and post primary to further/higher education and employment. Through this project they provide swimming or music lessons for children as well as technology sessions, careers sessions and the IT Qualification, through workshops and on a one to one basis. The Realise Project residentials are comprised of activities designed to build skills and confidence in young people including an option to undertake the Bronze, Silver or Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award.

The Realise Project is funded by the Big Lottery Fund under their Empowering Young People Programme

Raising awareness of sight loss and eye health among children and young people is a key activity in the Children and Families Service. They provide this training in schools and youth clubs across Northern Ireland and currently reach 1500-2000 children per year.

The RNIB Youth Service: works with young blind and partially sighted people aged 16-25 to increase their independence, confidence and life skills through a range of programmes, activities and events. They run a series of residentials at the chalet based at the Share Holiday Village which include workshops on confidence, assertiveness and daily living skills.

Having good mobility is an important factor in assessing a person's level of employability. The role of teaching habilitation/rehabilitation for this age group is done by HSC Trust rehabilitation workers. If RNIB are supporting someone in employment or to get into employment and they require mobility training in their work environment or routes to and from work, then we refer to the appropriate rehabilitation worker in their Trust area.