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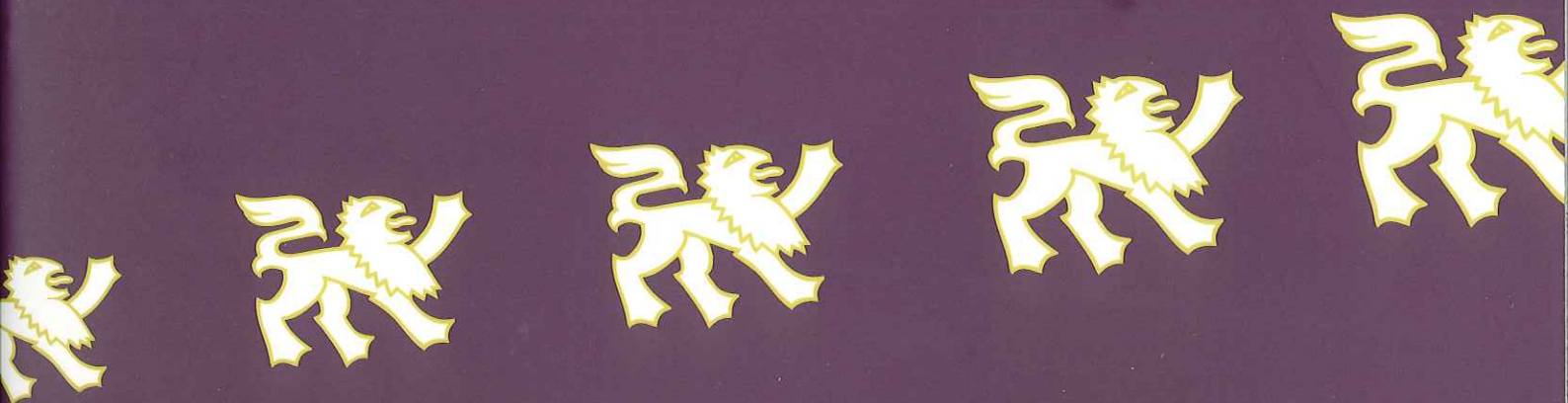
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Social Partnership and Children's Services

The potential of local partnership programmes for developing children's services in Ireland

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The Children's Research Centre

acknowledgments

the children's research centre

The Children's Research Centre was set up in Trinity College Dublin in September 1995. The Centre operates a programme of research and evaluation of children's programmes and services with a particular concern for projects in disadvantaged communities. This paper has emerged out of this work.

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summary

In the last decade, social partnership, whereby government, employers, social partners and the voluntary (non-governmental) sector agree a national consensus for macro-economic and social planning, is widely attributed as contributing to the success of the Irish economy. This partnership was extended to the local level as a way of tackling growing social exclusion and of contributing to reform of the administrative system, particularly in relation to local government (housing, planning, environment) and local economic development. In the meantime, the Irish child welfare system struggles through perennial crises with little evidence of confident political and administrative leadership. In the midst of crisis there are indications that social partnership has provided new openings for child welfare development, at both local project levels and in relation to new inter-agency initiatives. This paper considers the potential of the social partnership approach for developing a new drive towards reforming the child welfare system and for restoring public confidence in its ability to both serve and protect children.

social partnership and combating exclusion

children's services – a system in crisis

Despite the passing of new Irish legislation (Child Care Act, 1991) and pending new legislation on juvenile justice (Children's Bill, 1996), and, in the wake of various reports on child abuse scandals (Department of Health, 1996a; Keenan, 1996; McGuinness, 1993), the Irish child welfare system remains in crisis. The government's gloomy admission in its presentation to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that it could not raise the age of criminal responsibility to over ten years because of *"the serious doubts about the ability of the child care agencies to cope with the additional burdens"* such a change would place on them (Irish Times, 12/1/'98), alongside the Committee's concerns that Ireland lacked a *"comprehensive, national policy"* incorporating the *"principles and provisions"* of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1998), under-line that the crisis, if it is to be surmounted, requires more vigorous political commitment and vision.

Nowhere is the lack of purpose in relation to tackling children's issues more evident than the contin-ued failure to satisfactorily resolve - one way or other - the protracted, divisive and sometimes bitter debate about the issue of mandatory reporting of child abuse. Successive governments, have instilled little confidence in the discussions: making promises to introduce mandatory reporting while in oppo-sition and diluting them when awareness of just how unprepared the system is to cope with its intro-duction becomes evident (Department of Health, 1996b).

In a much publicised lecture evening, The Marginalised Child (January 26, 1998), the academic co-director of the Children's Research Centre, Robbie Gilligan highlighted the following as illustrating some of the deficiencies in current Irish child welfare:

* **Placing children in care in hospitals because there is nowhere else**

* **Placing children needing care or accommodation in bed and breakfasts**

* **Placing children in centres outside the state**

* **Children placed in prison despite having committed no offence** [1]

Gilligan further highlighted that an, as of yet, unpublished report by Independent consultants retained by the Eastern Health Board - the largest of eight regional authorities with responsibility for social work and child and family services - to advise on the future of child care services, concluded that there is:

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1   Gilligan detailed these deficiencies in Irish Times (16/2/'98): - In the period June 1995 - May 1997 135 children in need of care who were not sick spent an aggregate of over 3,000 days living in hospital wards because the state could offer nothing else. In 1995, 1,636 referrals were made to the Eastern Health Board 'out of hours service' which is aimed at serving young people who present at night as homeless or in need of care. 292 (18%) of these were referred to Bed and Breakfast facilities by the board; a further 55 had to be detained in Garda stations overnight because of no alternative. At least 15 children at any one time are placed outside the jurisdiction in the North, Britain and the United States. For the first time in history a child was placed in St Patricks Detention Centre because the state has nothing else to offer

- **'a crisis in staff morale'**
- **'a crisis in the availability of placements for children', and that child care is**
- **'a service which is "crisis driven" at all levels' (Irish Times, 16/2/'98) .**

Gilligan suggested that a whole new approach to developing children's services was required and proposed that the social partnership model that had been used for economic development and for tackling long-term unemployed at both local and national levels be introduced and tried with children's services. Gilligan's suggestions gained support in an editorial in the Irish Times:

> *"Perhaps this is where a national childcare authority, of the sort demanded for many years, by those campaigning on behalf of children, might come in. Such an authority, made up of the social partners, could produce a plan and obtain the necessary money to help vulnerable children. It most certainly could not be worse than the politicians and civil servants who have been charged with doing the job up to now. It is time perhaps they stood aside and allowed someone else to try" (Irish Times, February 2, 1998).*

social partnership

Social Partnership, describes a mechanism whereby government, trade unions, and employers, since 1989, periodically (every 3-4 years) negotiate national agreements covering pay increases, industrial relations generally and other matters concerning national social and economic planning. It is widely acknowledged that this form of social partnership is the mainstay of Ireland's economic recovery over the last decade, earning it record economic employment growth, low levels of inflation, budget deficits and debt ratios (Department of Finance, 1998; European Commission, 1997) and the envied reputation of Celtic Tiger. In 1991 this social partnership approach to development was extended, on a pilot basis, to the local level, and within two years it was being proposed both as a way of (i) improving the conditions of the country's more vulnerable and disadvantaged areas and groups, and (ii) as a way of helping to reform administrative and institutional structures and of improving the relationship between these structures and local communities (Sabel, 1996). The most direct expression of this new, local partnership is one of the three sub-programmes (sub-programme 2) involving area-based partnership companies, in the Operational Programme on Local Urban and Rural Development, 1994-1999 (Ireland, 1995) which is jointly funded by the Irish government and the European Union[2]. Under this sub-programme, thirty-eight independent local partnership companies were set up in designated geographic areas of social and economic disadvantage to put into place measures for tackling long-term unemployment and social exclusion. (Generally this sub-programme no. 2 tends to get referred to as the Local Development Programme and this reference will be used in the remainder of this paper.)

There are three types of areas participating in the Local Development Programme - Dublin urban, other urban and rural. The choice of areas - which is made by government - is based on an assessment of areas involving objective criteria and measurements drawn from local census population figures, feasible operational boundaries and viability in terms of size and economic base. Area sizes range from 13,000 to over 100,000.

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2 In 1993 the Irish government launched the National Development Plan (Ireland, 1993). The primary purpose of this National Development
   Plan was to summarise to the European Commission government proposals for the utilisation of Structural Funds for the five year period
   1994-'99 and as set out under broad headings and funds at the Heads of State summit held some months previously in Edinburgh in
   December 1992. Chapter 7 of the National Development Plan outlined the Government's commitment to local development in recognition of
   the role which local initiatives play in bringing about local, economic, social and environmental development. The operational details of
   Chapter 7 were set out in Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development, 1994-1999 (Ireland, 1995). Under the operational
   programme three components of local development were outlined

   - local enterprise programme incorporating city and county enterprise boards
   - integrated developments in disadvantaged areas (through local development partnership companies)
   - urban and village renewal (e.g. Temple Bar, Markets)

In the context of the Local Development Programme, local development is defined as:

"the collective effort of a community to improve local economic, social and environmental conditions...It involves empowering communities to sponsor innovative projects for enterprise, education, training and community and environmental development as well as enabling them to focus mainstream programmes in a better way in their local areas" (Area Development Management, 1995).

This is a targeted programme. Not only are socially disadvantaged areas targeted for inclusion, but so too are specific sub-groups such as Travellers, persons with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, and, those perceived as at-risk of becoming long-term unemployed - this targeting includes children and young people who have left formal schooling or who are perceived as being at-risk of so doing.

A second important feature of the programme is that the local companies set up to manage it consist of representatives of community, statutory agencies and social partners (employers and trade unions): a local development structure which, through its very existence, highlights the deficiencies of local government and other institutional measures for tackling social exclusion, and which also draws attention to the potential of new models of management and innovation in relation to developing future local initiatives in social and economic development. At a national level the programme is managed and coordinated by an independent, non-government partnership company - known as Area Development Management (ADM) which has similar structures to local companies.

A third feature of the programme is that funding of local companies is contingent on them developing a comprehensive 3-5 year plan that is developed in conjunction with all relevant local interests and assessed in terms of suitability of measures for funding, the structures proposed for implementation and the procedures for monitoring performance.

community demands for local development

The Local Development Programme emerged out of two sets of needs or demands. Firstly, it emerged from a demand from community groups engaged in tackling poverty and social exclusion at a local level, particularly in the midst of Ireland's economic recession during the late 1970s and 1980s. This recession hit during a period when Ireland had hardly completed its short transformation from being a closed, isolated and primarily agricultural economy to becoming an industrial economy, heavily dependent on foreign trade and investment (Brunt, 1988; Litton, 1982). In the late 1970s, one of the main casualties of recession was a voiceless, disorganised, segregated, former unskilled working class that resided in public housing in flat complexes in Dublin's inner city, and estates - both large and small - on the periphery of cities and towns (Joyce & McCashin, 1982; National Economic and Social Council, 1981). Many of these estates continued to lack basic services and infrastructure and were about to become overwhelmed by drug problems, crime and a disaffected youth.

At both national and local government levels however, there was a lack of understanding of these problems and of capacity to target areas and specific groups that were most badly affected by rapid social and economic change. Consequently, official responses, over this period to new, emerging problems - such as inner city decline, problem drug use, early shoolleaving and juvenile crime - can be regarded as minimalist and in the main, local initiatives around these problems have tended to result more from the demands and actions of the community sector than from state-driven policies.

During the 1980s a vast array of bottom-up community development activities emerged from within local communities, particularly from within many public housing schemes and inner-city flat complex estates (Kelleher and Whelan, 1992; Combat Poverty Agency, 1990). Indigenous community groups

have been involved in projects including women's development (Hayes, 1990), leadership training (Community Action Network, 1990), community resource centres (Harvey, 1990) community enterprise development (Collins, 1986) vocational skills training (Faughnan, 1989) local children's services (Tobin, 1990) and in-school and out-of-school educational support programmes (Crooks & Stokes, 1987). In many instances these developments involved local partnerships between front-line personnel from government agencies, and community members, in efforts to deliver better services and to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Their work has found support from within some European Union (EU) and national programmes such as EU Poverty 2 (Cullen, 1989) and EU Poverty 3 (Harvey, 1994), and the Irish government's Community Development Programme (Cullen, 1994).

Although community projects, through this array of initiatives demonstrated a capacity to stimulate local responses to poverty and to get local people involved in dealing with social issues in their own areas and with tackling local social problems, they lacked the scope, resources and powers necessary to respond on the scale required and on an area basis to all the problems which they identified and encountered. There is a multi-dimensional aspect to the needs of communities where poverty is concentrated (Donnison et., al., 1989) and in the late 1980s, some of the more organised community development projects in such communities articulated demands for integrated local development responses in tackling social exclusion for the very reason that they recognised their own limitations and lack of capacity to achieve comprehensive change and development(Cullen, 1989; Duggan & Ronayne, 1990; Frazer, 1996; Harvey, 1994).

central demands for local partnership

Secondly, the programme emerged as an instrument of government policy to extend social partnership from the local to central levels. Following a period of seemingly intractable unemployment, the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (Ireland, 1991) (PESP) which was the first national wage and labour agreement for many years, included a commitment by the government to initiate a locally-based pilot integrated programme on long-term unemployment, involving a new partnership between social partners, state agencies and community bodies, in twelve selected geographic areas. Following a review of PESP (Craig & McKeown, 1993) an extension of the programme (both in terms of number of partnerships and range of local actions) was included and agreed as an important element of the governments national development proposals to Europe as part of the Structural and Cohesion Funds Framework, 1994-1999. The formation of the partnerships constituted official, political recognition of the correlation between two pressing problems: high levels of long-term unemployment and the extent to which some communities had become increasingly marginalised from the social and economic mainstream. Furthermore, it constituted an acknowledgement that centralised and compartmentalised decision-making in government and state agencies was inhibiting effective actions in relation to both these problems and that an experiment in new structures and forms of decision-making, at local and national level, was badly needed. Alongside the expansion of the programme a review of local government was initiated and the report on this review acknowledged the importance of the programme and the necessity for creating a new framework for integrating local government and local development (Department of Environment, 1996).

partnership details and linkages

In specific terms the Local Development Programme is focused on countering disadvantage through a set of community-led, integrated actions with the objectives of:

- creating local enterprise and employment;

- supporting the efforts of the long-term unemployed and socially excluded communities to gain employment;

- improving the physical environment;

- creating new training, education and work experience opportunities for the long-term unemployed;

- providing additional educational supports at both primary and secondary level to those at risk of early school-leaving;

- enhancing the capacity of disadvantaged communities to participate in local development and to tackle social exclusion (Area Development Management, 1995)

The emergence and development of the Local Development Programme has coincided with other central measures for solidifying social partnership processes. Extensive community development activities have led to the formation of a significant number of organised lobby groups, such as Community Workers' Cooperative (a national organisation of community workers), Irish Rural Link (a network of rural-based community development organisations), Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (a federation of centres for the unemployed) and European Anti-Poverty Network (Ireland) (a network of organisations and individuals tackling poverty in Ireland with a European dimension). National mechanisms and structures have been developed whereby these groups, and others, have an input, albeit limited, into the formation of national social policies, particularly as these relate to tackling long-term unemployment, educational disadvantage and social exclusion. These mechanisms include:

- the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), which provides a focus for developing new social policy initiatives and which includes parliamentarians, representatives from the traditional social partners (employers, farmers organisations and trade unions) and representatives from what is called the 'third strand', voluntary and community sector agencies;

- Partnership 2000, a national wage and social partnership agreement which like the NESF involves both the traditional social partners and - since 1996 - voluntary and community sector agencies.

In addition, local community and lobby groups were intensely involved in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) whereby government, following the UN Summit on World Poverty in 1995, engaged in extensive local and regional level consultation to form a national policy for tackling poverty (Ireland, 1997). The emergence and development of such partnership mechanisms at both local and national levels has contributed to a growing consensus on the need for a *"coherent and integrated strategy to address the underlying causes of poverty and social exclusion"* (Combat Poverty Agency, 1997).

Issues in relation to poverty and social exclusion have also been given greater impetus as a result of the government's decision to set up a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and Drugs. Government policy in relation to the operation of the local development programme is processed and developed through this committee. Furthermore, the committee has also processed and resourced recommenda-

tions in a government report which highlighted that drug problems were concentrated in no more than twelve geographic areas that were characterised by poverty and generalised deprivation (First Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Measures to Reduce the Demand for Drugs, 1996). Local drugs task forces have been established with a similar development model as local partnerships. A further development of the model is also evident in a government decision to set up a Young People's Facilities and Services Fund. Of this fund - totalling £30m over three years - £20m has been allocated to support the development of facilities and services to meed the needs of young people "at-risk" in drugs task force areas (Department of Tourism, Sports and Recreation, 1998), all of which are in local partnership areas.

social partnership and child welfare

There is no partnership mechanism, comparable to Local Development Programme structures, for developing new policies and programmes in relation to services for children "at-risk" or who are socially excluded. The main children's issues that have emerged, to date, in the context of the Local Development Programme and the above institutional mechanisms have been concerned primarily with income supports (child benefit), educational disadvantage and the provision of child-care facilities as a measure for increasing labour market participation (Ireland, 1996a). Issues, directly relating to child welfare and the protection of children at-risk per se, have not featured.

The absence of an explicit child welfare dimension to these developments is somewhat surprising, for two main reasons. Firstly, families with children have greatest risk of poverty (Nolan & Farrell, 1990; Callan and Nolan, 1996) suggesting that measures to tackle social exclusion should have a child dimension. Secondly, community development demands for institutional reforms over the last two decades owe some of their origins to earlier initiatives concerning children at-risk and child welfare. During the 1970's, for example, there was considerable public concern about detached youth, who following the closure of reformatory and industrial schools in the wake of the Kennedy Report (Report on the Reformatory and Industrial Schools System, 1969), were increasingly visible in their communities and sometimes out-of-home, out-of-school and at-risk of becoming involved with crime, drugs and prostitution (HOPE, 1979). Their predicament spurred the formation of lobby groups such as Campaign for Deprived Children (CARE, 1972), Children First (Mollan, 1979) and the Working Party on the Young Offender in Ireland in the Department of Social Administration, University College Dublin (Burke, et. al., 1981). Such lobby groups were made up mainly of child welfare professionals and they strongly advocated new community-based measures for responding to children's needs. Indeed, among the first exclusively Irish Exchequer-funded community development initiatives were five neighbourhood youth projects set up in response to the recommendations of the Interim Report of the Task Force on Children's Services (1975) and HOPE -Finglas and Rialto youth projects - community-based projects for disadvantaged young people which were initiated in 1980 and which presaged the later introduction of community youth projects in youth work services (Crooks & O'Flaherty, 1988).

Personnel from some of these projects and others with a community development and child welfare interest featured prominently in the early stages of developing a national network of Irish community workers through national conferences held in Waterford 1978 and 1980, Galway 1979 and eventually in Dublin in 1981 at which the Community Workers' Co-Op (CWC) was set up. These conferences and the formation of the CWC were highly influenced by community work developments in the UK and by the activities of the First EU Programme to Combat Poverty (National Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty, 1980) and in particular their focus on involving targeted, disadvantaged groups in the self-assessment of needs and in developing local responses in which they had a direct role. Such principles as they relate to children' services were, at the time, given cogent expression in the Final Report of the Task Force on Children's Services (1980), which was a blueprint for a comprehensive administrative and institutional reform of children's services. The report included proposals for children's area committees, incorporating some of the features of voluntary-community-statutory

partnership, now evident in the Local Development Programme as well as proposals for vertical integration and for overcoming compartmentalisation of overall policy, management and delivery systems. Alas, it was a blueprint that was years before its time. The Irish administrative system was, in 1980, a long way from acknowledging internal system deficiencies such as are recognised under current restructuring proposals (Ireland, 1996b). Furthermore, the Irish economy in 1980 was entering recession and a period of major social expenditure cutback. Whatever misgivings policymakers may have had about the reforms recommended in the Task Force Report its implementation would have involved such an expansion of service and related expenditure, that, given the then climate of expenditure cutback, was not likely to be forthcoming unless the issue itself was to become one of national importance.

Clearly, this did not happen: the State was not, at the time, prepared to recognise that children's services required such extensive reform and investment and its traditional reliance on religious orders to provide for children's welfare was seemingly, expected to continue. In pursuing this approach, the State demonstrated a lack of belief in developing and promoting civil institutions - not of a religious type - for supporting social development, particularly in relation to vulnerable children. In reality, religious orders were losing vocations and their traditional form of service response - large child care institutions - had lost position and relevance in child welfare. Furthermore, the type of problems concerning young people and children that were emerging in public housing estates in Dublin and other urban centres, required responses into which new local, community institutions, as well as the growing numbers of state-employed field professionals, would need to have an input. It was no longer a case of simply leaving it to the religious. Through the 1970s and the 1980s, health boards were under increasing pressure from both their own child welfare professionals and community interests to fund new children's specialist and community-support services. Although health boards used once-off funding mechanisms to respond to such demands, it was not until new reforming legislation was passed (Child Care Act, 1991) that a comprehensive response seemed possible. By the time these changing realities were acknowledged however, and the reforms introduced, the child welfare system itself was rocked by a series of child abuse scandals (Department of Health, 1996; Keenan, 1996; McGuinness, 1993) that have weakened its capacity to lead and drive comprehensive reform. Furthermore, the focus of wider public and political concern - and demand - is now more with procedures for investigation and prosecution that with prevention or community supports. The complexity of the issues raised by dramatic increases in reported cases of child abuse required that child welfare professionals focus their energies and resources primarily (and initially) on developing badly-needed professional statutory, investigation and treatment systems. While such child protection elements are critical components of a comprehensive child welfare system, on their own and without adequate support measures they contribute to the system being constantly defined by crisis. New opportunities need to be explored for making preventive and support services more central to the child welfare system.

local partnerships and opportunities for developing children's services

Although the Local Development Programme does not have mechanisms for providing direct support to projects for children (apart from measures to tackle early-school-leaving) it has provided community groups who are involved with children's projects with new opportunities to develop their work at a local level and to develop their capacity to influence decision-making both at national policy level and at the levels of local and regional mainstream service provision. In the operation of this programme children's services get focused on as a secondary outcome of economic interest; i.e., their capacity to generate new opportunities for occupational activities in what has become known as a social economy, for example, developing children's services as entry-level enterprises for the unemployed (particularly women) (Jouen, 1996).

Some area partnership companies are grasping these opportunities and tending to focus on developing local social service type jobs and related training and enterprises and to link these developments with greater community demands for more state funding of local services. In particular these opportunities are being developed in the areas of child care, family development, drug-use prevention, crime prevention and youth education and training. There is a significant crossover of personnel involved both in these type of services and partnership companies. Potentially, these connections provide new opportunities for developing integrated, coordinated responses to the needs of young families and children at local levels and a further expansion in programmes aimed specifically at young people while they are still in school and even younger. The development of enterprise and employment related initiatives, under both national government and EU funding programmes, could, potentially in the future, include early intervention actions with children. Given these developments, a proposal to develop a social partnership around children's issues as a way of mobilising out of the child welfare crisis, particularly in areas and communities experiencing social disadvantage, has potential. However, before proceeding to summarise such a proposal some examples of relevant partnership actions are outlined below in more detail.

Partnership company actions involving children and young people can be divided into two headings as follows:

a)   **actions in which there is a direct labour market, enterprise dimension;**

b)   **actions which involve the local development of children's services.**

Under the first of these headings proposals for spending programme funds must demonstrate that the basic intention is to either provide new jobs or to provide new ways in which existing jobs can be better accessed by persons who are long -term unemployed, or at risk of same. Under the second heading funding proposals are usually of a type that contribute to a community's capacity to participate in, and obtain benefit from, both existing and new mainstream programmes, including programmes that involve children's welfare and social development. Some actions of course can straddle both headings.

a)   **actions in which there is a direct labour market, enterprise dimension;**

There are basically two types of actions affecting children and young people under the first heading: (i) child care and (ii) supports to prevent early school-leaving. Both types of actions are eligible for funding as they are perceived as supporting direct labour market initiatives. For this reason, such actions are taking place across all of the partnership areas with only some local variations in terms of ideas and how community members are linked into providing support.

child care

Because the lack of suitable child care is perceived as one of the main barriers preventing women from returning to work, the programme supports the expansion and development of child care facilities. Typical objectives include the expansion of numbers, the improvement of facilities and standards, and the provision of child care training programmes linked with subsidised work experience in community-owned units as a way of providing entry-level employment opportunities. Although the provision of child care facilities is viewed primarily as a labour-market type of initiative, partnerships have tended to link their development with more effective demands for the provision of comprehensive pre-school and child-care services and to support this they have developed local working groups on child care, involving both statutory and voluntary service providers. Such child care actions have been enhanced by a decision of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to establish a Pilot

Childcare Initiative, which is basically a central government fund for distributing additional resources to child care actions in disadvantaged areas (McKeown and Fitzgerald, 1997). The operation of this Pilot Childcare Initiative provided an impetus for a commitment to childcare to be inserted in the most recent national wage agreement, Partnership 2000, under which an expert working group has been established to devise a national framework for the development of the childcare sector (Ireland, 1996a).

early school-leaving

Because leaving school early or leaving without a qualification is seen as one of the greatest barriers to attaining work, partnership companies can utilise budgets to provide a range of preventive interventions both in and outside school. These include homework clubs, after-schools projects, supplementary tuition for people on low incomes, grant aid for books, materials and bus fares, drugs awareness projects and projects to stimulate parental and community involvement in education. Not only has there been an expansion in both the number and funding for such interventions but their operation under the aegis of a national programme has provided opportunities for the pooling of ideas and exchanging practices and has also created a demand for more direct Department of Education and Science involvement in funding school-community initiatives. Indeed, the Department is currently preparing a two year pilot scheme on measures to tackle early school-leaving through such interventions (Department of Education and Science, 1998).

b)   actions which involve the local development of children's services

There are a much wider range of actions affecting children under the second heading - actions which involve the local development of children's services. Actions under this heading are funded through each partnerships community development budget - and companies have a wide range of choices on how to utilise these budgets. Interventions involving children and young people compete with other intervention possibilities with locally excluded groups - for example budgets are used for supporting women's groups, groups working with Travellers, community art projects, persons with disabilities and so on. Generally, partnership companies tend to want to support community development actions which have more strategic than short-term value, for example, actions which indicate the possibility of attracting mainstream funding - the choice of groups for funding is related to an assessment of existing capacity to attract additional funds.

Actions under this heading can be sub-grouped as follows:

- **actions which are oriented toward developing a specific long-term programme with main stream funding; and**

- **actions which are oriented toward developing a local network/collaborative which will more effectively coordinate and integrate existing and new programmes.**

actions seeking mainstream funding

I will provide you with three examples of the first. New Ross is a small town (8,000 population) in County Wexford in Ireland's south east. The town is a small port that up until the mid 1980s had a thriving industrial base arising mainly from the manufacture of agricultural fertiliser. The town has experienced economic and social decline and among traditional working class groups in the town's local authority housing estates young people experienced problems arising from early school-leaving, crime and minor drug-use. The town is on the border between two different counties and quite isolated from its own county capital.

Youth New Ross (YNR) is a local organisation set up in the early 1990s with the objective of providing social, recreational and educational services to disadvantaged young people in New Ross. The organisation consists of persons who are involved in local public and social service - nursing, social work, teaching, religious and police. Despite many attempts to attract public funding for its work, YNR survived on a shoestring for its first years and achieved very little progress. However, with the formation of the Wexford County Partnership under the Local Development Programme, YNR received financial support over a period of two years to recruit staff and to operate a programme of social and educational supports to those who were experiencing particular difficulties with the educational, social service and legal systems. The project was perceived to be successful in targeting and engaging young people at greatest risk and arising from this the programme attracted significant mainstream funding. The project now has two workers, it no longer relies on partnership company funding and it is able to plan a more comprehensive and long term programme. The County Partnership company is now using a similar approach to develop and initiate services for young people at-risk in two other main towns in its county area. "

I now want to elaborate on a second example. Rialto is a community in the south west area of Dublin city and located in the catchment area of the Canal Communities Partnership, which with a population of 13,000 is the smallest of the thirty-eight partnership companies. Rialto has a population of 5,000 almost half of whom live in two local authority flat complexes, which were built in the 1950s and are now run-down and undermined by unemployment, tenant transience and drug problems. The official unemployment rate in Rialto is 40% and 70% of this group are either long term unemployed or never worked. Over 50% of the population left school by age 15 (official schoolleaving age) and only 4% continued in education after the age of 19. Forty per cent of family units are headed by a lone parent which compares with a national figure of 16%. The area has a mean rank score of 10 from two ranking scales 1-10 that were devised to rank areas according to Census of Ireland small area population statistics. In short it is very hard to find other areas in Ireland that are considered more disadvantaged (Canal Communities Partnership, 1996).

The Canal Communities Partnership is one of the newer partnership companies. I will try to give some indication of local perceptions of progress that has been made since the area first became involved in the Local Development Programme. Although the process of partnership was initiated in 1993 the formation of a company did not happen for three years and the company itself is fully functioning for a little more than one year. However, the initial consultation and setting-up processes provided unique opportunities for both community residents to sit with state agencies and in the course of devising plans for a partnership company, yet to be formed, opportunities were found to discuss ways of dealing with local problems through existing mainstream state programmes. In particular these discussions led to actions in the form of new resources and personnel that previously seemed unattainable.

At the outset of the partnership process in 1993 the only substantial community resource in the area was a funded youth project which employed two full-time workers in two small offices in a community building in which facilities for an area-designated health board addiction counsellor were also provided. Although the project was highly regarded, particularly in its use of art and drama for developing meaningful relationships with young people, many of whom seemed otherwise destined for an involvement in drugs and crime, it nonetheless experienced great difficulties in drawing the state agencies' attentions to the area's needs. Four years after the partnership process commenced this youth project now has four full-time workers and is more visible in providing direct services in the two flats complexes. It also has been given a substantial grant to refurbish a designated community premises. Furthermore, the project has formed links with an adjacent youth project in its partnership area and together with other groups and organisations involved with children and young people, these have formed a Children and Young Person's Forum, as the

first stage in bringing about a regional youth service for the partnership area, which, if successful, would be the first such, bottom-up, regional youth service within the Dublin catchment area.

The addiction counsellor has become team leader of a community drug team, which in addition to a general staff of two counsellors and a community drug worker, also has separate satellite clinics with local resource workers providing a service to young drug uses in the two flat complexes. The drug team, alongside the partnership company, played important roles in supporting the formation and development of a local drugs task force which was set up as a result of the Rabbitte Report (First Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Measures to Reduce the Demand for Drugs, 1996) and has also commented on wider policy issues in relation to community drug problems (Bowden, 1996).

The community has also acquired a family resource centre which involves the state social work services in a partnership with local people and which employs three workers to provide a range of family support and development programmes. Two of the local primary schools piloted an in-schools support project for children who had indicated learning difficulties arising from their social circumstances. The project was developed with the support of community personnel and the schools have now been given the sanction to operate it on a permanent basis (Cullen, 1997a). A drugs education worker has also been assigned to work with local primary schools in designing and operating in-schools drugs education in conjunction with community groups and projects. At a coordinating level, the area has acquired a government-funded community development project which acts as a network group for integrating the community's efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Finally, in addition, the Partnership company has been able to channel project funds to most of the above projects to assist them in specific, partnership-related activities, such as after schools programmes, homework clubs, adult education arts-environmental projects etc.

Of course specific child outcomes from this process are not yet explicitly evident. Clearly, it is too early a stage for these to be adequately evaluated and documented. However, the reported local benefits are that as a result of working through the partnership process, local groups and local structures have succeeded in attracting critical resources which they believe could make a difference and which previously were simply not made available. It will take the application of these resources and initiatives over a period of time in the future to ascertain the individual benefits.

The third example illustrates that new initiatives taking place in the overall context of partnership processes can embrace practice approaches involving child protection and direct social work intervention. One of the Eastern Health Board's community care social work teams - with responsibility for child protection matters - straddles three separate designated partnership areas. In recent years the number of families being dealt with by the social work team, where problem drug use is a serious issue has escalated significantly placing new, pressing demands on the system's placement options for children in care. Issues relating to parents' lifestyle, criminality and health impinge upon service provision. The senior social worker, drawing on his new relationships with local partnership and drugs task forces has brought forward a proposal - that has been funded - to develop a new social work and child support service to families where there are chronic drug-use problems. This service has now been initiated - on a pilot basis - as three sub-teams (2 social workers; 1 child care worker) within the social work team. It will be more community-based than traditional social work services, it will work in close cooperation with local family support services and it will train and support a wider team of family support workers who will be recruited from the local community to provide day-care and other intensive family supports. It is unlikely that the financial support for this intensive initiative could have come through normal funding channels. The opportunity for initiating the service results directly from local partnership processes and specifically, from local drugs task forces.

actions seeking local integration and collaboration

The second sub-set concerns actions which are focused on developing collaborations and here again I will refer to two examples. The first of these concerns the efforts of groups in the north east part of Dublin Inner City Partnership to develop structures for more effective integration of mainstream services. In contrast to Rialto- which had few community-based services for children and young people at the outset of the partnership process- the north east inner city could be described as having one of the greater concentrations of community, child care and educational programmes in the country. The history of this concentration is related to a number of political and other high public profile developments in the area since the late 1970s [3]. What concerns community groups in this area is that many services have developed in an unplanned manner and they lack effective mechanisms for coordinating and integrating the work of local projects with mainstream resources and services.

In the local operation of the partnership programme, the Dublin inner city area, is divided into four quadrants, north east, north west, south east and south west, each of which has separate structures for organising community involvement in the partnership company. The north east inner city with a population of 28,000 is considered one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged areas in Ireland and has similar social deprivation indicators that are highlighted earlier for Rialto (Brennan, 1988; Inner City Organisation's Network, 1994; McKeown, 1991). The local structure known as Inner City Organisation's Network (ICON) is a network of over fifty community development, community service and tenant and residents' organisations in the north east inner city area.

In the process of developing its organisational structures ICON, in 1994, hosted a conference on select local themes including, services to children, local drug problems and enterprise developments. In relation to the first of these - services to children - an important consequence of the conference was a decision by its organising group - ICON's Youth, Family, Child Care Group - to initiate an action/research project on local issues in relation to children and families. The group was concerned that *'considerable public resources are currently devoted to educational, health and social services'* locally but *'this level of spending is not having the necessary impact in terms of alleviating social problems and promoting social development and solidarity'* (Integrated Services Initiative, 1997).

The group was supported with government funds to set up the Integrated Services Initiative (or ISI). The overall aim of ISI is *"to develop models of provision of an integrated nature in the areas of education, health, justice and social services which will allow everyone in the local community to contribute* actively to society *and to achieve their full potential"* (Ibid.) ISI is managed by a committee made up of representatives of the local community, local statutory agencies and relevant government departments and employs a full-time research and development worker whose work focuses on issues and problems arising in the local coordination of services.

Arising from this initiative ISI undertook a comprehensive analysis of issues in the provision of services to children and young people. It identified many of the problems contributing to a lack of coordination and cohesion, including: issues arising from confidentiality, high workloads, varying geographic boundaries, inter-agency suspicions and tensions, high turnover in personnel and a general

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3   In 1978 a decision by the local authority to detenant public housing in the north east inner city area of Dublin and to promote commercial development in its place sparked a concerted community protest campaign in opposition, which led to a lot of public debate about the value of preserving the inner city's community fabric. The campaign, at one stage, resulted in the arrest and subsequent imprisonment - for a few nights - of a community social worker for his failure to undertake not to participate in further street protest (Dennett, et., al., 1982). It also contributed to the mobilisation of political support behind the election to the national parliament - Dail Éireann - of independent community candidate, Tony Gregory, in 1992. This mobilisation has been used as an effective political tool for wrenching government support to local projects and services in this area in the years since, particularly as in his first parliamentary term, Gregory held a crucial balance of power.

absence at a central level of a belief in or commitment to collaborative structures. ISI commissioned some research of collaborative models and structures in other jurisdictions and reflecting on these in the context of the problems and issues it identified itself it brought forward proposals for developing collaborative models of service provision in its area. These proposals influenced the government to initiate a pilot integrated service programme in four of the country's most disadvantaged urban areas, including both the north east inner city and the Rialto area (referred to above) (Department of Sports, Tourism and Recreation, 1998).

And finally, the last example to be outlined, concerns an initiative taken by the Combat Poverty Agency (1996). Arising from the Agency's decision to include action on educational disadvantage in its current strategic plan, it decided to support the formation of pilot network projects aimed at integrating local efforts to tackle educational disadvantage. The pilot scheme was made open to network proposals from organisations operating in areas included in the Local Development Programme and with partnership company support as many of the demands for this type of initiative had emerged from such partnership companies. Four network projects are being supported. Their purpose is to draw together in their respective areas, all of the key players in relation to tackling education - from the schools, colleges, community, social partners and to develop a collaborative aimed at more effectively coordinating and integrating local efforts. The programme has a research and evaluation component to it, thus ensuring there will be an opportunity to process issues which arise in the operation of the programme into other levels of official policy-making (The Children's Research Centre is evaluation consultant to this programme).

Although the above summary of partnership actions as these impact on children and young people is small in number and limited in overall scope, it, nevertheless provides some indication that there is the potential to drive a child welfare and child 'at-risk' agenda from within a local partnership process. This helps to raise the question whether it could be possible to stimulate reform of child welfare provision from within a social partnership model and thus steer current debate and public concerns away from their preoccupation with the most recent child abuse scandal and help to focus on the policy, resource and implementation issues that underline comprehensive child welfare provision. The social partnership approach is not so much about creating a new layer of service delivery as much as it is about creating new mechanisms and procedures -at local, national and other levels - for achieving better integration of existing layers of provision, and achieving better identification of need and resource and service responses.

types and levels of integration

As part of its work for the Combat Poverty Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage, the Children's Research Centre prepared a paper on Integrated Services and Children At-Risk, which sets out different types and levels of integration as these relate to children's services. Citing Himmelman (1992) the paper defines and compares different integrative strategies as follows:

- *Networking*
  defined as exchanging information for mutual benefit is the simplest form of integration;

- *Coordination*
  defined as exchanging information and altering activities for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose, is more complex and requires participating organisations to share in decisions about changes;

- *Cooperation*
  defined as exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose, requires even greater organisational commitments and possibly even legal instruments to cover the redeployment of personnel and financial and technical resources in new integrative arrangements;

- *Collaboration*
  defined as exchanging information, altering activities, sharing resources, and enhancing the capacity of another for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose, requires the application of sophisticated organisational linkages involving the sharing of risks, the development of shared visions and the development of complex partnership relationships and processes.

The paper for the Combat Poverty Agency also cites Bruner's (1991) outline of four different levels of integration:

- *Level 1: Interagency collaboration - Administration*
  administrators at the state or local levels manage agencies to facilitate interagency and intraagency collaboration through protocols, interagency agreements, staff organisation, staff incentives, and job evaluation systems;

- *Level 2: Interagency collaboration - Service*
  workers at the service delivery level in various agencies are given incentives and support for joint efforts with staff in other agencies;

- *Level 3: Intra agency collaboration*
  workers at the frontline service delivery level are given discretion in serving clients, provided support for decision-making, and involved in agency planning;

- *Level 4: Worker-family collaboration*
  frontline worker and family members determine needs, set goals, and work toward greater family autonomy and functioning.

The above outline and distinctions highlight the complexity in relation to the concept of integration and that there are a variety of different ways in which integrative responses can be initiated - community or family levels; frontline worker levels; middle management levels; executive levels, etc. Integrative initiatives at a higher executive level can bring a commitment to institutional change with the risk however that they will encounter resistance at lower levels and contribute to the formation of centralised, uniform and inflexible integrative practices. Integrative initiatives that emerge from the practices and decisions of frontline personnel can involve quite a lot of trial and error of trust-building and the development of positive working relationships in the search of good practice models. However, such developments can lack authority and therefore lack the capacity to bring about wider systems changes. Integrative initiatives that are built in conjunction with parents and other community members constitute a bottom up development and also, because they treat parents and children not simply as service receivers but as resources for planning and developing new responses, they contribute to community development processes. Initiatives that take place at this level without higher levels of institutional support however, can lack the capacity for continuation and self-sustainment. Essentially, what is needed is a support frameworks that can allow experiment in integrative approaches at all levels - management and policy levels down to frontline practice. The next section outlines a broad framework that could encourage such innovation.

proposal for children's services partnership

In a submission to National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the broad framework of a proposal for a social partnership initiative around child welfare was outlined by the Children's Research Centre. This submission outlined the following as weaknesses in the delivery of local services to children and young people:

- the participation of families and communities in the delivery of services is minimal and this reflects the absence of a commitment to participation at both policy and practice levels;

- services have evolved out of a relatively central and hierarchical delivery model and as a result there is an absence of mechanisms whereby local and regional service managers can effectively plan and evaluate their efforts; and,

- those involved in the delivery of services tend to abide by rigid professional and bureaucratic boundaries and consequently there is an absence of mechanisms for multi-disciplinary co-operation and inter-agency co-ordination.

The submission argued that there is evidence - from the experience of the Local Development Programme - that some of these problems could be overcome, *"provided there is a dedicated, funded programme specifically committed to doing this"*. The submission goes on to propose a partnership initiative modelled on the Local Development Programme *"for the purposes of developing and coordinating social supports and services to disadvantaged children and families in areas of concentrated needs"*. The intention of the proposed programme would be to *"mobilise new energies at both central and local levels"* to *"contribute to new structures where it really matters - at local level - leading to new inter-departmental and inter-agency arrangements at other levels"*. It was argued that the programme could *" provide the basis for developing a new vision for children's services based on consultation, participation and partnership with families and communities"* and that it could also *"provide a testing ground for teasing out many of the proposals that were contained in the report of the Final Report of the Task Force on Child Care Services, (1980)"*. The proposal suggests that local companies or trusts be set up in a small number of designated areas and that the type of initiatives undertaken - the company or trust would not itself directly manage or operate programmes - should be accessible, easy to use and with an emphasis on family and community participation, offering both practical services and intense interventions. Staff on such programmes should be willing to work on an inter-agency basis and efforts should be made to train and recruit staff from within the programme's catchment areas. Programmes should also have in-built mechanisms or undertaking ongoing research, evaluation and review.

It was proposed that programme or trust would develop plans to include primary and secondary prevention and direct intervention and child protection services.

primary prevention

The company could complement the preventive work of PHNs, GPs, teachers, social workers and voluntary service providers as follows:

- provide a base for both collecting and disseminating information on child poverty to local service personnel;

- develop voluntary and statutory groups;

- initiate research on the local dimension of child poverty utilising existing data;

- provide a community base for arranging assessments, ante-,peri-and post-natal support and examinations in situations where it has not been possible to do this through either home visits or clinical appointments;

- provide back-up advice, information, toy library and practical assistance to pre-school and after-school services in the community;

- provide a focus for the exchange of information, discussion and joint-training sessions for relevant local professional and community personnel;

- provide a base for bringing local personnel together in relation to once-off community-specific specialist information sessions - e.g. information on early detection of symptoms associated with HIV particularly with children of drug-using parents; information on early detection of prolonged and problematic grief in relation to children who have been bereaved or separated; information on indicators of alcohol or drug use among teenagers; information on indicators of stress among school-going children, etc.

secondary prevention

The company could complement the provision of services to targeted families with special needs, as follows:

- the provision of courses on personal development, personal and family health, budgeting, home management , school homework, play etc. to parents who have indicated areas of concern or need;

- the setting up of lone parent groups;

- the provision of other group supports for the parents of families who are under mild stress;

- the setting up of self-help mutual counselling groups; the setting up and provision of support to family group projects, homestart and community mother schemes;

- the provision of an effective liaison between home-visiting agencies (social workers, SVP, probation, community mothers, school-liaison, etc) and local community services and programmes;

- the provision of after-schools and other recreational activity programmes;

- the development of Neighbourhood Youth Projects;

- the development of special assistance programmes in schools;

- the provision of literacy and homework-assistance programmes.

direct intervention and child protection services

The company could assist in programmes of child care and protection as follows:

- provide, in conjunction with social work services, a community-based setting for arranged and planned individual, group and family programmes which involve intensive assessment or therapeutic input;

- provide direct referral to other specialised therapeutic and child guidance programmes and liaise in relation to follow-up and integration;

- develop, in conjunction with other local services, early warning, detection and intervention systems and procedures in relation to children who are at serious risk at home or in the community;

- develop, in conjunction with other services, localised fostering and residential projects for children who need to come into care on either a temporary or permanent basis.

The government has recently announced a new pilot initiative in relation to integrated services provision in four small local areas (Department of Tourism, Sports and Recreation, 1998). The above submission to National Anti-Poverty Strategy is summarised here in order to provide some elaboration of the practical details of local initiatives in relation to integrating children's services and as a way of helping to inform both the government's and other's initiatives. Elsewhere (Cullen, 1997b) as outlined above, the Children's Research Centre has elaborated on the concept of integration as it relates to children "at-risk" and has identified issues that arise in relation to how integrated services are created, supported and developed. The Children's Research Centre will, over the next two years, be undertaking intensive research around the potential, possibilities and limitations of integrated models of children's services and, alongside its role as evaluator of the Combat Poverty Agency's programme on educational disadvantage it is envisaged that other papers on this and related topics will be issued.

conclusions

The first point that arises in reflecting on the material in this paper relates to the language itself, the language of social partnership and social exclusion, which is very new and very much a language in development. There is a great risk of assuming that those who use the language first - be they EU or government officials, the more vocal community and political activists or indeed programme researchers and evaluators - fundamentally know what they are talking about. They may not. The language is there for invention and meanings change more regularly than one can keep up with. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that the Children's Research Centre is attracted to researching this field and that is that we see integrated developments in relation to social exclusion as reflecting many of the critical issues about changing social systems and the position of children in them. The Local Development Programme is an important intervention by government into local social systems and from whatever perspective it is analysed, it provides useful pointers as to how future services, including local services for children, will be organised and developed.

The Irish system of government and administration could hardly be over-regarded in its capacity to manage the social side of recent change. By nature government is over-centralised, and traditionally over-reliant on religious orders to pioneer, develop and operate personal social services. Although it has promoted innovation through the Local Development Programme, problems of social management persist and are mirrored in official responses to the needs of children. Quite simply, Irish society lacks a civic infrastructure to support effective responses to the needs of children at-risk or who are abused or neglected and nowhere is this lack of infrastructure more apparent than in communities where poverty and deprivation are most concentrated.

The absence of an effective system of local government and administration and other mechanisms for facilitating the effective local integration of children's services has hampered official responses to problems such as youth drug use, early shoolleaving and juvenile crime. In the main, local initiatives around these problems have tended to result more from the demands and actions of voluntary and community bodies than from State driven policies.

The Local Development Programme - a labour market initiative - has delivered badly-needed resources to community groups involved in tackling exclusion among children and young people. At its outset, outcomes in terms of 'jobs created for the long-term unemployed' were seen as critical measures of success. Now seven years after the initiative was first piloted and three years since it was expanded it is increasingly apparent that many outcomes may not directly have a lot to do with the labour market at all and reflect the need for a more comprehensive understanding of local needs (Area Development Management, 1997). If anything, the operation of the programme reflects the certainty that the problems being tackled are in many respects no more complex than the systems and institutions charged with tackling them. The Local Development Programme is a manifestation of the type of measures required to reconstruct institutional responses to poverty and social exclusion at a general level. More specifically, from the point of view of this paper, it opens up new possibilities for driving state responses to the needs of socially disadvantaged children at local levels. In some instances the programme has provided the first real opportunity for such local groups to attract funding and the funding has been

used to develop activities that are capable of being mainstreamed. The programme has also provided an impetus for generating new collaborative initiatives in relation to children, at local levels. In the long term a relevant and important issue from a research perspective is whether these new developments provide real and meaningful benefits or improvements for the individual children concerned and whether a more outcome-oriented system of services development emerges. In this regard, the Children's Research Centre is embarking on a major research programme on integrated children's services that will assist in providing some answers to these questions.

This is for the long-term: for the present it is important to reflect on whether social partnership is a way forward for developing children's services. The Irish Times editorial cited at the outset of this paper suggests that social partnership is worth trying if only for the reason that it could "not be worse than the politicians and civil servants who have been charged with doing the job up to now". There are other good reasons. The indications are that social partnership can generate innovation where inertia persists: it can create a climate where a spirit of cooperation and dedication to specific tasks can prevail. A troubling feature of the current system of service development in relation to children is the extent to which significant stakeholders (government, administrators, child welfare agencies, child advocacy agencies and professional groups) are seemingly locked in conflict on issues, such as mandatory-reporting, which, while they have clear importance in their own right, may have little significance in relation to the overall task of rescuing the child welfare system from perennial crisis. Whatever about the rights and wrongs of mandatory reporting, further attention to it as an issue of public policy, will detract from the real objectives of policy and fail to inspire confidence in the system or assist the system to take up new challenges. If anything, the child welfare system needs help to find the space to reform itself; it needs to acknowledge that it needs this help and needs to have the courage to engage others to assist in the reform process.

In this paper an extract from a proposal for developing an integrated response to children's needs based on a social partnership model was summarised. This is not a new proposal nor are its ideas original. The proposal is influenced by writings and ideas developed in other jurisdictions, especially the United States (Comer, 1988; Garbarino, 1992; Schorr, 1988; Whittaker, 1990) and in particular by programmes that emphasise a family focus (Kagan, et., al., 1994), community mobilisation around need (Melaville, Blank and Asayesh, 1993), and inter-agency collaboration (Illback, Cobb and Joseph Jr., 1997). The proposal is also influenced by the work of developmental ecologists such as Bronfenbrenner (1979) who stress the relevance of multiple systems on children's development (self; family; extended family; neighbourhood; wider community; school; social clubs; and society etc.) and the need for interventions to focus on strengthening the systems as much as the individual living within these systems, and also the work of Rutter (1979) and others who demonstrate that it is not a single risk factor that makes a difference with children but multiple risks and for this reason interventions require strategies that address multiple aspects of a child's and family's life to reduce risk factors and strengthen protective factors.

The proposal was submitted to National Anti-Poverty Strategy during its consultation process in 1996. Perhaps, because the proposal was still underdeveloped and because of the absence of similar proposals from a range of organisations, it did not feature in the Strategy's reports. However, there may now be a different, changed climate for supporting such a proposal. Indeed, the recent announcement by the government that it will pilot four new services integration projects is an indication that new initiatives are needed and given the frustration of commentators such as in the aforementioned Irish Times editorial and other editorials since (Irish Times, May 11, 1998: May 19, 1998), it may be that now is the time to develop such proposals further.

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