

Response ID ANON-TN88-KJZA-2

Submitted to COVID-19 VULNERABLE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

1 What is your name?

Name:

Christina Cloyd

2 What is your email address?

Email:

christina.cloyd@niacro.co.uk

3 What is your organisation?

Organisation:

NIACRO

4 Are you content for the name of your organisation to be published?

Yes

If no, please explain why:

5 Do you agree with how the Plan has defined vulnerable children and young people?

No

If no, please explain why:

NIACRO welcomes the definitions listed in the plan, however, other vulnerable children definitions would benefit from being identified in this section. Some of the other definitions were mentioned briefly in the action sections of the consultation. Placing them in the introduction would be appropriate. Those other definitions are:

- A child who is at risk of offending
- A child with one or both parent(s) in custody
- A child that is taught outside of the traditional education system
- A child living in temporary accommodation
- A child with parents where English is a second language, and children who have a parent or parents with literacy hardships
- A child that is disengaged from education
- A child that is living under the poverty threshold
- A child that has a family member or parent under paramilitary threat

Some of these vulnerable children themes might fall under a child who is 'on the edge' of receiving support from children's social services—however, we were not clear what the term fully entails.

6 Do you agree with the objectives of the Plan?

Yes

If no, please explain why:

SECTION 1: PROMOTING SAFETY AND WELLBEING IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

7 Do you agree that the right actions have been included here?

Yes

If no, please explain why:

8 Are there any needs that are not being addressed through the actions in this section?

Yes

If yes, please specify:

NIACRO agrees that the right actions have been included but would like to provide additional comment and suggestions. Parenting NI is a great resource for parents and would be helpful to circulate alongside awareness-raising and signposting communications. The Education Authority has been disseminating devices

to students in need if they need to do distant learning, it would be great to see this better promoted, and schools could use more resources to get the devices and resources out to students.

Sure Start is for children aged 0-4 and available in only certain postcodes, how can we make this available across Northern Ireland? Additionally, Barnardo's Connection Programme has been beneficial for families and would be good to signpost. NIACRO aims to reduce anti-social and offending behaviour among those perceived to be vulnerable to offending through our work with children, young people and their families and have many projects available to offer support. Those projects can be found on our website at www.niacro.co.uk. We also are represented on all Family Support Hubs in the Belfast and Southern Trust area and serve as the host agency for the Craigavon and Banbridge Family Support Hub. Through our EISS and Caps projects, feedback from parents with children who have Special Education Needs have expressed that they needed extra support in the home if the children were engaging in distanced learning. There have also been frustrations from families who are not able to access supports in their local region that are offered in other areas and we believe that there needs to be a consistent approach between the health trusts.

It should also be noted that during COVID-19 there were extra pressures on the foster care system, unstable foster care availability, and children, young people, and parents who foster were needing more support which wasn't available.

We welcome the additional supports listed in section 1.4 to address food insecurity, however, practical needs go beyond food. Through our work we have, we have identified other types of support that are often needed to address fuel poverty, period poverty, transportation and travel assistance, access to clean and warm clothing and bedding, and assistance purchasing school uniforms. This is especially helpful for families with no recourse to public funds.

9 Are you aware of any examples of best practice that are addressing need in this area?

No

If yes, please specify:

SECTION 2: PROMOTING SAFETY AND WELLBEING IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

10 Do you agree that the right actions have been included here?

Yes

If no, please explain why:

11 Are there any needs that are not being addressed through the actions in this section?

Yes

If yes, please specify:

NIACRO agrees that the right actions have been included here and would suggest incorporating awareness about gaming addictions in children. Gaming addiction is harmful in itself but also makes children even more vulnerable to sexual abuse, exploitation, and financial loss.

There are no mentions of providing support to young people who identify as LBGTQ+, a resource should be planned for in the signposting sources of advice and support in both the home environment and in the wider community. LBGTQ+ youth are four times more likely to self-harm pre-Covid-19. The stress and isolation brought on during the pandemic will likely be exasperated.

12 Are you aware of any examples of best practice that are addressing need in this area?

No

If yes, please specify:

SECTION 3: STRENGTHEN SYSTEM CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO CURRENT RISKS

13 Do you agree that the right actions have been included here?

Yes

If no, please explain why:

14 Are there any needs that are not being addressed through the actions in this section?

Yes

If yes, please specify:

NIACRO would encourage consistency between all the trusts and schools and that plans are reviewed every four weeks to ensure that the appropriate actions are meeting needs.

15 Are you aware of any examples of best practice that are addressing need in this area?

No

If yes, please specify:

SECTION 4: REBUILD SERVICES

16 Are there additional actions required in connection with rebuilding/resetting/restarting services for vulnerable children and families?

No

If yes, please specify:

17 In the event of a further surge, are there specific actions which you would recommend to safeguard vulnerable children and young people and promote their welfare?

Yes

If yes, please specify:

In consultation with our Children and Family Services Programme Manager and Senior Practitioners collated their suggestions for specific actions. They are:

- Continuation of services for children with special needs e.g. respite for parents, opportunities for social interactions e.g. for those with ASD/ADHD.
- Children who normally receive support in school (e.g. classroom assistant etc.) receiving particular support e.g. small group learning opportunities.
- Waiting lists for assessments are even longer -- 3 years plus for ASD and ADHD. Needs more funding put into this area.
- Sensory toys/equipment available for children who usually have access to it in school.
- Children from low-income families. Addressing the range of parental ability to meet educational needs e.g. log onto 'google classroom', download worksheets or submit them. Literacy levels among lower-income families tend to be poorer.
- Cold-weather payments for families - using more heating, electricity etc. due to being at home, needs to be topped up.
- Children who are looked after in a residential setting - ensuring their liberties and mental health balance is taken into account. Need to keep them safe and keep COVID out of residential homes, but to look after their mental health in terms of being able to see relatives, friends, get outdoors etc.
- For looked after children also, more specialised individual support is required e.g. information about COVID, what to expect.
- More specialised individual support esp. info about COVID-19 - what to expect, what symptoms are etc. Many of the residential homes are experiencing extremely short-staff because of isolation etc. which means there aren't enough to provide usual services, one-to-ones, 'trust' visits etc.
- Practical things like in Lakewood, children having to share one iPad and phone set per home which means they can't do group virtual activities with their usual providers (e.g. our - IR scheme)
- In many residential homes, phone calls are only allowed after 6pm, so if schools are closed, this could be looked at more flexibly.
- Clarity on services and what they are offering (we had a family that originally did not want a referral to CAHMS because they didn't think they were open - referral was eventually made and was essential to that child's wellbeing).
- More adverts/visibility on what to do if you are concerned about a child's welfare.
- Focus groups of young people on zoom or socially distance to ask their opinion and advice on this matter.
- Look at ways in which children and young people can visit their family members in prison.
- There is a lack of communication from services about what changes they have put in place and families are left in the dark about supports. Alternatives are not being looked at in some cases the support has just stopped.
- Some families have been passed from one service to another without explanation of what they are/who for/what they do.

SUMMING UP

18 Are you aware of any sources of evidence that would be useful to the Executive in meeting needs of vulnerable children and young people during Covid-19?

If yes, please detail below:

- <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/safeguarding/children>
- <https://medium.com/rcpch-insight/im-a-paediatrician-and-i-see-the-impact-of-poverty-and-childhood-hunger-486b5629b9fc>
- <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/news/co-space-study-early-results/>
- <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/rcpch-responds-new-ofsted-reports-regarding-impact-covid-19-children>
- <https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/coronavirus>
- <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2020/april/supporting-children-young-people-mental-health>

19 Any other comments?

If yes, please detail below:

NIACRO welcomes the COVID-19 Vulnerable Children & Young People's Plan and appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback into the plan's development.