

Western Health Board Child and Family Services – Overview

The Western Health Board provides services to children (0 - 18 years) throughout the Board's area in the context of its responsibilities under the Child Care Act 1991 and the incoming Children's Act 2001. Services are provided across three domains, family support, child protection and alternative care. The focus of service delivery is towards assisting and maintaining families experiencing adversity, in particular where children are at risk or are likely to become at risk, ensuring their safety as paramount. Where children need to come into the care of the Board, the focus of sustaining their happy childhood is constant, and at the same time where at all possible working towards their earliest reunification with their family. Importantly, services are delivered by professionals including social workers, psychologists, area medical officers, child care workers, psychiatrists, special project workers, public health nurses and other professionals through multi-disciplinary teams, and in collaboration with other state and voluntary agencies, with a mutual aim of 'what's best for the child'.

Children and families are now partners in this process, and in line with the goals outlined in the National Children's Strategy 2000, and Children First Guidelines, services are developed and directed towards 'what works best for families'. These services ideally should be available locally, be supportive and non-stigmatising. The Board's core principles for its work with Children and Families require it to:

- Regard the welfare of the child as the first and paramount consideration
- Have regard to the rights and duties of parents
- Give due consideration to the child's wishes
- Have regard to the principle that it is generally better for children to be brought up in their own families.

Finally, the issue of how the Western Health Board adequately services children and families in need of help is documented in its annual publication 'Review of Adequacy Child Care and Family Support Services Report'. All services are monitored through county child care managers, its Regional Child Care Unit and supported by the Regional Child Care Advisory Committee.