

# **REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF INTO MEMBERS ACTING AS DESIGNATED LIAISON PERSON UNDER THE CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES 'CHILDREN FIRST'**

## **REPORT TO CONGRESS 2008**

### **Congress 2007 Resolution**

Congress 2007, in Cork, adopted the following resolution:

*"Congress demands that the CEC carry out a thorough investigation and review of the role of INTO members acting as the Designated Liaison Person under the child protection guidelines Children First, this review would examine the structures of the inter-agency communication along with the supports and legal advice available to INTO members and to report to Congress 2008."*

### **Tasks**

The requirements of this resolution are broken down into three main tasks as follows:

- Carry out a thorough investigation and review
- Examine the structures of inter-agency communication
- Examine the structures of available supports and legal advice

### **Methodology**

In order to comply with the terms of the resolution adopted by Congress 2007, the CEC agreed that the following methodology be adopted in carrying out the proposed review:

- That a random 15% sample of the principal teacher population in the country be furnished with a survey for completion (c/f: Appendix 1)
- That prior to furnishing the survey to the 15% sample outlined above, a pilot of the survey would be undertaken amongst a small group of Designated Liaison Persons, (hereafter DLPs)
- That the survey would issue to the selected principal teachers in mid September for completion and return by 1 October, 2007

- That, upon completion of the analysis of the survey results, a number of respondents would be requested to attend a Focus Group in order to tease out and discuss the findings of the survey.

Consideration would also be given to arranging one on one, face to face or telephone interviews with a number of respondents. Principal teachers would be requested to furnish their details as part of the survey should they be willing to make themselves available for such an interview.

### **Aims**

The aims of undertaking the survey, focus groups and interviews were defined as follows:

- To identify training needs and other supports
- To identify the positive and negative experiences of DLPs of dealing with other agencies
- To enable the INTO to make appropriate recommendations/take appropriate action to address the terms of the Congress resolution

### **Survey**

Following a successful pilot of the survey and a number of small adjustments to the form itself, the survey (Appendix 1) was sent to a random sample of 550 principal teachers requesting them to complete the form if they were the DLP for their school and if not, that the form be passed to the relevant person.

Returns were received from 335 DLPs and some of the results were as follows:

- 55% indicated that they had been appointed as DLP since 2004
- 91% indicated that they were principals of their schools
- 53% indicated that they had not had any training to carry out the role of DLP
- 70% of those who had indicated that they had received training, found it to be inadequate

- 69% of those who had indicated that they had received training felt that further training was necessary
- 40% stated that they had sought advice from the HSE in relation to a child protection matter
- 25% stated that they had referred an allegation or had made a disclosure of child abuse to the HSE
- 60% felt that the relevance and effectiveness of supports provided by the HSE was fair to poor
- 71% reported that the follow up/feedback provided by the HSE was fair or poor

(c/f: Appendix 2 – Full Survey Results)

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

A number of survey respondents indicated their willingness to participate in a Focus Group to elaborate on their experiences.

Two Focus Groups were arranged. The first took place in the Abbey Court Hotel, Nenagh on Tuesday, 29 January, 2008, and was attended by 8 of the survey respondents. The second Focus Group took place in the Plaza Hotel, Tallaght, on Monday, 11 February, 2008, and was attended by 6 of the survey respondents.

The following questions were put to each of the Focus Groups:

1. What has been your overall experience of carrying out the role of the DLP?
2. In our survey, 69% of respondents indicated that they needed additional training for the role. What areas need to be covered in such training?
3. What has been your experience, if any, of seeking advice from the HSE under Section 3.2.2 of the Guidelines?
4. What has been your experience, if any, of making referrals of child protection concerns to the HSE?
5. What has been your experience of dealing with other agencies (Garda, DES, Management) in relation to child protection issues?

6. How can INTO best assist members in relation to child protection issues?

### **MAIN ISSUES OF CONCERN**

The main issues of concern identified at the Focus Group mirrored, to a large extent, the comments made by respondents to the survey.

#### **Training**

As indicated earlier in this report, 53% of respondents stated that they had received no training whatsoever to enable them to undertake the role of DLP. This figure closely equates to the 55% of respondents who stated that they had been appointed to the role of DLP since 2004 when the last training took place for DLPs.

The fact that 55% of our respondents have been appointed to the role of DLP since 2004, serves to highlight the need for training on an on-going basis and not, as heretofore, on a periodical basis.

The survey commentators and those in attendance at Focus Groups stressed the need for:

- on-going effective training and refresher courses;
- whole staff training in addition to specific training for Designated Liaison Persons;
- training to include a session on report-writing;
- an input from the HSE and An Garda Síochána at training sessions; and
- summary guidelines

#### **Role And Experience Of Designated Liaison Person**

Generally speaking, members found their experience of carrying out the role of DLP to be time consuming and very isolating and solitary. The role demands that the DLP supports class teachers and others involved in child protection issues but the survey indicated that there was no support structure for the DLP or the

school. It was stated that there seemed to be a general lack of understanding by other agencies of how schools work.

Reference was made to difficulties arising with newcomer children in the area of child protection, particularly with regard to cultural differences and what the parents of these children view as acceptable levels of punishment, discipline etc. It was stated that there was a need for child protection leaflets to be produced in a number of languages to cover the considerable number of different nationalities now part of the school community.

While acknowledging that supports are put in place by the social services for the child and the family concerned, it was felt there was no recognition of the fact that because the DLP had made a disclosure/allegation, the potential for damage to the relationship built by the school with a parent/parents over many years was great, making it difficult to maintain any form of positive relationship with the parent/parents into the future.

There is little indication that there is any recognition of the fact that the school is the principal link between all of the agencies involved and that the school must maintain contact with parents even when other agencies are no longer involved.

The Survey and Focus Groups highlighted the lack of feedback to the DLP once a referral had been made, particularly if a decision had been made by the HSE not to pursue the matter. It was also felt that the emphasis within the HSE was on sexual abuse and that issues of neglect and physical abuse were not a priority. On the positive side, it was accepted that, where referrals were made, the outcome for the children concerned had generally, been positive.

### **Role Of The Other Agencies**

Survey respondents and Focus Group participants expressed a view that, rather than being able to seek advice without outlining specifics, pressure to make a disclosure is now being brought to bear by the social services. It was the view of respondents that social services are protecting themselves at the expense of the DLP/school. It was also indicated that the HSE operates a one-way system of information giving and does not work in a partnership situation.

The importance of building a relationship between the DLP and the social worker was highlighted by respondents. However, DLP's often found they could not speak to the same social worker when they called regarding a case and a large number of respondents also stated that duty Social Workers tended to be inexperienced. DLP's felt that duty Social Workers do not actively listen and are unable to tease out issues in advance of making a referral.

Reference to attendance at Case Conferences was made by respondents and Focus Group participants. The experience was referred to as being unsatisfactory for a number of reasons:

- The amount of time taken with attending a Case Conference.
- The fact that Case Conferences tend to take place at times and places that do not suit teachers, for example in the middle of the summer or at times when teachers would not otherwise be working.
- In event of the teacher being unable to attend a Case Conference, it was difficult to obtain the Conference notes.

A number of questions arose with regard to the role of health professionals, especially GPs, in referring children to the HSE. In general, it was stated that the Gardaí were found to be very helpful when contacted. Child services, where they were in place, were also found to be an excellent support. However, it was stated that the role of the National Education and Welfare Board (NEWB) needed to be explored, particularly in relation to children who moved regularly and to children under the age of six.

The survey found that additional supports for DLPs were required including:

- travel expenses for attendance at Case Conferences;
- DLP support groups – perhaps through the INTO Principals' Fora given that the majority of DLPs are Principal Teachers; and
- Regular inter-agency meetings in order to build good working relationships in the area of child protection.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The CEC considered the issues arising from the survey and the Focus Groups and also heard from officials involved in child protection cases. A number of views were expressed about the current practice of the DES on receipt of complaints and how this practice was not in line with aspects of the DES guidelines to schools.

The recommendations arising from the review of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) are as follows:

- Training should be provided for full school staff in relation to child protection issues.
- Specific training should be provided for DLPs to include report-writing, input from the HSE at local level and summary guidelines.
- Child protection matters should be included in Leadership Development in Schools (LDS) Misneach training for newly appointed principals.
- Supports must be put in place for the DLP as the key school link person with the family and all the other agencies.
- A local area network for those involved in child protection should be established to include schools, the HSE, An Garda Síochána and the NEWB.
- Guidance should be made available to teachers and parents on the issue of cultural differences and their impact on child protection issues.
- Any guidance produced for parents should be made available in different languages.
- Support groups should be established for DLPs, perhaps through the local INTO Principals' Fora.
- Travel expenses should be paid to DLPs attending Case Conferences.
- INTO should meet with the appropriate section of the HSE with regard to inconsistencies in dealing with allegations/disclosures from children and with complaints made against teachers.

- INTO should meet with the DES in relation to their practices and the application of Circular 0046/2007 where an allegation is made to a staff member of the DES



# **REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF INTO MEMBERS ACTING AS DESIGNATED LIAISON PERSON UNDER THE CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES 'CHILDREN FIRST'**

## **SURVEY**

Q1 When were you appointed DLP?  
(Designated Liaison Person)

2001 ☐ 2002 ☐ 2003 ☐  
2004 ☐ 2005 ☐ 2006 ☐ 2007 ☐

Q2 Are you Principal of your School?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If not, please indicate whether or not you hold  
a post of responsibility:

DP ☐ AP ☐ SDT ☐ Not Promoted ☐

Q3 Have you had any training to enable  
you carry out the role of DLP?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Was the training adequate?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Do you think further training is  
necessary?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Q4 As DLP have you ever sought advice from the  
HSE (Health Service Executive) in  
relation to a  
child protection matter?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Q5 As DLP have you ever referred an  
allegation/disclosure of child abuse to  
the HSE?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Q6 How would you rate the relevance and  
effectiveness

of the support provided by the HSE?

V. ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

Q7 How would you rate the  
followup/feedback

provided by the HSE?

V. ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

Please give details:


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Q8 If as DLP you have dealt with a child protection matter, did you liaise with any other agencies  
eg Gardai, legal, management, DES, INTO etc:

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please give details of interagency liaison - not the specific case


Q9 Any other comments:


## Appendix 2

### DLP REVIEW RESULTS

Survey sent to a random sample of Principal Teachers:  
Returns received:

550

100%

335

61%

To calculate percentage of returns:

335

100%

Q1	When were you appointed DLP? (Designated Liaison Person)	2001	43	12.84%	2002	46	13.73%	2003	39	11.64%		
		2004	48	14.33%	2005	42	12.54%	2006	53	15.82%	2007	41
	Did not respond to this question	23	6.86%									

Q2	Are you Principal of your School?	Yes	305	91.04%	No	29	8.66%						
	Did not respond to this question		1	0.30%									
	To calculate percentage returns:					29	100%						
	If not, please indicate whether or not you hold a post of responsibility :												
		DP	17	58.63%	AP	3	10.34%	SDT	5	17.24%	Not Promoted	1	3.45%
	Did not respond to this question:		3	10.34%									

To calculate percentage of returns:

335

100%

Q3 Have you had any training to enable

Did not respond to this question	3	0.90%
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182 answered this question. 57 of the 154 who stated they had received training viewed it as adequate - 125 stated training was inadequate although the figure, based on the number who stated they had received training, would indicate that of these 125, 28 had not received training or had not indicated that they had received training, in the previous question. I am basing the calculations on the 182 and dividing the answers in three categories.

Yes 57 31.32% No 125 68.68% of 28 22.40% either had no training or had no training in the last 12 months. 22.40% indicated that they had at Q3

To calculate percentage of returns:	335	<b>100%</b>
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Did not respond to this question:	79	23.58%
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This may be due to the fact that they answered NO to the question asking if they had received training and therefore were not in a position to answer if FURTHER training was necessary.

Did not respond to this question:	1	0.30%
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Did not respond to this question:	3	0.90%
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To calculate percentage of returns:	191	100%
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Q6	How would you rate the relevance and effectiveness of the support provided by the HSE?	↑	
	Responded to this question:	↓	191 57.01%

The 191 responded to Q6 as follows:	V. Good	13	6.81%	Good	62	32.46%	Fair	55	28.79%	Poor	61	31.94%
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To calculate percentage of returns:	167	100%
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Q7	How would you rate the followup/feedback provided by the HSE?	↑	
	Responded to this question:	↓	167 49.85%

The 167 responded to Q7 as follows:	V. Good	2	1.20%	Good	46	27.54%	Fair	45	26.95%	Poor	74	44.31%
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Q8	If as DLP you have dealt with a child protection matter,did you liaise with any other agencies eg Gardai, legal, management, DES, INTO etc:	Yes	75	No	104
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It is not possible to analyse this question properly given that a number of people who had indicated that they had not dealt with a child protection matter at Q4 & Q5 above responded to this question