

JILLIAN VAN TURNHOUT

INDEPENDENT
SENATOR



Agency needs to protect and care for our children

BACK in November the Irish people voted in a referendum to put protection of children's rights at the heart of this Government's agenda.

For even longer the Government has been promising to establish the Child and Family Support Agency - the kind of body that could ensure children are protected and cared for by the State the way they deserve.

We've already set aside €546million in 2013 for this agency which will have more than 4,000 staff.

The good news is the Government is on the verge of bringing in a new law to set up this body.

But here's the problem: There has been no debate on this agency - what its job will be, how it will carry it out and how it'll be made accountable.

As a Senator and someone who's worked for many years as an advocate for children's rights, I went up and down the country campaigning hard for a Yes vote in the referendum.

Everywhere I went I heard people's concerns about how constitutional change would affect them and their children.

People want to know this agency will do everything in its power to keep families together.

They want to know intervention in difficult cases will be early, proportionate and accountable.

We can do this - and we owe it to our children to do this - but only if our Government is willing to listen to people with real experience of crisis situations.

A chunk of the HSE will transfer to the new agency. Nobody wants to see it inherit the faults of the HSE - faults so many of us witnessed first-hand.

Nobody wants a Nama for kids, a body which can only intervene when the child is in a desperate situation.

We've seen these problems before. Take the HSE. Money set aside for mental health services is constantly being diverted to make up the losses

TOP PRIZE
Sophie Healy-
Thow, Ciara Judge
and Emer Hickey
with their award



GIRL GUIDED TO SCIENTIFIC SUCCESS

I'D like to say well done to all the entrants of the BT Young Scientist and Technology exhibition in the RDS earlier this month. The overall winners

were a trio of friends, Emer Hickey, Ciara Judge and Sophie Healy-Thow from Kinsale Community School, Cork. A big shout out to Emer Hickey who

is also an active member of the Irish Girl Guides.

Yet more proof involvement in youth work and good results go hand in hand.

in other parts of the health service. This December we learnt we still have not been able to pay for the hundreds of mental health staff that have long been promised.

And has the HSE been held accountable? Not a chance.

What children in State care need is stability, and the knowledge there's someone there for them every step of the way.

When a crisis occurs the child

needs a dedicated person who has responsibility for them. Someone they can talk to. Someone they can trust.

I've heard too many stories of children being shunted around with no one person to speak to or trust.

The agency is the most powerful vehicle for reform I've seen in years of working for children's rights.

What we need is an informed, integrated approach - one that brings together all the health and support

services for children such as child welfare, prevention and early intervention services, child protection, family support, therapeutic, speech and language, psychological services, public health nursing and accessible mental health services.

But we can only make the reforms if we create a public debate to ensure everyone affected has a voice.

We owe it to our children. Let's start it today.

Property Tax can have exemptions

THE Property Tax has been on everyone's mind recently.

I've been working with the Finance Minister to ensure both community and voluntary organisations will be exempt from the tax.

These are the people who work with children, young people, and many other groups in our society, providing crucial services and facilities for social activities and personal development.

The minister has committed to working with me to ensure these important exemptions go through when the Finance Bill is finally passed.

EU Presidency will help us build image and exports

SO, for the next five months, Ireland holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU which sees us at the centre of European attention once again, albeit in a more positive light than in recent times.

With more than 180 official Presidency meetings and events due to take place here over the coming six months,

and more than 15,000 people expected to visit Ireland on official and unofficial Presidency-related business, we have a great opportunity to rebuild our image and brand on the world stage.

Irish businesses are working to get back on their feet and exports are absolutely crucial to that. That's why business

and trade will be key to our Presidency.

We will be working hard to secure bilateral trade agreements with key partners like the US and Japan.

This could well help our pharmaceutical, software, and food exports to expand, adding upwards of €100million to the Irish economy.