

Reimagine Children's Collective: One Year On

Who are we?

The Reimagine Children's Collective is a collaboration of ten major charities working with children, young people and families in Northern Ireland. Our goal is to advocate for the effective implementation of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services. We are ambitious for our children and believe Northern Ireland has the potential to develop and provide world-class services to support them.

Why are we working together?

Transformational change in children's social care services in Northern Ireland is urgently needed. [The Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services](#), led by Professor Ray Jones and published in June 2023, has provided a significant opportunity to reimagine how services are organised and delivered regionally.

The Review provided 53 recommendations for improvement. These included:

- Investing more in early intervention and prevention for families.
- Making better use of existing resources and staff.
- Making major structural changes to deliver children's social care through a single regional organisation, instead of the current five Health and Social Care Trusts.

The Independent Review did not underestimate the nature and extent of the systemic changes required to transform children's social care services in Northern Ireland. Neither do leaders in the Children's Sector. No single agency or organisation can achieve the necessary changes alone. As the Reimagine Children's Collective, we are committed to working together to implement the Review's recommendations and encourage contributions from other organisations who work with children and families to collaborate with us in this effort.



22,875

CHILDREN IN NEED IN
NORTHERN IRELAND¹



4,000

FAMILIES WAITING FOR
ALLOCATION OF THEIR CASE²



2,251

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
WAITING FOR AN INITIAL CHILD
AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL
HEALTH SERVICE (CAMHS)
ASSESSMENT³

What have we done?

1: 'Reimagining Children's Social Care Services' Launch at Stormont

The Reimagine Children's Collective jointly developed and launched our 'Reimagining Children's Social Care Services' policy paper on 9th November 2023 at Stormont. The paper was designed to assist others in the Children's Sector to respond to the Review consultation. In our paper we outlined five key themes which need to be addressed to improve the outcomes for children and families:



Listening to
Children, Young People
and Families

We propose a Children and Family Charter to formalise this commitment, along with better access to age-appropriate information and independent advocacy services.



Increasing Accountability

Introduce new measures to increase accountability and effectively monitor progress. This includes quality assurance processes, better use of data and the appointment of a Minister for Children and Families.



Supporting Early
Intervention and Prevention

Renew focus and investment in early intervention and prevention within our communities, including expanding SureStart.



Valuing the Role of the
Community and Voluntary Sector

Foster collective action for transformational change, valuing and supporting the role of the community and voluntary sector and improving collaboration across all sectors.



No Privatisation of Children's Social Care
Services in Northern Ireland

Oppose the privatisation of children's social care services in Northern Ireland.



Read our briefing paper
[here!](#)

2: Reimagine Children's Collective at the Health Committee

The Reimagine Children's Collective attended the Health Committee for a briefing by the Department of Health on the progress of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services on 21st March 2024. Young people who had engaged with Professor Jones and participated in the Review from Include Youth and VOYPIC joined us and met with Department of Health representatives to ensure that the voices of children and young people remain a priority.

3: Reset and Rebalance: Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector Workstream

In May 2024, the Reimagine Children's Collective worked with the Department of Health to develop the "Reset and Rebalance: Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector" workstream. This workstream forms part of the reform agenda related to the Independent Review led by statutory colleagues. The purpose of this partnership is to reset the dynamics between statutory bodies and voluntary and community organisations towards greater collaboration and mutual support in order to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

Key Objectives of the Partnership:

- **Reset:** Develop new ways to strengthen partnerships, set shared goals, improve communication, ensure fair representation for voluntary and community organisations and prioritise systemic changes, including funding for children's social care.
- **Rebalance:** Shift the focus of children's social care from crisis intervention to early support for families, through coordinated efforts and resource sharing across sectors.

4: Contact with Professor Jones

Over the year, we have facilitated meetings between Professor Jones and colleagues from the British Association of Social Workers and Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance, as well as the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. We met with Professor Ray Jones before his appearance at the Health Committee on 6th June 2024 to share concerns about the slow pace of change one year on from the publication of the Review.

Prof Jones told the Health Committee, “There is a load of activity around children’s social care but not much action.” Professor Jones drew attention to the worsening situation in children’s social care which has seen 400 more children in care since the Review began in 2022. He emphasised that transformational change is urgently needed to address these systemic and endemic problems and that the Review's main recommendation, to create a single children's organisation, would serve to refocus efforts on improving children's social care services.



Click [here](#) to watch a video from Professor Ray Jones



Next steps

In the next year, the Reimagine Children's Collective is planning:

- **Review Conference in Autumn 2024:** The Reimagine Children's Collective will collaborate with the Department of Health and support children and families to participate in organising a conference to review the progress of the Review recommendations.
- **Children and Family Charter:** Many children, young people, parents and carers often feel frustrated and disempowered when trying to access information about services and interact with the system. The Reimagine Children's Collective will support the co-design of a Children and Families Charter in partnership with statutory bodies. This charter will define the standards of service provision, outline the rights of children and young people, explain how their views will be heard and respected and provide a complaints process if those standards are not met.
- **Developing a New Funding Model:** The Reimagine Children's Collective will work with statutory partners to develop proposals for a new funding model for services delivered by the voluntary and community sector. This model aims to ensure effective delivery, secure stability, enable short to medium-term planning and establish full cost recovery.

The Reimagine Children's Collective is currently chaired by Michele Janes, Director of Barnardo's NI with the secretariat provided by the National Children's Bureau. Please contact Dr Donna Kernaghan, Reimagine Co-ordinator at donna@statsandstories.co.uk for further information.

