



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

CHILD SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT

March 2020

The Adoption Authority's (AAI) Child Safeguarding Statement has been developed in line with requirements under the Children First Act 2015 and the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Tusla's Guidance on Developing a Child Safeguarding Statement. The Children First Act 2015 was enacted on 19th November 2015 and commenced in full on December 11th 2017.

1. Name of service being provided

The AAI is located on the Floors 3 and 4 of Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4 DO4 H6F6. The current number of staff is currently 28 with one vacancy, full complement is 29 and all staff work in the offices at Shelbourne House.

2. Nature of service and principles to safeguard children from harm

Consultation hearings with family members in relation to the adoption process; consultations at the time of finalising adoption orders; multi-disciplinary work related to the selection and matching of children for adoption; information and tracing services; accreditation, review and inspection of national adoption services.

The Children First principles guiding work with families, underpin this Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment (A Guide for the Reporting of Child Protection and Welfare Concerns, page 2).

- The safety and welfare of children is everyone's concern;
- The best interests of the child should be paramount;
- The overall aim in all dealings with children and their families is to intervene proportionately to support families to keep children safe from harm;
- Interventions by the State should build on existing strengths and protective factors in the family;
- Early intervention is key to getting better outcomes. Where it is necessary for the State to intervene to keep children safe, the minimum intervention necessary should be used;
- Children should only be separated from their parents or carers when alternative means of protecting them have been exhausted;
- Children have a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously. Taking into account their age and understanding, children should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions that may affect their lives;
- Parents and carers have a right to respect, and should be consulted and involved in matters that concern their family;

- A proper balance must be struck between protecting children and respecting the rights and needs of parents, carers and families. Where there is conflict, the child's welfare must come first; and
- Child protection is a multiagency, multidisciplinary activity. Agencies and professionals must work together in the interests of the children.

3. Risk Assessment

The Children First Act 2015 Section 11(1)(a) defines **risk** as 'any potential for harm to a child while availing of the service' and Section 2 defines **harm** to a child as 'sexual abuse of the child' or 'assault, ill treatment or neglect...likely to seriously affect the child's health, development or welfare'.

This risk assessment shows areas of risk within the AAI. Controls specific to each risk are detailed within the **Table 1** below. Overall controls operating generally in the Authority include:

- Children are in the company of their parents at all times in the Authority offices;
- Garda vetting of staff who have access to children and information on children;
- All staff receive training in Children First and know who to report concerns to;
- Services are provided by registered, regulated and professionally qualified staff, who are mandated persons;
- There is limited contact with children because AAI staff do not provide direct services to individual children; and
- Secure email and filing systems.

4. Procedures

All child protection issues are routed through the 'Relevant Person' Katie Harrigan ext 318 or any member of the Social Work team, to the appropriate Tusla Child and Family Agency office. The Deputy Liaison Person in the Authority is Nicole Scannell ext 322. In addition to the procedures listed in the risk assessment above, the following procedures support the safeguarding of children while they are availing of services at the Authority:

4(i) *Procedure for the management of allegations of abuse or misconduct against workers, of a child availing of the services of the Authority:*

- Complaint documented and responded to in writing immediately stating that the complaint has been received and giving the direct contact details of the Relevant Person or Deputy liaison person who is dealing with the complaint
- CEO is informed
- Level of action required to address the complaint is determined within one-three days, by the Relevant Person or Deputy liaison person, HR and CEO
- If it does not further harm the child or create more risk, the staff member is notified immediately of the complaint, given a written record of the allegation, and advised of a time to meet to discuss what has happened. If an abusive interaction has been found to occur, the matter will be reported to Tusla by the mandatory reporter
- The child and family concerned are informed clearly and in writing of the next steps in relation to the complaint.

Table 1. Risk Assessment

Risk Identified	Procedure in place to manage risk identified.
Harm to children and young people through their direct contact with Adoption Authority staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are in the company of their parents or guardians at all times in the AAI's offices; • Board consultations with children, and hearings in relation to adoptions - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the hearing, preparatory clear accessible information (leaflets) are given to children and families by post and they are informed of information on AAI website prior to attending the AAI offices for consultation or hearing; • Consultation with children at the AAI offices is carried out by Board members who are Garda vetted and bound by professional ethics, Codes of Conduct and Governance; and • Where young people aged under 18 years old seek a service such as tracing or counselling, they are consulted by professionally qualified staff in the company of their parents.

Risk Identified	Procedure in place to manage risk identified.
<p>Observation by staff of any obvious neglectful or abusive act towards children, in the waiting area, interviewing or Board rooms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and Board members are aware from training and information provided by the Relevant Person in the AAI, of what constitutes a Child Protection risk at the AAI, and the need to report suspected abuse to the Relevant person or Deputy Liaison Person.
<p>Inappropriate use by staff, of confidential and identifying information on children, which can include video material of a highly sensitive nature including physical disability and nakedness. This information is circulated from email systems abroad and from the mediation agency HHAMA, to the Authority as the Central Authority. It is seen and reviewed by staff at a number of levels in each organisation. The information on children includes identifying details and can include photographic and video material that indicates the child's additional needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encrypted email system allowing limited access to staff members in the Authority; Garda vetting of staff who have access to personal and highly sensitive information on children; On taking up a post at the AAI, each staff member signs a Confidentiality agreement. Employment of professionally qualified and regulated staff in a multi-disciplinary manner, to review the information; Professional staff are mandated persons; Compliance with Data Protection legislation and regulations, which includes redacting identifying information to prospective parents prior to acceptance of the referral of the child; and can include redaction of information on reports to Board if appropriate; Controls from some of the countries involved include the use of confidential passwords and encrypted databases; Information is kept in paper form, on indexed files, in locked cabinets at the Authority offices; and These controls are also in evidence at the accredited body HHAMA under the Authority's regulation,
<p>Abuse of young people under 18 seeking a service such as tracing or counselling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people seen in company of parent or guardian; Consultation by professionally qualified staff in the company of young person's carer; and Professional staff are registered, Garda vetted, and mandated persons.

Risk Identified	Procedure in place to manage risk identified.
<p>The provision by organisations accredited by the AAI, of adoption services including the placement of infants and children for adoption, away from their birth families; and direct counselling pre- and post-adoption of young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controls in place at these organisations are evidenced by self-monitoring review reports for the AAI as the regulatory body; • During review and inspection times, AAI staff note from desk-top review and on site staff interviews, that accredited bodies have written policies and procedures on current Children First guidelines, and that staff are aware of them and know what to report to the mandated person; • Services are provided by registered and professionally qualified staff who are mandated persons; • Staff who have access to children are Garda vetted regularly; • Staff have completed the Tusla online training in relation to the 2017 Children First Guidelines; • Mitigating factors also include the intensive assessment and preparation process undergone by birth parents and prospective adopters in collaboration with professionals, before during and after the placement of an infant/ child.
<p>Retrospective abuse disclosures where perpetrators of retrospective abuse may be still alive</p> <p>Crisis pregnancies where mother may be vulnerable</p> <p>Family support issues that may require intervention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty phone and review system staffed by professional social workers who can refer to appropriate services; • Professional staff are registered, Garda vetted, supervised by an Independent CORU registered Social Worker, and are mandated persons; <p>These types of child protection concerns have come to the notice of the AAI through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mediation and counselling provided for the National Adoption Contact Preference Register; • Reviews of assessments for adoption; and • Duty calls, letters and emails .

Risk Identified	Procedure in place to manage risk identified.
<p>Non-compliance by staff, with Children First Child Protection policy and procedures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff undertake Tusla online training; • Relevant person ensures that; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certificates for online training are granted; • each person has copies of current information; and • each person avails of ongoing training provided by Relevant person.
<p>Delay in making referrals to Tusla</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant person or the duty social worker prioritises urgent complaints, ensuring that they are dealt with on the spot. They are documented and referred to Tusla and the Gardai as necessary; and • Time limit on all referrals - where referral may be required, these cases are discussed by the Relevant Person with the SW Team Leader or AAI Senior Management Team or with mandated reporters on the social work team between 1-3 days of the first alert.
<p>Receipt of complaint of child abuse in relation to a staff member</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant person deals with the complaint with the support of the CEO, and HR, in line with Children First Guidelines and the AAI procedures for complaints; and • Where the issue is to be reported to Tusla, this will be done by the Relevant Person or Deputy liaison person
<p>Referral to AAI website for children;</p> <p>Children under 12 to access info regarding: Your Adoption Hearing Info for Young People Videos of process of Adoption hearings and Adoption Day</p> <p>Children age 12-17 Adoption Day Video</p>	<p>Animated videos, no children filmed</p> <p>No access to other internet sources.</p> <p>Encrypted website</p> <p>Emails are monitored, no replies to under 18-year-old. If email received in AAI from minor in any Unit in AAI, it is forwarded to SW unit. SW will contact sender of email and direct them to seek permission from parents or guardians before accessing AAI services.</p> <p>Videos that are available in the website can be accessed here.</p>

4 (ii) Procedure for the safe recruitment and selection of staff who may have contact with children directly or indirectly:

- Professional staff must show evidence of registration with their associated regulatory body, prior to interview for the position
- Interviewer checks registration numbers prior to invitation to interview
- If successful at interview, work and character references are followed up, and information on known disciplinary procedures against the candidate in relation to abusive interactions with children or vulnerable adults in their care, is requested
- Candidates are Garda vetted prior to taking up positions at the AAI.
- Newly appointed staff sign a Confidentiality Agreement
- Appointment of Board members is undertaken through State Boards.ie
- Conflicts of Interest statements are required from decision-makers at management and Board level

4(iii) Procedure for provision and access to child safeguarding training and information, including the identification of the occurrence of harm

- All staff received the Children First National Guidance Booklet in December 2017.
- All current/new staff in the AAI have completed the Tusla Children First online training.
- Relevant person in the AAI has monitored the awards given to staff members for this training.
- All staff in the AAI have been informed through email on a yearly basis of their responsibilities under the Children First Act 2015, and are aware of their responsibility to report a concern to the Relevant person.
- It is the responsibility of the Relevant person or duty social worker to identify the occurrence of harm.
- The AAI Relevant person sources and provides ongoing training material from Tusla in relation to Children First.

4(iv) Procedure for reporting of child protection or welfare concerns to Tusla

- The details documented by the concerned person are reviewed by the Relevant person who ascertains the level of service provision or reporting required to address the situation, as outlined in the Tusla: A Guide for the Reporting of Child Protection and Welfare Concerns, 2017, p9.
- Where the matter is to be reported on to Tusla, this is undertaken solely by the Relevant person or another mandated person in the organisation.

- Social workers at the AAI, as mandated persons, report to Tusla in the online standardised format provided by Tusla, as outlined in The Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017; and Tusla: A Guide for the Reporting of Child Protection and Welfare Concerns, 2017. Where the online system is not operational, the report is sent on the standardised forms and relayed to the relevant Tusla office
- Social Workers are also mandatory assistants to Tusla in some cases, and are required to report and assist as required in the investigation of the disclosure

4(v) Procedure for maintaining a list of mandated reporters

- The schedule outlined in the Children First Act 2015 indicates that all social workers and the Medical Advisor at the Authority are mandated persons.
- Corporate Services will list social workers as Mandated Reports on the internal phone list. The list is updated as professional staff leave or join the Authority.
- Contact details for the Relevant person and Deputy Liaison Person in the Authority are available publicly on the website and in the reception area of the Authority's 4th Floor offices.
- Due to the small size of the organisation and the level of Children First training undertaken by staff, the names and contact details of all mandated persons are known to all staff members.

4(vi) Procedure for appointing a relevant person

A delegated Relevant person is to be the first point of contact in relation to the Child Safeguarding Statement and all matters of child protection. Due to the small size of the organisation, the AAI agrees that both roles can be held by one individual position at the main AAI offices in Shelbourne Road. The role carries responsibilities in relation to judgement and decision-making, report-writing, training and monitoring of the implementation of the Children First Act within the organisation. The Relevant Person in the AAI is required to analyse child welfare concerns as they arise, and make judgements based on the best interests of children so as to ensure that timely reports on incidents above a certain threshold, are made to the relevant authorities in the required format.

Due to the need to have the qualifications, training and experience to place them in a position to protect children from harm, a social worker as a mandated person, fulfils this role in the AAI. Due to the responsibilities, which are outside a regular caseload of work, the role has been assigned to Senior Social Work Practitioner.

The AAI relevant person is Katie Harrigan, Senior Social Work Practitioner, ext 318, Katie_harrigan@aai.gov.ie

5. Implementation of the Children First Act 2015 at the Authority

The AAI staff have completed the online Tusla training module. This training builds on staff's current knowledge gained in training on Children First in 2011 and in 2016, and following a presentation to staff in November 2017 on the relevant updates in the 2017 Guidelines. Each staff member has been given a copy of The Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017.

The AAI recognises that implementation is an ongoing process and the Relevant person will continue to monitor its implementation through requirements such as staff members producing certificates to show they have undertaken the online Tusla training, and through staff attendance at training sessions, and feedback received following such sessions. All issues that are reported to Tusla or the Gardai by the Authority's social workers as Mandated Persons, are reported on in the annual Children First Compliance report to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The AAI is committed to the implementation of this Child Safeguarding Statement and the procedures that support staff to keep children safe from harm while availing of the AAI services. The Children First Annual Child Protection compliance report is presented to the board in the final quarter of each year.

The Child Safeguarding Statement will be published on the AAI website,

The Child Safeguarding Statement has been provided to all staff, Board, and any other persons involved with AAI.

The Child Safeguarding Statement is readily accessible to parents and guardians on request.

Signed: Patricia Carey

Date: 25 March 2020

Patricia Carey, Chief Executive Officer

On behalf of The Adoption Authority of Ireland

For queries, please contact the Children First Relevant Person Katie Harrigan, Senior Social Work Practitioner at 01 2309318 katie_harrigan@aai.gov.ie or the Deputy Liaison Person Nicole Scannell, Social Work Team Leader at 01 2309 322 nicole_scannell@aai.gov.ie

Updated 20 March 2020. This Child Safeguarding Statement will be reviewed in January 2022 and after there has been a material change in any matter to which this statement refers.