

# Irish Foster Care Association National Conference 2 – 4 November 2018



## Fostering Stability

The Irish Foster Care Association National Conference brings together all those with an interest in foster care, including general and relative foster carers, care leavers, health and social care practitioners, academics, students, teachers, policy makers, and members of the community and voluntary sector to learn together, engage in dialogue, and share their experiences and best practice. This year, the conference will take place from 2 to 4 November at the Radisson Blu Hotel, Limerick.

### Conference theme

We are delighted to announce this year's conference theme: **Fostering Stability**. It is well-recognised that a secure and stable environment is key to children's healthy development and well-being. Due to the circumstances which lead to children being received into care and the many changes to their world that may be part of this, it is critical that we do all we can to support the most vulnerable children in our society to feel safety, security and stability.

The conference will offer scope to explore how the system can better support stability for children in foster care and look at many aspects of practice and policy of relevance to this theme. Stability may relate to our everyday foster care practice - how can our practice facilitate healthy child development and well-being? Stability may also relate to the practical and legal arrangements that are in place for a child. For example, how can every element of a child's care-planning and its follow-through contribute to a child's sense of stability and well-being? For the foster family, what are the factors which can contribute to parental

autonomy within the foster care parenting role? Closely related to the concept of stability in foster care is that of permanence. The meanings of permanence in terms of stability, emotional security and family membership into adulthood are complex<sup>[1]</sup>. One definition of permanence is: 'a set of goal-directed activities designed to help children live in families that offer continuity of relationships with nurturing parents or caretakers and the opportunity to establish lifetime relationships'<sup>[2]</sup>. Another definition is: 'the security and well-being that comes from being accepted as members of 'new' families'<sup>[3]</sup>. While some children who come into care return to live with their birth parents, for those who can't, permanence within the foster family can be an alternative. In the Republic of Ireland, a number of different legal options are available or may be proposed within the current review of the Child Care Act 1991, and views vary on which of these options is best able to achieve permanence in both practical and emotional terms. Other areas central to the concept of stability in foster care include: the provision of supports to foster carers; and more broadly, how can the stability of foster care itself be sustained in Ireland? We hope that the conference will stimulate further debate, discussion and learning on these many aspects of fostering stability.

### Keynote speaker

We are delighted to announce that Dr Karen Winter will be the keynote speaker. Karen is a senior lecturer in social work at Queen's University Belfast. Prior to taking up her academic post 10 years ago, Karen was a social worker in a child protection team, a team manager of a child and family team and a Guardian ad Litem for the Northern Ireland Guardian ad Litem Agency (NIGALA). She has extensive professional experience in working with foster carers and foster children. She is currently chair of the advisory group for Fostering Network Northern Ireland and a non-executive social work professional member of the Board of NIGALA. She has written and researched extensively on the area of children in care. Current projects include the development of a paired reading intervention for foster children and how social workers can improve their communication with children and carers.

### Focus of keynote address

Foster carers, social workers all have in common their desire to secure stability for the children they look after. And yet we all know that stability can be hard to achieve and hard to maintain. Taking a wide view and, keeping at the forefront the perspectives of children and foster carers, the keynote will explore what is meant by stability and what factors at the level of the child, carer, social worker and wider organisational structures, contribute to stability and instability. This keynote will focus on the views of foster carers and foster children as to what can be done to support stability. It will be evident that support needs to be delivered at multiple levels and that it is an ongoing rather than one-off process. Networks of foster carers offering support to one another informally are vital to the process of securing stability given their emphasis on 'common' and 'shared experiences' that cannot be found in professional relationships.

### How can I book a place?

The conference brochure and booking system will go live on the IFCA website in mid-August. **Early bird rates: until 3 October (adults only). Final booking date: 19 October.**

## Irish Foster Care Association

The Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA) is the representative body for foster care in Ireland. Child-centred and rights-based, IFCA promotes excellence in foster care. We aim to accomplish this by providing information, support and learning opportunities for all those involved in foster care through our direct work in Advocacy, Branch Development, Support, Learning and Development. IFCA seeks to build a culture of learning that values the accumulation of knowledge, skills and experience of all with an involvement in fostering in the development of best practice. The annual conference is one of a range of opportunities in its learning programme which also includes training, seminars, and a journal on developments in foster care practice, policy and research, 'Foster'.



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Schofield, G., Beck, M. and Ward, E. (2012) Part of the family: 'Planning for permanence in long-term family foster care in long-term family foster care' *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(1) January.

<sup>2</sup> Maluccio and Fein, 1983: 5, cited in Stott and Gustavsson, 2010: 622, cited in Moran, L., McGregor, C. and Devaney, C. (2017) *Outcomes for Permanence and Stability for Children in Long-term Care*. Galway. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, The National University of Ireland, Galway.

<sup>3</sup> UK Performance and Innovation Unit (2000) in O'Brien, V. and Palmer, A. (2016) 'Permanence in long-term foster care: what are the options?' *Foster*, Issue 2, pp27-45.