



*Painéal Náisiúnta Athbhreithnithe*  
**NATIONAL REVIEW PANEL**

**Review undertaken in respect of a death experienced by a young person  
whose family had contact with Tusla**

**Eddie**

**Executive Summary**

**March 2019**

## **1. Introduction and background:**

The young person who is the subject of this review is here called, Eddie. He was aged 16 when he died following an accident. This case was referred to the NRP because Eddie had been referred to Tusla. Eddie lived with his mother and her partner. He had little contact with his father. When Eddie was nearly 16 years old, four referrals about him were received by the Tusla SWD over a period of three weeks. The first was from the Gardaí following an approach by Eddie's mother, Rachel, in relation to his school refusal and was not considered eligible for Tusla services. The remaining referrals were received from his school, CAMHS and his GP, all reporting an incident where he had been wandering around a local town at night and had stayed with a friend without his mother's permission, expressed reluctance to go home and had allegedly expressed suicidal ideation.

Information from the reports and from Eddie's mother indicated that his behaviour had become challenging over recent months, including aggressive outbursts and defiance and some episodes of anti-social behaviour. He had been referred to CAMHS but was considered ineligible for the service. His mother was finding him difficult to manage and was open to support. The SWD, whose main contact was by telephone with Eddie's mother, referred him to the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Service (PPFS) for support with regard to his school refusal, his relationship with his family and his challenging behaviours. Tragically, Eddie was involved in a fatal accident shortly after the service was offered to him.

## **2. Findings**

Eddie's death was a tragic accident and there is no evidence that this event was affected by the availability or quality of a service. When referrals about him were made to the Tusla social work services, they received a prompt response and referrers were contacted by letter. The various reports contained information about Eddie's behaviours which was concerning in nature. Although the referral of Eddie to PPFS was appropriate in the circumstances, the review found that the SWD could have probed more deeply into the information contained in the reports made about him, for example by contacting his school for further detail. It also noted that no contact was made with Eddie himself to ascertain his own view of his needs and the services that he would be interested in engaging with. Given the nature of the concerns reported, the review considers that the SWD could have provided more written evidence for their decision to take no further action.

### 3. Key Learning

This report has attempted to reflect on the Eddie's life and the challenges faced by the staff who worked with his family. The review team considers that there are areas where lessons can be learned.

- Research comparing the child welfare systems in separate countries identified higher or lower thresholds for intervention as between safety or need.<sup>1</sup> Social workers and their managers need to consider that the absence of immediate risk to a child's safety does not negate the need for an initial assessment should a referral indicate *prima facie* welfare concerns.
- Record-keeping is the dual responsibility of frontline workers and their managers. This is particularly the case in respect of decision-making. The written record is important in providing concrete and lasting information of the worker's and manager's thinking, the actions agreed and the reasons for them.<sup>2</sup>
- Young people value the support of social workers who listened and acted on what they told them<sup>3</sup>. The importance of establishing direct contact with young people themselves, when making decisions or putting supports in place, cannot be understated

**Dr Helen Buckley**

**Chair, National Review Panel**

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<sup>1</sup> Berrick, J., Dickens, J., Pösö, T., Skivenes. M. (2017) A Cross-Country Comparison of Child Welfare Systems and Workers' Responses to Children Appearing to be at Risk or in Need of Help. *Child Abuse Review* Vol. 26: 305–319

<sup>2</sup> Wilkins, D., How is supervision recorded in child and family social work? An analysis of 244 written records of formal supervision. (2017) *Child and Family Social Work*, 22, pp 1130–1140

<sup>3</sup> Deardon, J.(2004) Resilience: a study of risk and protective factors from the perspective of young people with experience of local authority care. *Support for Learning* Vol.19. 4 pp187-193.