



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

**Review undertaken in respect of the death of a young child  
known to the child protection system: Baby Sarah.**

**Summary**

**August 2016**

## **1. Background and main findings**

Baby Sarah died from natural causes when she was a few months old. She and her family had been known to child protection services since before her birth. The review found no direct link between her sad death and the interventions or lack of interventions of the social work department. However, it has identified a number of practice deficits in the way that reports about the family were processed prior to and following Sarah's birth. These included an inadequate response to reports about her mother's vulnerability. The review also noted that assessment was superficial and lacked analysis, underestimating the impact of some significant factors. A local review was critical of the governance of the social work department which has since been subject to structural and administrative reform.

## **2. Key Learning**

A number of learning points were identified by the reviewers as follows:

### **2.1 Assessment**

If a network check conducted as part of an assessment reveals that certain factors are prevalent, these issues and their impact on any children in the family must be considered and reflected upon. It is not sufficient to merely note the supportive input of a particular family member or service; it must be evaluated in terms of its potential to compensate for other weaknesses. The carer's capacity and motivation to change must also be examined. At that point, a conclusion may be reached about the goals that the family is expected to attain and the resources, services and interventions that will be required to assist them will be identified.

### **2.2 Impact of growing up in care**

- Recent research in the UK shows that 10% of care leavers who are parents themselves have their children removed to care in any given year (Centre for Social Justice 2015<sup>1</sup>) and are often affected by the lasting impact of pre-care experiences. While care leavers are not a homogenous group, this issue should be taken into consideration as a factor potentially impacting on parenting capacity, and one which should attract extra supports.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-client-groups/children-young-people/centreforsocialjustice/1707772015\\_Finding\\_Feet.pdf](http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-client-groups/children-young-people/centreforsocialjustice/1707772015_Finding_Feet.pdf)

### **2.3 The impact of parental alcohol abuse**

- There is a growing body of material on the impact of alcohol misuse on a parent's ability to meet their children's developmental needs, which indicate that they may be less available, have poorer concentration and subject to irritability<sup>2</sup>.

### **2.4 Working with victims of domestic violence**

- The Child and Family Agency have produced very useful guidance on working with victims of domestic violence<sup>3</sup>, in which are listed 'Do's and Don'ts' of practice as well as indicators of dangerousness and safety planning. It also provides a list of questions that may be asked when assessing children's safety in domestic violence situations.

### **2.5 Impact of multiple adversities**

- Research suggests that while children may be sufficiently resilient to withstand the impact of individual parental factors, particularly when there are protective factors and available supports, their risk of harm considerably increases when there are a combination of adverse factors.

Dr. Helen Buckley

Chair, National Review Panel

---

<sup>2</sup> Hope, A. (2011) Hidden Realities: Children's Exposure to Risk from Parental Drinking  
[http://www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/research/2011/NWAF\\_Realities\\_Report.pdf](http://www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/research/2011/NWAF_Realities_Report.pdf)

Cleaver, H., Unell, I and Aldgate, J. (2011) Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity. London: Stationery Office.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Domestic\\_Practice\\_Guide\\_on\\_DSG\\_bassed\\_violence.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Domestic_Practice_Guide_on_DSG_bassed_violence.pdf)