

CHARTER FOR A COLLABORATIVE FORUM OF FORMER RESIDENTS OF MOTHER AND BABY HOMES AND RELATED INSTITUTIONS

Minister Katherine Zappone is to establish a Collaborative Forum to facilitate dialogue and action on issues of concern to former residents of the institutions which historically focused on services for unmarried mothers and their children.

The Minister recognises that a significant number of people have been deeply affected by the experiences which they, or family members and relatives, may have had in these institutions.

The establishment of the Collaborative Forum is a new approach in the State's response to the theme of "*nothing about us without us*" which has emerged from the former residents who have participated in consultations to date. Open and consistent engagement between the State and former residents will provide a strong voice for former residents in the decisions which affect them.

This Forum is separate from the independent Commission of Investigation which is investigating the issues of significant public concern in relation to these institutions.

The purpose of the Collaborative Forum is to:

- 1) Build upon the process of engagement and consultation with former residents commenced through the facilitated meetings hosted by Minister Zappone in June and October 2017;
- 2) Enable former residents to identify, discuss and prioritise the issues of concern to them;
- 3) Facilitate the active participation of former residents in recommending actions and solutions to address their concerns, including those issues raised in the reports of the facilitated meetings;
- 4) Focus on persons who were resident for a time in a mother and baby home and those with comparable experiences in a County Home;
- 5) Have a role in monitoring the implementation of measures designed to support former residents;
- 6) Enhance public understanding and appreciation of the impact of their experiences on the lives of former residents and their families;
- 7) To provide reports to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in relation to these matters;

Membership

- 8) Will consist of 20 representative members including a Chairperson appointed by the Minister;
- 9) An independent panel will select representative members from those persons who express an interest in participating in this process;

Sub-committees

- 10) Three sub-committees, each with a unique focus, will be tasked with examining specific issues on a modular basis to facilitate the Forum in making recommendations to the Minister. In addition to its members, the Forum may nominate additional persons to sit on these sub-committees. The three sub-committees are as follows:

a. **Terminology, Identity, and Representation:**

Develop respectful and inclusive language which represents former residents and their experiences; develop strategies to undo stigma and raise awareness around the use of appropriate language; design an awareness programme for public bodies to assist service providers in their interactions with former residents; examine the arrangements for the provision of information and communication with former residents;

b. **Health and Well-being Supports:**

To examine how best to assist the advocacy and support work of national and local groups; identifying and sharing good practice in peer to peer support activities; providing safe spaces to discuss and reflect on experiences; examine the type of professional counselling support required and how best to enhance access to such support; consider the separate needs of different groups and make recommendations to facilitate access to specific health and personal social services;

c. **Memorialisation and Personal Narratives:**

Examine the potential use of memorialisation in its various forms to acknowledge and recognise past events, and most significantly to inform how people perceive these matters; to consider the development of a scheme to fund permanent and lasting local memorials to honour and commemorate the children who died in each of the named institutions; to consider the establishment of oral and digital memories projects to ensure an archive of material is created and preserved. This could include interviews with mothers, children and others with relevant knowledge.

In conducting its work the Forum will:

- 11) Be a participant-centred process which adopts a consensus-oriented decision making approach in its deliberations;
- 12) Ensure consistent communication and meaningful engagement with former residents, their families and advocates during this collaborative project;
- 13) Develop a strategy to facilitate wider public communication of its work;
- 14) Facilitate the full and equal participation of all members;
- 15) Ensure the specific and separate needs of different groups are identified;
- 16) Have access to expertise and advice through an Inter-Agency Support Panel
- 17) Have access to administrative resources through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs;
- 18) Conduct its activities in a manner which does not impact upon or pre-empt the outcome of the statutory investigations being conducted by the Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters);
- 19) Provide its first report and recommendations to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs within 6 months of its establishment.