

East Limerick Children's Services (ELCS) Family Forum Re-Launch 16th November 2023

Attendees:

Independent Facilitator: John McCusker (JMcC).

East Limerick Children's Services: Children's Disability Network Manager (CDNM) Melissa Murtagh

Brian O'Flanagan and Sharon Drost (minute taker).

22 parent/family attendees

MM, ELCS CDNM welcomed families to re-launch of ELCS family forum and advised that she has commenced in post as manager since July 2023. Advised that Baerbel Schlueter who was previously in post is now Children's Services Manager of Avista. MM stated that her understanding is that the last family forum meeting had been challenging and that there had been disagreements in relation to the parent representative election process. Advised that the election process will be discussed in more depth today and that a re-election of 2 parent representatives will take place in January 2024.

JMcC discussed the ground rules for today's family forum and the following were agreed:

- Full Confidentiality: it is important for all to feel this is a safe space and to feel comfortable sharing.
- To focus on the broader issues and for any concerns specific to individual children to be discussed with CDNM/ELCS staff following today's forum.
- Treat everyone with dignity & respect.

JMcC discussed the role of the family forum, that it is part of the governance structure of Progressing Disability Services (PDS) and the opportunities it provides families.

MM provided an update on ELCS (caseload size and staffing levels).

Current challenges experienced by families and ELCS were discussed:

- Communication and access to services for families.
- Difficulty transitioning to PDS model of service delivery.
- Staffing recruitment and retention issues) were discussed.

New developments that have been implemented over the last 6 months were explained:

- Query Management Tracker process to improve response times to queries from parents/carers.
- Recent funding for 2 Assistant Psychologists (12 mth contracts) and receipt of 2.6 posts to serve St. Vincent's School in Lisnagry. (1 WTE SLT, 0.6 WTE OT, 0.5 WTE Psychology and 0.5 WTE SW), 2.1 of which have been recruited.
- Implementation of quality improvement initiatives across both the 0-9yrs and 9-18yrs teams: Family service plan meetings and revised initial contact/intake process.

MM acknowledged the significant wait time for entry to services and the frustration this is causing families. MM discussed factors such as staffing recruitment and retention challenges that are contributing to this issue. MM advised that ELCS are keen to work collaboratively with families and are eager to hear feedback on what is working/not working.

Group Discussion - What are 3 things you would like from the Family Forum?
Families were broken into groups and were provided with the opportunity to discuss their suggestions. These were then fed back to the wider group.

- Clear information on East Limerick Children's Services:
 - o Communication in relation to pathway to services and a rough timeframe for waiting periods
 - o Information on how services are delivered
 - o Names and pictures of ELCS to help prepare families for appointments
 - o Training for other agencies on complex needs
 - o Appointment letters outlining who your child will meet at their appointment(s)
 - o A social story for visiting ELCS
 - o A facility (E.g. email) for parents to share information on their child's likes/dislikes and strengths in advance to help make appointments easier for children.
 - o Clearer information on Family Service Plans (FSPs)
 - Signposting to local groups/resources/upcoming events/entitlements on the website
 - Facilitation of coffee mornings for parents
 - Workshops for parents on a variety of topics
 - Groups for siblings
 - Preparation for leaving the service at adulthood
- MM explained that there are a number of regional initiatives that are currently targeting some of the suggestions above. It was stressed to families that all of suggestions are valid but that it will be important for CDN M to reflect with staff on these suggestions and that it will take time to implement and build on ideas once agreed upon.

JMcC discussed the process for electing family representatives and the role of a family representative. MM explained that self-nomination sheets had been provided to all families on the caseload via post in advance of today's forum and that there were also forms available at the rear of the room should anyone wish to self-nominate today. Explained that the list of self-nominees will be circulated in advance of the next family forum meeting in January and that self-nominees will have the opportunity to speak at this meeting followed by completion of the election process.

MM explained that going forward all communication in relation to the Family Forum will take place via email/text. Advised that a mailshot was provided to all 987 families on the caseload as part of the re-launch of the family forum however from a funding and administrative capacity this would not be possible going forward.

Family Forum dates for 2024 were provided (Venue and time TBC):

January 25th

April 25th

3rd October

MM expressed gratitude to families for their attendance and participation today. MM explained that she will be going on maternity leave at Christmas and that an application to backfill her position has been made. Advised that in the absence of backfill, the Family Forum will be supported by Children's Services Manager Baerbel Schlueter.

The family forum was concluded at this stage.