A.S.S.C

Accompaniment Support Services for Children

2-year strategic plan 2020-2022
Program for Stability

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A.S.S. C'S VISION AND MISSION

ABOUT A.S.S.C

A.S.S.C (Accompaniment Support Service for Children) was set up in 2020 to address the needs of young people as they negotiate their way through the criminal justice system. Our service provides accompaniment and advocacy for young people and their families at different stages through the justice system.

We are a charity that aims to ensure that all children who need our support receive it, in a timely and appropriate manner irrespective of their means.

VISION AND MISSION

The vision and mission of A.S.S.C is to provide all young people and families with accompaniment and support during their time within the criminal justice system. A.S.S.C provides advocacy and a voice for the rights and experiences of young people and their families through the criminal justice system.

VALUES

A.S.S.C believes that services should cater to the developmental needs of young people so that young people do not have to change their developmental level to the criminal justice system.

A.S.S.C believes that all young people have the right to access services that will facilitate their age. Young people have the right to be supported in such a way that they are protected from secondary victimization.

CORE SERVICES

A.S.S. C's core services are to provide specialised accompaniment, advocacy and support for all young people and their families as they negotiate the criminal justice system.

FORENSIC ACCOMPANIMENT

A.S.S.C provides forensic accompaniment to children and their families who attend the OneHouse, Galway and the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) in the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin.

A.S.S. C's highly trained volunteers accompany children and their families/carers as children undergo a forensic medical examination. They offer emotional and practical support to the families while their child is being examined. This is a difficult and often traumatic time for children and families and the support offered can be really helpful in reducing the stress and trauma.

In addition, A.S.S.C volunteers have also supported and assisted in coordinating A.S.S. C's aftercare service. This service is offered to any adult/career involved in supporting a child through the forensic process. Aftercare phone support is a service that families can avail of, free of charge, that provides a client led empathic, supportive space. The aftercare support helps families from feeling isolated and allows a space for a parent or carer to explore any common concerns or questions.

COURT ACCOMPANIMENT

Our court service supports the children and their parents, carers or guardians who have to go to court. Currently the court system is designed and set up for adults, and the professionals involved are used to dealing with adult witnesses. Therefore, the court process can be a frightening, alienating and traumatic experience for the child. The continued reliance on an adversarial court system means that those few children who are asked to give evidence within a court are placed under enormous pressure, both real and perceived when asked to make a formal statement in the court setting.

FOCUSING ON OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

This plan – 'Program for Stability' - sets the course for A.S.S.C for the next two years to create stability and sustainability to this new charity.

Three strategic objectives will shape our operational plans over the next two years - 'Program for Stability'

1. Secure the financial stability of A.S.S.C.
2. Transition the services successfully and develop A.S.S. C's advocacy voice.
3. Ensure proper Governance is embedded into the roots of A.S.S.C.

Secure the financial stability of A.S.S.C

Define the objective

So that A.S.S.C can provide these essential services it must secure financial stability within its first two years. Stability should be secured through several funding sources and not just one. There should be a culture of seeking out and developing sustainability revenue for service provision.

Key operational actions:

Operational Action
Develop a strong and robust relationship with the Department of Justice as A.S.S. C's main funding source
Seek out new funding opportunities through grants, fundraising events, public donations through A.S.S. C's social media platforms.
Develop a two-year fundraising strategy to will aim to develop financial security
Maintain existing fundraising relationships and seek out new fundraising streams

Transition the services successfully and develop A.S.S. C's advocacy voice

Define the objective

The client caseload and Service Level Agreements of the Court and Forensic Accompaniment Service needs to be transferred over from CARI (Children at Risk Ireland) who were the formal service providers.

A.S.S.C must also develop its function as an advocate and voice for the young people that it provides this service for.

Key operational actions:

Operational Action
Conduct a safe transition of client files that will ensure a continuity of service for the clients involved
Develop a communication plan with all relevant stakeholders to inform them of this transition and seek and object stakeholder buy in
Identity and obtain specialist advice where necessary to ensure high A.S.S.Card service provision
Maintain stakeholder relationships through regular, transparent and effective communication
Create, develop and engage regularly social media platforms that will support both A.S.S.C's advocacy work and fundraising strategies

Ensure proper Governance is embedded into the roots of A.S.S.C

Define the objective

As a new charity A.S.S.C must put best practice and governance at the forefront of its operations. Governance through the Charities Regulator, Financial best practice, GDPR compliance and Children First best practice are amongst some of the focuses of A.S.S.C for the next two years.

Key operational actions:

Operational Action
Attract appropriate expertise for a robust Board of Management to help guide A.S.S.C towards and governance excellence
Led A.S.S.C through its journey to the Charities Regulators Governance Code
Develop and test policies that will ensure child protection, financial and data compliance
Operate through transparency by utilizing the charities website and communicating regularly with relevant stakeholders

CONTEXT AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Legislative developments for children in the Criminal Justice System

The adversarial nature of the criminal justice system gives victims little participatory rights in the administration of justice regarding the crimes that have been committed against them. The balance between including victims more whilst not impinging on the rights to a fair trial of the accused is a difficult one.

A significant step toward this balance will come in the form of the Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum

standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA and Ireland's domestic legislation, the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime Act) 2017.

However, bringing the Cinderella of Criminal Law out from the cold requires a cultural change and shift in our approach to working with victims of crime.

The rise in children attending court

CARI, who were the previous service providers for supporting children who attended court, reported an increase in service demand year on year. Below is a table outlining the growth of demand for this service as gleaned from CARI's previous Annual Reports.

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
Children supported	47	70	89	90
Families supported	154	182	357	279
Accompaniments provided	58	129	201	198
Calls	1049	1562	2523	2566

Developments in Ireland for children's forensic needs being met

The Rotunda SATU was established in 1985 and was the first dedicated unit of its kind in Europe. As the years passed, they were six more SATU's developed throughout the country. This was done as a commitment to the people of Ireland that should you, as an adult, become

a victim of sexual assault or rape, you would be able to access a forensic medical examination no more than two hours from your home.

Once at the unit you would, in addition to having your medical and forensic needs met, would also have the psychological support of a trained support worker from the local Rape Crisis Centre. This onsite support, often, led to further ongoing support from the local Rape Crisis Centre long after the adults time at the SATU unit had finished.

For children subject to the same crime, there was nothing! In 2006, just 14 years ago a National Review of Sexual Assault Treatment Services was published[1], and the findings for children was not great, they were as follows:

1. Currently there are no dedicated medical services for children who experience acute sexual assault
2. Over the years ad-hoc arrangements have developed in Dublin to try to meet the needs of these victims
3. Examinations, both acute forensic and elective, are performed in all three children's hospitals by doctors from various backgrounds and in a variety of settings which often causes confusion among agencies as to where to refer the child and when
4. Few places meet the appropriate requirements for forensic examination
5. Nowhere at present can offer victims and families an out of hours service
6. Outside of Dublin children presenting to A&E departments may or may not be seen by an experienced doctor and are very often subject to repeated interviews/examinations due to the lack of appropriately skilled personnel
7. Frequently parents/guardians are advised to transport the child to an A&E department in one of the Dublin based children's hospitals, even though they do not provide a formal CSA service.
8. absence of structured data collection procedures it is notoriously difficult to estimate the number of children who require forensic or medical examination every year

That was the terrain, just 12 years ago. What is available for children now.

[1] Sexual Assault Treatment Services, A National Review, 2006

No other organisation supporting children and families during this time

When CARI made the decision to cease as the service provider for children attending court as a witness and attending for a forensic medical exam there were no other services in existence in Ireland to cater to the needs of children during this time. The other NGO's that provide accompaniment for vulnerable victims to court and for a forensic exam do so for adults.