

The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)

Foundation of the Society

In 1875, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was formed. It aimed to combat squalor, neglect and abuse in relation to children. An equivalent society, which was to become the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), was established in Britain in 1884 and within five years it had 31 branches. The first Irish branch of the NSPCC was formed in Dublin in 1889. For a period of 67 years, from 1889 to 1956, the Society within Ireland operated under the auspices of the NSPCC despite the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. It was not until 1956 that the Irish branches ceded from the NSPCC and formed an independent Society known as, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC). The initiative for the severance came from the Central Executive Committee of the NSPCC, on the grounds that it was 'not practicable to go on with the work in the Republic of Ireland'. The question of finance was a very important consideration in this decision to sever links with Ireland. In particular, it was pointed out that substantial subsidies produced by the NSPCC in England should 'rightfully be employed in aiding children in England and that this was a serious drain on financial resources'.

The ISPCC was registered as a company, which came into being on 18th January 1956. It assumed responsibility from the 1st March 1956 for all the duties and work previously performed by the NSPCC. To facilitate the smooth and efficient continuation of the work in protecting the welfare of the children in Ireland, the NSPCC made a grant to the ISPCC in the sum of £13,432.99, which was the total sum of money collected in Ireland between June 1955 and February 1956. The Patrons of the ISPCC at its inception included the President of Ireland, the Archbishop of Dublin and the Church of Ireland and Catholic Primates of All Ireland. This newly formed independent society continued to operate along the same lines as the NSPCC and it adopted the same aims.

The Society employed inspectors to carry out its functions of protecting the welfare of children. In 1968, social workers were appointed to undertake the work previously carried out by inspectors with the emphasis on social casework. And in 1970, with the formation of the health boards, the functions which had been carried out by the Society were taken over by these boards.

Purposes of the Society

The NSPCC was granted a Royal Charter in 1895, conferring on it the following duties:

- To prevent the public and private wrongs of children and the corruption of their morals
- To take action for the enforcement of laws for their protection
- To provide and maintain an organisation for the above objects

- To do all such other lawful things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects.

These functions of the Society were adopted by the ISPCC when it was founded and were consistently re-stated in its annual reports up to the 1970s. In essence, the primary purpose of the Society was the welfare and protection of children.

The limitations of the ISPCC records

The documentation in the possession of the ISPCC is very limited. One explanation given by the Society is that a fire occurred in 1961 at their head office in Molesworth Street, and another was that some files could have been lost in the changeover in 1956. At the Phase III hearing, Mr Paul Gilligan, Chief Executive Officer of the ISPCC, admitted that:

there are significant limitations in the amount of material available to us. Unfortunately, we don't have an explanation as to where the other material has gone, there was a fire in our head office in 1961, perhaps material was destroyed in that.

The records that do exist consist of the annual reports of the various branches of the Society from 1930–55, national annual reports from 1956, NSPCC inspectors' handbooks and directory, index books and inspectors' notebooks and administration files. In addition, there are some 8,000 case files, but these are confined to three specific areas – Wexford, Mayo and Cork – and only a fraction of these files relate to the pre-1970 period.

In the year 2000, the ISPCC employed an archivist to archive their existing records. However, the administration files have not been archived, according to the ISPCC, owing to lack of resources. They also engaged consultants to review the case files. An unpublished report was prepared by Seamus O Cinneide and Moira Maguire of NUI, Maynooth in 2000 entitled 'Findings from NSPCC Records'. Their report was based on a random sampling of pre-1970 case files, with a particular emphasis on cases resulting in committal to Industrial Schools. They examined 250 case files that involved 750 children, of which 50 cases resulted in committal to Industrial Schools of 62 children. The authors of this report also pointed out another limitation with the cases files, which was that their content and quality were uneven: some files recorded the barest of details while others were quite extensive.

The role of the inspector

As stated previously, the first Irish branch of the NSPCC was established in Dublin in May 1889, with two further branches in Cork and Belfast in 1891 and subsequently branches throughout the country. In total, there were approximately 14 branches within the country. Each of these branches was staffed by an inspector who was paid a salary and was provided with a house that was intended to double up as a local office. Dublin was divided into five areas with an inspector for each area. The inspector was known colloquially as 'the cruelty man'.

Each inspector was answerable to a local committee of interested persons, who gave their service on a voluntary basis. The inspectors were generally recruited from the ranks of retired police and army personnel. They wore a brown uniform and, with one or two exceptions, they were all men. Up to the 1960s the inspectors mainly dealt with social and environmental deprivation. Dealing with problems such as scurvy, rickets, malnutrition, and high infant mortality were part of their routine and they often provided material assistance to the families with whom they were working. The Society also intervened when charges of cruelty or neglect of children were made against families, whether poor or better off.

The inspectors operated very much on an independent basis as there was no monitoring or supervision of them by the branch committee. They did, however, have to report to the honorary secretary of each branch. The honorary secretary of each branch was the local representative of the Society who was entrusted with the responsibility for overseeing that the rules of the Society were complied with. The inspector was under the direct control of the local honorary secretary and, according to the *Inspector's Directory*, an inspector had to take instructions on cases and reports from the honorary secretary or from some person appointed by the local committee for that purpose. In particular, the inspector could not take action on a case without the consent of the honorary secretary.

At the Phase III hearing, however, Mr Gilligan confirmed that *'there was no evidence that there was any structured supervision or monitoring of their role'*. The reporting structure consisted of the inspector reporting to the honorary secretary by means of record keeping. The *Inspector's Directory* stipulated that *'all books and records in an Inspector's charge must be kept up to date'* and that *'all branch records are subject to examination by a representative of the Central Office at any time'*. An inspector was also required to maintain a daily diary of all the duties in which he had been engaged. The *Inspector's Directory* stipulated that:

The Diary must be regularly kept, and produced for the Hon. Secretary's examination and signature at least once a week. The best time for this is when the Inspector gets his pay-sheet signed, but this must be according to the convenience of the Hon. Secretary.

Primarily, the onus was on the inspector to communicate with his superiors rather than the other way around. Mr Gilligan spoke about the management structure governing the inspectors:

we didn't come across any evidence of a sort of structured sit down and supervise situation. It would appear that it was through recordkeeping and through very clear distinct reporting responsibility seeking permission to warn a family, to seek procedures, to instigate procedures for committal or prosecution. So there was a management structure. They weren't on their own, per se, but how structured that was in terms of sitting down and managing as we would know today...

The duties of inspectors were set out in the *Inspector's Handbook* of 1947 and the *Inspector's Directory* of 1960. The 1960 *Inspector's Directory* defined the role of the inspector as follows:

An Inspector's aim – first and last – is to be a force for the welfare of children. He must always do all in his power for the good of the child who is suffering, and if no other means are available, provide what is necessary at the expense of the Society. An Inspector who seeks merely the prosecution of an offender is liable for instant dismissal. Any neglect in doing for a child what is necessary and possible is shameful, and, most naturally and most justly, risks the good name of the Society, and interferes with the success of its work.

Their function was to investigate complaints of child neglect and abuse. These complaints came from a variety of sources such as the general public, the Gardaí, school officials and the parents themselves. From the research conducted by O Cinneide and Maguire, 60 percent of the cases that were reviewed by them were people who had approached the inspector themselves. The categories of referrals related directly to the Children Act 1908, and it was this legislation that drove the work of the Society. Neglect was one of the main categories of referrals, which arose primarily from poverty, poor housing conditions, absence of a parent or illegitimacy. The living conditions of many in the 1930s and 1940s were very difficult. Housing conditions were described as filthy and squalid, with no proper sanitary facilities. There were large numbers of people living in very small accommodation, possibly one room, and living on very low incomes with not enough money to feed them all.

The reports of the NSPCC from the 1940s and 1950s are revealing as to living conditions. In the year 1944-45, the Society dealt with 1,103 cases, the overwhelming majority classed under the heading 'neglect'. No cases were listed under the headings 'criminal and indecent assault'. Only 18 people were prosecuted, and the report indicated that 'of real and deliberate cruelty to children there had been practically none'.

The general tenor of the Society's reports from the 1930s to the 1950s was to describe in graphic terms cases of neglect, squalor and parental irresponsibility, as well as calling for legal adoption, and strongly criticising the excessive use of Industrial Schools as an alternative to providing a new family life for victims. 'It must be recognised' they reported in 1948-49, 'that children are to a large extent deprived of home influences and it would be much better if we could avoid sending them to such institutions'. Their pleas went unheard and in 1956, when the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr John Charles McQuaid, became one of the patrons of the Society, the challenging and graphic case studies were gone; the awkward questions posed about adoption and Industrial Schools were jettisoned. The exposure of the underbelly had ground to a halt.

The role of the inspectors was, according to Mr Gilligan, '*to ensure that change occurs for the child, that the parents are either supported or warned to make changes for the child so that the child is adequately cared for and protected*'. This was emphasised in the annual reports. To that end the inspectors pursued a focused practical approach.

Mr Gilligan, at the Phase III hearing, said that the inspectors '*were obliged to make every attempt to support the family, to persuade either through information support or warnings, the parents to take their responsibilities to care for their children seriously*'. He provided examples of practical support such as '*...trying to organise clothes, perhaps in some cases organise a job, certainly medical care for children, in some cases housing. But it is clearly practical support and also providing the parents with clear indication of what would be expected*'. The inspectors also conducted supervision visits of the homes of children who were under threat to ensure a change for the better in the circumstances of the child. If no change was forthcoming, the inspectors had to look at the option of providing alternative care for the child, which could involve committal to an Industrial School.

The role of the Society in the committal of children to Industrial Schools

The Society had a role in committing children to Industrial Schools. The extent and significance of this role cannot be accurately ascertained as there are no definitive statistics in respect of the actual numbers of children who were committed by the Society. This is due to the paucity of records available. However, the Maynooth research indicated that out of a sample of 250 case files, 62 children out of 750 were committed to Industrial Schools. But this sample of cases consisted of those who had been sent to Industrial Schools and, as Mr Gilligan pointed out in evidence, '*it would certainly be a skewed sample*'. Therefore, this figure is not indicative of the numbers generally. The research also found from the sample taken, that 41 children or 66 percent of children committed to Industrial Schools were committed at the request of their parents. The 1956 Annual Report of the ISPCC indicated that 1.3 percent of referrals to the Society resulted in court proceedings. These court proceedings would include both the prosecution of a parent or parents for neglect and also a committal to an Industrial School.

Of note, is the fact that many of the witnesses who testified to the Investigation Committee concerning their time in Industrials Schools were committed by the NSPCC /ISPCC. A total of 15 Industrial Schools were investigated by the Investigation Committee. A total of 226 complainants testified about their time in these Industrial Schools. 84 of the 226 witnesses had been referred

to these Industrial Schools by the NSPCC/ISPCC, which equates to 37 per cent or over one-third of the total number of complainants heard in respect of the 15 Industrial Schools.

At the Phase III hearing, Mr Gilligan conceded that the ISPCC had played a prominent role in the committal of children to Industrial Schools as they were the only child protection agency in the country at that time. He said:

I think if we were the only child protection – child protective organisation then I think it is reasonable to suspect that we certainly would have committed a significant number to the industrial schools. But I really have no idea about the overall percentage.

Moreover, the general public perception at the time was that the Society was heavily involved in committing children to Industrial Schools, hence the apprehension in the minds of the public associated with the ‘cruelty man’. Even the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr McQuaid, had reservations about the role of the Society in committing children to Industrial Schools. On 4th June 1941, soon after his appointment as Archbishop of Dublin, Dr McQuaid wrote to Frank Duff, an active lay Catholic with a social conscience, who was the mainspring of the lay Catholic social work society, the Legion of Mary. He was also the one of the few contemporary voices critical of the Industrial Schools. The Archbishop enclosed the report of the NSPCC (Dublin Branch) for 1939–40 and requested the following of Mr Duff:

Will you kindly have a look through the specimen cases in the enclosed booklet? Anyone who reads the six specimen cases encountered by the Society that year would be appalled by the poverty and suffering described. To take just one example from the Report:

A man and his wife charged with the neglect of their daughters, aged six, four and three. The man was absent from home at work from six in the morning until six in the evening; but he said his only interest was his children. He was sentenced to a few hours’ imprisonment, and was released on the rising of the Court.

Mr Duff replied on 12th June 1941. He expressed grave disquiet about the actions of the NSPCC and continued:

I have read the Specimen Cases set out in the 1939/40 Report. The details given seem bad enough, but they might be made to prove too much. The culling of six special cases from a poor city like Dublin could easily create a false impression. Moreover, I would not be satisfied that there is no exaggeration at work. I profoundly distrust every word and action of one of the Society’s Inspectors, Mrs XX. I go further and I say that I regard her as a danger. She is quite capable (by which I mean that she has already done it) of distorting facts to suit any point of view she is trying to make. She exercised an ascendancy over ex-Justice YY, and between them they simply *shovelled children into Industrial Schools*. I consider that no proper attempt is made by the Society to restore a home or keep a home together. This was the view held by Fr. Tom Ryan, SJ who before his transfer to Hong Kong took a keen interest in juvenile delinquency and practically lived in the Courts. He gave it to me as his considered judgment based on his long and detailed observation that the Charter of the Society for the PCC should be withdrawn, that the Society constituted a public menace. Mr Charles J Joyce, who has considerable acquaintance with the courts, has raised something similar with me.

The ISPCC counteracted these criticisms of exaggeration of cases and wilfully committing children to Industrial Schools by saying in its statement that ‘In reviewing the information available in this case, it is difficult to comprehend how any allegation of exaggeration could be upheld’. With regard to the allegation that the inspector’s behaviour was bringing about the committal of children:

It is certainly not possible for us to comment on his allegation except to say that our review of material verifies the Society’s ongoing philosophy of keeping families together and

rigorous attempts to support the preservation of family integrity as illustrated in the numerous examples quoted throughout this statement and borne out by the statistics. The extent of referrals by a range of other agencies and the numerous approaches by families themselves seeking assistance from the Society demonstrates a high level of public and professional confidence in the organisation.

Furthermore, in 1952 there was an allegation that NSPCC inspectors were taking bribes as an inducement to send children to Industrial Schools. This was revealed in a Visitation Report of 1952 in respect of St Joseph's Industrial School, Tralee. The Congregational Visitor had expressed concern about the payment of expenses to two NSPCC inspectors, but he was informed by the Superior of the school that the payment was a subscription to the Society's funds.

The Society throughout the 1940s and 1950s was at pains to rebut this image of being overly eager to commit children to Industrial Schools. They pointed out again and again in their reports that committal was seen very much as a last rather than a first resort. The annual reports of the Society down through the years reiterated that the home rather than an Industrial School was the best place for children to be brought up in, no matter how good the institution was. The 1948–49 Annual Report of the Dublin Branch of the Society stated:

During the year we have had to arrange for the placing of a large number of children in Industrial Schools, chiefly because their parents were unable to maintain them, but in some cases because their home conditions were so undesirable as to make it necessary to remove them. There is no doubt that in these schools they receive care and attention and a sound education, and are brought up to be useful members of the community. Nevertheless, however grateful we may be for the devoted work of the Orders which conduct these schools, it must be recognised that the children are to a large extent deprived of home influences, and that it would be much better if we could avoid sending them to such institutions. If their own homes are impossible, good foster homes would give them a healthier and happier introduction to life. It is, however, seldom possible to find such homes, in the cases presented to the Society.

In their 1951–52, Annual Report they stated:

It is a clear working rule in all our cases that where the question of committal arises, that every effort must be made to find some other solution and committal is only sought or advised when there is no other way out.

Again in its 1953–54 Annual Report, the Society defended itself against growing criticism that they were overly zealous in committing children to Industrial Schools:

But in spite of what we have written in former reports, there seems to be a mistaken impression in the minds of many people that we regard the committal of children to Industrial Schools as a sovereign remedy for unhappiness or unsuitable conditions in the home. A poor home, they say, is better than no home. Now it is a clear working rule in all our cases where the question of committal arises, that every effort must be made to find some other solution, and committal is only sought or advised where there is no other way out.

The ISPCC in its Statement pointed out:

There does not appear to be records of the actual numbers of applications/ committals of children by ISPCC to industrial schools in each year. However annual reports do indicate that this was a small element of the work carried out by Inspectors. What is clear is that the Society's philosophy was to work alongside parents whenever possible...

However, according to one of the social workers recruited by the ISPC in the late 1960s, some of the cruelty men were too quick to seek committal and not sufficiently flexible and imaginative in seeking alternatives to the schools: they took the view that the schools were safe places, which turned out well-behaved citizens and that this was all that needed to be done.

An inspector had to follow set guidelines laid down in the *Inspector's Directory* before committing a child to an Industrial School. The inspector would have to inform the honorary secretary of his respective branch of his intention to bring committal proceedings and the central office of the branch would also have to be informed and give their consent to the application.

From the records available, the ISPC do not have any information to indicate that inspectors visited these schools or were familiar with them. It was not the policy of the Society to follow up on children who had been placed in Industrial Schools. The Society was aware of the stigma that attached to children who were put into these institutions and the view society had of them, particularly when they would leave the schools in search of employment. The Society, however, did not provide any form of after care for these children, nor was it engaged in thinking about it.

Alternatives to sending children to Industrial Schools

During the time period under consideration, primarily the 1930s to the 1960s there were very few alternatives to sending a child to an Industrial School if the problem could not be solved within the family. Foster care was not widely available and it appeared to be primarily for babies and young infants.

In its annual reports in the 1940s, the Society was aware that if financial assistance was directed towards helping families rather than paying a capitation grant to the schools, the children could be maintained at home and the cost to the taxpayer would be lessened. The annual reports spoke about the inadequacies of the social welfare provisions for families which hindered families from caring properly for their children's needs. The 1947-48 Annual Report of the Dublin Branch made specific reference to this problem:

In previous reports we have drawn attention to the large number of cases where we have had to intervene to rescue children from the squalor and undernourishment directly due to poverty. No authority seems to have worked out for Dublin what should be considered as the poverty line, though there have been a number of private sample inquiries conducted in past years. In our Report for 1945-46 we indicated that a collation of such figures as were available showed that for the ordinary family to provide proper nutrition on a sum of 8/- a head should be made available for food alone. Even with the increases recently made in some of the allowances the amount available leaves many families well below the poverty line, on any calculation. A peculiar feature of the Unemployment Assistance Scale, which has brought a number of families to us, is the application of the maximum rate of allowance, viz. 38/- a week, even where there are more than five children. Even giving a man and wife and 5 children the allowances, plus 7/6 children's allowances, this is clearly inadequate. Allowing for a moderate rent of, say, 5/- per week, the amount available per head, viz., 5/9 $\frac{1}{2}$ is well below the minimum necessary to provide food alone. In the case of widow's pensions the gap is still wider. It is true that in the worst cases the home assistance authorities sometimes intervene with an allowance for rent; but say nothing of clothing or bedding, much less for any less necessary amenities. It is small wonder that some parents give up the unequal contest and apply for the committal of their children to industrial schools on the grounds of inability to support them, when, as we have so often pointed out, they cost the public funds 15/- a head. If the parents were given, say, 10/0 a head, they could keep their children, who then would not be deprived of home influences, and the taxpayer would save 5/- a head. Possibly the worst feature of this short-sighted system is that the resultant under-nourishment is certain

to produce a large crop of unemployable weeds, themselves in time to multiply and increase the dead weight round the neck of the taxpayer.

Again, in the 1948–49 Annual Report, the same point was emphasised:

In last year's report attention was drawn to the undernourishment of large numbers of children owing to the fact that the allowances provided under the various Social Services, Unemployment Assistance, Home Assistance, Widows' Pensions and the like, were insufficient to allow the parents to keep their children properly fed. The cases dealt with during the year disclose quite a number of instances in which there has been definite under-nourishment, owing to the fact that the parents or guardians of the children have been dependent on such allowances, and have been simply unable to support their children. There is a wide difference between the methods of administering Home Assistance in various areas, and a number of particularly glaring cases of inadequacy will be found below. Last year we drew attention to two aspects of this system. The first was that the family must often be broken up if the children are to be properly fed and clothed, so that they may grow up useful citizens. The second was that the resultant cost of providing for children removed from their parents on the ground of inability to maintain them is much greater than the amount which, if given in Home Assistance, or some other form of allowance, would enable the family to be kept together. We went on to point out the danger that the persistent under-nourishment of families dependent on various forms of public relief must result in the creation of whole families of unemployables. There is, however, a third aspect which has not been emphasised in the past, and that is the moral effect of dealing with these families under the methods pursued hitherto. The position of the family as the foundation of the State has been written into the Constitution of this country, and anything that tends to break it up should evoke the efforts of all the Social Services against such conditions; and these inadequate allowances are a constant cause of disruption of family life. It is to be hoped that this point of view will be appreciated in the future.

These pleas by the Society fell on deaf ears for the next three decades, and it was not until the 1970s that State assistance was finally given to families to help keep them together. The 1973 Annual Report of the ISPCC made reference to this:

it is a source of satisfaction to us that the comparatively recent recognition of the State's responsibility to deserted wives and families and other changes contemplated to assist families in need are being brought about by the submissions and representations made by the ISPCC with the support of kindred bodies.

Finance

In 1963, the Government for the first time granted financial support to the Society and continues to do so to the present day. However, the ISPCC pointed out in their statement to the Investigation Committee that 'The Society has always been dependent for survival on fundraising'.

Whilst fundraising was the main source of income for the Society, inspectors were prohibited from collecting money. The *Inspector's Directory* stated:

Only under special circumstances and under instructions is an Inspector allowed to collect money, except collections under maintenance orders.

In the event of a contribution being made to an Inspector for the relief of a case he must remit the amount at once to the central office and await instructions as to its application. A receipt will be furnished to the contributor whose names and addresses should be sent with the remittance.

However in documentation discovered to the Commission from the Christian Brothers in respect of one of their Industrial Schools, St Joseph's Industrial School, Tralee, there is a record of payments being made to two NSPCC inspectors in 1952. The Congregational Visitor to the school expressed concerns in his Visitation Report of 1952 that a payment of £9 was sought by one NSPCC inspector in respect of expenses. Reference was made to the bursar considering it to be more like a bribe to induce the inspector to bring boys to the school. The Superior was questioned about this payment and he stated that it was a subscription to the Society's funds and this was the explanation that was given to the Visitor at the time. Reference was also made to another NSPCC inspector also seeking expenses and he was considered by the Visitor as 'a well-known sponger'. The 1952 Visitation Report stated the situation as follows:

That Mr. X, local Inspector of the N.S.P.C.C., was having boys committed as exactly one year under their true age. When this complaint was made to me I enquired what interest this gentleman had in this falsification of documents and found that the Bursar had asked himself the same question earlier in the year, especially when he was asked to sign a cheque for £9 for X's 'expenses'. On being asked a third time for the cheque, the Bursar told him he felt compelled to protest against this payment as it seemed to him to be a bribe, or like a bribe, to induce X to bring boys to the school. The Superior then stated that it was a subscription to the Society's funds.

The Superior of Tralee Industrial School had sought the advice of the Provincial in respect of the payment of expenses to NSPCC inspectors. He was told by the Provincial that a payment of £1 was to be paid to the inspectors as they incurred extra expense in bringing boys to the school as they travelled by car. However, one of the inspectors claimed that his expenses were in excess of £1 and so the Superior again sought clarification from the Provincial and only with his permission was any payment made. It is clear from documentation furnished by the Christian Brothers that the NSPCC inspectors in the early 1950s were accustomed to receiving payment for expenses. This clearly was in contravention of the rules laid down in the *Inspector's Directory* quoted above.

Conclusions

- **The NSPCC/ISPCC played an important role in committing children to Industrial Schools. The extent of this involvement cannot be accurately ascertained because of a lack of documentation, but it can be stated as being significant.**
- **It has been established by this Report and elsewhere that the main reason for children being committed to residential care was the poverty of their families. The obvious solution of giving direct aid to impoverished families in order to allow them to stay together was articulated by the Society as early as 1951. This would have meant a substantial saving to the taxpayer when compared with the cost of institutionalisation. The question should be asked why this debate did not receive wider attention throughout the relevant period and was only acknowledged in the 1970s.**

