

11<sup>th</sup> November 2014

Dear Minister O Riordain & Deputy Conway

I would like to thank you for your recent visit to Waterford , and for the opportunity to share with you, my experience of working with residents of the RIA Direct Provision Centre in Birchwood House in Waterford City.

Barnardos Waterford Student Mothers Group supports teenage mothers to remain in second level education. This service has worked with young mothers who resided in Birchwood House, along with their children. However these young women experienced many difficulties that impacted on their ability to commit to their education and to reach their full potential.

I believe these young women were very vulnerable, as they were parenting alone, and without any family support. Direct Provision Centres are not suitable settings for teenagers, or teenage parents, just because they are considered 'Aged Out Minors', when they turn 18 years of age. They are being forced to live in an adult environment, whereas they need the support of a family in a home-like environment. One young woman I worked with considered giving up her baby for adoption so he might have a better life, with a family, but she also wished that "someone would adopt her too".

In terms of education it was difficult for these young women to remain focussed on school. They had been moved around from town to town in Ireland, and therefore from school to school. They knew that they could not afford to go to college or that they were not eligible to apply for a job after school. They had ambitions to achieve a new life but became unmotivated as their future opportunities were both unclear and limited. There needs to be a review of educational and work opportunities, which may also include opportunities to do meaningful voluntary work within the community.

Additionally they did not know how long their applications for Residency would take, and therefore wondered if it was worth going to school, in case they may be deported. The process surrounding Residency applications and the length of time involved needs to be addressed with clear timeframes for these applicants.

Finally, I would also like to point out that the RIA accommodation in Waterford is insufficient for family living. The rooms are too small, parents cannot cook for their children, and they are limited to eating whatever food is provided to them by the service. I would advocate that families have a wider choice of foods to reflect their cultural tastes and that the accommodation is more spacious with specific living areas, along with recreational and play areas for all family members.

I sincerely hope you will give consideration to the Residents of Direct Provision Centres. I would also appreciate any feedback or notifications on follow-up actions that will take place about this.

Yours Sincerely,

Annette Dowling ,

Project Worker, Barnardos Waterford Student Mothers Group

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Sent back to Ushag Gray  
on protection program  
AG.*