

## Call for out of hours service for children at risk

20/07/2008

The Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors has called on the Ombudsman for Children, Ms Emily Logan, to take urgent action to ensure that the Health Service Executive (HSE) provides a countrywide out of hours social worker service for children at risk.

“We have also written to a number of organisations asking them to take whatever steps are available to them to ensure that no child ever again has to spend the night in a garda station,” said member of the AGSI National Executive, Willie Gleeson.

The call arises from a recent incident when a 15 year-old boy was reported missing in north Cork on July 1st and was located by gardaí that night at 9pm near Charleville Co. Cork. Emergency mobile phone numbers supplied by the HSE were not contactable and the boy had to be accommodated overnight in Mallow Garda Station on a made-up bed.

“It is furthermore a terrible disgrace and an indictment of the HSE that a spokesperson told the local media that they (the HSE) only cater for children at risk on a 9 to 5 basis, Monday to Friday, and that gardaí were responsible for troubled children outside those hours,” said Mr Gleeson. “Quite apart from the factual inaccuracy of the statements, it has to be seriously questioned if this is in fact the mindset of the HSE.”

“Gardaí are not trained to deal with children and garda stations do not have the facilities to cater for them. Garda stations are also totally unsuitable places for accommodating children because they have to cater for many different kinds of persons, including those under the influence of intoxicants and those under suspicion for all kinds of crimes. There are no separate rooms for children and there are no facilities to feed and care for them properly,” continued Mr Gleeson.

“This is not the first incident of this kind and our Annual Delegate Conference back in March heard several horror stories. We have

raised this issue before with the Minister for Health, Ms Harney, but there appears to be little progress so we are asking all organisations with an interest in child safety to get involved. It is time the State provided a service for its most vulnerable citizens,” he concluded.