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Families and family life are very important for all children and the opportunity to experience the qualities of family life is one of the main objectives of the National Children's Strategy. For those children who cannot be looked after in their own families, and therefore, need to be provided with alternative care, foster care provides the best hope of experiencing family life. Foster Carers play a critically important role in the lives of these vulnerable and at times troubled children. Their dedication to helping the children in their care is an example of social and civic commitment at its best.

The government is committed to further strengthening the child welfare and protection and family support services, including foster care. As part of this commitment the government agreed in principle to implement, on a phased basis, the recommendations of the Report of the Working Group of Foster Care, 'Foster Care – A Child Centred Partnership,' which was published earlier this year.

The National Children's Strategy places emphasis on the views of young people and I was particularly pleased to be able to appoint three young people to the National Children's Advisory Council, ensuring that the voice of all children, including those in foster care, is heard directly. That voice was also heard at Dail na nÓg and I aim to ensure it is heard at all levels in matters which affect young people.

The publication of this special edition of the Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies, "A Celebration of Foster Care," is to be welcomed. The collection of essays touches on many of the issues in the Foster Care Report, but also different perspectives on foster care from a range of people involved in foster care. I am particularly pleased to see that not only are academics and social workers contributing but that foster carers and young people in care are also sharing their own views and experiences of foster care. This is a valuable contribution to our endeavours to improve the services for children and young people in care, their families and their foster Carers.

Go neiri le chuile dhuine atá páirteach



Mary Hanafin T.D.
Minister for Children