

Ballyowen Meadows

Family Assessment Centre



Information Pack for Social Workers

Ballyowen Meadows

Who we are

Ballyowen Meadows is a National Family Assessment and Intervention Service established in 1998 committed to ensuring best outcomes for children. This purpose-built centre provides a unique setting in which children can live with their families in a safe and secure environment while parenting skills are assessed and developed.

The family based residential placements at Ballyowen Meadows aim to be preventative in their design, enabling service providers to uniquely address child protection concerns within the family while, at the same time, supporting families to remain connected with each other.

What we do

Ballyowen Meadows offer evidence-based parenting capacity assessments together with effective and responsive parenting intervention programmes. In carrying out assessments the team make use of *The Child and Family Assessment Framework* (Department of Health et al, 2000) to provide individual, evidence-based parenting capacity assessments. Information and evidence of family functioning, strengths and difficulties is gathered using specific family assessment tools – 24-hour observations, interviews, tasks, scales and questionnaires.

In addition, modules from the *Hope for Children and Families* intervention programmes are used during assessments. The programmes which include *promoting attachment, positive parenting, promoting health, development and wellbeing and targeting abusive and neglectful parenting*, provide an accessible set of evidence-based approaches, resources and tools intended to empower children, young people, their families and practitioners when working together – building on strengths and overcoming difficulties.

Theraplay

The principles and practice of *Theraplay* are also incorporated into the programme at Ballyowen Meadows through one to one parent/child games and activities. *Theraplay* is a child and family therapy for enhancing and building attachment, self-esteem, trust in others, and joyful engagement. It is based on the natural patterns of playful, healthy interaction

between a parent and child and is personal, physical, and fun. Theraplay interactions focus on four essential qualities found in parent-child relationships: Structure, Engagement, Nurture, and Challenge.

The goals of Theraplay is to enhance attachment, increase self-regulation, promote trust and joyful engagement and to empower the parents to continue carrying out these positive and healthy interactions on their own with their child.

The unit in Ballyowen Meadows offers assessment to a family of up to six children along with both parents. The unit is staffed by two social care workers on a 24-hour basis. Ballyowen Meadows consists of a large six bedroomed accommodation which is fully furnished for single parent families and whole family units. One family is admitted to the unit at any one time for assessment.

Assessment Suitability:

All referrals for Ballyowen Meadows will be considered for placement. On receipt of all information from the central referrals committee, a risk assessment will be completed which will determine whether the family is deemed suitable for placement or not.

Families are admitted to Ballyowen Meadows under various circumstances

- Voluntarily - no care status on the children
- Care Order – Voluntary, Supervision or Interim Care Orders
- Alternative Care – assessment to determine possibility of reunification

We assess:

- Both mothers and fathers, either together or separately
- Families where abuse or maltreatment is alleged, suspected, or known to have occurred
- Parents who are considered to pose a risk to their children
- Parents with mental health problems
- Parents who have learning difficulties
- Parents with histories of being exposed to abuse and maltreatment
- Parents who have been placed in care in their own childhoods

- Vulnerable young and teenage parents
- Parents who misuse alcohol and /or substances
- Parents where domestic violence is present/ suspected

Referral criteria:

Ballyowen Meadows requests the following before a family assessment can be carried out:

- A letter of instruction from the Social Work Team detailing specific areas of family functioning and parenting capacity which require assessment (see appendix one).
- Commitment from the Social Work Team to attend bi weekly reviews for the duration of the assessment process.
- In the event that the allocated Social Worker is on leave from their duties for any reason a new Social worker is allocated to the case immediately.
- The family are aware of the purpose of the placement; reasons for referral for family assessment and any child protection concerns are clearly identified with the family before the family are admitted to Ballyowen Meadows.
- The family must have an address to return to after the 12-week assessment.

Ballyowen Meadows is unable to admit a young person(s) under the following conditions:

- Required medically supervised detoxification for drug or substance misuse.
- Has an acute psychiatric or medical illness requiring intensive medical intervention.

As part of the referral process all safeguarding issues will be identified and risk assessments formulated in conjunction with the referring social worker before admission to the unit.

Parents referred to the centre will be requested to undertake a cognitive assessment as part of the assessment process where deemed appropriate.

Age of Residents

2 parents and up to 6 children.

Gender of Residents

Male and Females

Where we are

Ballyowen Meadows is located on the Fonthill Road, Clondalkin.

Ballyowen Meadows is part of Traveller Families' Care CLG, a voluntary organisation funded by Child and Family Agency Dublin Mid Leinster.

How a family is referred

Referrals are accepted from Child and Family Agency Social Workers. The referral process is managed by the Children's Residential Services Regional Office. All referrals are made to this office where they are processed and forwarded to Ballyowen Meadows.

Referrals can be emailed to referrals.crsdml@hse.ie or the office can be contacted on

01 4632 855.

Assessment Process

Stage 1 – Referral and Planning

The referral and planning stage begin when:

1. The referred family meet all criteria as set out in the purpose and function
2. The Central Referrals Committee endorse the decision by the manager and director of services to admit the family to Ballyowen Meadows for a parenting capacity assessment.

Once family referral has been approved:

- Referral information is reviewed by the team at Ballyowen Meadows.
- Any further information required is identified in preparation for planning meeting with social work department.
- The families' case history is compiled.
- Any gaps in the family case history are identified to be discussed with the Social Worker.

Planning Meeting with the Social Work Team

The agenda of the meeting set out the following:

- Assessment process is outlined
- Letter of instruction agreed
- Contract between Ballyowen Meadows and social work department signed.
- Safeguarding Assessment and Responses (SARS) agreed with social work team.
- Any gaps in referral information/case history clarified.
- Risk and safeguarding concerns identified.
- Social worker requested to arrange full medical check for each child – health, development, weight, height -reports to be submitted to Ballyowen Meadows.
- Urine analysis discussed and requirement for weekly urine testing with independent GP agreed.
- Social work team requested to make arrangements for cognitive assessment if not already completed.
- Request multi-disciplinary meeting with all current professionals involved with the family.
- The public health nurse may provide information in regards to where the child is in regards to their developmental milestones. The public health nurse may also provide information/advice to parents in regards to the care of their children for example, adequate sleep, nutrition, play, reaching developmental milestones and safety.
- Speech and language therapist may provide information in regards to parents taking children to appointments and carrying out tasks in relation to supporting the child's speech and language development.
- School teacher/principal may provide information in regards to the child's educational attainment, the completion of homework, school attendance and if a child attends/is collected from school at the appropriate time.

Pre-Admission Family Visit to the Centre

The family visit Ballyowen Meadows. During this visit the:

- Assessment process is clearly explained to the parents and children (if applicable) via the resident guides and booklets.
- The social work team explain the child protection concerns to parents and reasons for the referral to Ballyowen Meadows.

- Pre-admission assessment is explained to parents and dates organised to visit the family home agreed.
- Admission date agreed.

Community Based Viability Assessment

The team endeavour to visit the family home and undertake some of the following assessment interview/tasks/scales with the family prior to admission:

- Mapping Current Identified Problems
- Basic Care and Health Needs Interview
- Parenting Daily Hassles Scale
- Adult Well Being Scale
- Home Conditions Scale
- Recent Life Events Scale
- Family Activity Scale
- Alcohol and Drugs Interview
- Part One - Family History Interview
- Case History explored with the family and Part one of SAAF Interview.

Admission to Ballyowen Meadows

The parents and children will move to Ballyowen Meadows in a planned way on a set date once the community-based assessment is complete. The following contracts are explained and signed with parents and social worker.

- Parent Contract re Urinalysis (weekly urinalysis requested).
- Parent Contract re Code of Behaviour
- Parent Contract re Engagement in the Assessment Process (including termination of placements).
- Bi weekly meeting with social work department scheduled.

The 12-week assessment plan and recording forms are shown and explained to parents and children (if applicable).

Risk assessments and child protection reporting procedures are explained and agreed with parents.

Stage 2- The Child and Family Assessment

The Family Assessment uses evidence-based tools to gather information. The tools include questionnaires and scales, interviews and observations. The information gathered is then organised and categorised into child development needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors using the Assessment Framework.



12 Week Assessment Plan

Weeks 1 – 3: Observation Based – Primarily led by Safeguarding Assessment and Responses (evidence based):

- Daily Recording and Observations – 3 recorded observations per day, 7 days per week. Focus on meal times, bedtimes, bath-time, playtime.
- Interviews, tasks, scales, questionnaires.

Weeks 4 – 9: Intervention Based – Strengths and difficulties identified – plan of intervention agreed with parents:

- Continue with Daily Recording and Observations – Focus on areas of difficulty outlined during initial 3-week assessment period, put intervention plan in place.
- Interviews, tasks, scales, questionnaires.

- Start using the Hope Modules

Modules from the *Hope for Children and Families* modular systemic interventions are used during the part of the assessment. This programme provides an accessible set of evidence-based approaches, resources and tools for assessment intervention and measuring outcomes. The resources are intended to empower children, young people, their families and practitioners when working together – building on strengths and overcoming difficulties. The resources used for the assessment are;

- Working with Parents: Promoting Attachment (Bentovim, A. et al, 2015).
 - Working with Parents: Positive Parenting (Bentovim, A. et al, 2015).
 - Working with Parents: Promoting Health, Development and Well-being (Bentovim, A. et al, 2015).
 - Working with Parents: Targeting Abusive and Neglectful Parenting (Bentovim, A. et al, 2015).
- Continue with Interviews, scales and tasks
 - Use of Theraplay to build relationships.

Weeks 10 – 12: Capacity to Change

Observation Based - Primarily led by Safeguarding Assessment and Responses (evidence based):

- Daily Recording and Observations – 3 recorded observations per day, 7 days per week, focus on areas of difficulty outlined during initial 3-week assessment period to see if Parents can sustain the intervention without intensive support.

Stage 3 & 4 – Establishing the Nature and Level of Harm and Analysis of Patterns of Harm and Protection

The information gathered (scales, interviews, tasks, observations) is categorised and organised using the assessment framework triangle headings. The information is gathered and summarised each week at the weekly team meetings. In undertaking weekly meetings, the team can assess family strengths and difficulties from a team approach.

The information gathered is then analysed using the Safeguarding Children Assessment and Analysis Framework (SAAF) tools. The processes in the family are identified and the impact they have on the children is the focus of the analysis. The SAAF tools are used to assess a

profile of harm and risks of re-abuse or likelihood of future harm. The SAAF tools are then used to predict the likely outlook for children and determine the prospects for successful intervention. The SAAF tools are discussed and completed during team meetings.

Stage 5 – Child Protection Decision Making and Care Planning

Following the 12-week assessment period a parenting capacity report is presented in a child centred assessment report addressed to the referring Social Work team. The report is written by the unit manager with input from the wider team. The report presents the information gathered and the analysis of the information. The instruction questions are answered and a clear recommendation is given on the care of the child.

A review meeting will take place with the social work team, family and team at Ballyowen Meadows to discuss the findings and recommendations of the assessment report. At this point a decision will be made as to whether the family would benefit most from:

- Transition plan to the community or other services – community supports identified
- Alternative care placements.

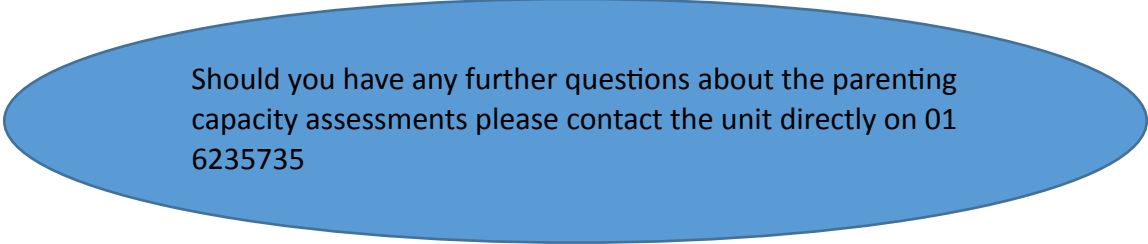
Sample Letter of Instruction.

This is a letter of instruction by (Social Work Department) dated agreed by all the parties during the referral and planning stage. It is understood that the assessment will begin on DATE. The assessment will take place in Ballyowen Meadows and will run for 12 weeks.

Ballyowen Meadows are instructed to undertake a full parenting assessment, which will enable suitably informed decisions be made regarding whether or not it is in the children's (NAMES) best interest to remain in the permanent care of their parent/s or carers. Ballyowen Meadows are asked to particularly address the following:

- 1. The individual needs of each child and whether the parents are able to meet those needs.**
- 2. Can the parents make sufficient change within the time frame of their children.**
- 3. Their perceptions of themselves as parents, their relationship and their perceptions of each child.**
- 4. Their capacity to interpret and respond to the practical and emotional care needs of each child now and in the future as their needs develop.**

5. Their ability to keep each child safe, their understanding of child protection issues and their ability to assess and identify risks posed by each other and by others.
6. Each parent's childhood experiences of growing up and their perceptions of the parenting they received.
7. Assess the parent's capacity to learn new ways of parenting/ coping/ changing behaviours.
8. Their response to supportive intervention, their ability to work with professionals openly and honestly, to accept professional advice and their ability to sustain any change needed.
9. The support network available to the parents and their willingness to access this.
10. Please advise of any other issues whether positive or negative noted as a result of the assessment.
11. Please advise whether any other assessment is required and if so what?
12. What if any support would each parent individually and as a unit require in parenting the children?



Should you have any further questions about the parenting capacity assessments please contact the unit directly on 01 6235735