

Evening Herald Thursday March 04 2010

Dad held for possessing child pornography was cleared as foster parent:

By Cormac Byrne, EXCLUSIVE,

Thursday March 04 2010

A MAN imprisoned for possessing child porn was cleared as a foster parent by gardai and health authorities.

The Dublin dad, in his 60s, was convicted of possessing shocking images.

The man, who cannot be named for legal reasons, is currently serving a prison sentence for possession of graphic images depicting children in sexually explicit situations.

Opposition Health spokesman Dr James Reilly today called for all the children in the man's care to be interviewed to determine if they had been abused.

Fine Gael said that an inquiry should be set up immediately to see "how this man slipped through the net".

"This is a serious issue in any event and they would have to go back and interview the children to see if they suffered any abuse," Dr Reilly said.

"There needs to be an investigation to improve the vetting procedure. I'm not trying to lay the blame at anyone's door but we must address the issues that allowed this man to slip through the net."

Neighbours confirmed to the Herald that the man had brought up a number of foster children.

"I know of him alright. Suffice to say I hope he doesn't come back," said a neighbour, who said she is nervous of the man's release.

But the HSE would not confirm or deny that the man was on the fostering register.

Another neighbour admitted that there were constant rumours about the man's behaviour towards children in his care.

"I've had a bad feeling about him for years," said a mother in the area where the man resided.

"Everyone has always been suspicious of him, he would talk to children in the area inappropriately.

"Even from when we were very young, we were always wary about him.

"My child would play in his house with his grandson but I won't be allowing him over there unsupervised or when he's around anymore."

A local resident who lives very close to the man has warned that the man will not be welcomed back to the area on his release.

"I don't know how he's going to come back and live here," the neighbour said.

Health authorities are responsible for vetting possible foster carers, who must also gain garda clearance before taking children into their home.

According to the Irish Foster Care Association "the health authority will seek and speak to referees and will also require the applicant's permission to seek Garda clearance on all adult family members residing in the home.

“There are certain offences that will prevent you becoming a foster carer, so if you have ever been convicted of a sexual offence or a violent act towards a child then you will not be able to foster.”

The HSE would not discuss the case to protect the identity of children who may have been fostered by the man and defended its protocol surrounding carers.

“Under the 1991 Childcare Act, the HSE is precluded from discussing the details of any child in its care, including the details of individual foster carers as this may lead to the identification of the child/ren,” they said in a statement to the Herald.

“Where there are concerns, either from the HSE or family perspective, the HSE would review the situation through the foster carer/family Link Worker and the child's Social Worker, and if fostering is considered not to be appropriate, the contract would be terminated, by either the HSE or the foster carer/family.

“The HSE also works very closely with An Garda Siochana which is the other statutory authority with responsibility for childcare.”

This latest revelation comes after it was revealed that children in foster care have made repeated complaints of physical and sexual abuse in the HSE's Dublin north-east region over a period of three years, but none of their alleged abusers has been prosecuted.

The man in this case is not believed to be linked to these cases.

- Cormac Byrne, EXCLUSIVE,