

## **Sinead Ryan: Tracey Fay was our Baby P and someone must be held to account:**

By Sinead Ryan

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What is more outrageous? What happened to troubled teenager Tracey Fay during her short life or the fact that we're only getting the report into it after eight long years?

Tracey was probably once known as Baby T in social worker parlance, just like the equally tragic Baby P who made all the headlines after he was found dead from neglect at just two years old.

Tracey's horror of abuse went on for a further 16 years how-ever, much of it inflicted by the State which was constitutionally bound to protect her.

Concerns about her welfare started at just eight months old, just like Baby P. She found her way on to the State protection register at eight and again at 10 years old, but it was in Britain where she briefly lived.

Here, she had no chance at all. Indeed, the worst abuses happened while she was in care in Ireland.

She was prostituted, introduced to drugs and went missing for 23 of 29 days, all while under the "protection" of the State. When everyone else was celebrating the turn of the millennium and worrying about Y2K, Tracey spent 217 nights in 17 different bed and breakfasts.

She died on a cold night in early 2002, her body only found six days later by gardai.

Yes, of course we need to blame the Minister for Whatever -- whether it be Justice, Children, Health or Education. They all have Tracey's blood on their hands and therein lies the problem.

### **RESIGN**

We have no cohesive child-welfare policy funded and run by a single entity. We are brilliant at writing reports on how to care for children and abysmal at actually caring for them. We are worse at holding anyone accountable when failures happen.

Somebody needs to resign -- and quite publicly -- as happened in Baby P's case, to make us believe they 'get it'.

Implementation plans, proposals, recommendations and guidelines: we have shelves full of them gathering dust in departmental offices. How dare successive ministers deal with anything else until they get this right? How is it possible to rate anything -- banks, jobs, recessions or e-voting machines -- above the protection of children?

Not all parents are good ones. Some are atrocious. Identifying them is only the first step. Getting their children into a safe environment and bringing them up to, well, remain alive as a start, has to be our priority.

Failure to do so is failure at the most basic job function a social worker, or a minister, has.

One of them, Barry Andrews, seems far more concerned at the fact that Tracey's abusive mother's permission wasn't sought before Fine Gael leaked the report's contents. Yes, clearly that's the main issue, Mr Andrews. Any chance it might be followed by some sense of shame or guilt?

- Sinead Ryan