

Strategic Plan

2019 - 2022

A plan for revitalisation and sustainability

President's welcome

The idea to create an organisation that resulted in IFCO is 40 years old this year! This is an important milestone for the organisation, our members and our supporters and one that should be celebrated. We look back with great pride at the achievements of IFCO, a small volunteer-led organisation. We have contributed much to foster care in those four decades of our existence. We have provided support, training, information, networking opportunities, camaraderie and friendship to so many people involved in foster care over the years. We are rightly proud of our efforts to improve the lives of children in care and their foster carers in many parts of the world.

As we approach our 40th anniversary in just two years' time, we feel this not only provides us with an opportunity to celebrate our achievements, it also gives us a chance to consider the future. IFCO, like all organisations, must plan for its future. The world which existed all those years ago when IFCO was founded has changed to an astonishing extent, economically, politically, and socially. The development of information technology has brought about the most extraordinary changes to human life. Information technology has become a provider of great liberation and knowledge and at the same time it has laid before us a host of new challenges to be addressed.

IFCO has faced many challenges during its lifetime, and it currently sits at a crossroads. Traditionally IFCO has been a volunteer-run organisation as well as being volunteer led. However, the demands of managing an organisation with an international reach in this fast-moving technological age, where our members rightly have high expectations of us, no longer can be met by a volunteer-run organisation. IFCO must adapt to survive, to remain relevant and to ensure the best possible service for our members and for children in care globally.

In these pages we set out a blue print for IFCO's future. We have outlined our vision for IFCO where children and young people in care are at the heart of IFCO's work. Our commitment to children includes the ongoing support of foster carers, without the commitment and dedication of whom, so many children would not have had the wonderful opportunity of experiencing a safe and stable family environment. The development of this strategic plan is an important step in IFCO's regeneration to ensure its sustainability into the future. In it we make proposals to revitalise our organisation from top to bottom: governance, management, staffing, finances, membership, activities, communications and policy. The implementation of this strategic plan, in conjunction with an accompanying operational plan, will rejuvenate the incredible ground-breaking work begun by our founders.

It is with great enthusiasm that I lead IFCO into the next period of its life. I hope that in time those who will review IFCO's history will acknowledge the importance of this document in the life of IFCO. Finally, I wish to thank all of those in the IFCO family who contributed to this plan for their belief in us, for their time and for their commitment to our wonderful organisation.



Danielle Douglas

*Danielle Douglas
IFCO President
August 2019*

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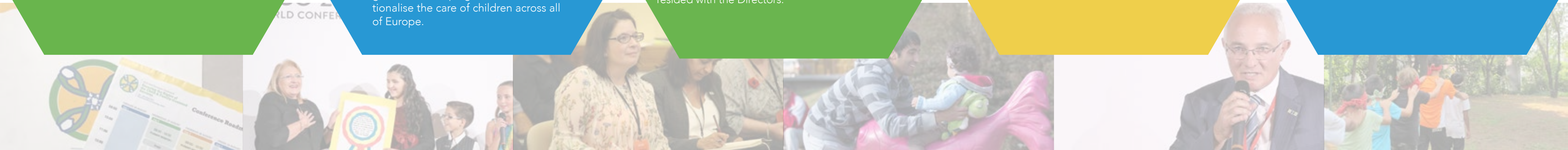
IFCO (International Foster Care Organisation) was first mooted in 1979 in Oxford, UK, at a conference organised by the National Foster Care Association, UK, to discuss a response to the United Nations' International Year of the Child. Two years later in 1981 in the Netherlands, IFCO was formally established and subsequently incorporated as a charity in the UK. IFCO has always been a multi-national membership-driven organisation, with an emphasis on involvement of people with care-experience and foster carers. Its biennial conferences and regular newsletters have been central to IFCO's activities, providing support to children who are in care, foster parents and professionals who work with children in care and their families.

Between 2005 and 2007 IFCO, together with SOS Children's Villages International and FICE, the International Federation of Educative Communities, worked on the Quality4Children project in developing European Standards for children in out-of-home care. Between 2016 and 2019 IFCO collaborated with the international organisations Eurochild, FICE, Hope and Homes for Children and SOS Children's Villages International, and civil society groups in 16 European countries, on the Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign. The aim of the campaign was to support child protection systems in the European Union that strengthen families and ensure high quality family and community-based alternative care for children. A primary goal of the campaign was to deinstitutionalise the care of children across all of Europe.

Traditionally, IFCO's work has been carried out by dedicated volunteers who gave their time freely to furthering IFCO's aims. This has been a significant challenge for IFCO as the requirements of running an international organisation successfully on a voluntary basis takes its toll on those involved. IFCO has attempted to address this issue when in the period between 2001-2006 an office was established in the Hague, Netherlands. In 2013 IFCO's Directors contracted out the administrative element of its work when it appointed Partnership for Every Child, Ukraine, to provide a Secretariat service for IFCO. In mid-2018 when the contract for Partnership for Every Child came to an end a new three-person team based in Ireland/Australia/UK took over the work of the Secretariat. The new Secretariat was contracted to take on many of the professional tasks which had resided with the Directors.

A Short History of IFCO

The IFCO Directors had recognised the enormity of trying to sustain and grow the organisation with the bulk of the work resting on the shoulders of a small number of volunteers. This strategic plan is an important step in revitalising IFCO and in sustaining its important work into the future.



Core Values

IFCO believes that:

1. Alternative care for children should be child-centred and family focused
2. In all decisions about children's care, the needs and rights of the child should be the primary consideration
3. Children should have a say in all decisions made about their lives
4. Foster and kinship care should be an inclusive effort by all, birth families (where possible and appropriate), foster carers, professionals and agencies, respecting the diverse contribution of each in the interests of children who are in alternative care

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Vision

IFCO's vision is that children in alternative care across the world would have the choice to live in family-based care. We believe this form of care offers children the best opportunity to grow and prosper.

Goal One

IFCO will advocate on behalf of children in alternative care so that all those children who need and want it, will have the opportunity to avail of family-based foster or kinship care.

Objective 1.1

IFCO, on its own and in collaboration with other like-minded organisations, will promote Goal 1 at the highest international level of government to encourage family-based care as the primary response to out-of-home children.

Objective 1.2

IFCO will initiate, support and disseminate research on care experiences and outcomes for children who are/have been in out-of-home care to inform best practice in this field.

Goal Three

IFCO is committed to supporting foster and kinship families to achieve and maintain the highest standard of care to ensure best outcomes for children in their care.

Objective 3.1

IFCO will develop and provide training and other supports for foster and kinship families.

Objective 3.2

IFCO is committed to engaging with and, where possible, to influencing politicians, administrators and professionals to support foster and kinship families and children in their care.

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Goal Two

IFCO will promote the rights of children in alternative care to ensure the inclusion of their views on all matters affecting them as set out in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Objective 2.1

IFCO will promote Goal 2 by consulting with children in out-of-home care in the development of its policies and practices.

Objective 2.2

IFCO will provide and encourage platforms at international level for children in out-of-home care to have their voices heard.

Goals & Objectives

IFCO's Strategic Priorities

Governance

IFCO has been incorporated as a company and charity since the early 1980s and we have our legal base in the UK. IFCO is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association (M&AA). IFCO intends updating its M&AA as best practice in governance has moved on since IFCO's foundation.

Management

The Directors are responsible for the management of the work of IFCO. In effect, it is the Management Committee (MC), consisting of the officers of the Board (President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer) of IFCO that oversee the day-to-day operation of the organisation. The burden of this task has been identified by the MC as 'unsustainable'. The complexity and intensity of the workload for such a small group of volunteers has caused strain on the organisation and the individuals entrusted with this work for many years. There are three key elements for review in the management task: the individual and collective roles of the MC, the role of sub-committees, and paid staff.

Finances

IFCO's conferences have been the main source of funds for its work. However, to date IFCO has been unable to generate an ongoing critical mass of funding to place it on a firm financial footing where organisationally it can achieve its goals consistently and at the highest level. The control and management of IFCO's financial procedures need to be reviewed to ensure they meet best practice.

Staffing

For most of its history IFCO's members have provided the day-to-day supports and services for the organisation. It is not possible for IFCO to sustain this voluntary model and to achieve its aims. In response to this reality IFCO Directors have contracted out the administrative aspects of its work since 2013. Since mid-2018 IFCO has progressed a step further by contracting out the administrative duties and more of the responsibilities which had resided with the Directors, such as project management, policy, strategy and communications. There are some challenges to the contract model used by IFCO: the contracted staff are not employees of IFCO; the work of the organisation is mostly carried out online; and, IFCO does not have a recognised office base.

Membership

At the core of IFCO is its membership, and our members come from across the world. The organisation was established as a membership organisation and this core value remains central to IFCO's ethos. IFCO offers four types of membership: individual, organisational, youth and life member. IFCO acknowledges that there needs to be greater stability in membership numbers overall and a year-on-year increase. IFCO recognises that the benefits of membership require significant improvement. IFCO's members are essential to the organisation and must be prioritised to ensure the ongoing support of loyal members and to attract new members. A strong and informed membership equals a strong IFCO.

Activities

IFCO's core activities have traditionally included conferences, training and collaboration with other groups. For many in the membership conferences are the soul of the organisation, providing a biennial opportunity to get together with the IFCO family from across the world. IFCO's young members meet at the IFCO youth conference which is held in conjunction with the IFCO biennial conference. IFCO has played an important role in supporting young people in care and care-leavers, through its conferences and through training. IFCO training has been successful and there is scope for developing this arm of IFCO's expertise. IFCO's collaborations with other organisations on different projects over the years has been of value to IFCO, the groups involved in the collaboration, and the project outcomes.

Communications

IFCO has a website which is undergoing an upgrade. It also has a Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn presence. IFCO holds its Board meetings online through Zoom and all written communications are through email. Its documentation is shared and stored using relevant software. IFCO publishes an online newsletter distributed through Mailchimp. Yet, IFCO's online presence has not been as active as it should be. IFCO has developed a communications strategy to address these issues and has appointed a communications officer on a part-time basis to implement the strategy and promote IFCO's presence and profile.

Policy

A central aim of IFCO is to influence decision-making at a political level to improve the lives of children in care. IFCO's conferences have always provided a platform for policy and in subsequent publications of conference proceedings. IFCO has fostered links with tertiary institutions which have hosted and participated in IFCO conferences through the years. These various links have been and continue to be important to IFCO's work, but these relationships require rekindling and further development to ensure maximum benefit to the policy aims of IFCO.

Towards More Effective Governance

	IFCO's Commitment	Benefit	Outcome
Aims of IFCO	We are committed to streamlining our aims to more accurately reflect our work supporting children in foster and kinship care.	To provide clarity to our primary task.	It will become easier to promote our organisation and our aims. It will make it easier for us to secure funding for our work.
Selection of Directors	We are committed to appointing Directors with more diverse experience and a range of qualifications.	To enhance our capacity as an organisation by having greater diversity in our Board membership.	We will improve our capacity to deliver on our aims.
Update the category of Life Member	We are committed to amending our M&AA to allow for a change in the definition of a Life Member.	To recognise outstanding contributions to our work by individual members.	IFCO becomes known for valuing its members' contributions.
Support for Directors	We are committed to improving our support for IFCO's Directors by developing new policies and procedures to enhance their participation.	To develop best practice in supporting our Directors to assist them in their work for IFCO.	IFCO's Directors will be assisted in carrying out their role to the highest standards.
Language change in the M&AA	We are committed to diversity at IFCO and we will change the wording of our M&AA from 'he/him' to be more inclusive of all gender identification.	To demonstrate our commitment to diversity and inclusivity.	All members and others associated in any way with IFCO will feel welcome.

Reviewing the Management Task

	IFCO's Commitment	Benefit	Outcome
Management Committee	We are committed to reducing the burden of work on the Management Committee.	To make the management task more manageable for IFCO's Management Committee	Allows Directors to perform their core legal tasks of oversight and governance.
Sub-Committees	We are committed to reviewing the need, make-up and operation of sub-committees.	To devise a committee structure that is more effective and responsive to the needs of IFCO.	Committees will be regarded as a valuable resource for IFCO.
Staffing	We are committed to professionalising our staffing model (see Section 4 below).	To enhance our day-to-day work to achieve our aims.	Allows Directors to perform their core legal tasks of oversight and governance.

Stabilising & Growing our Finances

	IFCO's Commitment	Benefit	Outcome
IFCO's financial management systems	We are committed to reviewing and enhancing our financial management systems to ensure they are up-to-date and meet best practice in the not-for-profit sector. This will include the appointment to the Board of Directors someone with an accounting or financial management background.	To have financial management oversight and practices in line with best practice.	Greater transparency and trust in IFCO's financial oversight and management. Greater confidence by donors in IFCO's financial oversight and management which will lead to increased opportunities for funding.
Funding strategy	We are committed to developing and implementing a funding strategy to increase the finances available to IFCO.	To increase funding to provide greater financial stability.	IFCO will be better able to meet its aims with increased funding.
Training for Directors	We are committed to support training for our Directors in financial responsibilities and fundraising techniques.	To assist our Directors to become more knowledgeable about managing finances and fundraising techniques.	To enhance the Board of Directors' expertise in the key areas of finances and fundraising.

Professionalising our Staffing Model

	IFCO's Commitment	Benefit	Outcome
Moving from voluntary effort to professional staff	We are committed to shifting our dependence on voluntary input by IFCO's Directors for the day-to-day work of the organisation to a professional staff.	To enhance the performance of our day-to-day work to assist achieve our aims.	Allows Directors to perform their core legal tasks of oversight and governance.
Contracting of staff	We are committed to continuing our contract model for the period of this strategic plan.	To provide a period of organisational stability between 2019 and 2022.	Brings IFCO's work and performance to a high standard.
Review of IFCO staffing model	We are committed to reviewing our contractual model of staffing to examine if it is the most suitable form of staffing for IFCO in the long term.	To allow the development of a long-term staffing plan.	Ensures IFCO will have the most suitable staffing model to meet its needs.
Review of IFCO base	We are committed to exploring the need for a permanent office base.	To assess if a permanent office base would be useful for IFCO's long-term future.	An agreement on IFCO's location for the long-term.

Valuing our Membership

	IFCO's Commitment	Benefit	Outcome
Improve IFCO's benefits to members	We are committed to reviewing the practical benefits of IFCO membership with the intention of improving the offering to members.	To increase member loyalty to IFCO.	A more committed, engaged and informed membership.
Membership recruitment	We are committed to developing a strategy to increase membership, which will include a focus on attracting members from the less-represented regions of the world.	To retain IFCO's pre-eminence as a leading voice in the field of foster care.	Increased membership will give IFCO greater strength and depth as an organisation. Increased membership from less-represented regions will strengthen IFCO's commitment to foster care globally.
Review membership fees	We are committed to giving value for money to members.	To determine a fair fee structure that is not burdensome on any membership category.	Greater transparency in membership fees will allow members see the value of their financial contribution to IFCO.
Change of criteria for life member	We are committed to changing the category of Life Member. This change will be recommended to honour the special contribution of individual members through the implementation of an honorary life-member category irrespective of age.	To acknowledge significant contributions to the work of IFCO by individual members.	IFCO becomes known for valuing its members' contributions.

Developing our Activities

	IFCO's Commitment	Benefit	Outcome
Conferences	We are committed to using our conference profile and brand to extend the reach of our conferences. We are committed to developing a range of conference options which will have an IFCO input but not always as the sole or lead organiser.	To have a range of conference options available: sole organiser, partnership, franchise and online/virtual conferences. The implementation of these options will ensure that IFCO will be involved in at least one conference each year.	The development of these conference models will extend IFCO's influence in this field and it will also add to the organisation's financial resources. IFCO will be the lead conference provider on foster care and related issues.
Training	We are committed to enhancing the provision of quality training for various groups.	To develop and offer streamlined training for different target groups.	IFCO training will improve the experience of care for children. IFCO training will improve the skills and knowledge of foster and kinship carers and the professionals who support them and children in care.
Youth programme	We are committed to expanding our work with youth to improve the lives of children in foster care and other children and youth in care as well as those young people who are ageing out of care.	To enhance the lives of young people in care through IFCO's youth programme by providing empowerment, leadership, research and advocacy training to support them as agents for change in their own lives.	There will be several outcomes from this development: care-leavers networks; mentoring programme to support the transitions for young people; and, the expansion of the Pat Whelan fund to finance young people to attend and participate in conferences, seminars and training.
Collaborations	We will continue to collaborate with like-minded organisations to pursue our goals whenever the opportunity arises.	To benefit IFCO's advocacy agenda through collaboration.	Working closely with other organisations will improve policy and practice for foster and kinship carers and children in their care.

Improving our Communications

	IFCO's Commitment	Benefit	Outcome
Online presence	Through the implementation of our communications strategy we are committed to regular and targeted use of the main social media platforms.	To better inform our members, supporters, followers and those with an interest in foster care.	IFCO's improved social media presence and redeveloped website will play a major part in improving IFCO's profile and contribution to knowledge of foster and kinship care.
Newsletter and magazine	We are committed to redesigning the IFCO Newsletter. From January 2020 this e-newsletter will be published monthly and distributed freely to our members and interested members of the public. A more extensive quarterly magazine will be published for IFCO members only.	To connect IFCO members to the work of the organisation. To provide regular up-to-date information and news on developments, conferences and research on foster and kinship care and related areas.	These online publications will inform IFCO members and the public on important matters relating to IFCO, foster and kinship care and associated issues.
Communication with children and youth	We are committed to children and young people and will develop our communications to engage with young people in care. IFCO will have dedicated sections for young people and children on the IFCO website.	To improve engagement with children and young people in care and with children who are not in care.	To let children and youth in care know that IFCO sees their needs as a priority. To have a better-informed youth population on foster and kinship care and related issues.

Leading the Way in Policy

	IFCO's Commitment	Benefit	Outcome
Repository of knowledge on foster care	We are committed to establishing a repository of academic research and knowledge on foster and kinship care and related subjects.	To provide easy links for IFCO members and non-members to all scientific, practice and policy literature in this field.	The availability of links to this source material on IFCO's website will provide an important resource to a wide range of people who have an interest in foster and kinship care.
Policy links	We are committed to establishing or re-establishing links to international and national policy-making institutions.	To help us influence policy change for children in care.	IFCO will try to influence policy debates to promote the use of foster and kinship care as the primary form of alternative care for out-of-home children.
Research on foster care	We are committed to initiating and contracting research on foster and kinship care, alternative care, ageing out of care, and other aspects of the care experience.	To have us recognised as a global advocate and leader of research in foster and kinship care.	IFCO will have research evidence to support its policy work.
Student research competitions	We are committed to the development of a range of competitions to enhance children's and young people's knowledge of foster care.	To improve public knowledge of foster and kinship care by encouraging children and young people to reflect on the meaning and consequences of alternative care for children.	These competitions, will encourage a greater knowledge and understanding of all forms of care, especially foster and kinship care.
Support of policy development in regions where IFCO has little presence	We are committed to developing alliances in all parts of the world to provide support to individuals or groups working towards the development of quality foster and kinship care.	To expand our relevance throughout the world as we are aware that our work is centred in the Western world.	These developments will support individuals and groups across the world to improve policy and practice in alternative care.

1981 Slagharen, The Netherlands (International)
1982 Beekse Bergen, The Netherlands (Regional)
1983 Christchurch, New Zealand (Regional)
1985 Christchurch, New Zealand (Regional)
1987 Leeds, United Kingdom (International)
1988 Lunteren, The Netherlands (Regional)
1989 Michigan, USA (International)
1990 Athens, Greece (Regional)
1991 Jonkoping, Sweden (International)
1992 Gent, Belgium (Regional)
1993 Dublin, Ireland (International)
1994 Berlin, Germany (Regional)
1995 Bergen, Norway (international)
1996 Los Angeles, USA (Regional)
1997 Vancouver, Canada (International)
1998 Budapest, Hungary (Regional)
1998 Manilla, The Philippines (Regional)
1999 Melbourne, Australia (International)
2000 Cork, Ireland (Regional)
2001 Veldhoven, The Netherlands (International)



40 Years of IFCO Conferences

1979 Oxford, United Kingdom (first International conference)
Organised by the National Foster Care Association

2002 Tampere, Finland (Regional)
2003 La Plata, Argentina (International)
2004 Paramaribo, Surinam (Regional)
2004 Prague, Czech Republic (Regional)
2005 Madison, USA (international)
2006 Bucharest, Romania (Project)
2006 Bratislava, Slovakia (Regional)
2007 Hamilton, New Zealand (International)
2007 Mellieha, Malta (Regional)
2009 Dublin, Ireland (International)
2010 Brighton, United Kingdom (Regional)
2011 Victoria, British Columbia, Canada (International)
2012 Sofia, Bulgaria (Regional)
2013 Osaka, Japan (International)
2014 Waterford, Ireland (Regional)
2015 Sydney, Australia (International)
2016 Sheffield, UK (Regional)
2017 Valetta, Malta (International)
2020 Montreal, Canada (International)

Contact IFCO

Email

ifco@ifco.info

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Strategic Plan
2019 - 2022

A plan for revitalisation and sustainability

