Strategic Plan
2019 - 2022

A plan for revitalisation and sustainability
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 blueprint 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.

President’s welcome

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17 IFCO Conferences
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 Educational 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.

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.
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.

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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Goals & Objectives

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 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.

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.
IFCO's Strategic Priorities

Governance

The Directors are responsible for the overall governance of IFCO. In ef-
fect, it is the voluntary President's
Committee (PC) and the Volun-
teer Network (VN) that makes up
the Board (President, Vice-President, Sec-
retary and Treasurer) of IFCO that oversee the
day-to-day operation of the organi-
sation. The PC is the elected body
within IFCO and the VN is comprised
of individuals interested in the work
of IFCO. The PC is responsible for
the strategic direction and overall
management of the organisation. The PC
has set out a number of goals and
strategies that IFCO will work towards
over the coming years. These goals
include increasing IFCO's visibility
and influence, increasing IFCO's
membership and strengthening the
organisational infrastructure.

Financial

IFCO's conferences have been the main source of funds for the
organisation. However, these conferences are constrained by
the costs associated with running them. As a result, IFCO has
been unable to generate the funds necessary to support its
mission. In order to address these challenges, IFCO is consid-
ering diversifying its revenue streams by exploring new
opportunities for partnerships and collaborations.

Staffing

For most of its history, IFCO has been volunteer-led, with
the majority of its volunteers working without financial
reward. However, the challenge of maintaining a viable
volunteer base has become increasingly difficult. As a result,
IFCO has been unable to sustain its operations and
achieve its goals. In order to address this challenge, IFCO
has been exploring the possibility of introducing paid staff to
support its operations.

Activities

At the core of IFCO's activities, and the work of many
informal professional groups, are conferences, train-
ing and collaboration. These activities are
essential for the advancement of IFCO's
work. However, the complexity and
intensity of this work have made
it increasingly difficult to
sustain. In order to address
these challenges, IFCO has
been exploring new models
for delivering its activities,
including online and virtual
platforms.

Communications

IFCO has a website which is undergoing
an upgrade. It also has a Facebook, Twitter,
Instagram and LinkedIn presence. IFCO
uses these platforms to share updates,
news and information. However,
IFCO's online presence has
not been as active as it could
be. In order to address this,
IFCO is exploring new
strategies and approaches
for engaging with its audience.

Policy

A central aim of IFCO is to
influence decision-making at a
number of levels. However,
the lives of children in care
remain difficult to address,
partly due to the lack of
resources and awareness.
In order to address these
challenges, IFCO is exploring
new strategies for influencing
policy, including working
with policymakers and
advocacy groups.

Membership

At the core of IFCO is its
membership. However,
the current membership base
is not reflective of the
broad diversity of IFCO's
work. In order to address
these challenges, IFCO
is exploring new strategies
for recruiting and engaging
with its membership.

Finances

IFCO's core activities have traditionally
involv...
Towards More Effective Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IFCO's Commitment</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims of IFCO</td>
<td>We are committed to streamlining our aims to more accurately reflect our work supporting children in foster and kinship care.</td>
<td>To provide clarity to our primary task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Directors</td>
<td>We are committed to appointing Directors with more diverse experience and a range of qualifications.</td>
<td>To enhance our capacity as an organisation by having greater diversity in our Board membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update the category of Life Member</td>
<td>We are committed to amending our M&amp;AA to allow for a change in the definition of a Life Member.</td>
<td>To recognize outstanding contributions to our work by individual members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Directors</td>
<td>We are committed to improving our support for IFCO’s Directors by developing new policies and procedures to enhance their participation.</td>
<td>To develop best practice in supporting our Directors to assist them in their work for IFCO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language change in the M&amp;AA</td>
<td>We are committed to diversity at IFCO and we will change the wording of our M&amp;AA from ‘he/ him’ to be more inclusive of all gender identification.</td>
<td>To demonstrate our commitment to diversity and inclusivity.</td>
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Reviewing the Management Task

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<tr>
<th>IFCO's Commitment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management Committee</td>
<td>We are committed to reducing the burden of work on the Management Committee.</td>
<td>To make the management task more manageable for IFCO’s Management Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Committees</td>
<td>We are committed to reviewing the need, make-up and operation of sub-committees.</td>
<td>To devise a committee structure that is more effective and responsive to the needs of IFCO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>We are committed to professionalising our staffing model (see Section 4 below).</td>
<td>To enhance our day-to-day work to achieve our aims.</td>
</tr>
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Stabilising & Growing our Finances

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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>To have financial management oversight and practices in line with best practice.</td>
<td>Greater transparency and trust in IFCO’s financial oversight and management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To increase funding to provide greater financial stability.</td>
<td>IFCO will be better able to meet its aims with increased funding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To assist our Directors to become more knowledgeable about managing finances and fundraising techniques.</td>
<td>To enhance the Board of Directors’ expertise in the key areas of finances and fundraising.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Funding strategy

We are committed to developing and implementing a funding strategy to increase the finances available to IFCO.

Training for Directors

We are committed to support training for our Directors in financial responsibilities and fundraising techniques.

Professionalising our Staffing Model

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<tr>
<td>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. We are committed to continuing our contract model for the period of this strategic plan.</td>
<td>To enhance the performance of our day-to-day work to assist achieve our aims.</td>
<td>To provide a period of organisational stability between 2019 and 2022.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>To allow the development of a long-term staffing plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are committed to exploring the need for a permanent office base.</td>
<td>To assess if a permanent office base would be useful for IFCO’s long-term future.</td>
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Moving from voluntary effort to professional staff

Contracting of staff

Review of IFCO staffing model

Review of IFCO base

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.

IFCO will be better able to meet its aims with increased funding.

To enhance the Board of Directors’ expertise in the key areas of finances and fundraising.

To provide a period of organisational stability between 2019 and 2022.

To allow the development of a long-term staffing plan.

To assess if a permanent office base would be useful for IFCO’s long-term future.

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To enhance the Board of Directors’ expertise in the key areas of finances and fundraising.

To provide a period of organisational stability between 2019 and 2022.

To allow the development of a long-term staffing plan.

To assess if a permanent office base would be useful for IFCO’s long-term future.

Ensures IFCO will have the most suitable staffing model to meet its needs.

An agreement on IFCO’s location for the long-term.
Valuing our Membership

IFCO's Commitment | Benefit | Outcome
---|---|---
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.

Review membership fees

We are committed to giving value for money to members.

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.

Developing our Activities

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.

We are committed to enhancing the provision of quality training for various groups.

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.

To have a range of conference options available: sole organiser, partnership, freelance and online/virtual conferences. The implementation of these options will ensure that IFCO will be involved in at least one conference each year.

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.

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We will continue to collaborate with like-minded organisations to pursue our goals wherever the opportunity arises.

Benefits of youth programmes include: care-leavers networks, mentoring programmes to support 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 wherever 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 care and children in their care.
Improving our Communications

**IFCO's Commitment**
Through the implementation of our communications strategy, we are committed to regular and targeted use of the main social media platforms.

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 new quarterly magazine will be published for IFCO members only.

**Benefit**
To better inform our members, supporters, followers and those with an interest in foster care.

**Outcome**
Through the implementation of our communications strategy, we are committed to regular and targeted use of the main social media platforms. This will improve our online presence.

Through the redesigning of the IFCO Newsletter, we aim to provide regular and targeted information to our members and interested members of the public.

**Communication with children and youth**
We are committed to communicate with 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.**

**Policy links**
We are committed to establishing or re-establishing links to international and national policy-making institutions.

**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.

**Student research competitions**
We are committed to establishing alliances in all parts of the world to provide support to individuals or groups working towards the development of quality 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.

**IFCO's Commitment**
We are committed to establishing a repository of academic research and knowledge on foster and kinship care and related subjects.

**Benefit**
To help us influence policy change for children in care.

**Outcome**
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.

**Leading the Way in Policy**

**Repository of knowledge on foster care**
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**IFCO's Commitment**
We are committed to providing easy links for IFCO members and non-members to all scientific, practice and policy literature in this field.

**Benefit**
To provide young people with an informed opinion of foster and kinship care.

**Outcome**
These online publications will inform IFCO members and the public on important matters relating to IFCO, foster and kinship care and associated issues.

**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.**

**These online publications will inform IFCO members and the public on important matters relating to IFCO, foster and kinship care and associated issues.**

**IFCO will have a better-informed youth population on foster and kinship care and related issues.**

**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.**

**IFCO will have research evidence to support its policy work.**

**These competitions will encourage a greater knowledge and understanding of all forms of care, especially foster and kinship care.**

**These developments will support individual and groups across the world to improve policy and practice in alternative care.**
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)

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 Manila, The Philippines (Regional)
1999 Melbourne, Australia (International)
2000 Cork, Ireland (Regional)
2001 Veldhoven, The Netherlands (International)
A plan for revitalisation and sustainability