

IRISH AFTERCARE NETWORK

Providing Support to People Working With Care Leavers

Dear Irish Aftercare Network Member

As we all continue to play our part in curbing the virus, the Irish Aftercare Network wishes to acknowledge the tremendous work of its members and all aftercare workers throughout Ireland who have shown enormous dedication, flexibility and creativity in their efforts to continue providing essential care and support for young people during these most challenging of times.

The lockdown adversely affected us all; to a greater or less extent, but for many care leavers it was especially hard. As we all know, leaving care can be very difficult at the best of times and many young people can feel extremely vulnerable, fearful and isolated. While the curtailment of normal aftercare services was absolutely necessary to protect everyone from harm, it did have the potential to increase the vulnerability of care leavers. However, like other frontline professionals, aftercare workers stepped up to the mark and showed great determination to overcome the barriers the lockdown presented and in doing so demonstrated, yet again, their unshakeable commitment to the young people in their care.

The network has been working hard behind the scenes and has adapted to this “new normal” .We include some highlights of the work achieved by the network since March to bring you up to date.

Unfortunately however we feel it is in everybody’s best interests and safety to postpone the conference scheduled for October this year until 2021.Our hope is to have it in the same venue, The Sheraton Hotel, Athlone on Friday 7th May 2021 with the very appropriate theme **“Embracing Resilience” Creating Foundations.**

We are also actively working on planning a morning webinar to support members which we will host in October and hope to have confirmation of this to you by early September.

For now, I want to take this opportunity again to thank you, our members, for all your incredible work over the past few months. The network is here to support you, please get in touch if we can help in any way.

Kind regards

Ciaran Kenny

Ciaran Kenny
Chairman

Irish Aftercare Network News

Irish Aftercare Network meeting with Tusla

As previously agreed the network meet with Tusla at least twice a year. The positive communication channels and working relationship that is now in place between the Irish Aftercare Network and Tusla benefits all. The first meeting of 2020 took place virtually in May. The purpose of this meeting is to communicate with Tusla an update of the issues that are raised by members during the regional meetings in the first Quarter of 2020. In attendance were Chairman, Ciaran Kenny and PRO, Neil Forsyth from the Irish Aftercare Network and Valerie Mawe, Professional Support Manager, William McNamara, National Implementation Lead Aftercare Services and Grainne Collins, National Policy Manager, Alternative Care from Tusla.

Issues that were discussed:

- **The two tier system** that is currently in place for young people in aftercare, whereby a young person in education will continue to get an aftercare service until they are 23 as opposed to a young person not in full time education receiving aftercare only until they are 21. It was agreed by all that this issue needs to be looked at more closely within the review of the Childcare Act. Tusla's CEO, Bernard Gloster has shown a real commitment to providing a strong aftercare service nationally and Bernard has made a point of meeting with all aftercare managers throughout the country recently. Tusla stated that if this was to be amended in legislation then it would be reflected in policy but it would require additional resources.
- The issue of **disparity in caseloads** nationally was discussed. Tusla did acknowledge that a number of years ago the increase in caseloads was due to a lack of aftercare workers and a high number of care leavers coming through the system. The case management project, which is based on the social work model, to review adequate caseloads will be piloted in two sites in September of this year with the aim for it to be finished by April 2021 with a shift regarding assessing young people from their complexity to the intensity involved in working with them. This positive was acknowledged by all.
- A request was made by the Irish Aftercare Network in relation to a **review of CAS** and where this was at. William stated that currently sixty-three young people have been housed nationally through CAS and that a total of seventy-five properties have been acquired. A review of CAS, interviewing all stakeholders involved, including twenty young people who have been housed through CAS will be completed by the end of this year.
- The **ongoing concern about aftercare allowance and the amount given to young people** was raised by the network. A number of examples of the difficulties this is creating for young

people, as well as how damaging it can be on the relationship between the young people and their aftercare worker was also spoken about. Tusla advised that they have been working on a way to address this but thus far had difficulties in implementing a system. This is ongoing and Tusla was acutely aware of the need to address the case where many young people are getting over two thousand euro's a month with no outgoings. Tusla advised that the current policy does allow for deductions to be made when there is concern in relation to the young person for example if they may place themselves at risk as a result of receiving significant money. Tusla also advised that the finance policy was under review to address those who are not contributing to rent and keeping in residential care sector. The effort in the review of the document is to standardise this payment for all in residential care.

- ***Aftercare Services Local Interagency Responses Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme.*** Details of which have been circulated to members. This programme identified care leavers as a target group to support in preparation for the labour market.
- The issue of ***disparity of pay regarding aftercare workers nationally*** was also spoken about. Members should contact their unions to address this issue further

Covid 19 Additional Supports

The Irish Aftercare Network welcomed the news from Bernard Gloster, CEO, Tusla that additional supports for young people due to leave care or exit formal aftercare have been further extended to October 31st 2020.

Minister Roderic O'Gorman

The network wrote to the Minister in late June congratulating him on his new appointment as Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration and requesting a meeting at his earliest convenience. We received an acknowledgment receipt of our request to meet with the Minister and were informed that a further reply will issue as soon as possible

The Irish Aftercare Network also took part in a Q&A on 29th July with the new Minister. Ciaran Kenny, Chairman and Neil Forsyth, PRO represented the Irish Aftercare Network.

Prior to the session we had submitted the following question

In the programme for government it states that the government will “ensure that aftercare and transition plans and protocols are developed for vulnerable homeless people or those at risk of homelessness leaving hospital, State care, foster care, prison or other State settings.”

What areas in particular will the Minister prioritise to improve outcomes for young people leaving State care?

We had the opportunity to ask the Minister this and gave a brief overview of the role of the Irish Aftercare Network

The Minister stated that he had linked in with Peter McVerry Trust and also Tusla CEO, Bernard Gloster in relation to the need to support care leavers, where they spoke of gaining more properties for care leavers and also the need to follow up with appropriate supports. Minister O'Gorman did

emphasise his awareness of the need for further supports for care leavers moving on from aftercare to independent living.

The Minister was also asked by another participant about raising the age of those being able to avail of aftercare to 26 as per the model in Scotland. The Minister did state that while it would be on a case by case basis any young person engaged in full time education post 23 would not be “left behind or left hanging” in relation to getting ongoing supports to finish their education

We very much welcomed the opportunity to be part of the Q&A event and view it as a positive step for future engagement and dialogue with the new Minister

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Children’s Rights Alliance held a members’ briefing on the new process where Ireland’s progress under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will be reviewed using the Simplified Reporting Procedure. We provided feedback for the completed final submission. We suggested that the question posed by the Children’s Rights Alliance in relation to the number of children who don’t have an allocated social worker could be followed up with a question in relation to the number of children/young people who don’t have an allocated aftercare worker.

We urged that the aftercare side of care was addressed given that the children and young people we are concerned with are those who could be considered ‘children of the state’. The following questions we submitted were included in the finalised document which you can see on page 10 of this link. [Click Here](#)

How many young people leaving state care have been allocated an aftercare worker? And what steps have the government taken to track/measure outcomes for children/young people leaving care?

The Alliance will be compiling a comprehensive alternative report in 2021 and will be consulting widely with members and other stakeholders where we will provide further feedback.

Review of the Child Care Act 1991

Ciaran Kenny, Chairman participated in an on online meeting on behalf of the network with DCYA regarding review of the Child Care Act 1991 in early June.

As part of its ongoing review of the Child Care Act 1991, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has launched a consultation on its initial proposals to amend the legislation. The Network is currently compiling a submission for this consultation. Should you have any feedback in relation to this that you would like us to include please forward to us no later than August 28th 2020.



Reminder: The annual conference has been rescheduled to Friday 7th May 2021