



IRISH AFTERCARE NETWORK

Providing Support to People Working With Care Leavers

Annual Conference 2022 a great success

It was great to see so many members in attendance at the Annual Conference on 15th October. Feedback was excellent and we share some reflections with you below.

Conference Reflection

After a long wait, I was thrilled to attend our first post-Covid conference in October. On the day itself, before the proceedings got underway, the excitement and energy in the room was palpable as everyone exchanged greetings, caught up on the latest news or just stood around sipping their coffee and marveling at the sight of so many of their fellow professionals all together in the same room. This wasn't some kind of 'new normal' – a phrase we heard a lot over the previous couple of years – this was more like the old normal. And everyone seemed very happy to be part of it. However, what was going to be a bit different this time was that a government minister would be in attendance. Having Minister O'Gorman open the conference really emphasised how far we've come and how everyone's dedication and hard work has helped firmly establish aftercare as an integral part of the care experience. Minister O'Gorman acknowledged this in his opening address and stressed his and the government's commitment to improving aftercare supports, particularly in relation to housing.

Overall, the conference itself was a great success. In fact, I think I enjoyed this one the most. Why? For a couple of reasons. Without doubt it had something to do with seeing all my colleagues in-person again. But it also had something to do with the quality of the speakers. They were all superb. And while each addressed a specific topic relevant to aftercare and came at it from a different angle – Rory Hearne on the meaning of home and the challenges within the housing sector, Bronagh Starrs on the psychological needs of young people, and Eavan Brady on the findings of her study of care-leavers' experiences during Covid – there was a common thread that linked them all. And I think the young people, David and Thomas, who spoke so eloquently at the conference about their time in care and their experiences of leaving care captured it perfectly. Thomas, expressed it well in his beautiful poem. As one line in the poem put it, the care system "wasn't built for me". This points to one of the biggest flaws in aftercare policy and practice. Despite many improvements over the years, it can still be a harsh, limiting and objectifying system in many ways. Often the unique experiences, feelings, thoughts and aspirations of young people like Thomas are not properly acknowledged or else they become buried under a mountain of complex policies, inflexible processes and carefully worded legalities. This must change.

But there are clear signs that this may change in the not-too-distant future. The voice of young people is being listened to now more than ever. The Minister's announcement at the conference that the Government will be undertaking a research project into the lives of children in care and adults who were in care as children is a good example. As he said himself, the study "will provide important insights into the experiences of children in care and how they get on later in life".

We badly need such insights. For it is only by listening to children and young people like Thomas that we can identify what is working and what is not working and then use such knowledge to bring about real and substantive change.

Neil Forsyth, IAN Committee Member & Head of Youth Services, Focus Ireland



"We all share an ambition for young adults transitioning out of care to thrive and to reach their potential. We must work together to assist their transition to independent living by timely planning and providing a wide range of supports that meet their individual needs." Minister Roderic O'Gorman at the Irish Aftercare Network Conference 2022

Post Conference 2022 delegate feedback

- The Average Rating was 9.2 out of 10
- 50% of attendees rated the conference 10 out of 10

Click here for [Conference video snippets 2022](#)

Conference Reflection

The initial impression of the event, as the delegates stood laden with welcome packs, lanyards and notebooks at the registration desk, was how excited everyone seemed. The positive buzz, early morning refreshments and friendly greeting made all feel welcome and happy to be in a Post COVID in person gathering in the familiar setting of the Sheraton Hotel Athlone.

The engagement and interest carried on into the welcome address and the presentations. Whilst some sessions garnered more interest than others, all present on the day took the opportunity to network and find out about on-going projects and challenges in our sectors.

In a post covid world of social care, I had the privilege of being a core member of the IAN committee and therefore stood present to realise the years planning and work come into effect. While I have a wonderful, however, time consuming role as Regional Manager for Daffodil Care Services, I have always felt it would be beneficial for me to be part of the bigger picture into what other sectors, my peers and colleagues are experiencing in the world of aftercare. So being a part of the Irish Aftercare Network Committee and supporting putting in place an annual conference, with respected speakers and ministerial presence, was a prerogative.

The day had a well-defined agenda and format. The morning began with the introductions and a warm welcome, explaining the importance of coming together, sharing our experiences and challenges and warming the delegates up to information sharing and networking. These plenary talks were followed by the 'presentation sessions', which consisted of a series of oral presentations that took place on the main stage. There were 6 sessions in all. Thankfully, the conference programme had detailed descriptions of each of the sessions in the trusty information packs, which made it a lot easier to follow the day. There were so many representatives from across all sectors of Social care and the realisation and reminder that what this event provided is that conferences are great for networking, reconnecting and eventually leading to solution focused interventions for our young people in our care.

Overall, the IAN Annual Conference 2022 was a very enriching and worthwhile experience. To be part of the initial conception and yearlong planning and to partake in supporting the delivery of the day was a privilege. I was inspired by the people who presented and the people I met and their dedication to improving the quality of services and opportunities available for the young people in our care. Looking forward to 2023!

Aoife Patterson, IAN Committee Member & Regional Manager, Daffodil Care Services

Other Network News

Aftercare consultation process meeting

The Irish Aftercare Network recently attended an online aftercare consultation process meeting with other relevant stakeholders on 21.10.2022, looking in depth at all aspects of aftercare at present, acknowledging what is working well, areas that need improving and strategies and ideas going forward which will ultimately see better outcomes for all young people leaving both state care and aftercare. Issues raised and collated from members throughout the country at regional Irish Aftercare Network meetings earlier in the year were all brought up and raised by committee member Ciaran Kenny who attended on behalf of the Irish Aftercare Network. Such consultation meetings are imperative to be able to address all aspects of aftercare provision nationally with relevant colleagues, as well as management from Tusla that can implement meaningful change. The Irish Aftercare Network are committed to continuing to engage in such processes going forward that can allow us a space to reflect the views and experiences of our members nationally, supporting young people in aftercare on a daily basis throughout the country.

National online information evening for the care experienced & alternative care sector

The Irish Aftercare Network were delighted to recently attend a National online information evening for the care experienced & alternative care sector on 24.11.2022, which focused greatly on educational opportunities and potential outlets for young people currently in care as well as those engaged in aftercare. Committee member Ciaran Kenny gave an overview on the night of the role of the Irish Aftercare Network and how it supports our members nationally. A hugely informative and enjoyable evening was had by all in attendance. The event was coordinated by Dr. Róisín Farragher, Postdoctoral Researcher in the University of Galway and was a clear example of the benefits and value such information sharing exercises can have for those of us working with young people in aftercare throughout the Country. Well done to Róisín for pulling it all together and we hope it is the first of many.

DNC Aftercare Christmas party evening for young people with care experience

As we approach that time of year it is great to hear Dublin North City aftercare team are planning a very special **Christmas Party on the evening of December 15th**, taking place in Crosscare Aftercare Service in Wellington Street. This special night is being put together for young people currently linked in with DNC Aftercare. This has been funded partly from the area DNC and through the FORA. The night itself will look to provide a positive and memorable festive space for young people at present who've been identified as particularly isolated and vulnerable and who may not have much support over the Christmas period. The night will see plenty of festive cheer, entertainment, food, and a special Christmas hamper for all young people attending.

TUSLA Career Guidance Counsellor Pilot Project in Waterford and Wexford

TUSLA Career Guidance Counsellor Pilot Project in Waterford and Wexford Funded by Dormant Account Funding, this two-year pilot project is jointly coordinated by Tusla

Education Support Services (TESS) and Tusla Aftercare Services in collaboration with Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board is up and running since March 2022. The project aims to provide career guidance supports to care-experienced young people aged 16-23 who are engaging with TUSLA Aftercare Services in Waterford and Wexford. The guidance counsellor employed by TUSLA is tasked with helping these young people explore their goals, make suitable choices, develop plans in relation to Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment pathways. The young people who are receiving this career guidance support are at different stages of their education journey and are attending education and training programmes in settings such as Secondary Schools, Youthreach, Local Training Initiatives, Colleges of Further Education and Higher Education Institutions. Interagency collaboration between TUSLA and WWETB is fundamental to the delivery and operation of these career guidance supports. This collaboration facilitates access to dedicated meeting spaces for young people in a range of WWETB centres and has also enabled networking and advocacy activities to help support the educational needs and progress of young people transitioning into and through Aftercare in Waterford and Wexford. The Governance and supporting structure of this innovative project involves the Tusla Educational Support Service National Manager, TUSLA's National Liaison lead for Aftercare Services and collaboration with TUSLA Aftercare Manager for Waterford/Wexford and an Adult Education Officer in WWETB. Within the design of this project there is an operational interagency steering chaired by Tusla. The project will within the pilot period undergo an independent evaluation where it is hoped based on a positive comparative analysis of the findings the programme will be deemed to have potential for scaling up nationally in support of Aftercare Service users.

Thank You & Welcome



Irish Aftercare Network outgoing Chairperson, Ciaran Kenny (on right) pictured with incoming Chairperson Daniel Keogh. Huge & sincere thanks to Ciaran who was five years in the role and did a superb job. We are very fortunate that Ciaran will remain on the committee as Vice Chairperson. We warmly welcome Daniel as incoming Chairperson.

Breaking Through wins Good Governance Award

We are absolutely delighted to share the good news with you that Breaking Through, co-ordinators of The Irish Aftercare Network have won a Good Governance Award.



A wonderful achievement for the small dedicated team of Yvonne, Jane & Fiona at Breaking Through, the voluntary Board of Directors, voluntary committees such as the Irish Aftercare Network Committee, Breaking Throughs supporters and those they support.

The judges were impressed by the clarity on funding, the detail on governance structures and the clear description of purpose, vision and values.

Breaking Through was among some very deserving winners in the other 6 categories.

<https://www.newstalk.com/news/winners-of-the-good-governance-awards-2022-announced-1403273>



Dates for the Diary

Next Irish Aftercare Network meetings:

Late February/Early March in Leinster and Munster. Details TBC.



We would like to take this opportunity to wish all our members a very happy & healthy Christmas. We thank you for your continued support of the network. Take care and enjoy the Christmas break.

Breaking Through CLG (Co-ordinators of The Irish Aftercare Network) under The Scheme to Support National Organisations is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development

