



Members Newsletter – December 2023

IRISH AFTERCARE NETWORK

Providing Support to People Working With Care Leavers

Dear Member,

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your engagement throughout 2023, have a lovely Christmas and we are looking forward to seeing what 2024 brings for the network.

We are happy to bring you updates on the work of the network since our last newsletter in September.

As always, if the network can help you in any way, please get in touch, all our contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

2023 Irish Aftercare Network Conference

“Power and Empowerment –Changing Perceptions, Challenging Barriers and Promoting Change”



We wish to thank all our members, who despite the ominous date of Friday 13th, attended our annual conference this year! The aim of the conference was to explore how power operates in the lives of young people leaving care and to identify ways in which such power, where it is perceived as damaging and restrictive, can be challenged. Aftercare workers seek to empower young people to take control of

their lives and to achieve positive outcomes and as such must also critically evaluate the systems and structures in which they work, many aspects of which, it could be argued, are antithetical to achieving this goal.

We were delighted to welcome 154 members to our Conference, representing over 14 statutory, academic, private



services and NGOs nationwide. Feedback from our members on the day, gave an overall average rating of 9.4 out of 10, with 58% of delegates rating the conference 10 out of 10! Some written feedback was also provided, including the following samples:

- 'Really enjoyed meeting so many committed co workers'
- 'Interacting with different agencies and meeting new people'
- 'Thought provoking'
- 'A reminder to never give up on the young people we work with'

The range of speakers at the 2023 IAN conference spoke to issues of power from multiple perspectives:

Our IAN Chairperson, Dan Keogh, opened the conference with a reminder of the IAN function - to bring us together so that we can learn from one another, network together, share successes and challenges, and ultimately work towards advocating for the continued improvement of outcomes for care leavers, year on year.

Following Dan's welcome, and with an eye to the theme of power, the conference opening address was delivered by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth – Roderic O'Gorman, who took the opportunity to

express his gratitude to the exceptional work carried out by Aftercare staff in supporting our care leavers path to independent living, while acknowledging how vital it is for the government and Tusla to provide effective supports to care leavers, and their commitment for improvement.

Clare Murphy, Interim National Director for Services & Integration, Tusla Child & Family Agency, then addressed the conference, stating that Tusla are working to streamline Aftercare services so that there is not discrepancy based on area or location, 'Equal services for all young people'.

Clare's address was followed by the Ombudsman for Children, Dr Niall Muldoon, who delivered a powerful presentation discussing the power imbalance in the context of children's rights. Dr. Muldoon stated that the State are the parents of children in care and need to step up to a higher level of service for them, recognising that, parent's responsibility does not end at the 18th birthday, it never ends.

After an extended and engaging networking and tea/coffee break, delegates heard from Dr. Cian Aherne, Clinical Psychologist & Clinical Manager, Jigsaw, Limerick, whose presentation was titled; A new lens: Thinking about power in the lives of young people using the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF). Dr. Aherne spoke about the importance of understanding the reasons why a child is acting the way they are, and how impactful it is to change our questions from 'What is wrong with you?', to 'What has happened to you?'

A standing ovation followed Psychologist, Memoirist and Lecturer, Dr. Katriona

O’Sullivan, who shared her story with heart and passion, drawing on her recent memoir, Poor. Dr. O’Sullivan highlighted the importance of children having an adult that believes in them and the long-term effect this can have on the child into the future.

After a break for lunch delegates engaged in a facilitated networking session with Dave Dunn.

Dr Philomena Mullen, Assistant Professor of Black Studies, Department of Sociology, Trinity College, Dublin, then presented on ‘Institutionalisation and identity: power dynamics and marginalised children aging out of the historical industrial school system’. Dr. Mullen spoke of the effects of racialisation on children leaving the care system, while sharing her own personal story with delegates. Dr. Mullen completed her presentation with the hope that members received a greater understanding of how difficult it is to be a black child in the care system, particularly one that is predominantly a white system.

And last but definitely not least, our conference ended with a session

delivered by Dr Sadhbh Whelan, Child Protection Information Manager, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, alongside Keren O’Leary & Shaunagh Cunningham, members of the Care Experienced Expert Panel from the Care Experiences Project, who presented on the background and update of their longitudinal study - Care Experiences: Journeys through the Irish Care System.

Our Conference was wrapped up with thanks by Yvonne Casey, National Director, Breaking Through (coordinators of the Irish Aftercare Network), with a special acknowledgement of thanks to our sponsors:

- The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Tusla – the Child and Family Agency
- Focus Ireland
- Daffodil Care Services

With thanks to everyone who attended and contributed to the conference on the day – we hope to see you all again next year!



DCEDIY R&D Project Stakeholder Advisory Group: Meeting 4

Our chairperson, Dan Keogh attended the above meeting on behalf of the network. Dan presented an overview of the network, our history, our membership and the work we have been engaged in over the past 12 months, including our meetings with the Ombudsman for Children, our successful annual conference, and the invaluable engagement from our membership across the year which has given us a strong mandate to advocate on behalf of care-leavers.

The advisory group was particularly interested in the details of the changes we want to see to national policy for care leavers including housing provision, a ringfenced aftercare budget, addressing the 2 tier aftercare system in relation to training and education, and raising the age of aftercare. Chairperson, Jillian Van Turnhout, thanked the membership of the network for their crucial input into the advocacy work above and stated that she very much looks forward to the network working with the advisory group into 2024.

Children's Rights Report Card 2024

The Irish Aftercare Network made a submission to the Children's Rights Alliance to inform their Report Card for 2024. The Report Card is published by the Alliance each year and tracks how the government is delivering on its commitments to children in the Programme for Government.

The Irish Aftercare Network's submission concentrated on the government's commitment to a Youth Homelessness Strategy and in particular how this relates to young people leaving care. In the Youth Homeless Strategy, published in late 2022, care leavers are identified "as a group that is at a heightened risk of homelessness". There are two actions in the strategy related specifically to young people leaving care. The first action refers to Tusla's Strategic Plan for Aftercare which was being finalized at the time. The second refers to the need to review and update Housing Circular 46/2014 – Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care. Tusla published its Strategic Plan for Aftercare in May, 2023. The timeline for review of the Protocol is set for Q1 2024. The Network highlighted the need for the Department of Housing to engage Tusla directly to formulate a coherent implementation plan for the aftercare strategy and ensure that it is properly aligned with the Youth Homeless Strategy across a number of key areas.

2024 Irish Aftercare Network meetings with the Ombudsman for Children



Members of the Irish Aftercare Network committee will have two meetings with Dr. Niall Muldoon, the Ombudsman for Children, in 2024. This first is confirmed for February 6th, 2024 at 2pm.

Child Summit Conference 2023



The Irish Aftercare Network Committee were in attendance at the Child Summit conference on 21 November 2023 in Croke Park, hosted by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

The Summit theme tied to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and each session explored the realisation of children’s rights in Ireland – what is working, what is not working and what we can do better.

The Summit brought together the main policy and decision-makers across Government, key figures within NGO’s and voluntary sector and most importantly a panel of expert young people.

Secretary General of the Dept. of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Kevin McCarty opened the Summit with a powerful message of vindicating the rights of all children equally. This was followed by a live zoom message from Taoiseach Leo Varadkar who launched the new National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028 titled ‘Young Ireland’, the focus of which is ‘eradicating child poverty’ and ‘vindicating children’s rights’.

Having read Young Ireland National Framework, it is of note that young people are defined in the report as encompassing ages of ‘18-24’. Currently, aftercare supports cease for care-leavers at 23. There is ongoing advocacy to extend aftercare services past 23 and we very much welcome recognition of young people defined in this policy up to 24.



The conference continued with some great key note speakers. The standout of which was Prof. Philip Jaffe, UNCRC Country Task Force Member. He gave an overview of Ireland’s ratification of the UNCRC in practice. On what is working well he noted:

The Lundy model of child protection

- A very active Ombudsman for Children
- 30+ youth Councils
- The Ombudsman for Children Advisory Panel
- The Children’s Assembly on Biodiversity

Such feedback demonstrates just how very capable Ireland’s young people are at being involved in decision making processes. Though our strengths were too balanced in areas that need much more improvements, to which will come as no surprise to most is:

- The large numbers of children living in poverty
- Increasing numbers of children and families living in emergency accommodation, and for such prolonged periods of time
- The overlap of social discrimination and poverty

- Deteriorating mental health of young people

While these lists were not conclusive, it is clear that Ireland has some way to go in the vindication of all children's rights. The young and adult panels proceeded:

Care leavers Keren Leary and Shaunagh Cunnin spoke on the need for better aftercare supports, noting the 'two-tiered system' in current operation is not fit for purpose. By this they were referring to the inability to access financial supports for young people in aftercare who are not in education/training. This is not an equal system and the message from Keren and Shaunagh is that we can and should do better. Keren called for an 'honest look at how the care system is structured' and stated we need a 'holistic' approach that is 'not just about finances.'

Minster for Children Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman closed the conference with a reiteration of a people-led approach.



He states: 'no meaningful discussion about the lives of children and young people is possible without their involvement or leadership'.

Update on Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services for Young People and Young Adults (2023-2026)

The Network was delighted to welcome William McNamara, Tusla's National Lead for Aftercare, to a meeting of members on November 24th.

William delivered a detailed presentation on Tusla's plans to implement the recently published Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services, 2023-2026. He told members that an Aftercare Strategy Implementation Group is being formed to devise a workplan which will outline specific, time-lined actions aligned to each of the five high level strategic recommendations. He added that subgroups will be established to examine some elements of the work plan and to seek specialist support and input. It is hoped that members of the Irish Aftercare Network will be able to assist with the



work of these subgroups and offer their practice-based expertise across a range of areas. William concluded his presentation by informing members that once the workplan is complete he will be happy to share it with the Network and its membership. We would like to take this opportunity to thank William for his excellent presentation and his longstanding commitment to the development of aftercare services in Ireland. We look forward to receiving the strategy workplan and to working with William and the Aftercare Implementation Group over the life-time of the strategy.

Aftercare Football Forum

In the summer months of 2023 Tusla DNC Aftercare Worker and Vice Chairperson of the Irish Aftercare Network, Ciaran Kenny, and his colleague, Stuart Lynch (Tusla DNC), undertook an Aftercare Football Forum with a group of seldom heard young people with care and Aftercare Experience. The aim of the forum was to find out their views and their overall experience of their time in care and aftercare and to assist all relevant stakeholders in finding a way to improve all services for young people in the care system going forward. A report detailing these findings was sent out following the conclusion of the forum to all aftercare workers in Dublin North city. The report gave a great insight into what is working well around service provision, and areas that can be improved from the perspective of the young people who accessed these services.

There were many famous faces in the forum such as former Irish football international Keith Treacey, former LOI Footballer Conan Byrne and former Professional football manager Roddy Collins. The project culminated in an amazing event where a football match took place at the home of FAI Cup Winners St. Patrick's Athletic, Richmond Park. Following this game, the young people were brought over land and sea to Scotland to see Celtic play in Celtic Park. It was an amazing experience for all involved. We have attached a link to the video of the forum below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fixReYMCLHQ&t=984s>



Minister Harris announces funding of €1.15 million to support Care Leavers and members of the Traveller and Roma communities

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD has today announced the roll-out of €1.15 million in funding to support Care leavers and members of the Traveller and Roma Communities to access third level education.

To read more on this please click [here](#).

First major research study to seek the views of care experienced young adults



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais, Míchumais, Láimhártocht agus Oige
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

From Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

A milestone new study will explore experiences of young adults who have left the Irish care system as part of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth’s Project: “Care Experiences, Journeys through the Irish Care System”.

To read more on this please click [here](#).

Date for Diary – Members’ Network Meeting

Date: 20 February 2024

Venue: LinkedIn’s EMEA HQ Office, Ground Floor One Wilton Park, Wilton Terrace, Dublin 2

More information will follow via email nearer the date.



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



Rialtas na hÉireann
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Breaking Through



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