

# IRISH AFTERCARE NETWORK

*Providing Support to People Working With Care Leavers*

## Members Newsletter – Quarter 2, 2025

Dear Members,

### **Welcome to Our Second Members Newsletter of 2025**

We are glad to share the latest updates with you. As always, if the network can support you in any way, please do not hesitate to get in touch, our full contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

We also welcome your suggestions for future member events. If there is any topic you would like us to cover or a speaker you would like to hear, especially at our Annual Conference in October, please let us know.

### **Exciting News: Back-to-Education Bursary Announced**

We are delighted to announce that thanks to the generous support of IASCE and Breaking Through, the Network can offer a Bursary Fund in 2025. The fund supports young people in aftercare to pursue further education.

As part of this initiative, 8 young people will each receive a €250 bursary to assist with costs such as course materials, registration fees or other essential supports which are not funded elsewhere.

This is a fantastic opportunity to support the continued growth, learning, and empowerment of young people with care experience. Further details on how to apply and the eligibility criteria will be shared soon with network members.

### **Members Event in April**

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Members Event of 2025 took place on Friday, 11th April. We were delighted to welcome Elizabeth Ward, Access Worker with Exchange House, as our guest speaker.

Elizabeth delivered an insightful presentation, sharing her experiences and offering valuable perspectives on working with care leavers from the Traveller community. Her talk sparked thoughtful discussion among attendees and her practical advice was well received by those working on the front line of aftercare services. The event provided a valuable opportunity for members to learn, network, and reflect on best practices in inclusive service delivery.

### **Members Event in May**

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> Members Event of the year was held on Thursday, 16th May. Focusing on the important topic of Boundary Management, participants discussed various aspects of professional boundaries, including ethical scenarios, motivations for entering the field, and the importance of reflective practice. Feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive, with members highlighting the relevance of the topic and the practical tools they gained for use in their daily work.

### Update on Exceptional Social Grounds (ESG) Scheme Proposal

The Irish Aftercare Network has written to express member concerns regarding the proposed changes to the Exceptional Social Grounds (ESG) scheme for care leavers.

The proposal under consideration would alter the current ESG process, assigning application assessments to the Allocations Section based on set criteria. While members acknowledge the need to review the existing ESG system, a number of important questions have been raised:

- Why are young people who have been in foster care excluded from the new criteria?
- How will the Allocations Section prioritise cases where all criteria are met?
- What qualifies as a “serious case,” particularly when homelessness is the only available option for a care leaver?

We have formally requested a meeting with the relevant authorities to discuss these concerns and seek further clarity. We will keep members informed of any developments.

### Revised Housing Protocol for Care Leavers Published as Part of Youth Homelessness Strategy

The long-awaited revised protocol between Tusla and the Local Authorities Housing Circular 46/2014 is published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and sent to each Local Authority. The protocol is reviewed and updated in consultation with key stakeholders as part of the government's Youth Homelessness Strategy which recognised the need to ensure appropriate forward planning for the future accommodation and support needs of young people leaving state care. *(see separate attachment for reference)*

### Update on Aftercare Awareness Campaign

Ian Doyle, DNC Aftercare Manager and Lead of the Aftercare Strategy Awareness Project, provides an update on the current status of the awareness campaign.

Over the past number of months, members of the aftercare awareness campaign have been meeting with relevant stakeholders to give a greater overview of the progress made. Recently we were delighted to meet with members of the Irish Aftercare Network (IAN) as well as the Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA). The overall purpose of the Aftercare Awareness Campaign is to increase awareness of Aftercare services for both Young People currently in care as well as Young Adults who are leaving or have left care. It also aims to create a greater understanding and response to issues facing care leavers as they transition to adulthood.

The 5 Key recommendations that are set out in the Aftercare Strategy 2023-2026 are:

- Strengthen Interdepartmental Work to provide a multi-disciplinary response to young adults with care experience
- Review existing service provision and parameters of accessing services to consider broadening the scope of service delivery
- Enhance Accommodation Provision
- Strengthen Organisational Structures and Enablers to better support staff in equitable and consistent Service Delivery.
- Implement a consistent model of practice in Aftercare Services

Tusla will undertake a pressure point analysis on the system to establish the areas that require additional support in meeting demands. This will consider the population and demographics including factors associated with urban and rural populations.

A consistent model of practice is imperative in ensuring the implementation of the recommendations outlined above. To ensure this is done Tusla will implement permanency planning for children in care to support carers and young people to remain living with their foster carers while focusing on the establishment of social support networks which will support care leavers into adulthood. Tusla will continue to engage with the DCEDIY on the longitudinal research for young people and young adults with care experience to support an evidenced informed strategic approach to developing services that can adapt responsively within a dynamic social landscape. A review and alignment of standard business processes and procedures will take place to ensure that all young adults with care experience have the same experience in relation to accessing services, information, communication and decision-making.

At the core of this campaign is the desire to ensure young people who are engaging in aftercare supports have a positive experience of their time within aftercare and feel listened to.

### Care Experiences: Journeys through the Irish care system - Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Stakeholders Advisory Group is established to bring service provider and policy-maker expertise to the Research Study on the Career and Educational Journeys of Care-Experienced Young Adults (Working Title).

As part of the Care Experiences Programme [Care Experiences: Journeys through the Irish care system](#), which is being jointly run by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and Tusla, the Centre for Effective Services (CES) is undertaking a crucial study on the barriers and enablers to employment, education and training for young care leavers aged 18-24 years. This study aims to inform policy and practice enhancements to assist care leavers to achieve their further education and/or career goals, and to increase their stability and independence into adulthood.

The study will be seeking the views of young care leavers aged 18-24 years, alongside service providers by:

- Conducting surveys, interviews and focus groups with both young care leavers and service providers.
- Setting up two separate advisory groups: one for young care leavers and one for service providers and policymakers.

IAN Committee member, Edel Weldon, is representing the IAN as part of the Stakeholder Advisory Group in support of this study, alongside our IAN Chairperson Neil Forsyth, who attends this group in his capacity as a representative of Focus Ireland. The Stakeholder Advisory Group has met twice together in May this year and will meet twice more in November.

The Advisory Group will help us to:

- ✓ Design and pilot surveys and focus group questions for service providers
- ✓ Support us with effective strategies for recruiting participants to the study
- ✓ Help us interpret preliminary findings and what they really mean
- ✓ Advise on recommendations for policy and practice.

We will keep you updated on all further developments in this study.

## Celebrating Strength and Spirit at Morton Stadium: Aftercare Fitness and Wellness Programme Culminates in 5K Triumph.

On Friday, May 30th, Morton Stadium, the proud home of Irish athletics played host to a remarkable event: the conclusion of a ten-week Aftercare Fitness and Wellness Programme. The initiative was coordinated by Irish Aftercare Network Vice Chairperson and Tusla Aftercare Worker, Ciaran Kenny, alongside his colleague Stuart Lynch, also a dedicated Tusla Aftercare Worker.



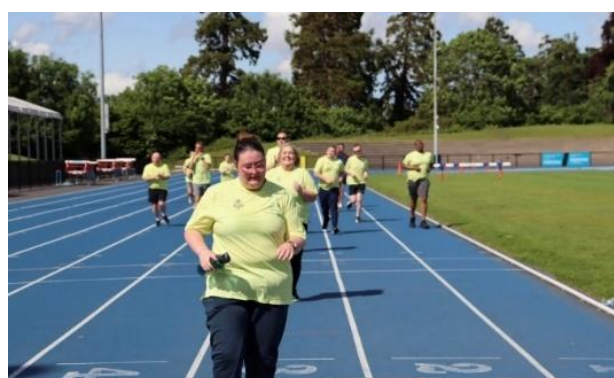
Over the course of ten weeks, ten young people—all of whom are currently accessing aftercare supports and have lived experience of care—came together to train, connect, and open up about their personal journeys. The programme not only encouraged physical activity but fostered peer support, resilience, and emotional growth.

Key to the success of the programme was the support from Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYP), who partnered with the group and provided essential training guidance. Throughout the initiative, guest speakers visited the group to share stories of their own struggles and triumphs, highlighting the transformative power of physical activity—especially in relation to mental health.

Among these speakers was Ger Redmond, a professional coach and world-travelled triathlete who shared his powerful journey from a life of crime to becoming a beacon of hope and inspiration for young people in his native Darndale. On the final day, Ger joined the group on the track, leading by example and encouraging every step of their journey.

The programme reached its conclusion as all ten participants completed a 5K run around the track at Morton Stadium. They were cheered on by proud family and friends, with the voice of Croke Park itself, Jerry Grogan providing commentary and support from the booth. What made the achievement even more remarkable was that none of the young people had prior experience in running before beginning the programme. Each of them spoke candidly about the profound impact it had on their mental and physical well-being.

Morton Stadium has witnessed many iconic performances and record-breaking feats over the years, but rarely has it seen the sheer courage, perseverance, and spirit that was displayed on that sunny Friday in May 2025. The determination of this group serves as a powerful reminder of the strength that lies within when support, belief, and opportunity are combined.



Well done to all involved

## New ESRI research finds care-experienced young people face “double transition” leaving care and school

A new ESRI and EPIC report highlights how school and care experiences jointly shape the lives of young people leaving care in Ireland. The study found that frequent care and school changes, limited educational support, and mental health issues can hinder educational progress. While some received strong backing from social workers and aftercare staff, many felt support was inconsistent or inadequate. The “double transition” from care and school to adulthood posed major challenges, especially without family support. The report calls for more flexible, consistent, and well-informed support systems to help care-experienced youth succeed in education and beyond.

[New ESRI research finds care-experienced young people face “double transition” leaving care and school | ESRI](#)

## Meeting the Legal Needs of Children and Young People in Ireland – A Children’s Rights Analysis

There is growing international recognition that access to justice is essential for the protection of children's rights. It plays a crucial role in safeguarding children from discrimination, violence, abuse and exploitation, as well as ensuring that their best interests are upheld in all actions involving or affecting them.

Community Law & Mediation (CLM) commissioned children’s law expert Róisín Webb to assess the need for a specialised legal service for children in Ireland, and to explore how such a service could enhance existing efforts to advance children's rights.

Members may find the report both interesting and relevant.

[Meeting the Legal Needs of Children and Young People in Ireland - A Children's Rights Analysis - Community Law](#)



## **Kinship Care Ireland**

Kinship care is when a child is cared for full-time by a relative or close family friend when their parents are unable to do so. This can happen for a variety of reasons, including parental illness, substance misuse, imprisonment, or death. Kinship carers may face significant emotional, financial, and legal challenges, often taking on caregiving roles unexpectedly and with little preparation or support. Kinship Care Ireland, a programme of Treoir is the national support organisation dedicated to promoting the rights and needs of kinship families across Ireland. They offer information, advocacy, and peer support to both kinship carers. Quote from a kinship carer: ‘It’s family and it’s love but that love needs support.’

For more information, support, or professional guidance, please contact: **Kinship Care Ireland**

☎ **Phone:** 087 148 7124/085 158 9189

✉ **Email:** [info@kinshipcare.ie](mailto:info@kinshipcare.ie)

🌐 **Website:** [www.kinshipcare.ie](http://www.kinshipcare.ie)

🌐 **Instagram:** @kinshipcareireland

## **Sponsorship Opportunity**

**IRISH AFTERCARE NETWORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2025 – SHERATON HOTEL, ATHLONE, 17 October 2025**

If you would like to sponsor or exhibit at this year's conference, please email [info@breakingthrough.org](mailto:info@breakingthrough.org) for information on sponsorship packages and exhibition stands. Please note that spaces for exhibitor stands are limited and are allocated on a first come first served basis.

## **Share Your Work and Events**

We would love to hear about any projects, initiatives, or forums happening across the country that are making a positive impact on the lives of young people in aftercare. If you are organising or know of upcoming events, please let us know so we can share them with our members.

We also welcome contributions to future newsletters. If you are interested in writing a piece or sharing an update in the next edition, we would be delighted to hear from you.

**If any of your colleagues would like to become members of the network, please feel free to share this link with them:**

**<https://www.irishaftercare.com/membership-form/>**

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|    | <a href="tel:016060858">01 6060858</a>  |
|  | <a href="http://www.irishaftercare.com">www.irishaftercare.com</a>                    |
|  | <a href="mailto:info@breakingthrough.org">info@breakingthrough.org</a>                |
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|  | <a href="https://www.facebook.com/irishaftercare">www.facebook.com/irishaftercare</a> |
|  | <a href="#">Irish Aftercare Network: LinkedIn</a>                                     |

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