

National Advocacy Service Casebook

2023



empowering people in care



National Advocacy Service

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📡 www.epiconline.ie

🕒 Mon- Fri 9am-5pm

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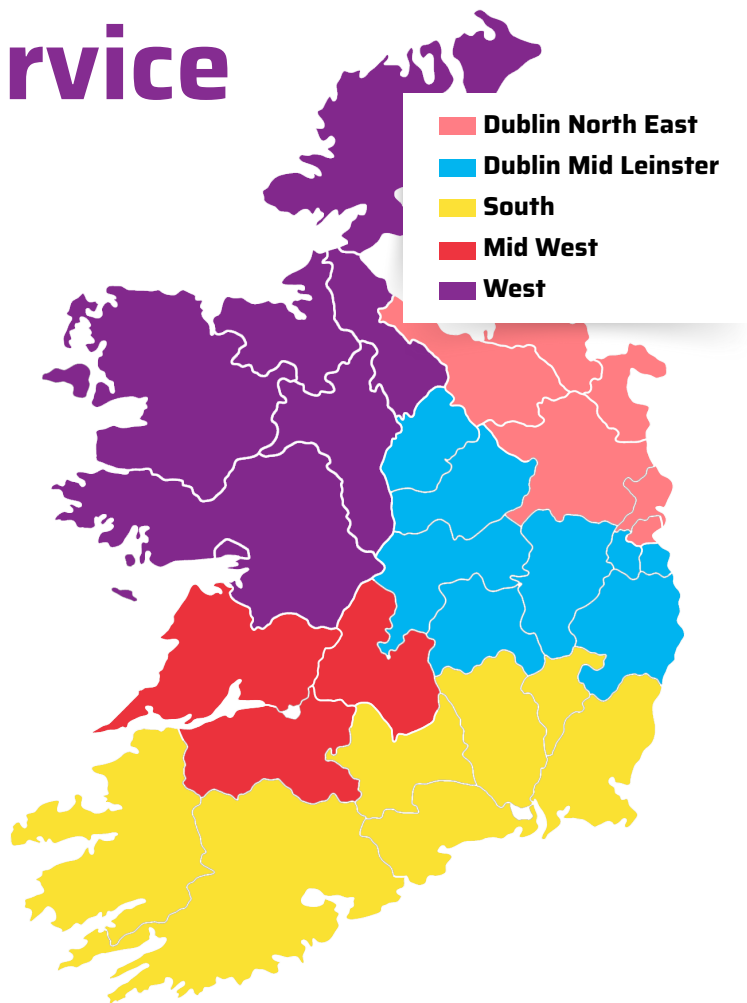
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📍 EPIC Cork
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📍 EPIC Mayo
Castlebar Social Services
Castle Street Car Park,
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Co. Mayo, F23 CY67



At the end of 2023, there were 5,615 children in the care of the state in Ireland, and 2,904 young people in aftercare services. They are not always visible, their voices are seldom heard in society, and they can be overlooked in public policy discussions that directly affect their lives.

Vision

A society where every child in the care system is valued, respected and heard.



Values



Empowering

Rights-Based

Inclusive

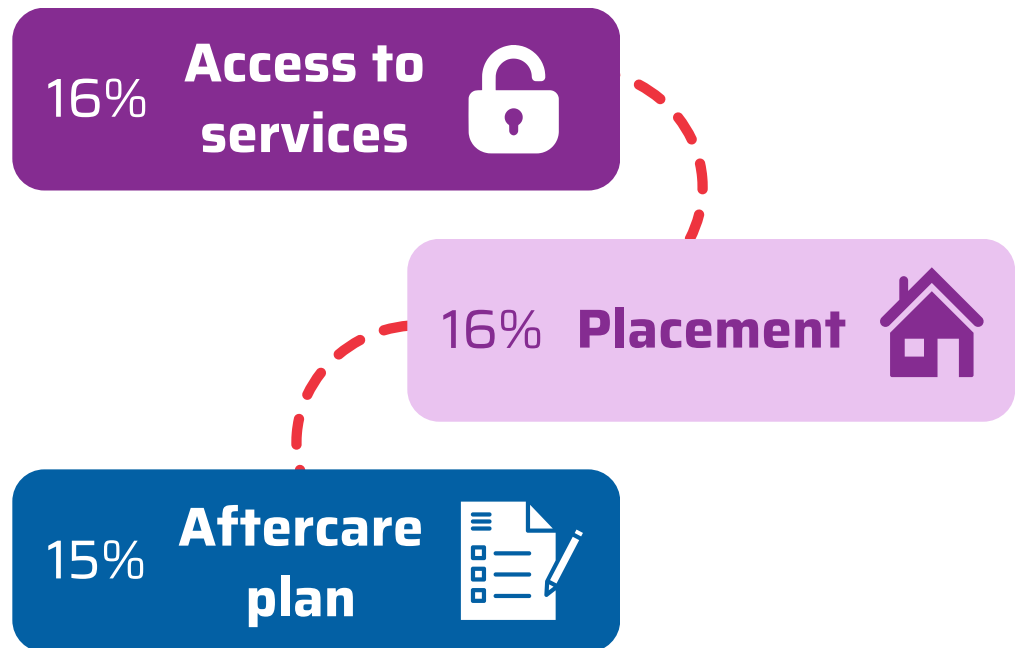
Ambitious

Mission

To champion the rights of care-experienced children and young people, ensure their voices inform the policy and practice that affects their lives and cultivate a care aware society.



Main Presenting Issues



For children and young people under 18



For young people over 18

Case Study: Grace

Main Presenting Issue: Access to Services



Background

Grace was approaching her 18th birthday and living in a residential care home when she contacted EPIC. She was awaiting a decision on her international protection application and therefore, had no clear plan for when she turned 18. Grace was still waiting for a decision from the International Protection Office (IPO) when she turned 18, so she was moved into an International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) centre. Without positive recognition of her protection status, she could not avail of a full aftercare service, and although she was eligible for the weekly IPAS allowance, her payment had not come through. Grace found life hard in the IPAS centre and was struggling financially, even with basic costs to attend school.



Key Actions taken by Grace's Advocacy Officer

Grace's Advocacy Officer assisted her to make applications for emergency funding from Tusla and her local social welfare office. Knowing these applications can take time to process, with Grace's consent, the Advocacy Officer applied for financial support for Grace through EPIC's Education and Emergency Funds. These small grants supported Grace to travel to school each day and have lunch as she was missing her meal at the IPAS centre.

Due to the communal living situation at the IPAS centre, it was difficult to find quiet space for study and rest. Through the Fund, Grace received a laptop and noise cancelling headphones so she could study at the library after school and read in the evenings when she got back to her accommodation centre. The grants also allowed for personal care needs while she waited to receive her IPAS allowance.

Case Study: Grace

Main Presenting Issue: Access to Services



Key Actions taken by Grace's Advocacy Officer

The Advocacy Officer then supported Grace in writing a letter to her solicitor to express the urgency in getting a decision from the IPO. In the letter, Grace outlined the impact of not having a decision - from struggling to attend school, and her new living environment, to the uncertainty of not knowing if she would receive aftercare and be able to move onto college.



Outcome

Shortly after, Grace received international protection status and as a result, she was eligible for the aftercare allowance and additional aftercare supports. The Advocacy Officer continued to work with Grace to apply for housing, but due to high rents, she still lives in the IPAS centre. Grace is still attending school and has started a part-time job.



Case Study: Jack

Main Presenting Issue: Placement



Background

Jack contacted EPIC when he was moving foster placement. Jack was upset because his sister, Emily, was being moved to a different placement in a different town. Jack said that he had believed his sister would be living with him.



Key Actions taken by Jack's Advocacy Officer

The Advocacy Officer met with Jack and assisted him to draft a letter to his social work team explaining that he was upset that his sister would not be living with him. In the letter, a meeting with the team to discuss Jack's concerns was requested. The team agreed to meet Jack to discuss his concerns and answer his questions about his sister's placement. The Advocacy Officer met with Jack in advance of this meeting to help him to prepare. They also emailed the social work team information about what issues and information Jack would like addressed during the meeting. Jack wanted to focus on the decision-making process about his sibling's placement, how these decisions were communicated to him, and the impact this had.

The Advocacy Officer attended the meeting with Jack, the social work team and Jack's foster carer. Jack was able to express his feelings of sadness and concern about the situation. At the meeting, Jack asked the questions he had prepared, and it was explained that all placement options were considered before making the decision. He was also assured that his sister Izzy was involved in the decision about where she would live.



Outcome

Jack did not get the outcome he had hoped for which was that he and his sister would live together, but he was assured that he would continue to see his sister regularly. Jack had all his questions answered in relation to his sister's placement, and the meeting addressed his concerns about the move and gave him the space to ask if his care placement was considered for his sibling, and why this could not go ahead.

Case Study: Johnny

Main Presenting Issue: Aftercare Plan



Background

Johnny was in care for a number of years. His residential care home made a referral to EPIC on his behalf as he could not return to his family home when turned 18. Johnny needed clarity on his aftercare plan and where he would move to when he turned 18.



Key Actions taken by Johnny's Advocacy Officer

Johnny's Advocacy Officer agreed a day and time to meet with Johnny to discuss his concerns and his aftercare plan. During the meeting, he informed his Advocacy Officer that he was turning 18 in five months and did not know where he was going to live. He wanted to know where he would be moving to so he could prepare for moving on from residential care.

Johnny gave his consent for the Advocacy Officer to discuss the issue with his aftercare worker and social worker. Due to the limited number of aftercare placements in the area, they could not guarantee that a placement would be available for Johnny on his 18th birthday.

Johnny had several aftercare planning meetings in the run up to his birthday but no updates on whether he would have accommodation to move onto or not. Three weeks before his 18th birthday, Johnny consented to his Advocacy Officer escalating the matter to EPIC's Advocacy Service Manager for the region, and the relevant senior professionals. The urgency of Johnny's situation was recognised, and funding was eventually secured for accommodation 11 days before Johnny turned 18.



Outcome

Johnny was able to transition into an aftercare placement when he turned 18. He was happy about this and settled into his new aftercare accommodation well. Johnny gained confidence from the experience of advocacy support and continued to avail of EPIC's Advocacy Service when needed.

Case Study: Laura

Main Presenting Issue: Accommodation



Background

Laura was nineteen and living in temporary transitional accommodation provided by her local County Council. She was subjected to domestic violence and coercive control by her partner and had secured a protection order against him. Laura was fearful of her ex-partner and was unable to deny him entry to her property, which was in breach of the conditions of her tenancy.

Having received an advocacy service from EPIC in the past, Laura reached out to EPIC for support as she was facing eviction. If evicted, Laura would not be able to access County Council or emergency homeless services for a period of 12 months, as per its policy.



Key Actions taken by Laura's Advocacy Officer

With Laura's permission, the Advocacy Officer spoke to the local Housing Officer and arranged a meeting to discuss Laura's tenancy agreement. In the meeting, the Advocacy Officer made the case for an extension for Laura and discussed her right to appeal any decision made. They also asked for the 12-month period to be reduced to 3 months given Laura's vulnerabilities.

The Advocacy Officer contacted Threshold on Laura's behalf and advised her on the steps she needed to take in order to self-advocate.

The Advocacy Officer supported Laura to feel confident attending meetings with the County Council and worked with Laura after meetings to debrief and explain any decisions made.

The Advocacy Officer contacted Laura's aftercare team to inquire about support for accommodation. The aftercare worker agreed to help Laura and made a referral to Focus Ireland on her behalf. The Advocacy Officer also assisted Laura to contact her local TD.

Case Study: Laura

Main Presenting Issue: Accommodation



Outcome

Laura received notice of eviction and had to leave the property. She was able to stay with a relative on a temporary basis. While the advocacy service could not prevent the County Council's final decision on her tenancy, the process gave Laura the confidence to continue engaging with the County Council to seek a resolution to her housing situation.



Case Study: Jenny

Main Presenting Issue: Legal



Background

Jenny felt she was neglected and harmed while in the care of Tusla as a child. She also felt that the decisions Tusla made about her care were not in her best interests. Jenny expressed a desire to take a case against Tusla and was referred to EPIC by her aftercare worker for independent advice.



Key Actions taken by Jenny's Advocacy Officer

After listening to Jenny's thoughts on the provision of care she received and her decision to take a case against Tusla, Jenny's Advocacy Officer suggested that she book an appointment for the Free Legal Advice Clinics provided by EPIC's partner, Community Law and Mediation (CLM). Jenny agreed and her Advocacy Officer made an appointment on her behalf. The Advocacy Officer attended the clinic with Jenny for support.

In the consultation with the solicitor, Jenny outlined her experience in care and her intention to take a case. The CLM solicitor explained the threshold for taking cases against State bodies and the burden of proof. She advised Jenny to apply for her care files under the FOI Act and to look at the information on file. The solicitor recommended that Jenny utilise the EPIC Advocacy Service to apply for the files, and to come back for a follow up consultation once she had received them.

The solicitor explained that Jenny can seek legal aid if she decided to move forward with the case against Tusla.



Outcome

Jenny decided to apply for her care files as advised. She was happy with the advice and decided to take the recommended steps before deciding whether to progress the matter. Her Advocacy Officer supported her to make the FOI request, and if required, the Advocacy Officer will assist Jenny in seeking further legal advice.

Case Study: Joy

Main Presenting Issue: Homelessness



Background

Joy, a care-experienced mum, had sought an advocacy service from EPIC during a period of assessment with her first-born child. When the assessment process was due to end, there wasn't any step-down accommodation options for Joy and her child. Joy was concerned for her own welfare and safety, as well as that of her baby, as it was likely that they would have to transition into emergency homelessness accommodation.



Key Actions taken by Joy's Advocacy Officer

Joy's Advocacy Officer explained to her that there was likely to be no immediate solution for her due to the ongoing housing crisis. The Advocacy Officer agreed that they would collaborate with all professionals and services, including Joy's aftercare worker, in highlighting Joy's vulnerability given the circumstances. The hope was to accelerate Joy's case and get her approved for long-term housing as a matter of urgency. Joy gave her consent for the Advocacy Officer to do so.

Upon completion of her assessment, Joy was moved into her first emergency accommodation placement. The Advocacy Officer supported Joy to articulate her concerns about this transition to the relevant County Council housing team and social work department. Shortly after, Joy was moved to a different emergency accommodation placement at very short notice.

On several occasions during Joy's time in the second emergency placement, she communicated to her Advocacy Officer that she felt hopeless and that she was going to leave because nothing was going to change. Joy's Advocacy Officer acknowledged her concerns and spoke to her in detail about what the implications for taking such a decision would be - including that if she disengaged with homeless services, her baby would be taken into care.

Case Study: Joy

Main Presenting Issue: Homelessness



Key Actions taken by Joy's Advocacy Officer

The Advocacy Officer also highlighted that even though the process was taking longer than Joy would like, it was a matter of 'when' and not 'if' a decision would be taken. In time, housing would be provided for her and her child.

Joy asked her Advocacy Officer to attend meetings related to her accommodation with her until it was resolved. Joy exercised the option of accessing this support from her Advocacy Officer when she felt it was necessary.

The Advocacy Officer wrote a letter outlining Joy's precarious circumstances to support the discussions Joy's aftercare worker was having with the local Council on Joy's behalf. The letter detailed Joy's vulnerability and level of need due to her circumstances.



Outcome

Joy decided to stay in her emergency accommodation and did so for a significant time. Eventually, she was offered suitable accommodation by the local Council, through an approved housing body. Joy still lives in this accommodation and continues to work with her Advocacy Officer on other advocacy issues.





empowering people in care

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