

Opinion

The Urgent  
Need for  
Aftercare  
Reform in  
Ireland

Josh Farrell



Interview

“I would recommend  
independent advocacy to  
any young person  
or kid in care  
going through  
a hard time.”



Column

The Soundtrack to  
My Life: How  
Music Got Me  
Through My Time  
in Care

Princess Esezobor

## Care Day 2025 - read all about it!

Andrea Reilly  
EPIC Youth Council

Care Day is a day to celebrate the positive experiences and contributions of children and young people with care-experience - a community that rises every day and overcomes challenges most will never experience.

Care Day was established in February 2016 by young care-leavers from Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

While discussing their different care experiences, they agreed that the public were not fully aware about care systems, and that this contributed to stigma and stereotypes about children and young people with care experience. They envisioned a day that would highlight the achievements and celebrate care-experienced children and young people, while also educating the public about the care system.

Another primary objective of Care Day is to create a sense of community across the world for those with care experience, to help children and young people support each other and be proud of who they are and what they have achieved.

Today, it is a joint initiative across five children’s rights organisations, - Become (England), Who Cares? Scotland, Voices from Care (Wales), Voice of Young People in Care (Northern Ireland), and EPIC, Empowering People in Care, which are now known as the

5 Nations 1 Voice (5N1V) alliance. It is supported by the Department of Children, Disability, and Equality and Tusla, among many others.

For our Care Day 2025 celebration, EPIC Care Community and Youth Council members chose the theme, “Voices from care, ripples of change”.

### “Voices from care, ripples of change”

The theme celebrates the transformative power of hearing directly from those with care-experience. Each voice from care carries a unique perspective, shedding light on both challenges and triumphs.

By sharing experiences, voices from care create ripples of change that inspire awareness, empathy, and action. They spark understanding and challenge misconceptions about life in care. These ripples influence public attitudes, but also shape policies and practices to improve the lives of care-experienced youth in Ireland.

This theme is a powerful reminder that every story matters and that change begins when we truly listen. It calls upon society to amplify care voices, ensuring they are heard in all spaces where decisions are made. By embracing the insights of those with lived experience, we can collectively build a care system that supports, uplifts, and empowers, leaving a legacy of hope and progress for generations to come.



“ Care Day is a call to  
listen, learn, and amplify  
voices from care, as every  
story has the potential to  
create a ripple of change!

## Join the Care Day celebration!

On behalf of the children and young people at EPIC, we are asking friends and allies to come together to celebrate children in care and care-leavers on their national day!

Share your Care Day messages on social media on Friday 21st February,, tag EPIC, and use the hashtag #CareDay25.



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth





# The EPIC Youth Council and Care Community

**“Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them, and adults should listen and take children seriously!”**

The EPIC Youth Council is a representative group of young people from across Ireland with care experience. Members advise EPIC and national stakeholders on issues and themes of concern related to children and young people in care.

EPIC Youth Council members work on advocacy campaigns and projects to improve the outcomes for children and young people in care at national level, working across thematic areas identified by members and the wider Care Community.

The EPIC Care Community is a space for children and young

people in care, aftercare or with care experience. It was created for connection, fun, and growth, as well as opportunities for training and action by working on projects and campaigns.

In the EPIC Care Community, children and young people learn about their rights and how their voices can create change.

**Find out more about the EPIC Youth Council and the Care Community by visiting [epiconline.ie](https://epiconline.ie).**



## Editorial | The state's duty to children in care



The current crises in Ireland's care system must compel political action. Children in the care of the state are being significantly impacted by systemic failures which cannot be addressed by Tusla alone.

As child protection referrals rise, foster placements decline, and special care units operate at half capacity. Despite many dedicated professionals within the system, these persistent challenges are putting children's welfare at risk.

However, with bold, collective action, these problems can be resolved. The Government must embrace its full responsibility to safeguard the rights of children in care and act as any reasonable parent would - with urgency and determination.

The challenges are clear: a shortage of suitable care placements, weak interagency cooperation, and critical staffing deficits.

Exacerbated by a lack of political prioritisation these issues have led to an overreliance on private care providers and unregulated accommodation which can compromise the stability and welfare of children.

To ensure sustainable improvements, a whole-of-government strategy is essential. This strategy must set measurable targets, increase placement capacity, bolster workforce planning, and shift reliance away from private providers. Crucially, it must be backed by sufficient funding and robust accountability mechanisms across all involved agencies and departments.

The situation is urgent. Staffing shortages have left Ireland's three special care facilities operating below capacity, even as the well documented need for such placements grows. The absence of high support placements for children

leaving special care further strains the system and prolongs children's time in secured environments intended for short stay therapeutic interventions.

Equally, stronger interagency collaboration is essential to address disparities faced by care-experienced children and young people in education, housing, health, and justice. Existing protocols between Tusla, the Health Service Executive (HSE), and other agencies must be reinforced with clear accountability mechanisms to ensure prompt and effective support.

It is important to highlight that there are strong foundations to build on. At present, Ireland has between 5,000–6,000 children in alternative care. The majority of these children are reaching their potential in the care of the many excellent foster families that are the backbone of our care system. However, we cannot ignore the fact that

some children as young as four are being placed in settings never intended for those under 12.

The risks of inaction to these children are immense, but the solutions are within reach. A well-resourced, coordinated national strategy could end the use of unregulated placements within the lifetime of this government. This requires leadership, commitment, and a recognition that the state has a fundamental duty to protect and nurture the children in its care.

It is time for the government to act—not just to fix the immediate crisis, but to build a care system that truly supports every child who needs it. Anything less is a failure of responsibility that Ireland cannot afford.

**Wayne Stanley is the CEO of EPIC, Empowering People in Care**



# Opinion | The Urgent Need for Aftercare Reform in Ireland

Each year, young people leave state care. While many will benefit from an aftercare service, some are left to fend for themselves, writes Josh Farrell.

Aftercare plays a significant role in the life of care-leavers. It is a package of support provided by Tusla, which can include a dedicated aftercare worker and services, financial supports and in some cases, aftercare accommodation. However, to date, the government have missed an opportunity to address a critical shortcoming of Ireland’s current legislation – not every young person leaving care is eligible, as aftercare is not universal.

This is the reality. When we don’t look out for the vulnerable or minorities, they can be forgotten in our society and in our policies. Some care leavers can end up homeless or at risk of exploitation. If we are to ensure that every young person leaving care is given the keys to unlock a bright future of their own, aftercare needs urgent review and reform.

## Investing in our future and the eligibility barrier

In the chapter titled “Investing in our future”, the new Programme for Government outlines commitments to the children and young people of Ireland. It includes a commitment to examine “ways to further support all young people as they age out of state care and foster care”.

As it stands, equal opportunities for care leavers are limited by restrictive eligibility criteria for aftercare. The current law states that a child must have spent 12 months in the care of the state between the ages of 13 and 18 years to be eligible for an Aftercare Assessment of Need, and 12 months continually

from their 17th birthday to be eligible for the aftercare allowance.

This is absolutely limiting and often blocks vulnerable young people from vital support. A teenager who enters care on their 17th birthday may be exempt from receiving aftercare as they don’t reach the eligibility requirements. This is very unfair as there is an acknowledgement by Tusla that the young person needed to be taken into care. This is always an act of last resort, which means, even at 17, a young person may have heightened vulnerabilities or be lacking family support or networks to fall back on.

Another consideration for Government is the eligibility criteria for an aftercare allowance, which currently depends on being in full time education on an accredited course. While further and higher education is an important pathway and should be incentivised, it should not impact eligibility for an aftercare allowance. A young person may need time to consider what career path they want to take, rather than opting for a course to ensure some financial stability as they transition to independent living. Progressing in life should not be limited to traditional academic education alone, as many alternative paths exist.

I would also argue for the age of aftercare supports to be raised to 26 years based on an assessment of need. Other young people take gap years, or start university later, whereas those leaving care can’t. Just last month, CSO data revealed that 70% of young people aged 25 in Ireland, still live at home with



their parents. Yet care leavers are expected to be fully independent much earlier.

## What needs to change?

A fundamental shift is needed in Ireland’s approach to aftercare. Every care leaver should have a guaranteed aftercare plan that ensures equal opportunities regardless of their level of education or duration in care. Discrimination based on these factors must be eliminated to create a fairer system.

The Government, which assumes the role of the parent for children in care, should not abruptly abandon its duty when a young person turns 18. Just as a parent continues to provide guidance beyond childhood, our government must uphold its responsibility as a child becomes a young adult.

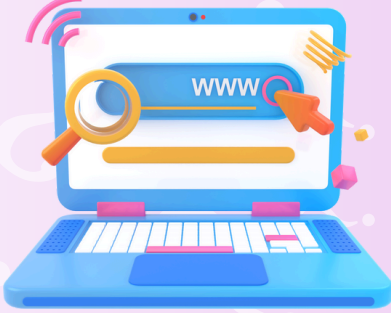
## A call for action

The failure to address these issues in the Draft Heads of the Child Care Amendment Act reflect a deeper issue: young people leaving care are not a political priority. As a society, we cannot continue to turn a blind eye to their struggles. The new government has committed to updating the Child Care Act, 1991 during its

lifetime, so there is still an opportunity to address these issues. Reform is not just necessary—it is urgent. If the government is truly committed to investing in our future and giving all young people in Ireland a fair chance, we must fix the cracks before more vulnerable lives slip through them.

Josh Farrell is a member of the EPIC Youth Council.

### Frequently asked questions



### on care or aftercare

[epiconline.ie](https://epiconline.ie)





# Q&A with the Ombudsman for Children, Niall Muldoon



**EPIC Youth Council member, Kai Brosnan caught up with Niall Muldoon, the Ombudsman for Children, in advance of Care Day to discuss role models, children’s rights and what Ireland’s long-term vision for our care system could look like.**

**Kai: So, Niall, who's your role model?**

**Niall:** Oh wow, role model. Probably Michael D Higgins, I think. A powerful, courageous man who's been doing the brave stuff, walking the walk since the 60s, you know. Talking about human rights when it was dangerous to talk about human rights. And really continuously putting people at the centre of his way of doing things.

**Kai: What are your pet peeves?**

**Niall:** Pet peeves. Oh, people who take up two parking spaces!

**Kai: Obviously a very important question, Do you have any pets?**

**Niall:** No, not at the moment. We had a number of cats when my children were growing up.. Three different cats. Yeah they were lovely

**Kai:** I've actually just gotten a cat recently. She’s a rescue, lovable but evil.

**Niall:** Oh yeah. We all know that we live in their world. It's not the other way around.

**Kai:** Absolutely, absolutely.

**Kai: Do you have any unusual hobbies or anything you like to do when you're not at work?**

**Niall:** I do a bit of biking, but my main hobby is sports psychology, so that's sort of an interesting thing I do, and totally different.

**Kai:** Oh, that’s interesting. What does sports psychology actually involve?



I’ve heard of it before but never looked into what it actually is.

**Niall:** I work with high level teams trying to improve their performances, around the GAA side of things, so hurling and football. It's great. It's an opportunity to get people to be as good as they can be, and I love doing that. It may or may not win you something, but at least you've improved and you’re better.

**Kai:** Yeah, exactly. It's the steps towards improving and not just the final outcome.

**Niall:** Yeah. Continuous progression. You know, my quote is always “progress, not perfection.”

**Kai:** I like that. Actually, I have to remember that. I'm in my final year of college at the moment!

**Niall:** Yeah, because sometimes we spend too much time looking for perfection and the reality is just keep moving forward, then you're always improving.

**Kai:** That's the thing. Like, you're never back at step one. You're always going on and on, which is nice, but it can be hard to see when you’re in the thick of it. Progress not perfection, something good to remember.

**Niall:** What are you studying Kai?

**Kai:** I'm in my final year of social care.

**Niall:** Congratulations. Brilliant.

**Kai:** So I qualified with a Level 7 last year and I'm doing my level eight this year, so I'm doing my thesis.

**Niall:** Fantastic. Oh, pulling your hair out, right? But it'll be worth it.

**Kai:** A little bit, a little bit, but I enjoy it. It's something I'm really, passionate about. You know, like I was 15 writing you letters, giving out about things, and you were coming down to Kerry listening to me give out. So, you know, kind of activism and advocacy and the rights of people is something I've always been really, really passionate about.

**Niall:** That's it. So there's a fit. It's an actual fit, which is great.

**Kai:** Yeah. Yeah. No, I love it.

**Kai: If you could have any superpower, what would it be?**

**Niall:** Wow. Umm. So, I'm going to be purely selfish. I'd love the superpower to be able to eat whatever I want and still be as fit as a fiddle. I’d love that.

**Kai:** I've never thought of that as a superpower. You're going to have to write to Marvel with this now.

**Niall:** I've never thought about a superpower. What would I love that I can't do? I'd love to be able to play music. I love people who can just step up and sing. Play a piano. You know, I think I just have great admiration for musicians, but superpowers. OK, superpowers.

Jeez, I'm not very good at this now.

**Kai:** And these are the easy questions.

**Niall:** Yes, the ability to make people laugh, perhaps?

**Kai:** Yeah, that's a good one.

**Kai: For someone that might not know, can you tell me a bit about your role as the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children’s Office?**

**Niall:** Our office is designed to promote and protect children's rights all over Ireland. So, every child in Ireland, whether they're born here or they're just passing through or they're living here from a different country, they all have the same rights. We promote the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which outlines 42 rights. We do that by taking complaints from children, or their representatives, parents or advocates, if they're not happy with a service they get from the government. So, any service that's provided by the government to children is under our remit. If they're not happy, we can inquire into it or do an investigation and challenge them. So that could be anything from schools, hospitals, waiting lists, housing, justice, any of those sorts of areas at all where children and the government interact.





We provide advice to the government and to departments in relation to legislation and on policy, making sure they are child rights proofed. We engage with them on an ongoing basis around that, and we take the learnings from our investigation so that we can change the next policy or the next iteration or the next law to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

We also raise awareness about children's rights. We do consultations with children who are very seldom heard. So, we have worked with children who are in inpatient mental health units.

We've talked to children in direct provision. We've talked to children experiencing homelessness. And we bring those consultations and their words directly to Parliament. We would oftentimes publish a report there.

We've had children working in our Youth Advisory Panel who have gone to Geneva to speak directly to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. So, we're all the time trying to raise the voices of children through our consultations and letting the people of power hear them.

**Kai:** That's amazing. 'Cause I think you need to learn from what went wrong before. And I think even today something that is so important, and it will always be important obviously, is the direct voice of the child or whoever you're working with. And I think when it comes to children, sometimes that voice can be deemed less important. So, you know, having those groups where you're making sure that they're aware of their rights is important, they can't have their rights upheld if they're not aware of them.

**Niall:** Yeah, correct. And I think it's going to make a difference because people, like yourself who are graduating, then they become the protectors of rights. And that makes all the difference. And then they become aunts and uncles, they become parents and they then push for children's rights as well. Even if you hope nobody ever needs us, but at least they know it's there and it's available.

**Kai:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah, it's kind of a ripple effect. Yeah, I didn't think of it that way.

**Kai:** In terms of Ireland as a whole and the government, do you think we're faring well in terms of promoting and upholding the rights of children in care and young people leaving care?

**Niall:** To be fair, I think Ireland is in reasonably good shape. I think the surveys would probably suggest that 75% of children are very happy with where they're at



and things are going well for them. And I think we've improved enormously from the old dark days of the 60s, 70s and 80s. If we compare ourselves against Europe, there's a lot of things we're doing right. But like we were saying before, progress not perfection.

We need to continuously progress and improve things. There's lots of children with disabilities who aren't being looked after properly, children with mental health issues, children within the LGBT+ community that are not being looked after, so there's still a lot of work to be done.

Children's rights are better than they have ever been before, but we're pushing very hard now as an Office to get the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic Irish law so that every public servant who makes a decision has to make sure that it's in compliance with children's rights. I think that's the only way forward. So that is the long-term goal every decision, whether that's in agriculture or housing or local authority or education, everybody's thinking about children's rights all the time, and if they don't think about it and they can't prove it, then there could be a lawsuit. So, we've a lot of work to do to make that

happen. It's been done in Scotland. It's been done in South Africa. It's been done in Sweden. We'd like Ireland to be among the first European countries to make it happen. And I think that's when you really will see the state properly step up and help those children who are vulnerable so that every child is considered. That's how you get proper inclusion.

**Kai:** As the Ombudsman for children. What do you think are the critical issues in our care system that the government must prioritise in the next year?

**Niall:** Within the care system, we need more foster care. We need to get that. And then I think we really have to grapple with the special care and the special emergency accommodation situation. We need to acknowledge that you cannot be outsourcing that all the time. We need to provide safe, secure, reliable services for those children, and I think that needs to be done through engaging with the NGO and the voluntary sector, which is part of the strategic plan of TUSLA – to increase the number of publicly run residential units for children in care. So yeah, I think that's where we really need to focus.

**Kai:** Yeah. And like looking at emergency arrangements at the moment for a child, you know, I had a few different experiences in a few different homes and stuff as a child and that was difficult enough. But I spent over a year in homeless services, and I just got a place there in December and I didn't realise how much stability would make such a difference in my life. Everything has become so much easier to handle. I'm getting up in a better mood. I'm coming home in a better mood. I'm looking after myself better and stuff, so I didn't realise. I knew stability was important. I did, but I didn't realise what a key role it plays. So, for a child going through a traumatic time already and then being put in hotels or being put in emergency arrangements like, I can't imagine you know how difficult that is.

**Niall:** I mean, it's certainly the very least you could hope for is you don't add to the trauma of a child.

Jeepers well done to you Kai. Oh my God, that's horrible that you had to go through that.

**Kai:** It wasn't the best situation now I will say. And sure, with the housing crisis and the rental crisis anyway, it's just absolutely impossible. You know, there's people still in their 30s and 40s living at home, and if you don't have the support network that your peers have then you're kind of at a disadvantage.

**Niall:** It's a secure place where you are now?

**Kai:** Yeah, yeah, so thank God. I kind of have just a bit of stability now, which it does, it makes all the difference, you know, like in every aspect, even my education.

**Niall:** Great. Well done.

**Kai:** So, in the programme for government, there's a commitment to develop a long-term vision for how the care system will operate in the future. What would your long-term vision for the care system be?

**Niall:** Well, I think if we start with foster care, we need to make sure that the foster families are properly supported. That kinship care is properly supported. That finance is not an issue. You know we should be saying. 'We are so delighted you're helping us to provide for these children that we will make your life as easy as possible. You don't have to fight for everything. We're not going to argue over everything.'



Make things as smooth as possible for that big army because you know nearly 6000 children are cared for, by probably 5000 families, something like. That's hugely important.



And then, and at the more severe stages, where we took away high support care for children, I think we need to reinstate those placements as well as special care beds. We need to provide a more rounded provision for those children who are a little bit more complicated, and we need to take it seriously. These children are in our care. We have a situation at the moment where TUSLA's statutory obligation is to provide for these children, to go to the High Court and get a court care order to bring those children in, but then they can't provide them with the right placement. And you know that is the definition of insanity.

You know, you're legally obliged. You spend tens of thousands of euros to go to the High Court, you get the care order, and then the child stays in unstable, emergency accommodation.

I think to be fair, the strategy and the plan is there. We need to make it happen and the government needs to provide the opportunities, and that could mean looking at compulsory orders and purchasing, maybe looking at different ways of providing accommodation. You know different ways of doing things. And then the last piece for me would always be, to make sure aftercare is fully supported as well. You know that's crucial. And again, we had plans for local authorities to be helping children coming out of care at 18 years of age into their services. We need to make sure that happens.

**Kai:** How do you think we can improve the outcomes for young care-experienced people transitioning to adulthood?

**Niall:** We need to acknowledge that we need to provide support and assistance, whether it's shared accommodation, whether it's, small studio type accommodation, but just we need to see a new way of doing that and making it happen. And again, we're not talking massive numbers either. You know, we need to get those units up and running in a way that's safe and secure and provide them for those in aftercare, whether they're in education or not.

We need to be providing for care-experienced youth. Education is great and we're delighted to get more in there. The more the better, however, that does not abdicate our responsibility for those not going on to further education.

**Kai:** Like if you look at like, people turned 18 who are living with their family. A lot of them will take a gap year to go travelling. A lot of them will stay at home because they can't rent somewhere. A lot of them will have their parents help fund somewhere to live. And the age of moving out of home is going up and up and up, but if you've grown up in, residential care, you know, it is kind of, it is scary. That kind of thought process is there, that one day you're being staffed 24/7 and then the next day you're an adult, and you don't have the support of having family and affordable housing.

**Kai:** Do you have any messages or advice for care-experienced people in care or in aftercare?

**Niall:** Wow, who am I to give advice? There are good people out there that will help you, but you need to know where to ask, and EPIC is probably a starting point. That's probably the best I could say at this point. Because I think, I could probably gain more advice from care-experienced children than I can give them. And if our office can help in any way, we'd be delighted to help. Yeah.

**Kai:** Brilliant. Anything else you'd like to add Niall?

**Niall:** Congratulations to you and all involved in Care Day. I hope it's a brilliant day. I'm so delighted to see it spreading. You know, from about 40 people at the first day out it's great to see you taking it in so many different directions all over the country and internationally, it's a wonderful thing to see. And again, it's that idea that we wanted to highlight. There's lots of great care-experienced kids doing great stuff and thriving and making the best and we don't hear enough from them.

**Kai:** I think so. There is a lot of stigma about growing up in the care system, but I think

Care Day is a great day for connecting with others. You're not a statistic. You're just as well able and deserving as everyone else. So, I think Care Day is a great day to show that and to show that we're all capable and that we're not our care experience.

**Niall:** Fantastic. Great, listen, that's it, I can't top that. Well done. Well done. Well done.

Niall Muldoon is Ireland's Ombudsman for Children.


The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is a human rights institution that promotes the rights and welfare of young people under 18 years of age living in Ireland.

Learn more at [oco.ie](https://oco.ie)

# Know your rights in care!

The United Nations Convention on The Rights Of The Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC is an important agreement by countries, including Ireland, who have promised to protect children's rights. The UNCRC explains what children's rights are and how they must be upheld by governments.



Download poster from [epiconline.ie](https://epiconline.ie)

# Independent Advocacy Service



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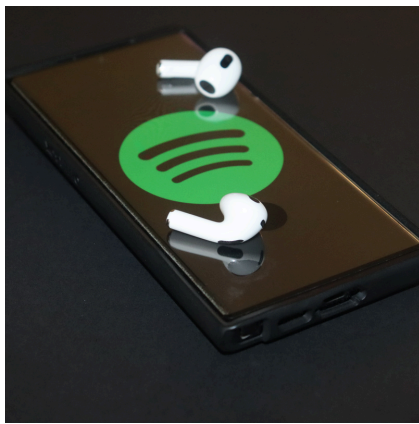
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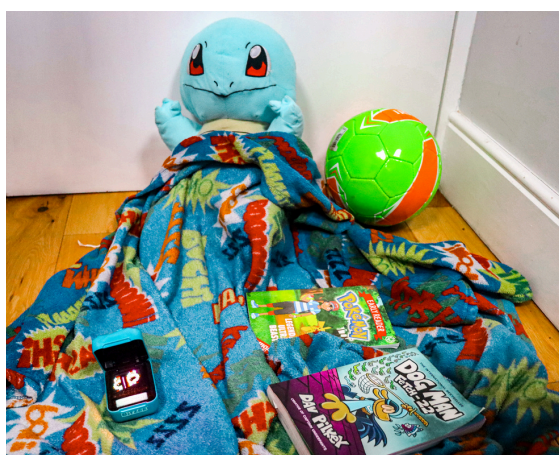




# Embrace Our Stories



## Photography Exhibition by care-experienced children and young people



**The Linenhall Arts Centre**  
Castlebar, Co. Mayo  
18th February -  
28th March 2025



# Falling Through the Cracks

## Child Law Project

An Analysis of Child Care Proceedings from 2021 to 2024

### Opinion | The Missing Ingredient of the Care System - High Support

**Maria Corbett**  
**The Child Law Project**

On Care Day we celebrate the achievements of children in care and care leavers and there is much to celebrate.

However, any discussion on the care system would be incomplete without acknowledging the acute shortage of placements currently being experienced in some parts of the country. This shortage undermines three decades of progress since the Child Care Act's commencement. The current situation creates a problematic cycle: delays in placing children in care, inappropriate placement settings, use of unregulated placements and extended waiting times for special care beds.

The solution to this crisis requires not just increasing the number of placements but also diversifying the type of placements available. Currently, almost all of the 5,823 children in care are placed in one of three placement settings: foster care (including with relatives), residential care or special care. While this works for many, trying to fit children and young people with a diverse range of talents and challenges into these limited categories is proving inadequate.

A key gap identified by the Child Law Project in its recent analytical report on care proceedings, 'Falling Through the Cracks' is that the care system is struggling to meet the needs and rights of a small, but growing, group of

teenagers who are described as having complex needs. These young people typically require therapeutic support for disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder, and for mental health and addictions difficulties. Many are extremely vulnerable, exhibiting behaviours such as self-harm, are engaged in high-risk substance abuse, sexual or criminal activity or at risk of trafficking or exploitation. Often, they have experienced multiple placement breakdowns, losing connection with trusted adults and may display aggressive or violent behaviour.

While special care might be appropriate in some cases, it is a secure setting that deprives children of their liberty so must remain a last resort. For some young people whose needs cannot be met through mainstream foster and residential care, Tusla has created bespoke placements with higher staff-to-child ratios and therapeutic support. While this may be beneficial for that individual child, it is

an ad hoc, sticking plaster solution for the wider problem.

High support care is not new to Ireland – 13 residential units operated for many years up until 2014 before being closed down. Some current bespoke placements are informally referred to as 'high support' placements, but no such care setting exists in law or policy. While no official definition exists, high support care is generally understood to offer assessments and trauma-informed therapeutic and safety interventions.

There is no legal impediment to Tusla setting up a placement with a higher staff-to-child ratio and therapeutic input, indeed such placements have been funded under a Joint Protocol with the HSE. However, it is unclear if a legal framework exists, outside of special care, for a care setting to operate restrictive measures aimed at keeping a child safe. Such measures may include placing restrictions on the young person's phone and



internet communications or on their movements. Proper safeguards and court oversight would be essential to ensure any restrictions have a clear safety and therapeutic rationale and are not used, or perceived to be, a form of punishment.

The new Programme for Government contains a commitment to develop a National Alternative Care Plan. This is a golden opportunity to reintroduce and reimagine high support care, a missing ingredient in the care system. Any national plan which fails to address the current gap in services for young people with complex needs will be doomed to fail. Success will also require cross-departmental co-operation on the necessary legal, regulatory and policy reform and capital investment.

By championing the creation of a model of high support care, the new Minister for Children, Disability and Equality has an opportunity to leave a transformative legacy that will turn the promise of children’s rights into lived reality for those who need our care and protection most.

Dr Maria Corbett is the former CEO of the Child Law Project.

The Child Law Project is an independent project that examines and reports on judicial child care proceedings.

[www.childlawproject.ie](http://www.childlawproject.ie)

# Princess Esezobor | The Soundtrack to My Life



It was August when I first went into care. I didn’t realise how far my first foster home would be from everything I knew. I missed two months of school at the time, but I felt safe. It was my Leaving Cert year, which is an important year. Honestly, I felt so demotivated and barely wanted to do anything. I just didn’t care. At least I thought I didn’t at the time.

I had dreams of studying medicine, psychology or science. Although I consider myself quite outgoing, I became used to isolation. Sometimes I liked it, sometimes I hated it. But through it all, I always had music.

Music became my escape. I liked to isolate myself because I considered it ‘me time’ or ‘my most mindful moments’. I listened to music for hours – Hozier, Michael Jackson, Jorja Smith, RAYE – and shut out the outside world. With all that was going on, music was one thing that made sense.

My third foster home lasted six months – but sure, who was counting? I had lost motivation and studying for the Leaving Cert felt impossible, but I tried my hardest. Music was still there, though. During my study breaks I would listen to TikTok’s biggest artist – Doja Cat and Olivia Rodrigo. Billie Eilish’s album, ‘Don’t Smile at Me’, was on repeat. She sang about emotions, not just

romance, and for the first time, I resonated with an artist.

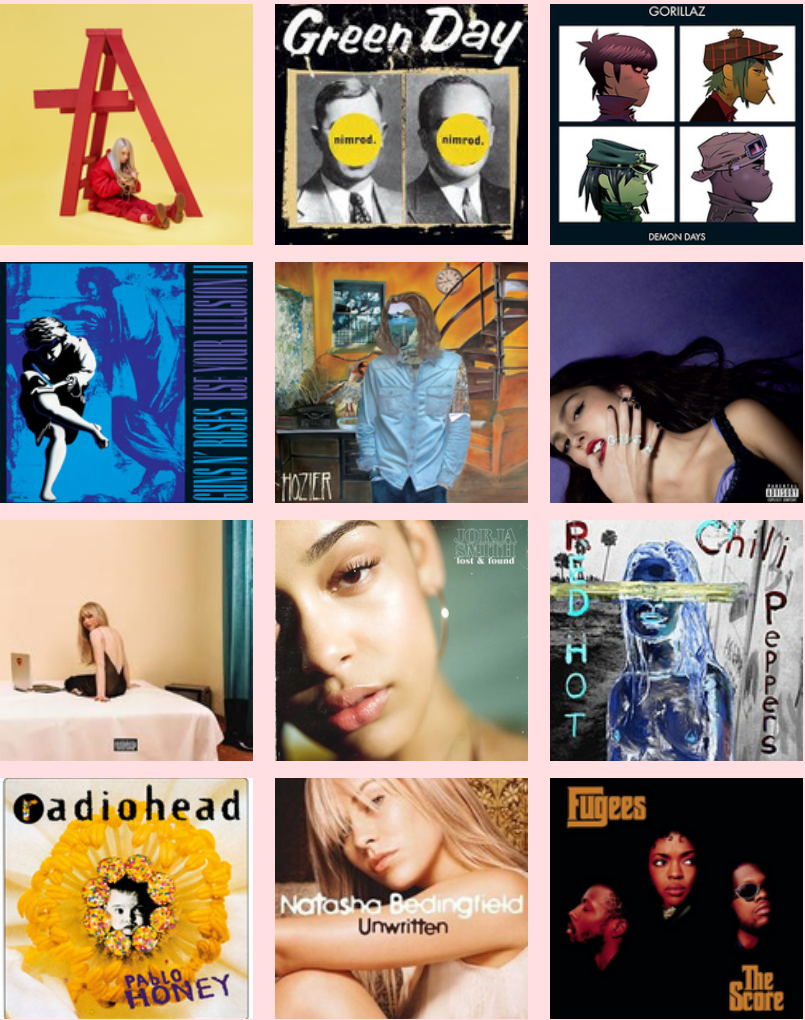
I struggled a lot to focus on my exams and blamed myself. Due to the breakdown of my foster homes, I always thought to myself ‘It was your fault...If you didn’t say this or do that, then you wouldn’t be in this position.’ The saying ‘Children should be seen and not heard’ played on my mind. I was angry and things were hard. And then, I moved again.

The summer after my Leaving Cert, I found solace in new music. ‘Supermassive Black Hole’ and ‘Starlight’ by Muse became my anthems.

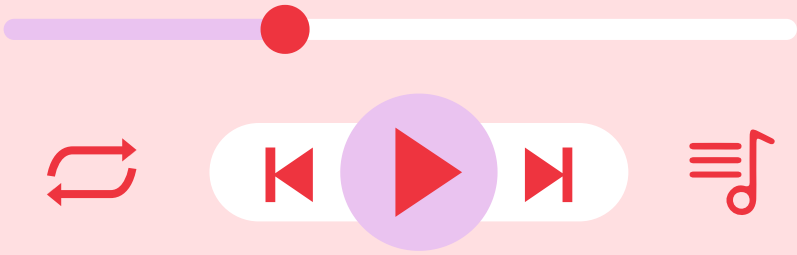
Some would consider my music taste quite random – I agree. It reflects what I’ve been through. Indie, pop, hip hop, rap, afrobeat, alternative, rock, even folk or Motown – every genre and every song has played a role. Music has always made me feel at home. In other words, I am chained to the rhythm.

Now in my final year of college, I look back and see how music has carried me through my life. There has always been a song that understood me when words failed. As I step into my future, I know one thing is certain: I will always have my music playing in the background, guiding me forward.

## Princess’s Playlist

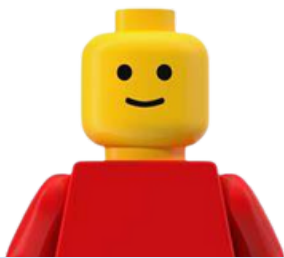


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From L-R: Billie Eilish, Green Day, Gorillaz, Guns N Roses, Hozier, Olivia Rodrigo, Jorja Smith, Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Radiohead, Natasha Beddingfield, The Fugees





# The Role of an Independent Advocate in a Young Person’s Life

## A conversation between Cian, a care-experienced young person, and his former EPIC Advocate, Joe

**Q: Cian, if someone asked you, what does advocacy at EPIC mean for you, what would you tell them?**

I would say that advocacy for me is having your own person who you can go to, to chat to, especially, like, around maybe being anxious around care and stuff like that. Considering I went and did the adoption process which took a long time, and it took a long time for me to actually process.

Do you know, like, I was very grateful that I had an advocate to advocate for me, for someone who I could chat to about it, and to get advice and to make, to just make the process nice and neat, in a way I understood.

**Q: And Joe, how would you describe the role of an independent advocate working with children and young people in care?**

Cian was my boss, and I was answerable to him. I only acted on what Cian wanted me to act on. And that's a very privileged role. So, you know my job as an advocate was to inform Cian to the best of my ability and to make sure that he was aware of everything that was going on and understood it. My main role was making sure that what Cian wanted to happen was represented - to either support Cian to represent his own voice or represent it for him in settings where maybe he couldn't be present or didn't want to be.

**Q: Cian, why did you ask for an EPIC advocate?**

I chose an EPIC advocate because I was getting so overwhelmed, and I wasn't the happiest of young people. I just, I just needed someone

to kind of talk to other than my mum and dad at home, while going through the adoption process.

It was just, it was harder, you know? And plus, it wasn't right for me to have all that frustration bottled up and I just, I said look, I need someone else to talk to and I was very lucky that my foster dad knew EPIC. I would consider myself lucky to have had an advocate. It's just someone who I could call if I had a problem. And just, if I needed to like finalise anything, he could break it down into smaller



sections and I'd be able to understand it a bit better.

**Q: Would you recommend having an independent advocate to other young people in care?**

I would 100% recommend it. Cause, if you're having problems and if you have like, if you have a difficult understanding of different things, at least the advocate can help you, help you out, like in the hard times. Like with myself, going through the

adoption process, I kind of found it quite hard, so I would recommend independent advocacy to any young person or any young kid in care going through a hard time.

**Q: Joe, can you tell us about the ways an advocate might help a young person?**

Joe: There's a spectrum of things that you might do in the role. In Cian's advocacy journey, he wanted someone to talk to about the process of adoption, about understanding that process and maybe why it takes time. Over a number of years, there were different pieces of advocacy work that we carried

sorted, which was good, but it just kind of meant there was a bit more of a delay and I just kind of wanted it done.

And even understanding the process, why it's delayed and why these things happen, get lost and things like that, my advocate helped me to understand, when you're maybe a bit frustrated when things don't go the way they should.

Joe: As an advocate you can also attend a child in care review. I was there representing Cian's views by reading a letter he wrote. It was quite clearly stated. I love the way Cian makes his points because he brings you around to make the point. He wanted to be adopted, and he wanted the process to start moving faster. And I suppose that was my role, you know, to represent that. Cian's wishes were the only thing I was there to represent.

Cian: It took a good bit of work and a good bit of understanding for the adoption board and the social workers to finally understand what I was trying to get across to them because I don't think they fully understood, and they knew I was getting frustrated.

I was very lucky that I had Joe, like, bring me to like point A to point B, all things like that. It's guidance and support, but also, I guess that piece about making sure that your voice was being heard and taken seriously when you felt that it wasn't.

**Q: Did you find the process of working with an advocate empowering Cian?**

Yeah. One thing that I learned is that it's important to express yourself and it's important that you as a young child or teenager has a voice and that you get your views and your point across. No one's out to get you. You know, just say how you feel?

out together. We would aim to meet at least once a month. And I suppose, you know, a lot can happen in that month. Cian would often ring, as he received an e-mail, a letter, or an update that he wasn't sure about. For example, there was an assessment that had to be carried out.

Cian: Like the assessment and that time a document got lost. And so, I rang Joe up about it. I came into the EPIC office, and we just chatted about it. We managed to get the document



I think being involved with EPIC like as well, it helped me to be a lot more social with people and actually tell them my story of how and why this happens and how this works. So, I do think having an advocate was a very good learning experience for me.

**Q: Joe, how is the role of an independent advocate different to that of other professionals in a child in care’s life?**

I suppose my time working in the care space and being immersed in it for a number of years, I learned that it is a volatile emotional space that has a lot of feelings. A lot of trauma. There's a lot.

Predominantly, what I found is that all people who work with children and young people want the best outcome for them. But when there are heightened emotions and feelings, we often can't communicate properly or correctly with one another.

I think that's what the unique role of an independent advocate is, you know, you have no other agenda, only to ensure that the voice of the child is heard and given due consideration.

I think that for me, is one of the main things. I don't work for the state, I don't work for the parents, foster parents, or residential staff, I work for the young person. I suppose there is a trick in advocacy and for me was always getting the other adults in the room to hear their story.

**Q: Cian, is there any standout moment in your advocacy journey with Joe?**

**Cian:** Two things. First of all, I'll say the like, expressing yourself. Like, before I came to EPIC, I didn't know how to do that. It was a Care Day project that I did. I personally didn't know how I would feel about doing it first. And then once I met all the other young people and all the rest of the Epic team, I kind of felt like, you know what? This is important. Do you know? I was, I was respected for what I enjoy, and you know, things like that. And then the other thing I would have to say is probably how Joe actually managed to help me do a lot of the care

work and do you know what? I can understand everything. So I would have to say those would be probably the two most standout moments for me.

Joe: I have one for you! Cian wrote an e-mail to his social worker. He took initiative and clearly outlined what he wanted to say. Cian is such a respectful person and he's a lovely nature and lovely way about him. He gave a lot of time and thought to this e-mail, and he scripted it in such a nice way, and it was very clear in terms of what he wanted.

Cian: Yeah, it was kind of pushing, let's say. Like so the e-mail, I'm a people pleaser as I like to call myself, but one of the things is, I don't tolerate it when I'm not told anything. And that's one thing, one thing that triggers me still, is that I wasn't been told any of the information. That really just annoyed me. I've done all the work; I've put in all these efforts for this work, and I've done what I've been asked to do, and I'm not being given information back. So, I said right, e-mail time. I spent maybe 20 minutes in my room thinking of what I was going to say. I sent it and got emailed back I'd say nearly two hours later, saying right, we'll get all this information together for you. I got the information the next day and I was happy as Larry.

**Q: Before having the support of an advocate, do you think you would have written that letter Cian?**

Cian: If I hadn't gotten the advocacy service from EPIC, I would still have written that e-mail, but I wouldn't have been calm with it, you know, I would have been like full on, right. This needs to be done, done, done, you know.

Where I was just calm like. All right, this just needs to be complete. I understand this and so and so. You know? Like being rude isn't the way. Like, I mean, yeah, fair enough, you have to have a bit of a push to encourage that person to actually get onto the task that you want done. What I figured out that day is if I hadn't come to EPIC, I wouldn't have written that e-mail as well as I did and correct me if I'm

wrong in saying that I thought it was very good, that e-mail.

Joe: I was just very proud of Cian that particular day because you know, Cian is a thinker, but there's also time to take action. I suppose Cian needed answers and rather than thinking about it, he said right, I'm going to look for clarity. He mentioned the timeline, that he did not get the feedback from his questions, and I thought well done, Cian, you've mastered self-advocacy.

“You’ve mastered self-advocacy”

**Q: Any last words of advice or wisdom?**

Joe: I suppose the thing I'd say to a young person in care is that care is part of who you are, but it will never define who you are. D’you know, it is a hard journey, but there are people and services out there that genuinely care about you. They might not always have the answers or the solutions, but don't be ever afraid to reach out and ask for support or help or advocacy.

Some young people find it so hard to stay in the present. I know it can be extremely difficult. Easier said than done. Without giving children and young people in care the right therapies and services when they need them, to process those feelings and emotions, it can be so hard to move forward in life.

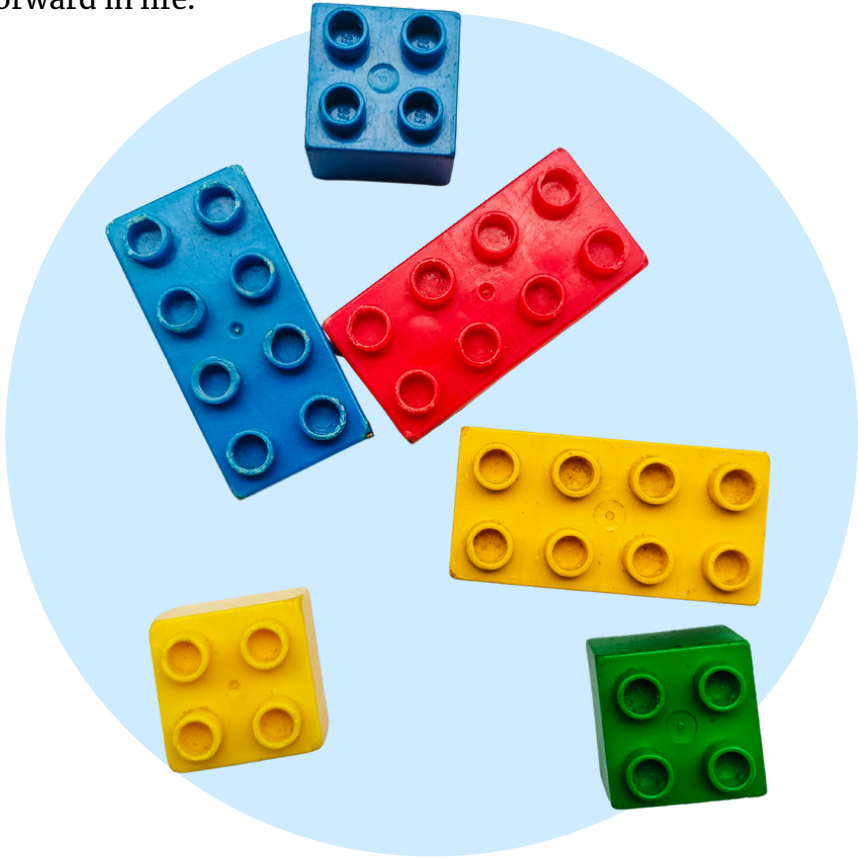
**Q: That's a really solid clear call to our government Joe, equip state agencies to deliver supports and services to children and young people in care when they need them, which might actually help young people move forward in life.**

**Q: What about you Cian?**

Like, yeah, at the end of the day, I do appreciate it is a process like. I mean I classified my adoption journey as a really long Lego set. Piece it together bit by bit. You have to just be prepared of what's coming next. Like at the start it may seem easy, but coming towards the middle and the end it's quite difficult. Do you know? At the end of the day, it will happen, but you just, you need to have a bit more patience and I don't think I had it. That's one thing that I couldn't really get over.

I love Lego and I've loved it since I was young. I love building the sets, but I didn't realise [adoption] would be like this really big set that would take four years!

One thing I would say to the care community, people who are still in care and care leavers, don't be panicking of what's ahead of you. Just think straight in front, you know, don't be worrying about the past. It's gone, done and dusted. Just continue on, moving on straight. And another thing would be like , stick to your guns!



To learn more about EPIC’s National Advocacy Service, visit [epiconline.ie](http://epiconline.ie).



# Feature | The Transformative Power of Fostering

Emily Hanbidge, tells the story of how one child’s life was changed forever.



Emily Hanbidge speaking at the launch of Tusla’s National Fostering Campaign in 2023.

In a world where misconceptions often overshadow realities, the story of children in care and the positive impact foster families can have on their lives is a beacon of hope. Some people seem to think that if you are a child in care, you are damaged goods, which is so not the case. In fact, it's the polar opposite.

Care-experienced kids are brave to a fault; they are seriously resilient and compassionate. Many channel their experiences into careers that involve caring for others, such as teachers, therapists, and social workers, among other professions. Their life journeys, marked by overcoming adversity and building emotional resilience, often lead them to paths where they can offer support and empathy to those in need.

One such story highlights the profound difference a stable, loving family environment can make. Consider the contrasting lives of two sisters. One was fortunate to be placed with a caring foster family, while the other was raised in residential care. The fostered sister thrived, absorbing life skills that would set her up for a successful future. Meanwhile, the sister raised in residential

care faced struggles that underscored the importance of familial support.

The fostered sister excelled in school, participated in extracurricular activities, and developed a strong sense of self-worth and independence. The foster family's nurturing environment provided her with stability, guidance, and love. She learned how to manage her finances, maintain a household, and build healthy relationships. As she grew older, she pursued higher education and ultimately embarked on a career helping others, inspired by the compassion and support she received from her foster family.

In comparison, her sister experienced a different upbringing. Raised in residential care, she didn’t receive the individualised attention and support that a family environment offers. She struggled in school, but managed to complete her Junior Cert. She then dropped out of Youthreach. She moved into a flat after she turned 18, but found it difficult to manage her finances, leading to unpaid bills and an unsustainable living situation. Eventually, she ended up homeless, relying on the kindness of friends and acquaintances for a place to stay.

This profound difference in outcomes highlights the essential role that foster families play in equipping children with the necessary life skills for adulthood. The fostered sister's success story is a testament to the transformative power of a nurturing home.

The benefits of fostering extend beyond immediate care and support. Foster families often become lifelong pillars of stability for children, offering a sense of belonging and continuity even after they reach adulthood. These relationships can provide a network of support that helps foster children navigate life's challenges long after they leave the foster system.

However, the story of the sister raised in residential care serves as a stark reminder of the different experiences and journeys that exist in our care system. It underscores the urgent need for reforms focused on providing all children, regardless of their circumstances, with stable care placements that provide the support and skills they need to achieve the best outcomes. While residential care placements are needed, they cannot replicate a family environment that prepares a child for the complexities of adult life.

Foster families, therefore, are not just caretakers; they are life-changers. They play a crucial role in shaping the future of children who have faced tremendous adversities.

**“Foster families, therefore, are not just caretakers; they are life-changers.”**

By providing a stable and loving home, foster families help children develop the resilience and skills necessary to build successful and fulfilling lives.

As a society, we must recognise and support the invaluable contributions of foster families. Initiatives that encourage and facilitate fostering can help ensure that more children have the opportunity to experience the transformative power of a loving home. Furthermore, providing resources and training for foster families can enhance their capacity to meet the diverse needs of foster children.

In conclusion, the story of the two sisters serves as a powerful illustration of the difference a foster family can make. Children in care are not damaged goods; they are brave, resilient, and capable of achieving great things with the right support. As a society, we must do our part to ensure no child is left behind and our government must champion the cause of foster families and work towards a future where every child in Ireland has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

Emily Hanbidge is a member of the EPIC Youth Council.







Tusla needs

# foster carers

Tusla Fostering  
In-Person Information Sessions



**Visit:** [fostering.ie](https://fostering.ie)  
**Freephone:** 1800 226 771  
**Email:** [tusla.fostering@tusla.ie](mailto:tusla.fostering@tusla.ie)

They can invest their energy into recovering from the experiences that meant that they needed to come into foster care.

Right now, in every part of Ireland there is a need for foster carers. Children come into care from every socio-economic group, across religions and cultures, across rural and urban communities throughout our country. Every child deserves the chance to live in a home within their own community.

In Tusla, our focus is to support foster carers and encourage people to consider becoming a carer for a child who is unable to remain at home. We do this through a spectrum of supports for fostering families. We collaborate closely with stakeholders and colleagues to innovate and advocate for children and families in the foster care system.

## Feature | Fostering care in our communities

Jacqui Smyth, Tusla’s National Lead for Foster Care, on the importance of a local, nurturing environment



Care Day is a celebration of children and young people with care experience – a recognition of their strength, resilience, and contributions. It also prompts us to reflect on how we can best meet the needs of children and young people in care and promote their best interests; striving to support them in achieving their potential. The provision of high-quality foster care is one way of achieving this.

Our public representatives understand their constituencies, their localities and the identity that comes with living in a particular place. Similarly, children and young people grow and develop in the context of the relationships that surround them and the community in which they live.

When children are able to stay

in their own communities and stay within a family, it means that they can grow up in a community they know and remain an integral part of it.

Recently, I attended a children’s sports event, where excited children jumped up and down waiting for the game to start, and nervous children hid behind the adults who brought them. As I watched children brighten up at the sight of familiar coaches and suddenly find the courage to join in the game it brought home to me the importance of community and positive adult relationships in a child’s life.

Foster care is centered around providing care to children in a family, in the context of a warm, reciprocal, safe relationship with a caring adult. For children who find themselves having to go into

foster care, the importance of maintaining community connections and familiar faces takes on a whole new meaning. In a time of incredible challenge, often against a background of difficulty, the comfort and sense of safety that familiarity brings cannot be underestimated.

**“The comfort and sense of safety that familiarity brings cannot be underestimated.”**

When the entire world is changing around you, being able to return to your own school, community, or activities can give a child assurance that not everything in the world has changed. Staying within your own culture and language provides consistency which can be a huge comfort and give an important sense of connectedness in a time when a child might feel alone.

In this way a child does not have to invest their limited energy into establishing entirely new relationships and figuring out a new world.

June is Tusla Fostering Awareness month, and we will be encouraging people across the country from every walk of life to think about whether foster care is something they could do.

We will also be reaching out to our colleagues, stakeholders, and public representatives to support us and open up their networks to help spread the word about the importance of foster care and the need for foster carers.

Tusla welcomes applicants and enquiries from all backgrounds, from people of different religions ethnicities and cultures from the LGBTQ+ community from all socio-economic backgrounds. It is really important that the pool of available foster carers is as diverse and unique as possible because the needs of every child differ.

Fostering is all about creating a nurturing environment... a sense of community in the home. Our public representatives are the voices of our communities, and they can be the voices for care in those communities, whether that be foster care, social care or aftercare – because a more care-centred world is good for us all, whatever community we’re in.

For more information, visit [fostering.ie](https://fostering.ie)



# Opinion | Action

## Needed on Care-Leaver Homelessness

Róisín Webb

Research and Policy Manager with EPIC, Empowering People in Care



Data from EPIC’s National Advocacy Service reveals a concerning rise in the number of young people seeking support for homelessness. In 2022, our data showed that homelessness cases had doubled to 48 compared to the previous year, and this troubling trend continued into 2023, when cases increased by 10% to 68 young people.

Care leavers in Ireland can face significant challenges as they transition to adulthood and independent living, particularly due to the ongoing housing crisis. The lack of sufficient housing options often leaves these young people at risk of homelessness, as many have limited family or community support to fall back on.

The Government has recognised the vulnerability of this group in the Youth Homelessness Strategy 2023–2025, which identifies care leavers as a priority group due to their higher risk of homelessness. However, the test of a government is not its commitments but its delivery.

The implementation of commitments in the Youth Homelessness Strategy will be critical in preventing homelessness. Delivering for

care experienced young people will only be successful if there is interagency collaboration.

EPIC has long advocated for a duty of care across all relevant state agencies when the state is acting in loco parentis, particularly in relation to children in care and care leavers. This should include a detailed strategy and commitments across government departments to ensure cross-agency implementation plans to allow collaboration to happen in a sustainable way.

Unfortunately, we have observed that this responsibility is often left solely with the Department of Children, Equality, and Disability and Tusla, while other bodies with the capacity and statutory obligation to contribute to this duty fail to do so. As a result, care leavers can be left without access to vital services and supports, leading to negative outcomes in their transition to independent living.

### Existing supports and gaps

It is important to highlight that there are programmes on which this government can

build. One such programme showing promise is the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) for Care Leavers. This initiative provides funding to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to acquire properties for young people leaving care. The scheme, funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, enables collaboration between AHBs, Tusla, and local authorities to secure housing for care leavers at risk of homelessness.

A recent review of the CAS for Care Leavers by University College Dublin confirmed the programme’s success in addressing housing needs. The review emphasised the importance of expanding the CAS scheme to meet future demand. Planning for this expansion and the benefits of doing so are clear from the recent Review and it is a key priority for EPIC to see this happen. Fewer than 1,000 young people leave care annually and only a fraction requiring housing, which makes the issue manageable with adequate planning and resources.

### Barriers to support

EPIC have highlighted issues including waiting lists for aftercare supports, high caseloads for aftercare workers, and insufficient housing options. Addressing these barriers will require ongoing collaboration between government agencies, local authorities, and advocacy organisations.

While there are areas of promise there are also long running issues that must be addressed. We know the benefit of aftercare services for care leavers but also the reality that many face barriers to accessing these services due to the current eligibility criteria.

Additionally, aftercare services typically end when a young person turns 21, unless they are engaged in education or training. This limited timeframe can leave care leavers without support during a critical period of transition to adulthood.

EPIC has called for the revision

of current eligibility criteria to ensure all care leavers in need of assistance can access support. Central to this is the importance of developing more transitional and long-term housing options for care-experienced young people.

The inadequacies of interagency cooperation have been well-documented in research and reports, including from the Ombudsman for Children’s Office, the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection and the Child Law Project. Without a whole of Government approach with detailed solutions to ensure inter-agency cooperation, children and young people will continue to face significant barriers in accessing the support they need.

### Government commitments

With focused action and sustained investment, this government can live up to its commitments, fully implement the Youth Homelessness Strategy, and ensure that no young person leaving care is left without the support they need. Achieving this will require the prioritisation of children in care and interagency collaboration that reflects that priority. This means ensuring that all relevant bodies – across housing, health, social services, and education – work together seamlessly to provide the comprehensive support that care leavers urgently need. This should include detailed commitments across Government Departments to ensure cross-agency implementation plans with clear, time-bound actions to ensure this happens in a sustainable way.

While the scale of the issue is limited, its impact on individuals is significant, and targeted interventions can make a measurable difference. Only through clear, coordinated action across agencies can we support care-experienced youth in their transition to a successful, empowered adulthood, where they have the opportunities, resources and support needed to thrive.



# Views | Letters to the Editor

Do you have something to say? Write to us: [communications@epiconline.ie](mailto:communications@epiconline.ie)

Dear Editor,

I am writing to commend the initiative by the EPIC Youth Council in creating resources to support LGBTQI+ children and young people in care. The development of these resources is a significant step towards addressing the unique challenges faced by LGBTQI+ youth in the care system.

They highlight the potential difficulties that these young people may encounter, such as the fear of being outed and the impact it can have on their mental health and relationships. By raising awareness and providing practical support, these materials aim to make the ‘coming out’ process less daunting for LGBTQI+ children and young people in care settings.

It is particularly noteworthy that these resources were developed with direct input from care-experienced young people themselves. This approach ensures that the content is relevant and reflective of their lived experiences, making it more impactful and authentic.

The collaboration between EPIC and Belong To is an excellent example of how organisations can work together to create meaningful change.

I hope that these resources will be widely disseminated and utilised by professionals working with care-experienced LGBTQI+ young people. It is crucial that we continue to support and empower them, ensuring that they feel valued, respected, and heard.

Sincerely,

Milly Reid

To the Editor,

I am writing to bring attention to “Headphones, Odd Shoes & A Second Chance at Life,” published by EPIC, Empowering People in Care. This insightful study explores the experiences of children in care and care-leavers with disabilities, shedding light on both the positive and challenging aspects of their journeys.

The report highlights the profound impact that supportive individuals can have on the lives of these young people. Many participants shared stories of carers, professionals, and peers who provided essential support, demonstrating how crucial human connections are in transforming their care experience.

However, the study also reveals significant challenges faced by these children and young people. Stigma, insufficient awareness of disabilities, and obstacles in accessing appropriate accommodation were common themes. Participants spoke of the difficulties in securing timely and effective supports, often encountering delays and systemic barriers.

One of the most concerning findings is the limited awareness among participants of their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This lack of knowledge underscores the need for better education and advocacy to ensure that these young people can fully exercise their rights.

The report concludes with several recommendations, including the need for better coordination between state agencies and government



departments and increased awareness of “invisible” disabilities.

I urge policymakers and practitioners to take the findings in this report seriously and to implement the recommended actions. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all children and young people in care.

Sincerely,

Zoe Hanbidge

Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the inadequate legislative framework for addressing the needs of unaccompanied minors in Ireland, as highlighted in the recent report by the Child Law Project.

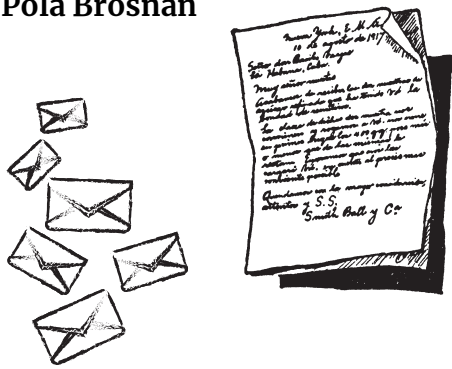
The Child Care Act 1991 does not specifically reference unaccompanied or separated minors, leaving Tusla with limited and inconsistent options for providing care. In practice, these children are accommodated under one of three provisions: section 5 (homeless children), section 4 (voluntary care agreements), or sections 13, 17, and 18 (judicial care orders). Each provision carries different rights and obligations, leading to varying levels of care and oversight. Alarminglly, the 2023 General Scheme of the Child Care Act fails to address this gap, leaving a vulnerable cohort without clear and consistent protections.

The lack of clarity in the law has tangible consequences. For example, the inability to provide aftercare for young people not formally "in care" highlights a systemic shortcoming. These children and young people, who have already endured immense hardship, deserve a cohesive and robust framework that ensures their safety, well-being, and access to necessary services.

I urge policymakers to prioritise amending the Child Care Act to explicitly address the needs of unaccompanied minors and provide clear guidelines for their care. Ireland must uphold its responsibility to protect these vulnerable children and young people and ensure they are not left to fall through the cracks.

Sincerely,

Pola Brosnan



Get in touch with EPIC!

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Phone: 01 872 7661

[www.epiconline.ie](http://www.epiconline.ie)



# Poetry | The Little Bold Twig on the Great Tree

One of the smallest twigs on Society’s Great Tree of Acknowledgement

Insignificance: the apparent corruption on this small twig

Yet, little do nearby branches realise it’s ‘invisible’ botJoe line to vulnerable souls -  
Like I, youthly troubled; rife roaring in identity crisis, statistically unfortunate in academics.

Resilient in Hope to abound and to expound the status quo

On this little twig came with pastly difficulties... precedently foretold.

Fadó Fadó one may say, yet this tiny twig, still heartaching for merit & overdue growth -  
Yearning a share of resources from the Roots of Society’s Great Tree of Acknowledgement

small Twig. BIG Impacter. Positive Society-Reverberator.

Life Changer. ‘Life Saver’. All Life-embracer.

Unconditional-type DNA. Hope-embodied

Heros. Exclusivity Thumper.

Invisible Acknowledging. Brightest Blossomer.

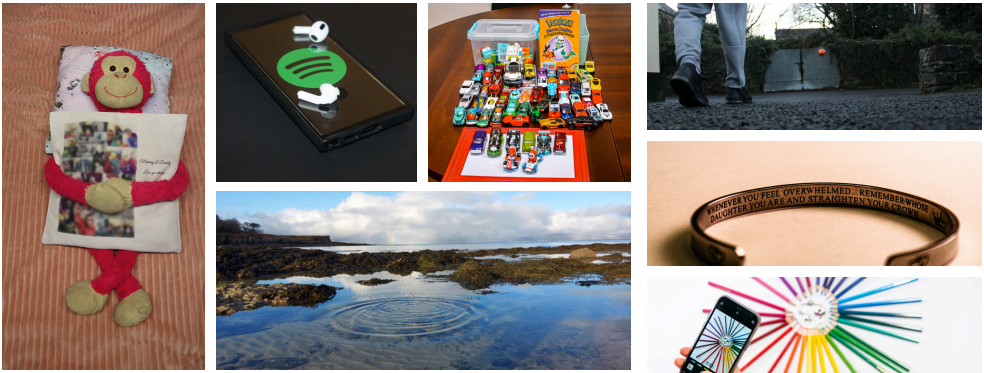
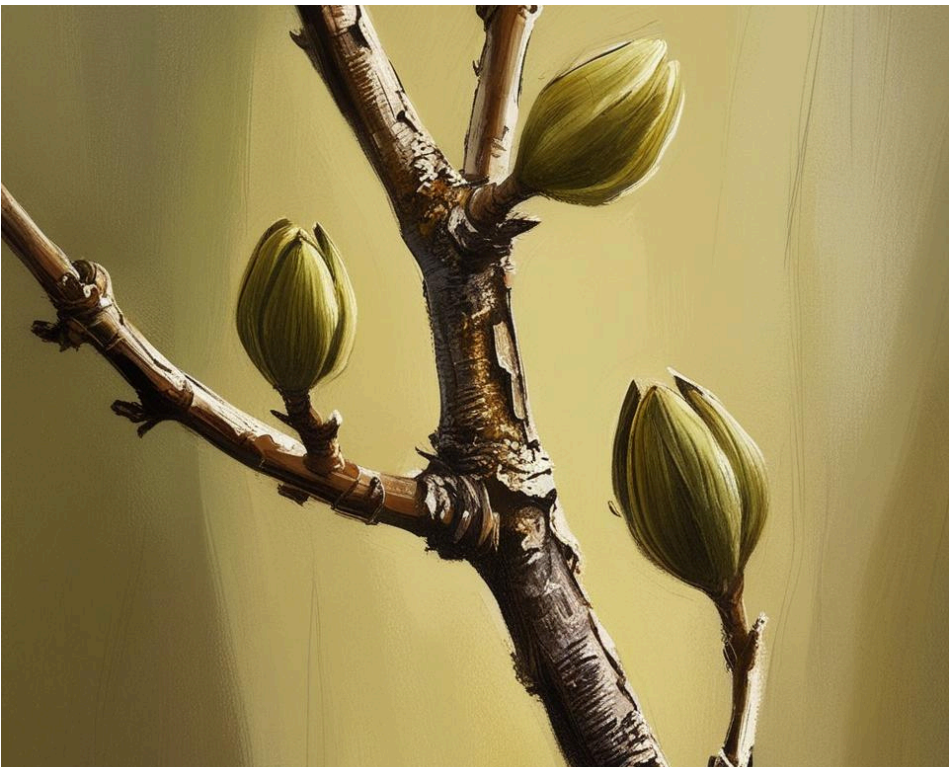
Love: Primary-Feuler

Watering such small Imbued twigs on Society’s Great Tree of Acknowledgement is like -  
nurturing the most Wholesome Commitment of your life, your community and your society.

Impatiently patiently awaiting your arrival,

FARUMBO

- Josh Farrell



## Embrace Our Stories



## Review | Embrace Our Stories Exhibition

The Embrace Our Stories exhibition, now with 17 new photographs and narratives by children and young people in Mayo, offers an intimate and moving glimpse into the lives of care-experienced youth in Ireland. Hosted at the Linenhall Arts Centre in Castlebar, the young photographers invite visitors to engage with the lived experiences of children in care and young care-leavers.

The everyday objects photographed may seem ordinary, but they hold personal significance for the children and young people who chose to photograph them. Each photograph tells a powerful story. A football represents fond childhood memories, a ring symbolises a family bond, while a pink monkey and a photo cushion provide comfort and familiarity.

The exhibition also explores identity and culture, including the significance of hair and St Philomena’s Cord in Traveller heritage or handmade wool bracelets that celebrate friendship and new traditions. Others focus on personal

passions - music as a means of concentration, volleyball as a confidence booster and puzzles that spark curiosity. This collection offers a unique insight into what matters to the young photographers. From the night light that brings a sense of security to the taste of Cidona evoking happy memories, through images they share their perspectives and experiences, inviting visitors to see the world through their eyes.

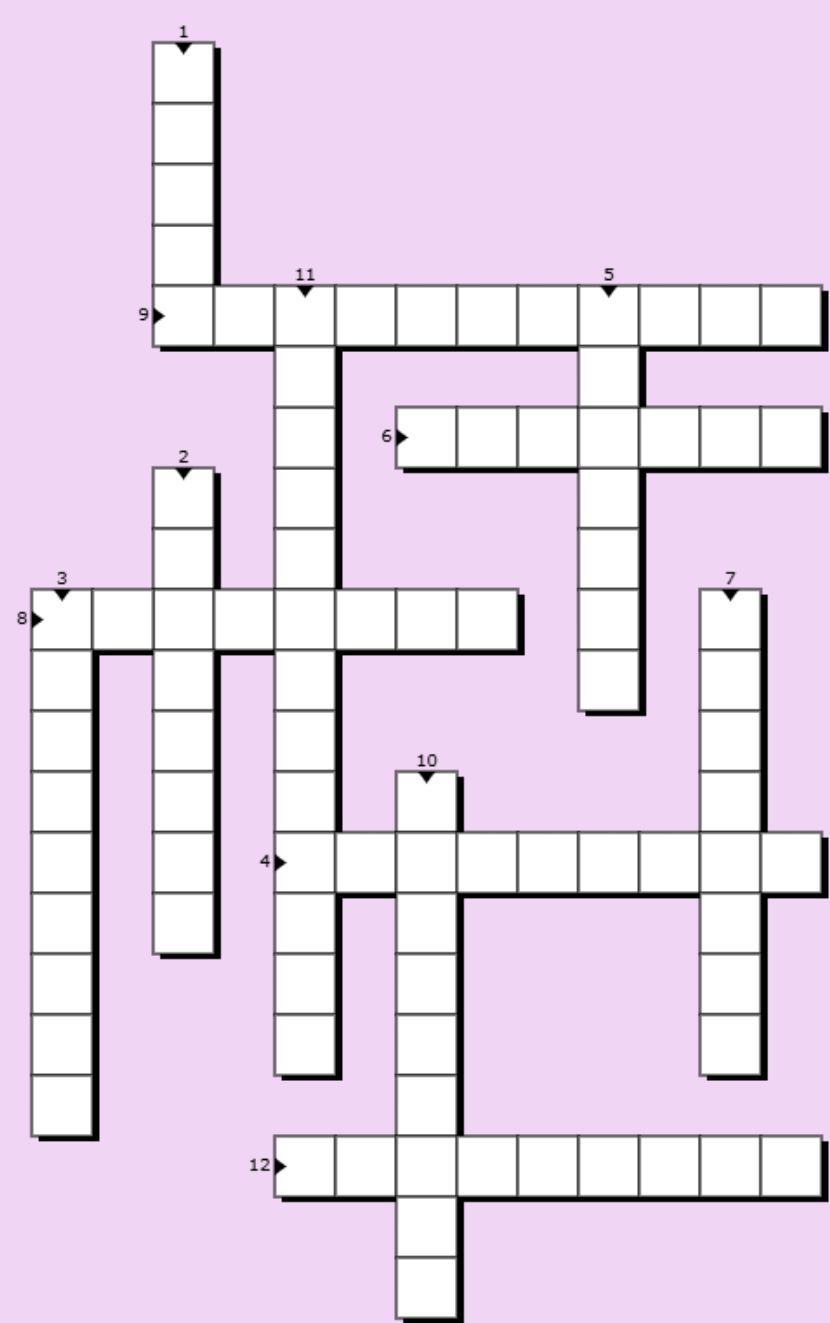
Embrace Our Stories is an honest and deeply personal exhibition that encourages insight and understanding. It highlights both the individuality of each young person and the shared experiences that connect us all.

The exhibition is on display at the Linenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar, Co. Mayo, from 18th February to 28th March 2025.

Embrace Our Stories is also on display in the ATU Galway and Mary Immaculate College Limerick as part of their Care Day celebrations.



# Crossword



## Clues

- 1. The UNCRC says every child has the right to express this and be heard.
- 2. A person who supports children in care and young care-leavers
- 3. After leaving care, young people may need this kind of plan
- 4. EPIC works with young people up to this age
- 5. EPIC Advocates may attend one of these with you or on your behalf
- 6. A special day to celebrate children in care and care-leavers
- 7. Different people may have different ones, but all deserve to be heard.
- 8. Another word for assistance or backing which EPIC Advocates provide
- 9. Giving people confidence and control over their own lives
- 10. EPIC Advocates ensure young people's opinions are taken\_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Taking an active role in decisions that affect you
- 12. A key skill Advocates need to make sure your voice is heard.

# Comic | What is Advocacy?





# Review | The Creative Aftercare Communities Project



A new and exciting initiative, The Creative Aftercare Communities Project, is making waves across Limerick. Launched as a pilot programme, the project is based at Learning Hub Limerick in the heart of the city’s north side and aims to provide young people with care experience the opportunity to explore their creativity in a supportive and inclusive environment. The goal of the programme is not just to nurture artistic skills but also to support the emotional and social wellbeing of participants, helping them find pathways into communities and fostering a sense of belonging and purpose. Coordinated by local community worker and creative professional Cein Daly, the programme ensures each participant receives personalised support to explore their creative interests, working alongside

skilled facilitators and accomplished artistic practitioners from the community to guide them on their creative journey.

The project is an interagency collaboration between Creative Ireland, Tusla, Limerick Children and Young People’s Services Committee (CYPSC), Limerick Arts Office and Learning Hub Limerick. A wider steering group also includes EPIC, the Limerick and Clare Local Creative Youth Partnership, Limerick Youth Service, Limetree | Belltable and Mary Immaculate College Drama and Theatre Department. It is funded primarily through Creative Ireland’s Youth Nurture Fund.

It specifically targets young people between the ages of 17 and 23 who are transitioning from care or are already in aftercare. The programme is designed to support the

young people by guiding them as they identify and engage in creative opportunities that speak to their unique experiences and interests. This tailored approach helps to include those who may be most vulnerable or overlooked by traditional aftercare services, providing them with meaningful avenues for creative expression and community engagement.

For young people leaving the care system, life after care can be challenging and isolating. The absence of a stable support network can lead to feelings of disconnection, making it harder to navigate adult life. The Creative Aftercare Communities Project offers an alternative means of engagement through creativity, which has been proven to improve mental health, build resilience, and foster a sense of belonging. By focusing on young people who may not have access to traditional resources, the programme offers them an opportunity to connect with themselves and others through creative exploration.

The partnership between Creative Ireland and Tusla has been instrumental in providing a structured yet open space for participants to explore a variety of creative disciplines. From visual arts and music to drama, digital media and gardening, the programme encourages young people to express themselves in ways that feel authentic to them. In addition to individual creative projects, the programme also facilitates opportunities for collaboration, allowing participants to connect with peers who share similar backgrounds and experiences.

Learning Hub Limerick, which serves as the main base for the project at present, is more than just a venue – it’s a dynamic community space where participants can access mentorship, learn new skills, and build relationships with other young people. With resources designed to help them grow both personally and professionally, the Learning Hub plays a vital role in providing a safe and welcoming space for creative expression and social connection.

One of the project’s key goals is to build a sense of community and break down social barriers for young people who may feel disconnected from society. By offering opportunities for young people to showcase their work – through art exhibitions, performances, and other creative events – the project helps to build confidence and encourage positive relationships. These shared experiences foster a supportive environment where young people can develop lasting connections and find their place within various communities.

With its innovative approach and focus on empowerment, The Creative Aftercare Communities Project is a step in the right direction for supporting young people in aftercare. As the pilot programme progresses, it is hoped that it will inspire similar initiatives across Ireland, creating a network of creative opportunities that can reach young people nationwide. For more information about the Creative Aftercare Communities Project, contact Cein Daly at [cein@learninghub.ie](mailto:cein@learninghub.ie).





# Political Horoscopes

What does the future hold?

## Capricorn

Norma Foley, Minister for Children, Disability and Equality



Your forward-thinking shaped a brighter future for children in care. A national strategy on alternative care has responded to their needs. You’ve revolutionised the care system, ensuring it is compassionate, empowering, and equipped to provide all the resources needed for the children in its care.

## Taurus

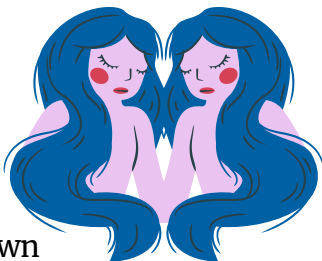
Hildegarde Naughton, Minister of State with responsibility for Disability



Your dedication and drive ensured care-experienced youth with disabilities were heard and they now receive the support they need, guaranteeing no child or young person is left behind. Through your determination and hard work, every young person has a fair chance at a fulfilling future as they have access to all they need to thrive.

## Gemini

Helen McEntee, Minister for Education and Youth



Thanks to your tireless work to break down barriers our schools have become empowering, care-aware spaces where children in care are fully supported to succeed. Your innovative problem-solving has enabled us to gain the knowledge needed to better understand care-experienced students’ journeys through education, paving the way for a brighter, more connected future for young people with care experience.

Leo  
An Taoiseach,  
Micheál Martin



Your leadership transformed the future for care-experienced youth. A fully funded national strategy on alternative care has ended emergency placements, delivered stable care placements, and enhanced supports and services. Thanks to your vision, every child in care has the opportunities, security, and support they need to build the future they deserve.

## Virgo

Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, Minister for Health



Your deep empathy helped create a future where trauma-informed care is universal. Emotional and psychological well-being are prioritised, ensuring that no child carries their pain alone. Through strategic thinking, you helped build a healthcare system that meets the needs of all children - your legacy is lasting change.

## Libra

James Brown, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage



Your sense of fairness transformed housing for young care-leavers. Stable, affordable homes are now guaranteed, and homelessness for care-experienced youth is a thing of the past. Your charm and diplomacy brought agencies together, ensuring no young person leaving care faces housing insecurity.

## Sagittarius


Jack Chambers, Minister for Public Expenditure



By listening to care-experienced voices momentum for bold reforms was fuelled. Your wise investment and strategic spending secured long-term benefits for children in care and young care leavers. This strong investment ensured stability and equal opportunity for vulnerable youth - yielding immeasurable social and economic returns.







Friday 21st  
February  
2025

# Care Day 2025

“Voices from Care,  
Ripples of Change”

**EPIC, Empowering People in Care**, is dedicated to championing the rights of children in care and young care-leavers and works to ensure they are valued, respected, and heard in our society.

EPIC's National Advocacy Service provides support to children and young people in care, as well as care leavers up to the age of 26. This service empowers individuals to have a say in decisions affecting their lives.

EPIC also champions youth engagement and participation through initiatives like this publication, thematic projects, and participative research. These platforms offer young people opportunities to connect, share experiences, and advocate for transformative change within the care system.

EPIC understands the challenges faced by some care-experienced youth and by providing evidence-based insights, the organisation aims to inform national policies and legislation to better meet the needs of the children and young people in care or with experience of care.



A rights-based organisation advocating  
with & for children in care & young  
care-leavers