

National Advocacy Service Report

2024



empowering people in care

National Advocacy Service

✉ info@epiconline.ie

📡 www.epiconline.ie

🕒 Mon- Fri 9am-5pm

☎ 01 872 7661

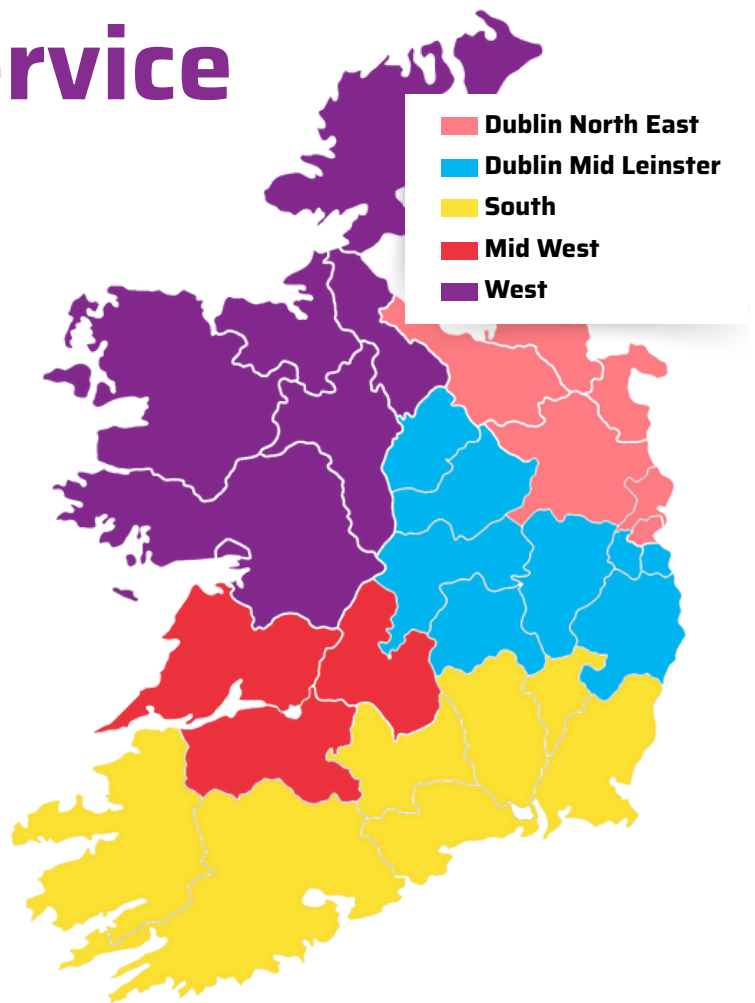
Our Offices

📍 EPIC Dublin
7 Red Cow Lane,
Smithfield, Dublin 7
Co. Dublin, D07 KX52

📍 EPIC Cork
Unit G1 & 2 Northside for
Business Campus, Ballyvolane,
Co. Cork T23 E6TT

📍 EPIC Limerick
Northside Youth Space
Ballynanty Rd, Ballynanty,
Co. Limerick, V94 TPP3

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



At the end of 2024, there were 5,823 children in the care of the state in Ireland, and 2,935 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.

Who we are

EPIC, Empowering People in Care works with children and young people that have experience of the care system, up to the age of 26. We exist because some children and young people need extra help or support arising from their experiences in care.

We are independent, with a single purpose and a clear mandate. We are child-focused and build trusted relationships with care-experienced children and young people, whose lived experience informs our advocacy, policy, and research.

Our team works with care-experienced children and young people across Ireland to make sure their voices are central to decisions that affect their lives. We create safe spaces for children and young people to come together to share their experiences and work on projects and campaigns that are important to them.



All of EPIC's work is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 12, which provides for the right to be heard and to participate in decision making.

Strategic Goal No. 1



Providing quality, effective and independent rights-based advocacy directly to care experienced children and young people up to age 26.

Taken from EPIC's Strategic Plan 2022-2027

Objectives

- 1.1** Ensure more care-experienced children and young people know about EPIC's National Advocacy Service and their rights while in care or aftercare.
- 1.2** Build the case for independent advocacy to be enshrined in law.
- 1.3** Meet the needs of care-experienced children and young people through enhanced partnerships.
- 1.4** Deliver a best-in-class direct advocacy model informed by the experience of children and young people.

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.



Acknowledgements

The management team and staff of EPIC thank Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for funding this service, as well as all those who have supported EPIC to deliver the service throughout 2024. We would also like to thank the Department of Children, Disability and Equality for their collaboration and engagement. Our project partnership with Community Law and Mediation (CLM) continued in 2024, delivering free legal advice clinics to children and young people with care experience. The CLM-EPIC partnership continues with support from, and in collaboration with, Tusla's Office of Legal Services.

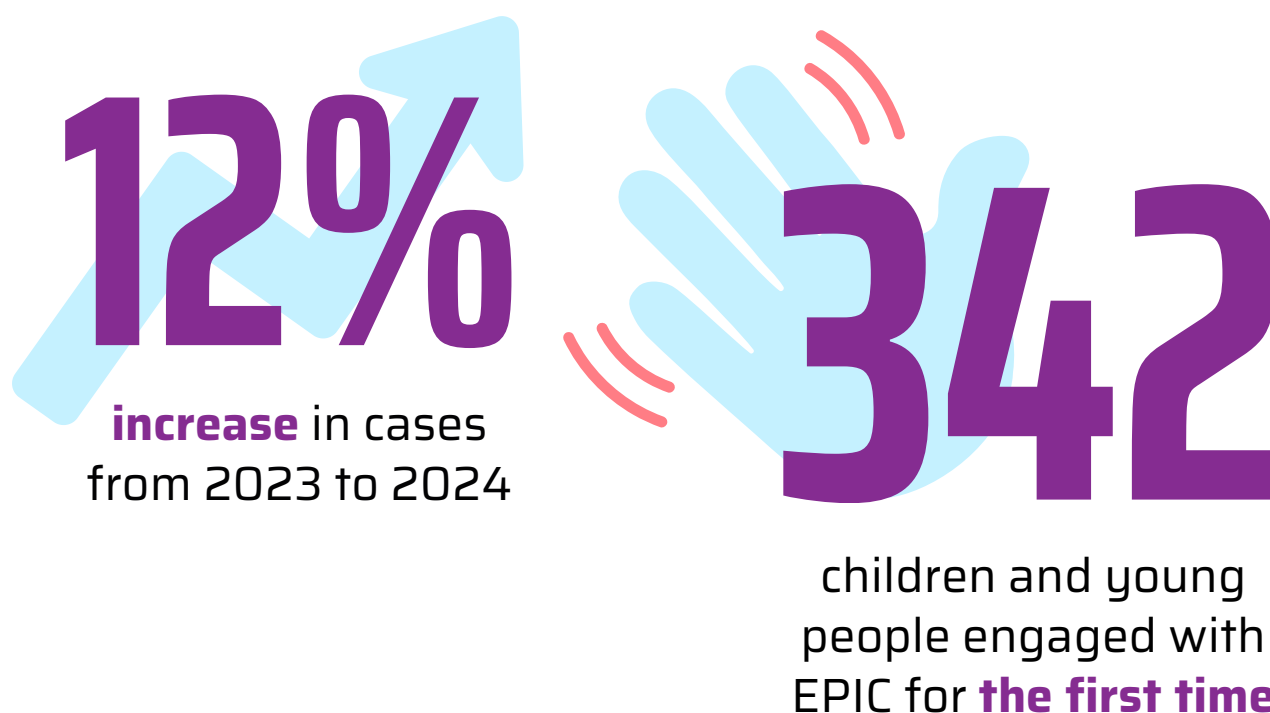
The strength of our National Advocacy Service is rooted in the partnerships we build with individuals, organisations, and services across both the statutory and voluntary sectors. We value the continued commitment of professionals who work alongside us to uphold the rights and wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people.

Most importantly, we wish to thank the children and young people who took part in our service throughout 2024. Their perspectives, experiences, and determination have shaped the work described in this report and continue to influence how we develop and deliver our support.

National Advocacy Service Snapshot



Advocacy Caseload 2020 - 2024



Geographical spread by case load

Dublin North-East

21%

Dublin Mid-Leinster

45%

South

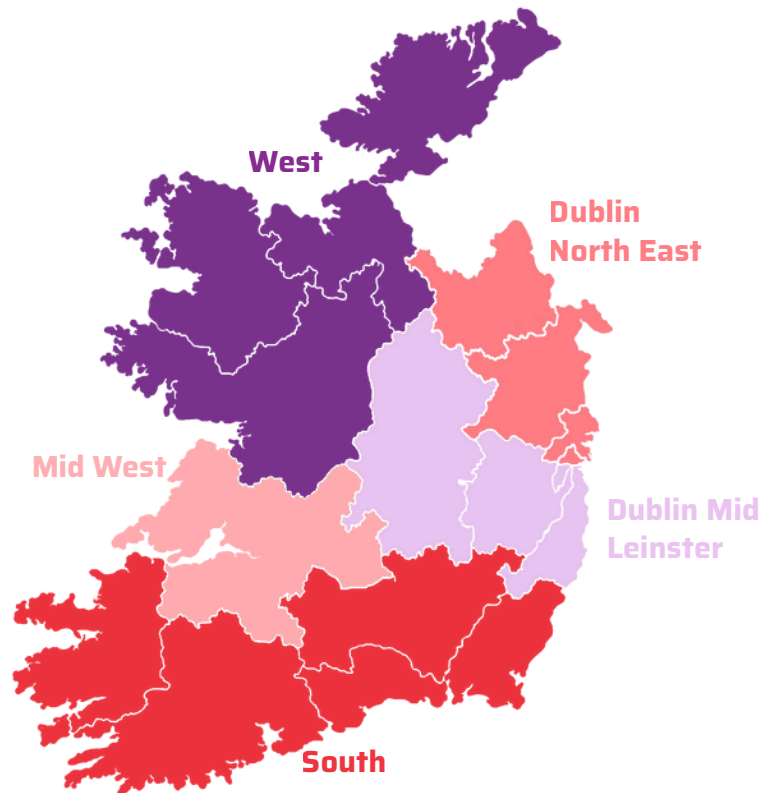
19%

West

8%

Mid West

7%



Advocacy Team in 2024



Report Introduction

Each year, approximately 6,000 children and young people are in the care of Tusla. They may live with extended family, foster carers, in children's residential care homes, or in special care placements. EPIC's National Advocacy Service works directly with care-experienced children and young people in Ireland to ensure their views and concerns are heard and taken seriously. Advocates work to empower them to speak for themselves, resolve issues and challenges they experience, and help them access the supports and services they need during childhood and the transition to adulthood.

The data in this report, along with the experiences of the children and young people we work with, play a pivotal role in shaping EPIC's work across policy and youth participation. Through our casework, we identify trends that guide the changes we seek across multiple government departments, including in relation to health, housing, education, and disability services.

In 2024, twelve Advocacy Officers and two Advocacy Service Managers supported 648 children and young people through direct independent advocacy across Ireland. Of these, 342 engaged with EPIC for the first time in 2024. A new pilot project was also launched, placing two advocates to work specifically with young people living in Special Emergency Arrangements (SEAs) in the Dublin North East and Dublin Mid Leinster regions.

Children in care and young care-leavers often have to navigate complex systems and processes, as well as a range of professionals and state agencies that most adults would find challenging. The advocacy provided in 2024 ranged from rights-based information and advice to practical support, such as working with other professionals to ensure the best outcomes for the child. Some cases required a higher level of engagement, where an advocate attended a Child in Care Review or court alongside a child or young person.

The need for advocacy continued to rise in 2024, with 975 cases recorded - the highest number since EPIC was established. Through this work, EPIC has seen the real-life impact of a lack of appropriate placements, frequent changes in

social work departments, and social worker shortages. Advocates also witness the effects of lengthy waiting times for assessments, related services, and legal proceedings.

The main presenting issues for children in care included complaints, difficulties with their current placement, access to therapeutic services, and support with aftercare planning. For care-experienced young people (aged 18 and over), there were significant numbers of cases relating to accommodation and homelessness, access to legal support, and financial issues.

For the first time, complaints emerged as a main presenting issue. The majority of these were related to Special Emergency Arrangements (SEAs), an unregulated placement type introduced by Tusla when an immediate placement is required and there is a lack of appropriate regulated options. In 2024, Tusla funded an additional one and a half time advocates specifically to visit young people living in SEAs in the Dublin North East and Dublin Mid Leinster regions. This role has been particularly important in supporting young people who may experience instability and uncertainty in these placements.

Residential care continued to be the most common source of referrals. During 2024, 220 young people living in residential care engaged with our advocacy team – representing almost half of all children and young people in residential care nationally (457 at year's end). This high referral rate reflects both the awareness among staff of the value of independent advocacy and the need for support among children and young people living in residential settings. In addition to residential care, our advocates worked with young people across a range of living situations, including 90 in foster care, 68 experiencing homelessness, and 9 in special care.

Many of the issues that EPIC's Advocacy Service help children and young people to address are reflective of broader challenges in Irish society, such as housing and homelessness, the rising cost of living, and pressure on the international protection system.

There was also a marked increase in separated children seeking international protection working with EPIC advocates, as well as young people who have left care with their international protection application still pending. One hundred children and young people from this cohort sought advocacy support from EPIC in 2024 – an increase of 67% from 2023. This represents a significant rise, with this group making up almost 10% of all advocacy cases in 2024, compared with just 3% in 2023.

EPIC is increasingly concerned about the difficulties these children and young people face in navigating a complex set of issues specific to their migration status. For separated children who arrived in Ireland after their 17th birthday, many do not qualify for aftercare and struggle to find support with accommodation, education, and other essential needs.

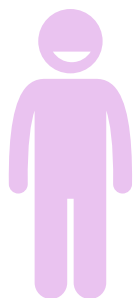
EPIC believes that every care-experienced child and young person should have access to independent, professional advocacy. Advocacy plays a vital role in helping them express their wishes and feelings, and take an active role in decisions about their lives. Children and young people who have used advocacy services often tell us how valuable this support has been, particularly at times when plans were being made about their care or access to supports and services. Through our advocacy work, EPIC also supports statutory authorities in fulfilling their duties as corporate parents, improving both children's experiences within the care system and their outcomes as they move into adulthood.

Children and Young People



41

Under 12



215

12-17yrs



392

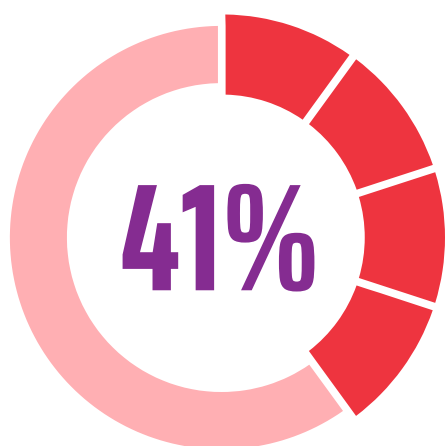
18yrs+



individual children and young people assessed as having an **additional need**



separated children seeking international protection sought support







of requests for advocacy were made by **children and young people**

38

young people (18+) who came to Ireland as separated children sought support

Main Presenting Issues

-  **Complaint**
-  **Placement**
-  **Access to services**
-  **Aftercare plan**

For children and young people **under 18**

-  **Accommodation**
-  **Legal**
-  **Access to services**
-  **Financial**

For young people **over 18**

Main Presenting Issues

Analysis: Children | U18

This analysis focuses on the four main presenting issues for children aged under 18 who engaged with EPIC's Advocacy Service in 2024: complaints, placements, access to services and aftercare planning. While some of these issues reflect longstanding systemic challenges, others are closely linked to recent developments in the care landscape, in particular the use of Special Emergency Arrangements (SEAs).

Complaints

For the first time, complaints emerged as a main presenting issue for children in care. In previous years, complaints have accounted for a small proportion of cases, and in 2024, they were associated with children living in SEAs. These placements are used by Tusla as emergency settings where a child is accommodated in a non-statutory or non-procured placement such as a hotel, B&B, or privately leased property, amongst other options. SEAs are also used for separated children seeking international protection in circumstances where Tusla has stated it is unable to increase placement capacity in line with increased demand.

In 2024, Tusla funded one full-time and one half-time EPIC advocate specifically to visit young people in SEAs in the Dublin North East and Dublin Mid-Leinster regions as a bespoke pilot project. The complaints raised by children and young people in SEAs were primarily about the placements themselves: their temporary nature, a lack of clarity about what comes next, limited information, and overall, the uncertainty this creates for them. The rise in complaints, alongside being an indicator of the kind of pressure that exists across the sector currently, underscores the importance of young people being supported and empowered to express their views within that context of instability and uncertainty.

Main Presenting Issues Analysis: Children | U18

EPIC is concerned about the continued use of SEAs and the fact that too many children are spending longer periods of time in SEAs. While EPIC's pilot project has been extended, it is limited to the Dublin and Leinster regions and does not include SEAs for separated children seeking international protection. The use of these placements was initially intended as a short-term emergency response where Tusla had to ensure an immediate place of safety for a child while an appropriate regulated placement was secured. EPIC is also concerned that SEAs are unregulated, not subject to the same standards as registered placements and not subject to independent inspections by HIQA. It is EPIC's view that children in all SEAs should have ongoing access to independent advocacy, and that every residential setting for children should be brought under the legal remit of HIQA.

Placements

Placements remained the second most common presenting issue, reflecting in part the ongoing crisis in fostering. Tusla's own data shows a steady decline in foster placements in recent years: 91.1% in 2021, 90.2% in 2022, 89.7% in 2023, and 88.6% in 2024. This reduction has increased the number of children placed in residential care and SEAs. Advocates reported that instability and frequent placement changes continue to be a source of anxiety for children, who often feel disconnected from decision-making processes when placements break down, or they are moved without explanation. Many children contact EPIC Advocates for advice and support when they feel their placements do not meet their needs, highlighting the ongoing importance of independent advocacy in helping children to navigate these challenges.

Access to Services

Access to services continues to be a persistent and multifaceted challenge. The majority of cases involve issues related to a lack of effective communication and

Main Presenting Issues Analysis: Children | U18

planning, between stakeholders and young people, regarding appropriate access to mental health and disability services. The Joint Protocol for Interagency Collaboration between the Health Service Executive and Tusla was reviewed and updated in 2020 to improve collaboration and integration of services for children and young people who require the intervention and support of both agencies, with a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed. This is particularly relevant for the timely access to appropriate mental health and disability assessments and interventions for children under the care of Tusla. However, there are still ongoing problems with the implementation of the protocol. Young people frequently encounter delays in assessments, difficulties in referral pathways, and barriers accessing therapeutic or specialist support. Pathways of transition to appropriate adult services are often unclear and access to therapeutic supports can lapse when a child moves placement or county.

Some of EPIC's advocacy cases reflect gaps in services and resources. There is insufficient availability of home-share, residential, and respite options for young people approaching 18. Disability case management is limited, and long-term planning is inconsistent. Late initiation of planning means services frequently react to crises rather than preventing them. In some areas, coordination is strong; elsewhere, agencies withdraw once the HSE becomes involved, sometimes leaving young people without important additional supports to which they are entitled.

In 2024, a new dimension to the work emerged with children seeking international protection. Advocates supported increasing numbers of young people navigating the international protection system, often facing uncertainty regarding their status and appropriate access to services tailored to their needs. EPIC is increasingly concerned about the difficulties these children and young people experience, navigating a distinct and complex array of issues.

These cases highlight the importance of ensuring that all children can access

Main Presenting Issues Analysis: Children | U18

advocacy, protection, and support as well as the need for stronger inter-agency responses to the specific and complex needs of separated children, particularly in relation to planning for when they turn 18.

Aftercare Planning

Aftercare planning was the fourth most frequent presenting issue among children under 18. Under the Child Care Act 1991, Tusla should engage with eligible young people from age 16 and complete a fully prepared aftercare plan six months before their 18th birthday. However, EPIC has observed that these timelines are sometimes unmet, often due to a lack of aftercare staff and resources.

Advocates are increasingly responding to enquiries from young people seeking to ensure their aftercare plans are underway, comprehensive and completed in a timely manner. These concerns mirror those raised by over 18's regarding access to suitable accommodation, education and employment opportunities. Ensuring timely aftercare planning is essential to supporting a young person transition to independence.



Case Study: Ryan

Main Presenting Issue: Complaint



Background

Ryan is a young person living in a Special Emergency Arrangement (SEA). During a monthly advocacy visit, he shared with his EPIC Advocate that he had been receiving €30 in weekly pocket money for the past two years. Ryan explained that, with the rising cost of living, this amount no longer met his basic needs. To support his point, Ryan had independently researched price increases over time, comparing the cost of everyday items such as toiletries, snacks, and transport fares from previous years to current prices.



Key Actions taken by Ryan's Advocate

With support from his advocate, Ryan drafted a letter of complaint to his social worker outlining his concerns. The letter included examples from his research, such as the increase in the cost of a bus fare from €2.10 to €2.60 and the price of lunch rising from €4.50 to €6.00. Ryan requested a review of his pocket money to reflect these changes and ensure he could manage his weekly expenses more effectively.



Outcome

Ryan's social worker reviewed the complaint and approved an increase in his weekly pocket money from €30 to €40. Ryan felt empowered by the process and was pleased that his voice had been heard and acted upon.

Case Study: Niamh

Main Presenting Issue: Placement



Background

Niamh, aged 15, is living in a special care placement. She first met her advocate through EPIC's monthly onsite visiting advocacy service, which offers young people the chance to meet with an advocate if they wish. Niamh explained that she was unhappy with the level of freedom she had. She wanted the opportunity to visit the nearby town to take part in a local football team. She also felt her bedtime was too early, and that having her door locked at night made her feel unsafe.



Key Actions taken by Niamh's Advocate

At their first meeting, Niamh's advocate explained the role of advocacy and the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Niamh chose to work with the advocate and shared her concerns about access to the football team in town, her bedtime, and the locking of her door.

With Niamh's consent, the advocate contacted her social worker, Guardian ad Litem, and case manager ahead of her upcoming Child in Care Review meeting to ensure her views would be considered. After the review, the case manager reported back that Niamh's concerns had been raised, though not all were resolved to her satisfaction.

Although initially reluctant to meet again, Niamh later chose to re-engage with the advocate to discuss the outcome.

Case Study: Niamh

Main Presenting Issue: Placement



Outcome

Niamh was given permission to participate as part of the football team in the local town, subject to a risk assessment. It was also agreed that her bedroom would no longer be locked at night. While the special care centre maintained its age-based policy on bedtimes, Niamh's was extended by ten minutes, with a further extension agreed when she turns 16.

Niamh was disappointed with the decision on her bedtime but said she understood the reasoning. She expressed satisfaction that her views were listened to and continues to engage with her advocate.

Case Study: Aoife

Main Presenting Issue: Access to Services



Background

Aoife is a 17-year-old student currently in fifth year of secondary school. She lives in a residential care placement. Aoife presented as socially isolated and struggling with her mental health, particularly anxiety.

Aoife had worked with EPIC in the past, but lost contact due to a change in social worker. When the advocate met Aoife, she identified two key areas where she needed support: access to consistent counselling and more opportunities to engage socially with peers.



Key Actions taken by Aoife's Advocate

The advocate worked to re-establish contact with Aoife and build relationships with the professionals who support her. This took a significant amount of time, due to a change in social worker and contact information for Aoife.

The advocate visited Aoife in her residential placement. Aoife discussed her concerns and told her Advocate that she would like to access consistent counselling support for her mental health. She also said that she was lonely and would like to make more friends.

Aoife's advocate communicated her needs to her wider team, advocating for consistent counselling and social engagement opportunities.

The advocate made a referral to EPIC's Youth Engagement Programme (YEP) for

Case Study: Aoife

Main Presenting Issue: Access to Services

Aoife to join EPIC's Care Community. This would give Aoife the opportunity to meet other care-experienced young people and take part in social activities.

The advocate continued to liaise with the care team to ensure Aoife's desire for regular counselling was prioritised and addressed.



Outcome

Aoife is now receiving counselling on a regular basis, which has helped her manage her anxiety more effectively. She has also begun engaging with YEP, offering her a chance to build peer connections and reduce her sense of isolation. Aoife has become an important member of the EPIC Care Community, and has encouraged other care-experienced young people to join.

Case Study: Aisling

Main Presenting Issue: Aftercare Planning



Background

Aisling was living in foster care and experiencing significant anxiety, which affected her education and her ability to engage with professionals. At 17, she recognised that building trust with new people was difficult for her. She asked to be allocated an aftercare worker early, so she would have time to establish a relationship before turning 18.



Key Actions taken by Aisling's Advocate

Aisling met with her advocate and gave consent for them to contact the relevant professionals. The advocate wrote to the aftercare manager, outlining Aisling's mental health needs, her limited social supports, and her wish to begin aftercare planning early. The request was then brought to the local aftercare planning committee for discussion.



Outcome

Within two weeks, Aisling was allocated an aftercare worker. A meeting was arranged to allow them to begin building a relationship ahead of her transition from care. Aisling expressed relief at the decision and felt reassured that she would have consistent support as she prepared for adulthood. She continues to engage with EPIC's Advocacy Service while planning for her future.

Main Presenting Issues

Analysis: Young People | 18+

The top main presenting issues for young people aged 18-26 who engaged with EPIC's Advocacy Service in 2024 were: accommodation, legal, access to services and financial issues. This highlights both the ongoing structural inequalities experienced by care-leavers and the broader pressures of the current housing and cost-of-living crises.

EPIC reports an increase in referrals during 2024 involving young people who arrived in Ireland as separated children seeking international protection and who have since turned 18. Many of these young people do not meet the criteria for aftercare support, and may have difficulty accessing education, accommodation, and appropriate health or therapeutic services. This group is particularly vulnerable to exploitation and harm, especially in situations where ineffective or inappropriate support services are in place. EPIC continues to receive frequent requests from these young people for assistance with immigration and other legal matters, as well as with accessing education and housing supports.

Accommodation

Accommodation remained the most frequent presenting issue for young people in 2024. The national housing crisis continues to have a disproportionate impact on young people leaving care, many of whom have limited family or other networks to rely on for temporary support.

Advocates reported increasing demand for support across all regions, not just those living in cities, showcasing how housing shortages have intensified in rural areas. Young people leaving residential care placements rarely remain beyond their 18th

Main Presenting Issues Analysis: Young People | 18+

birthday and often face an abrupt transition into independent living. Securing accommodation in time can be highly stressful for this cohort, particularly when there is no supported or traditional housing available.

A recurring pattern in these cases is the feeling of instability that follows young people as they move into adulthood. Care-leavers frequently described living situations that were precarious, ranging from temporary accommodation and informal arrangements with friends, to periods of homelessness. Young people also sought advocacy regarding private tenancy issues, such as notices to quit, problems with maintenance, or challenges understanding tenancy agreements.

Many care-leavers are not ready to live independently at 18 and will require additional supports, in keeping with the general population of young people in this age. There is an ongoing need for expanding supported accommodation models, earlier planning for the transition to adulthood and increased coordination between aftercare and housing services.

Some vulnerable young people, including unaccompanied minors, may find themselves entering care at a later stage, but will not meet the eligibility criteria for aftercare as they do not have 12 continuous months in care prior to their 18th birthday. These young people can be at risk of homelessness and are in need of specialist support from local authorities.

Legal

Legal issues were the second most common issue among young people engaging with an EPIC advocate in 2024. Young people continued to see support in areas such as aftercare entitlements, access to education and housing supports, name changes via deed poll and navigating the family court system.

Main Presenting Issues Analysis: Young People | 18+

EPIC's partnership with Community Law and Mediation (CLM) continued to be a vital resource. Clinics are held monthly, and are three-way between the child or young person, an EPIC advocate and CLM's specialist solicitor. In the main, the advocate support enables the young person to follow up on the legal advice, and it is not litigation but support and advocacy that is required.

Advocates also provided support to care-experienced parents when navigating family court proceedings involving their own children. In these cases, support and assistance which better enables these parents to understand legal terminology and processes is provided. The intersection of care-experience and parenthood can be particularly challenging, and the need for trauma-informed, non-judgmental advocacy in these circumstances is clear.

Access to Services

Access to services is a recurring issue, particularly for young people who require mental health, disability or other specialist support. Many of the cases in relation to access to services relate to gaps and inconsistencies in the implementation of the protocol between Tusla and the HSE, especially during the transition from care to adult services. This is particularly relevant for the timely access to appropriate mental health and disability assessments and interventions for children under the care of Tusla. The protocol also applies to young people with lifelong healthcare support needs that require specialist services when they leave the care of Tusla.

Advocates observed that young people often struggled to navigate complex referral pathways and unclear lines of responsibility. In particular, the transition from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs) to adult mental health services emerged as a significant point of vulnerability.

Main Presenting Issues Analysis: Young People | 18+

Some young people experienced delays or were deemed ineligible for adult services, resulting in unmet mental health needs during a period of major life transition. These cases underline the importance of clear inter-agency coordination, timely referrals, and trauma informed services tailored to the needs of care-experienced young people.

Financial Issues

Financial instability was another key presenting issue in 2024. The aftercare allowance of €300 per week has not increased since 2017 and is becoming increasingly insufficient in the face of rising living costs. For young people who remain in foster placements, this allowance is often divided between the young person and the foster carer, which can create financial strain and placement instability.

In addition, many young people rely on financial supports linked to their education status. The aftercare allowance is a weekly payment to support care-leavers who are eligible for aftercare with living costs while attending a full-time, accredited, educational or training course. This can be challenging for those who experienced disruption in their educational journeys for myriad reasons; the ongoing effects of trauma, housing, placement problems, or mental health difficulties.

Many young people struggle to engage with full-time education or training and need support as they transition from school to independent living. They may not qualify for the aftercare allowance or can lose the allowance if they cannot continue with their studies, resulting in financial hardship. This can also coincide with difficulties securing accommodation. Lack of stable and affordable accommodation options can be a significant barrier to young care-leavers continuing to engage in full time education or training.

Main Presenting Issues Analysis: Young People | 18+

Delayed payment of grants can cause serious hardship and, in some cases, result in young people dropping out of college. This applies particularly to those with no other aftercare financial supports. It is EPIC's view that supports for young people who are not in education and those who don't engage with aftercare services need to be addressed. These young people are often the most vulnerable and in greatest need of appropriate levels of support, advice, guidance, and signposting to other services.



Case Study: Paul

Main Presenting Issue: Accommodation



Background

Paul is a care-leaver who was not eligible for aftercare support, having spent only a short time in care before turning 18. Since leaving care, he moved between temporary arrangements, including friends' homes and short-term rentals, and had never had stable accommodation of his own. This lack of stability affected his wellbeing and made maintaining personal relationships challenging. Seeking to secure a more permanent home, Paul approached EPIC for guidance on housing options and support in navigating the system.



Key Actions taken by Paul's Advocate

At their first meeting, Paul explained that he had never been placed on a housing list and didn't know what options were available to him. The advocate helped him understand the different types of accommodation and guided him through the application process. A second meeting was arranged to go through the forms, check the required documents, and answer any questions. The advocate stayed in touch while Paul completed the application, offering practical advice and support to ensure it was submitted correctly.



Outcome

The housing application was submitted to the relevant authority. Shortly afterwards, Paul also found temporary shared accommodation independently, providing a more secure living situation while awaiting longer-term housing.

Case Study: Emily

Main Presenting Issue: Legal



Background

Emily spent most of her life living in relative foster care and was adopted by her cousin shortly before her 18th birthday. She and her adoptive parents believed she would receive the aftercare allowance, and she was allocated an aftercare worker.

When Emily sought her aftercare payment, she was informed that she was not entitled to the allowance because she was adopted. Emily is still in secondary school and planning for her future, but she was concerned about her finances and wanted support in accessing legal advice to challenge the decision.



Key Actions taken by Emily's Advocate

Emily's advocate met with her and her adoptive mother to explore the situation and confirm that no other payments, such as the post-adoption payment, had been offered. With Emily's consent, the advocate contacted her aftercare worker, social worker, and former Guardian ad Litem to gather information on her eligibility and the reasoning behind the decision.

The Advocate supported Emily in accessing legal advice through the Community Law & Mediation (CLM) clinic. Emily attended a CLM session, where she was advised on her options, including submitting a request for a discretionary review of the decision and, if necessary, pursuing a judicial review. With the advocate's guidance, Emily wrote to her aftercare worker to request a review and explain her financial need to continue in education.

Case Study: Emily

Main Presenting Issue: Legal



Outcome

Emily and her adoptive mother were later notified that the decision had been reviewed and that Tusla would grant the aftercare allowance given the circumstances, provided Emily remains in education. A judicial review was not required.

Emily is now receiving the aftercare allowance and continues in education.

Case Study: Daniel

Main Presenting Issue: Access to Services



Background

Daniel is a young person with care-experience who recently moved into an aftercare placement in a new town. Before the move, he had been linked in with a specialist counselling service that was only available in his former area. The relocation made it very difficult for Daniel to keep attending, as the journey by public transport would have taken over two hours each way with several changes.



Key Actions taken by Daniel's Advocate

Daniel spoke with his advocate about how the move had cut him off from counselling, which had been an important support for him since his teenage years. He also explained how valuable it was to have time with staff after sessions to help him manage the emotions that came up. With Daniel's agreement, the advocate raised the issue with his aftercare worker and arranged a joint meeting. At first, the focus was on promoting independence, but the advocate outlined Daniel's existing skills and showed how this situation created barriers beyond his control. They worked together to map the travel route and to highlight the emotional benefit of the support that followed each session.



Outcome

After further discussions, the aftercare worker brought the matter to management. Funding was approved for short-term transport assistance, including taxis and rental cars, while a longer-term option was explored. The support was due for review after six months. Daniel was able to return to counselling and felt reassured that his concerns were listened to and acted upon.

Community Law & Mediation



11

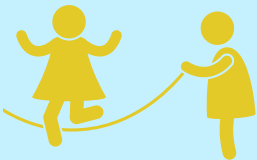
Number of clinics held



35

Number of children and young people assisted

7



Number of U18 assisted

28



Number of over 18s assisted



50

Number of legal issues

Main Presenting Issues

- Care and aftercare
- Family law (e.g. guardianship, custody and access)
- Housing
- Name changes via Deed Poll
- Education



Community
Law & Mediation

National Advocacy Service Snapshot

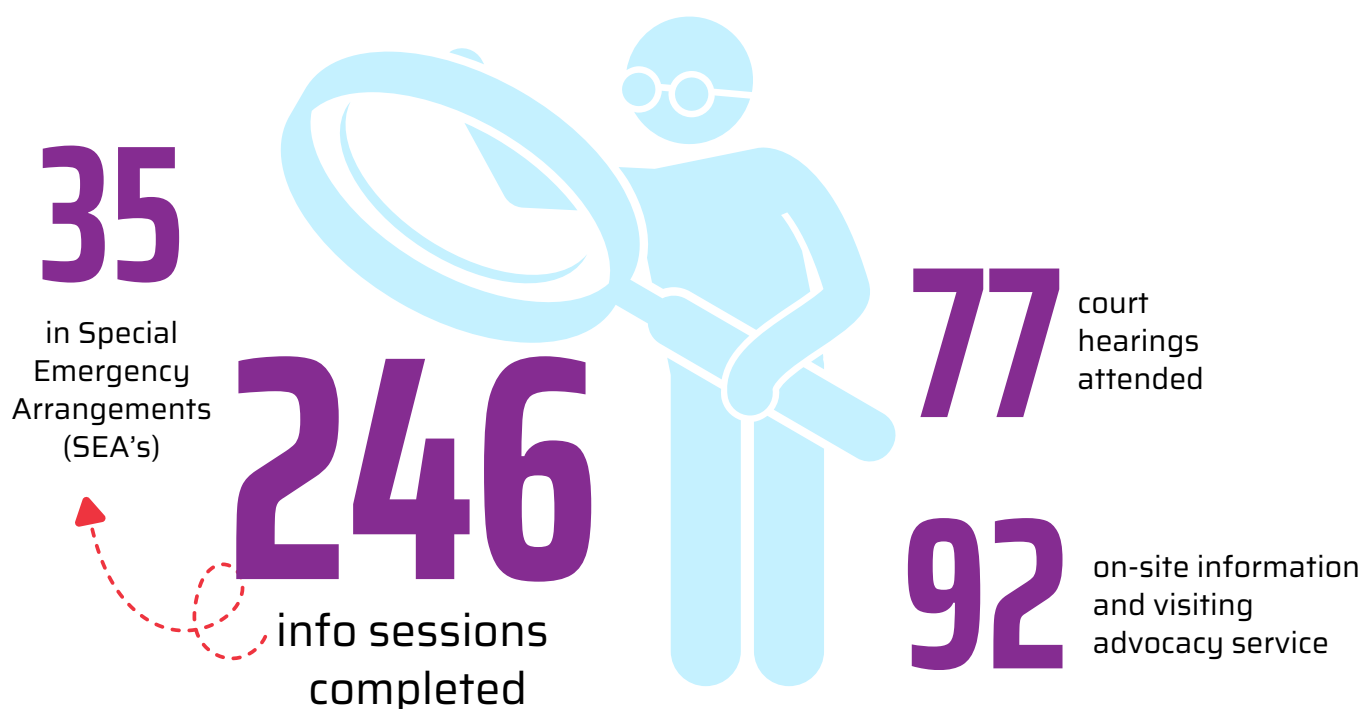


271

meetings with children/ young
people and professionals

109

meetings with professionals



Conclusion

The experiences of young people engaging with EPIC's Advocacy Service in 2024 reflect systemic challenges that extend far beyond individual cases. Accommodation insecurity, unclear service pathways, and insufficient financial supports continue to shape the transition from care to adulthood. The presenting issues illustrate the wide range of needs experienced by young people in care, spanning health, mental health, disability, education, and access to appropriate legal and immigration supports. Particular difficulties arise where there is no coordinated plan in place to meet these needs as young people approach adulthood. This lack of planning can create instability and anxiety, especially for those turning 18 who may already be navigating significant life changes.

While advocates continue to see many examples of good practice and positive cooperation between agencies and within aftercare committees, the extent to which organisations coordinate their services varies significantly. This inconsistency leads to uneven access to supports across the country and heightens the risk of children and young adults falling through gaps in service provision. EPIC remains acutely aware of the challenges faced by young people who enter the care system at a later stage and do not meet the eligibility criteria for aftercare payments and supports. These young people often experience the most acute difficulties, compounded by the absence of stable accommodation, clear entitlements or consistent financial assistance.

EPIC is increasingly concerned about the situation facing young people who arrived in Ireland as separated children seeking international protection, some of whom are ineligible for aftercare despite having complex needs and limited support networks. Many experience significant challenges accessing accommodation, education, therapeutic supports and other essential services once they turn 18, leaving them particularly vulnerable during this transition.

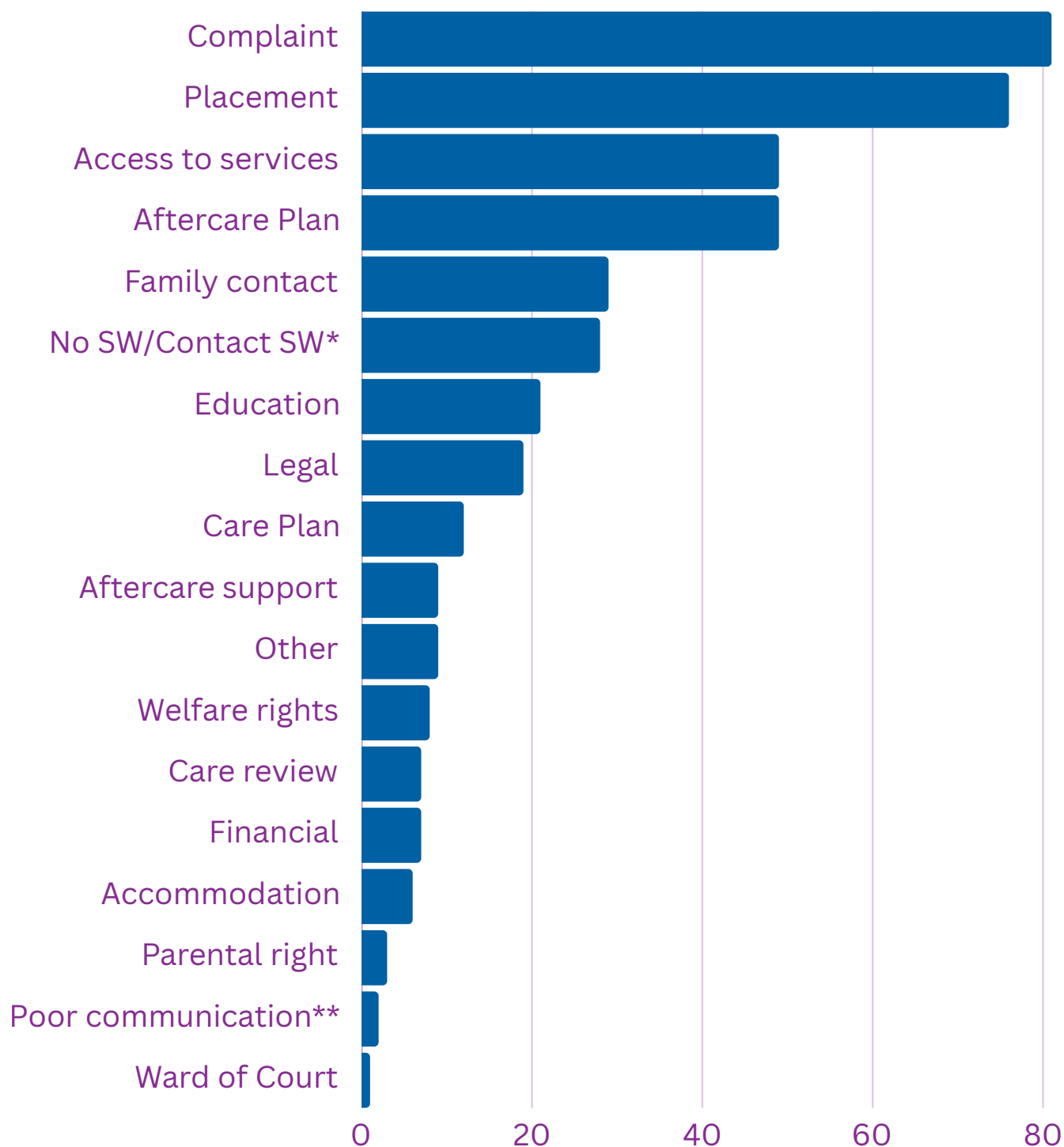
Conclusion

The issues highlighted in this report demonstrate the continued importance of independent advocacy in ensuring that children in care and care-leavers are heard, informed and supported. They also underscore the need for stronger national coordination, clearer pathways into adulthood, and sustained investment in the services that children and young people rely on.

EPIC is grateful to the children and young people who placed their trust in our service throughout 2024. Their experiences, insights and resilience guide our work and strengthen our commitment to meaningful change. We also acknowledge the dedication of our colleagues, partner organisations and professionals across the sector, whose efforts remain vital in supporting children and young people.

As we look ahead, EPIC remains firmly committed to advocating for the rights and needs of children in care and care-leavers, ensuring that their voices shape policy, practice and reform. Continued collaboration, investment and system-wide improvement are essential to creating a more equitable and responsive care system. EPIC will continue to work alongside young people, practitioners and policymakers to help ensure that every child and young person receives the stability, support and opportunities they deserve - within the care system and as they move into adult life.

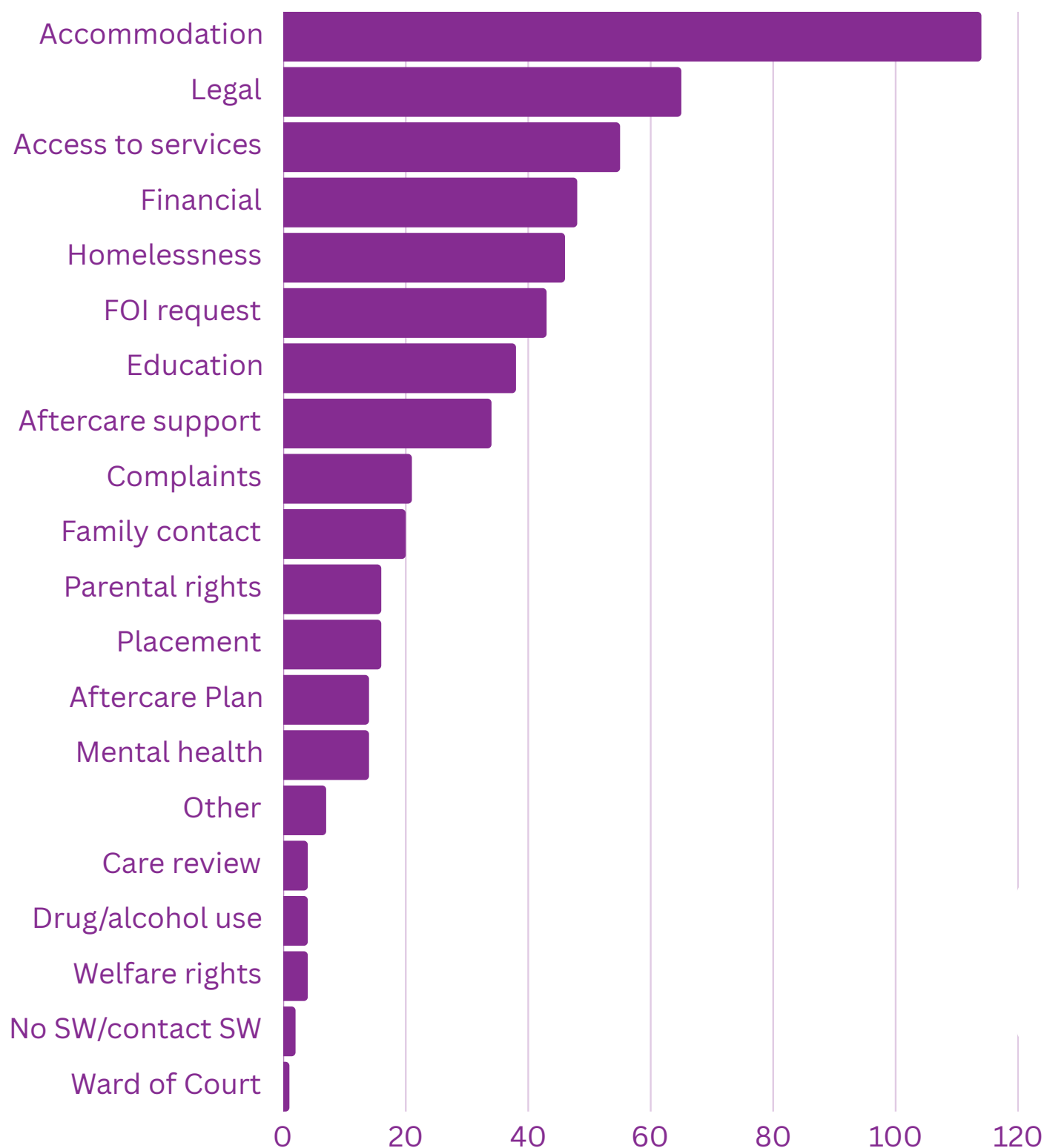
Main Presenting Issues for children | U18



EPIC categorise advocacy cases by the main presenting issue, reflecting what children or young people needed an Advocate's help with the most. To streamline data analysis, we focus on the 'Main Presenting Issue,' with additional issues possibly requiring separate advocacy cases.

*No Social Worker/Contact Social Worker; ** Poor communication with professionals

Main Presenting Issues for children | 18+





empowering people in care

7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7

CRO no: 381973

Reg Charity no: 20055080

CHY no: 15742

Chairperson: Maeve Doyle

www.epiconline.ie

info@epiconline.ie

01 8727661



@epicireland



@epicempoweringpeopleincare



@epicireland



EPIC - Empowering People in Care

Funded by

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency