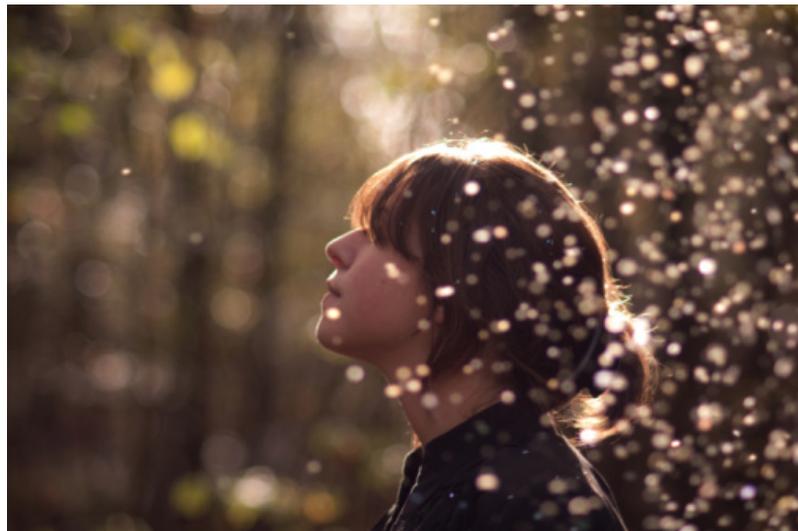


empowering people in care

## REPORT ON EPIC ADVOCACY CASES 2013



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**July 2015**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EPIC would like to thank those who have supported and accessed our Advocacy Service. Our appreciation goes to the primary funders of the Advocacy Service in 2013, the Health Service Executive (HSE). In addition, The One Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies provided additional funding for the research and policy posts in EPIC, which has made the compilation of this report possible. During the course of its advocacy work, EPIC links in with a variety of different professionals working in statutory and voluntary organisations, as well as other individuals, who are dedicated and committed to meeting the needs of young people with care experience. We would also like to acknowledge the young people's involvement in, and engagement with the EPIC Advocacy Service, which has resulted in this report. Finally, our thanks to Enclude who have assisted EPIC in setting up a Salesforce database and provided support to help this transition.

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## INTRODUCTION

This report gives an overview of the EPIC Advocacy cases in 2013. It presents a profile of the young people who sought advocacy support, identifies the main presenting issues and key actions taken by EPIC to address their concerns. The aim of EPIC's advocacy work is to empower children in care and young people with care experience to have a say in issues that significantly affect their lives. The nature of EPIC's role can vary from providing basic information, for example, in relation to social welfare entitlements, to providing practical support, such as assisting a young person to find an education course or appropriate accommodation. At the highest level of engagement, one of the EPIC Advocacy team may be asked by a young person to represent their views on their behalf, for example, by attending a care or aftercare review meeting.

This is the fifth annual report on EPIC Advocacy cases, the first of which was in 2009. The number of Advocacy cases has increased substantially over these five years – from 61 in 2009 to 241 in 2013. In October 2012, EPIC employed five additional staff members including a National Advocacy Service Manager and four Advocacy Officers (two for the Dublin Mid-Leinster region and two for the Southern region). This has increased EPIC's capacity to take on new Advocacy cases, which has certainly contributed to the rise of Advocacy cases. Nevertheless, there has been a real increase in the number of referrals being made to EPIC and an ever increasing demand for advocacy support.

The data presented in this report will help to inform the future development of EPIC's Advocacy work. In addition, the issues raised will contribute to EPIC's research and policy work, in particular to track emerging trends in presenting issues.

## METHODOLOGY

An Advocacy case file is opened when a young person agrees to receive advocacy support from EPIC. As well as documenting the issues involved and key developments during the case, information on young people's basic characteristics about the young person is recorded. Therefore, each Advocacy case comprises both quantitative and qualitative data.

The data from EPIC Advocacy cases is entered into a Salesforce database by the EPIC Advocacy Officer who has been allocated to the case. When data entry is complete, it is then analysed using Salesforce and a final report compiled by the EPIC Research Officer. This report for 2013 is the first year that data on EPIC's Advocacy cases has been compiled and analysed using Salesforce.<sup>1</sup> This transition has taken time and much effort on the part of all EPIC staff.

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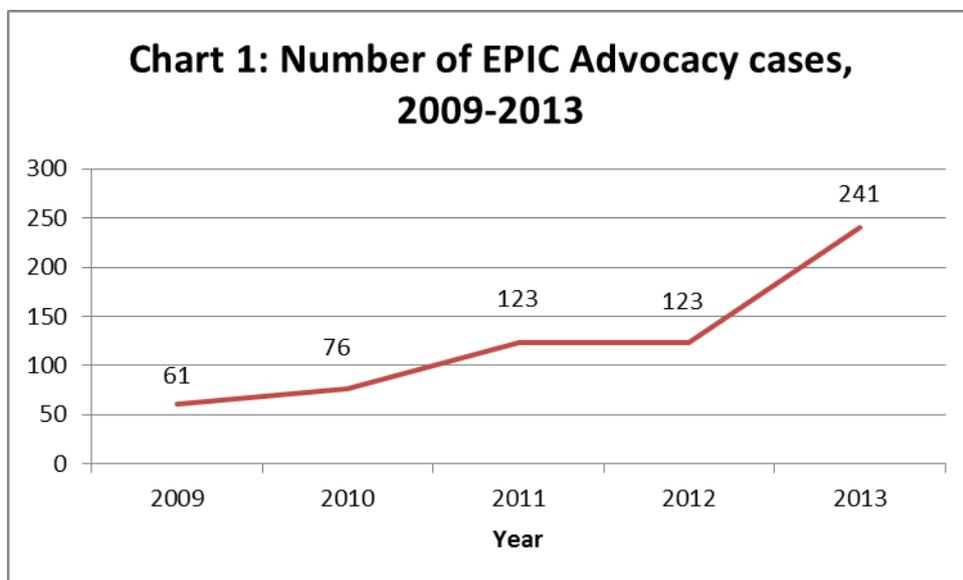
<sup>1</sup> Before this, quantitative data for EPIC Advocacy case files was input and analysed using the statistical computer package Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In addition, qualitative data was kept in handwritten files. Since 2014, all data related to EPIC's work and activities is now stored in a Salesforce database.

## MAIN FINDINGS

In 2013, there were a total of 241 EPIC Advocacy cases, which involved providing information, support and/or advocacy to 220 young people.<sup>2</sup> Compared to the previous year 2012 in which 123 Advocacy cases were recorded, this represents an increase of 96%.

In September 2012, the number of EPIC Advocacy Officers increased from three to seven. Therefore, it is likely that some of this increase reflects the greater capacity in the organisation to provide advocacy support to children and young people with care experience. However, there has been a consistent trend of an increasing number of referrals being made to EPIC over this time, thus reflecting a real increase in the demand for independent advocacy support for children and young people in care or with care experience.

Chart 1 shows the number of EPIC Advocacy cases between 2009 and 2013.



<sup>2</sup> In some instances, one young person may have had several Advocacy cases during the year as they may have requested support at different times or for different issues. In 2013, 17 young people had more than one Advocacy case (13 had 2 cases and 4 had 3 cases).

In 2009, there were 61 Advocacy cases, which increased to 123 in the years 2011 and 2012. Over the five years 2009 to 2013, the number of cases has increased by 295% (from 61 in 2009 to 241 in 2013).

In line with previous years, the vast majority of Advocacy cases in 2013 involved individual children and young people, 96% (232). Just 2% (6) of cases involved advocacy work with a group of children or young people. This data was unknown for the remaining cases.

## **Socio-economic characteristics**

### *Gender*

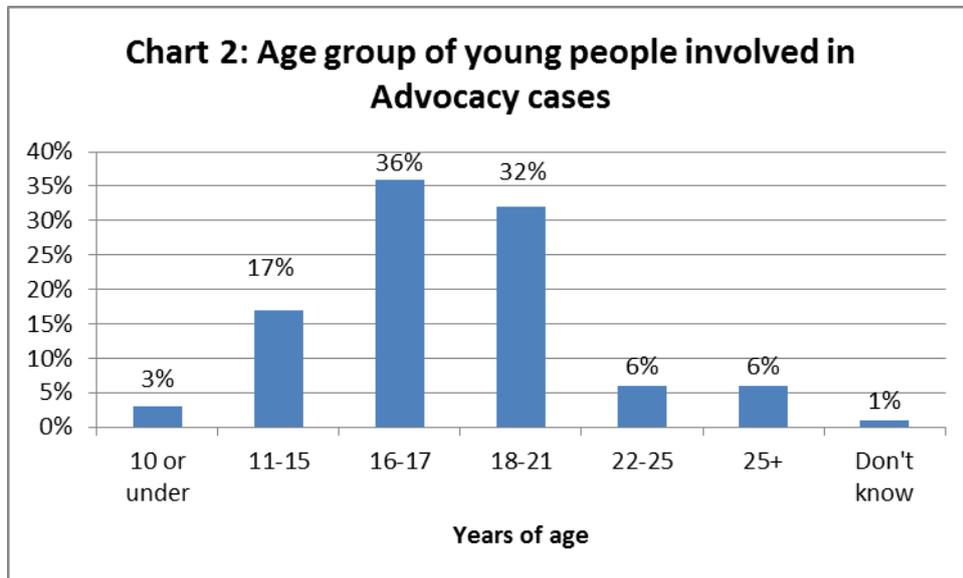
There was an even gender breakdown of cases: 49% (119) were male; 49% (118) were female; and 2% (4) were unknown. In 2012, the gender breakdown was 58% female and 41% male. Therefore, there was an increase in the proportion of males in 2013 compared to 2012.

### *Age*

The age of children and young people who received advocacy support in 2013 ranged from 2 years old (2 cases) to 40 years old (2 cases). In 2012, the age range was 3 years old to 35 years old, therefore it had widened in 2013. On average, young people were aged 17.7 years old. Chart 2 presents a breakdown of age group for EPIC Advocacy cases. It shows that 36% (87) of cases involved young people aged 16-17 years old. Second to this, 32% (76) of cases involved young adults aged 18-21 years old. It is interesting to see that 12% (28) of cases involved young adults over the age of 21 – 6% (14) were aged 22-25 and another 6% (14) were older than 25 years.

The data in Chart 2 also shows that 56% (136) of Advocacy cases were with young people under the age of 18, while 43% (103) involved young adults 18 years or older

(data for the remaining 1% was missing). There was an increase in the number of Advocacy cases involving young adults over the age of 18, which stood at 28% in 2012. Therefore, there was a relatively older age profile of young people involved in Advocacy cases in 2013 compared to 2012.



### *Country of birth*

Country of birth was known for 197 Advocacy cases. The majority of cases, 90% (178), involved young people who had been born in Ireland, which was similar to the previous year 2012. A further 3% (6) of cases involved young people born in Nigeria and another 3% (5) in the UK. Other countries where young people were born included Afghanistan, Congo, India, Libya, Russia and South Africa.

### *Ethnicity*

Ethnicity was known for 91 Advocacy cases. Out of these 79% (72) were White Irish, 8% (7) were White Irish Traveller and 1% (1) were from another White background. A further 8% (7) were Black African and 4% (4) were in the other ethnicity category including mixed background.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The categories for ethnicity were taken from the Census of Population compiled by the Central Statistics Office.

### *Separated young people*

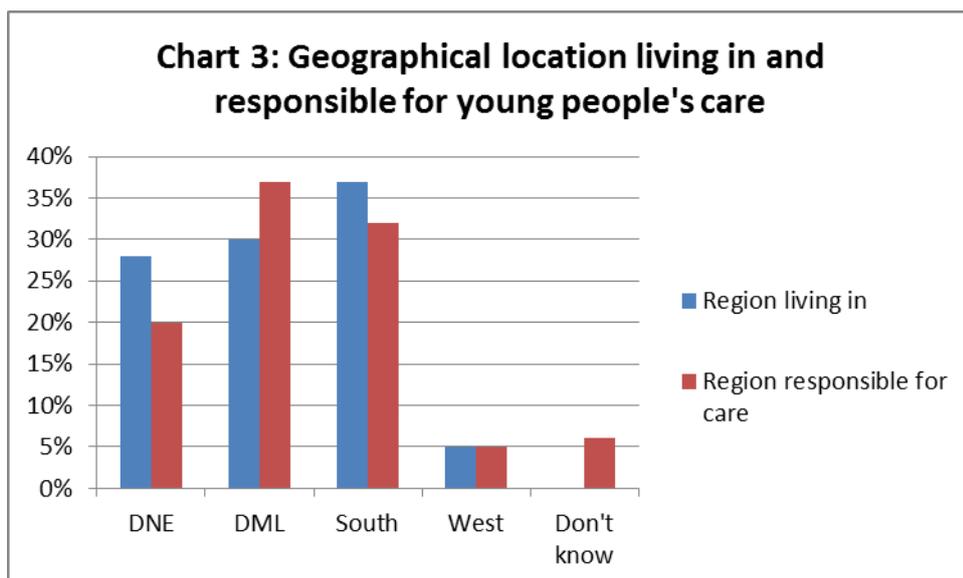
In 2013, there were 7 Advocacy cases that involved separated young people, which represented 3% of all cases. The countries of birth for these cases were Afghanistan (1 case), Nigeria (4 cases), Botswana (1 case) and other African country (1 case). Over the last few years, the number of separated young people involved in EPIC Advocacy cases increased from one in 2012 and four in 2011.

### *Geographical location*

The number of EPIC Advocacy cases in each of the four HSE regions was compiled. Over one third, 37% (88), involved young people living in the HSE South region. A further 30% (73) related to young people living in the Dublin Mid Leinster area, while 28% (67) were living in Dublin North East. Finally, 5% (13) of Advocacy cases involved young people living in the HSE West region. Where young people were in care or aftercare, this reflected the location of their current care/aftercare placement, while for those who had left care it showed the area they were currently living in.

Compared to 2012, the area that saw the biggest rise in Advocacy cases was the Southern region – there were 20 cases in 2012 and 88 cases in 2013, an increase of 340%. The opening of an EPIC office in Cork in September 2012 with two full-time Advocacy Officers accounts for this.

In addition to the geographical location where young people were currently living, data was also collected on the region responsible for their care. This was collected for the first time in 2013, as it was acknowledged that the region responsible for a young person's care placement may be different to that where they are actually living, particularly for those who have left care. This data was known for the majority of Advocacy cases, 94% (227) in 2013. Chart 3 presents the data on both geographical location variables.



It shows that some young people are placed in a different area to that responsible for their care – this holds for three of the four regions: Dublin North East; Dublin Mid Leinster; and South. In the case of Dublin North East and the Southern region, the number of young people living in these areas is higher than the number who fell under the remit of social work services in both areas. For example, 37% of Advocacy cases involved young people living in the Southern region, while 32% of Advocacy cases were the responsibility of the Southern region. In relation to Dublin Mid-Leinster, there were fewer young people living in this area (30%) than the number who were under the remit of local social work services (37%). Therefore, 7% of young people whose care was the responsibility of Dublin Mid-Leinster were currently living in a different area.

While some of this variation across the three affected regions can be explained by the 'unknown' category, further analysis found that one fifth of all Advocacy cases in 2013, 21% (50), involved a young person living in a different area to that which was responsible for their care. No further information is available about the reasons for this. However, an age breakdown found that 54% (27) of such cases involved young people under the age of 18, while 46% (23) related to young adults 18 years or older. Therefore, living in a different geographical area to that responsible for their care was not just experienced by young people who had aged out of the care system but also by those currently in care who were placed outside of their area.

### *Participation in education or training*

Information was given about young people's engagement in education or training for 206 Advocacy cases – 63% (130) were currently involved in education or training while 37% (76) were not. This was similar to the findings for 2012 where participation in education or training stood at 65%. Data on the type of education or training showed that young people were most likely to be going to school, 60% (78), followed by Youthreach, 9% (12) or a training centre, 9% (12) (e.g. Community Training Centre, SOLAS). A further 7% (9) were in a third level college or university (including Institutes of Technology).<sup>4</sup>

Looking at the care status of the Advocacy cases where young people were *not* engaged in education or training, 32% (24) were still in care, 30% (23) were in aftercare and 26% (20) were in the post-leaving care category.<sup>5</sup>

### *Special educational needs*

Just over one in ten of all Advocacy cases in 2013, 11% (27), involved a child or young person with a diagnosed special educational need, which was similar to 13% in 2012. The nature of special needs varied widely and in some cases, young people had been diagnosed with more than one. The most common types of special needs were: autism (4 cases); mild learning disability (4 cases); moderate learning disability (3 cases), Asperger Syndrome (2 cases); Dyspraxia (2 cases); and ADHD (2 cases). It should be stated that this may underestimate the actual prevalence of special educational needs amongst young people who engaged with EPIC, as it may not always have been disclosed or apparent, particularly in relation to mild learning difficulties.

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<sup>4</sup> The remaining cases were in 'other' types of education or training including a special school, a school attached to a residential centre or in a children detention school.

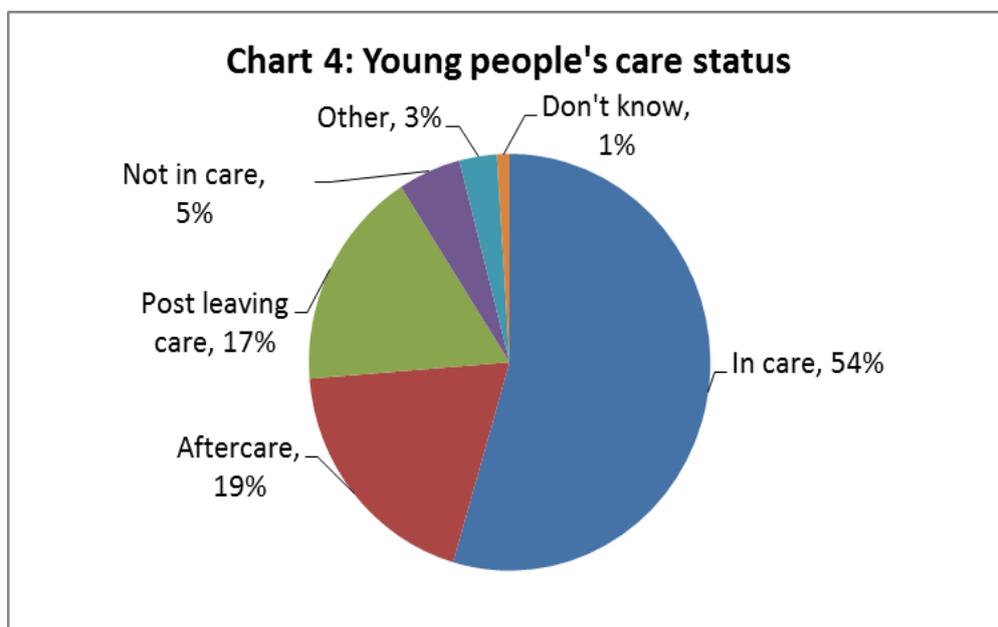
<sup>5</sup> The care status of the remaining cases not involved in education or training was 'not in care', 'other' or not known.

## Aspects of care placements

Some information was collected on certain aspects of young people's care placements in terms of their care status, the nature of their current placement (or living circumstances for those who have left care) and the number of placements while in care.

### Care status

Chart 4 shows the care status of the young people who were involved in EPIC Advocacy cases in 2013.



Over one half of cases, 54% (131), represented young people who were currently in care. A further 19% (46) were in an Aftercare placement and 17% (41) were categorised as 'post leaving care' having already left care (these young people were typically aged in their 20's or older). A small number of cases involved young people who were not in care, 5% (10), including a Children Detention School, disability service and at home with family. The remaining cases were in the 'other' category, 3% (7), or missing, 1% (3).

Compared to 2012, the proportion of Advocacy cases involving young people in aftercare has almost doubled from 10% in 2012 to 19% in 2013. This shows an increasing need for information, support and advocacy amongst young people when they leave care and during the early years of independent living.

*Type of care placement/current living circumstances*

Chart 5 presents the findings on young people’s type of care placement or current living circumstances in the Advocacy cases for 2013.

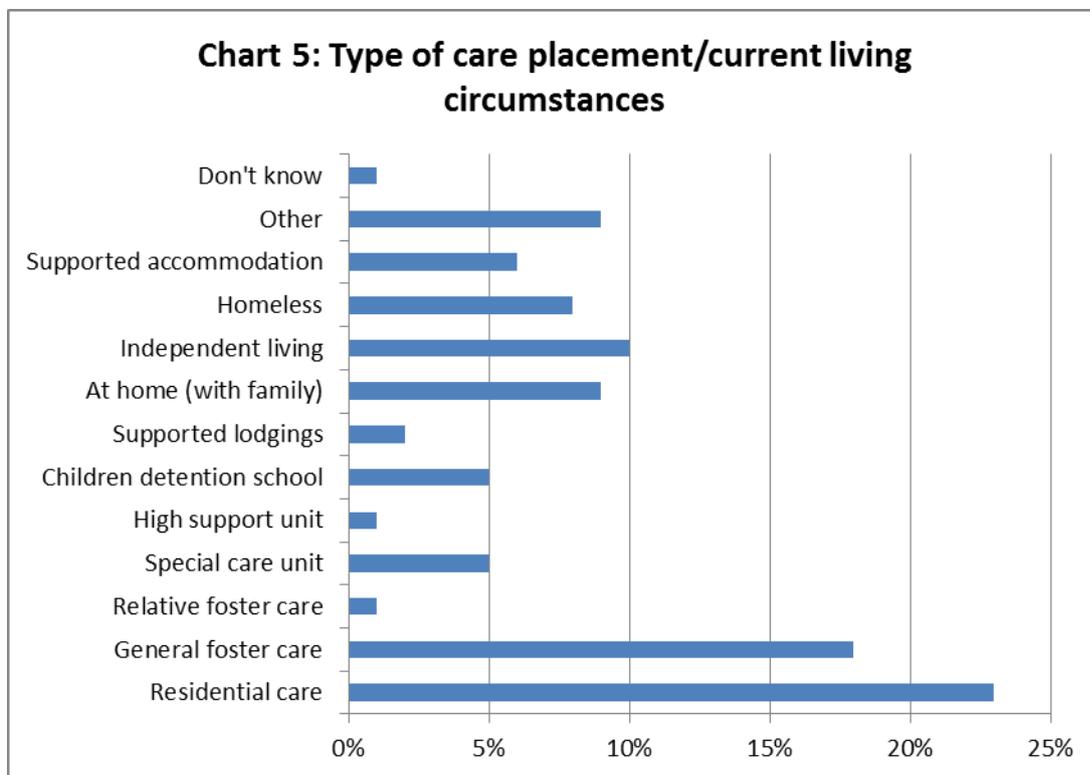


Chart 5 shows that Advocacy cases were most likely to involve young people who were in residential care, 23% (56) followed by foster care, 19% (47) (including 1% in relative foster care). In addition, there were a number of cases where young people were in a Special Care Unit, 5% (13), and a Children Detention School, 5% (12). Compared to 2012, the proportion of Advocacy cases involving young people in mainstream residential care has decreased from 32% in 2012 to 23% in 2013, although the proportion of those in Children Detention Schools has doubled (from

2% in 2012 to 5% in 2013). The proportion of those in foster care has remained relatively stable.

Where young people had left care, they were most likely to be living independently, 10% (25) or in supported accommodation, 6% (15). However, 8% (20) of all Advocacy cases involved a young person who was currently homeless.<sup>6</sup> Further analysis showed that two of these cases involved 16 year olds, while the remaining 18 cases were young people over the age of 18. Compared to 2012, the total number of Advocacy cases where a young person was currently homeless increased from 9 to 20.

#### *Private care provider*

Just 2% (6) of all Advocacy cases were in the care of a private care provider. Out of these six cases, two young people were in general foster care, three were in mainstream residential care and one was in a disability service.

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<sup>6</sup> Young people were defined as being homeless where they had no accommodation of their own. This is in line with the Youth Homelessness Strategy (Department of Health and Children, 2001:11) which defines youth homelessness as sleeping on the streets, in temporary accommodation (e.g. hostels, B&Bs) or insecure accommodation with relatives or friends.

### *Length of time in current placement/living circumstances*

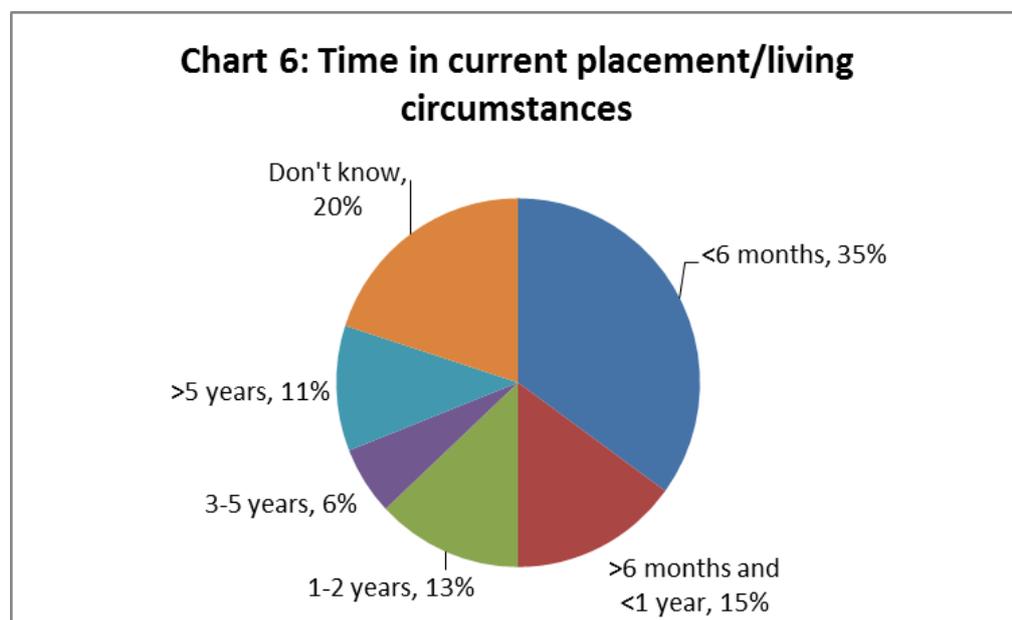


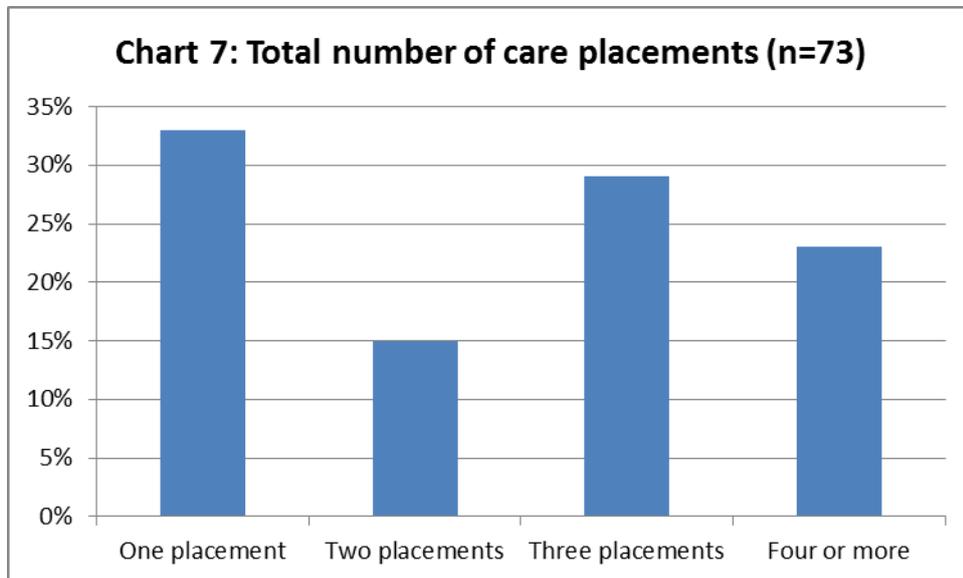
Chart 6 shows the length of time spent in current placement or living circumstances by young people who were involved in the Advocacy cases. In just over one third of cases, 35% (84), young people had been in the same placement or living circumstances for less than 6 months and 15% (35) for more than 6 months but less than one year – thus half of all Advocacy cases involved young people being in the same care placement or living circumstances for less than one year.

Almost one third of Advocacy cases, 30% (74), involved young people who had been in the same placement or living circumstances for more than one year (combining the three categories 1-2 years (13%, 32), 3-5 years (6%, 15) and more than 5 years (11%, 27)). This information was not known for the remaining 20% (48) of Advocacy cases.

### *Total number of care placements*

Another measure of stability is the total number of care placements experienced by young people who were the subject of EPIC's Advocacy cases in 2013. This information was available for 73 cases (30%). The number of care placements

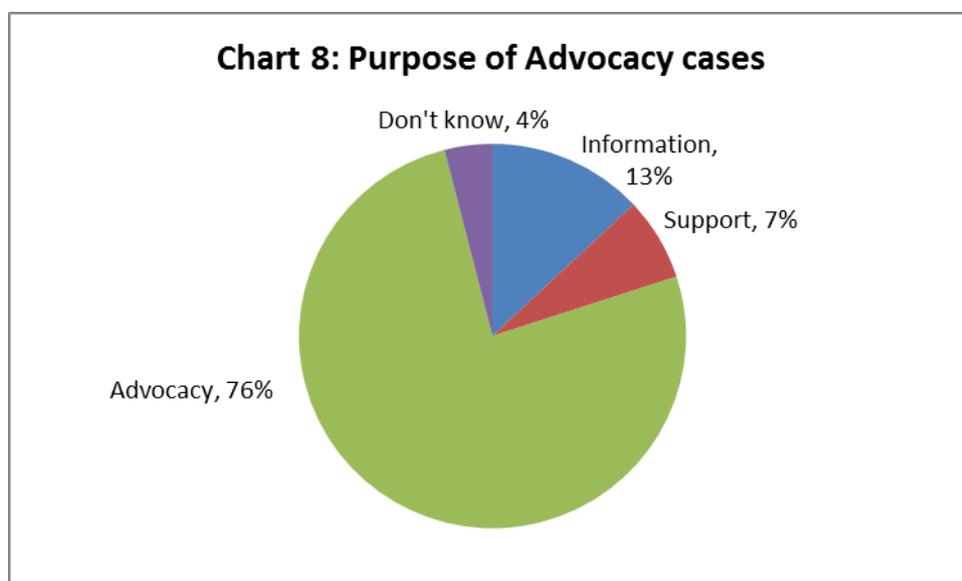
experienced by these young people ranged from one to ten and the average number of placements was 2.7. Chart 7 shows the results.



Out of these 73 cases, 33% (24), had just one placement in care, and 15% (11) had two placements. A further 29% (21) had experienced three placements while in care. Almost one quarter, 23% (17), had four or more care placements – with one young person having had ten care placements.

## Purpose of Advocacy cases

Chart 8 shows the main purpose of Advocacy cases in 2013.



Over three quarters of cases, 76% (183), were opened to provide advocacy to a child or young person. Information was the main purpose for 13% (32) of cases, and providing support was the primary reason for 7% (16) of cases. It should be noted here that giving information and support are also likely to be involved where the main purpose of the case is Advocacy, so the categories are not completely exclusive.

## Main presenting issues

Advocacy cases record the main presenting issues that resulted in children and young people seeking advocacy support from EPIC. This records the presenting issue(s) at the time of the start date of the case.<sup>7</sup> This information provides an insight into the issues or difficulties facing children and young people who seek advocacy support from EPIC. Chart 9 shows the results for the main presenting issues for the 2013 Advocacy cases.

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<sup>7</sup> While presenting issues could change over time, these results are based on the initial presenting issue(s) that led to the opening of an Advocacy case.

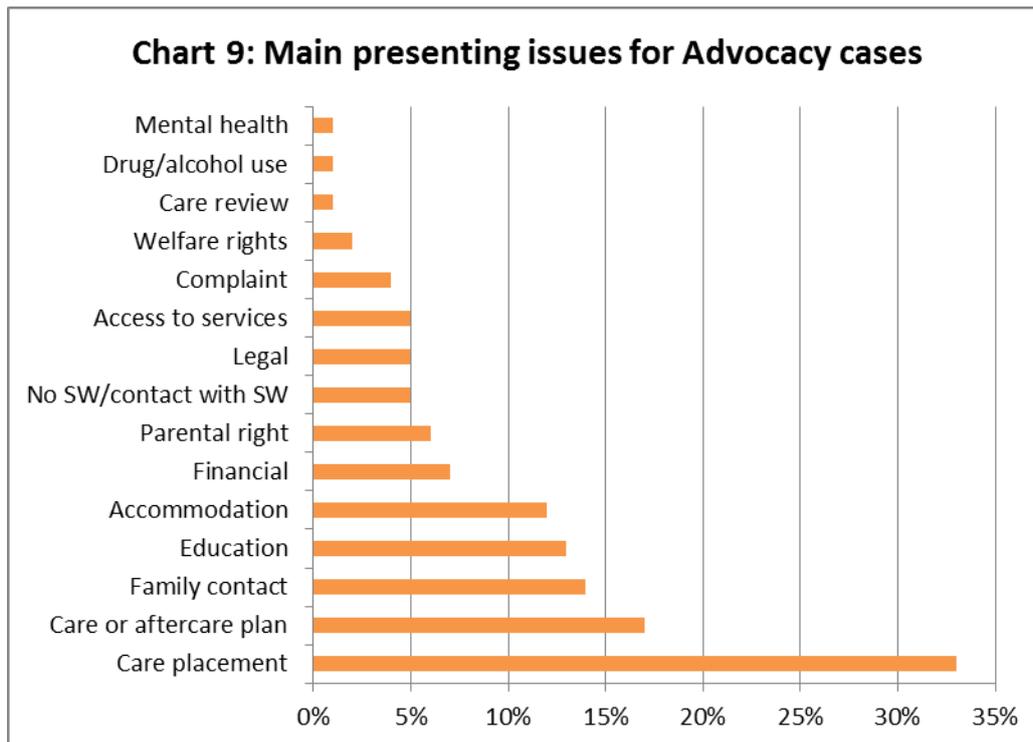


Chart 9 shows that the top five main presenting issues in 2013 were as follows:

- Care placement, 33% (79)
- Care or aftercare plan, 17% (41)
- Family contact, 14% (33)
- Education, 13% (32)
- Accommodation, 12% (29)

It is important to state that the data recorded here refers to the main *overriding* presenting issue (although in some cases two issues were recorded). Many Advocacy cases involved complex issues which may only emerge over time. However, in order to keep the data analysis and reporting manageable, it was necessary to keep the data entry to one or two responses.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It is acknowledged that this could have had an impact on the interpretation of the findings reported in Chart 6. For example, mental health is recorded as the main presenting issue for just 1% of Advocacy cases in 2013. However, this is not to say that mental health issues arose for only 1% of all cases, but rather it was the key presenting issue for this number of cases.

Compared to 2012, the top five presenting issues have remained the same.<sup>9</sup> However, there are some notable changes in the percentage results, presented in Chart 10.

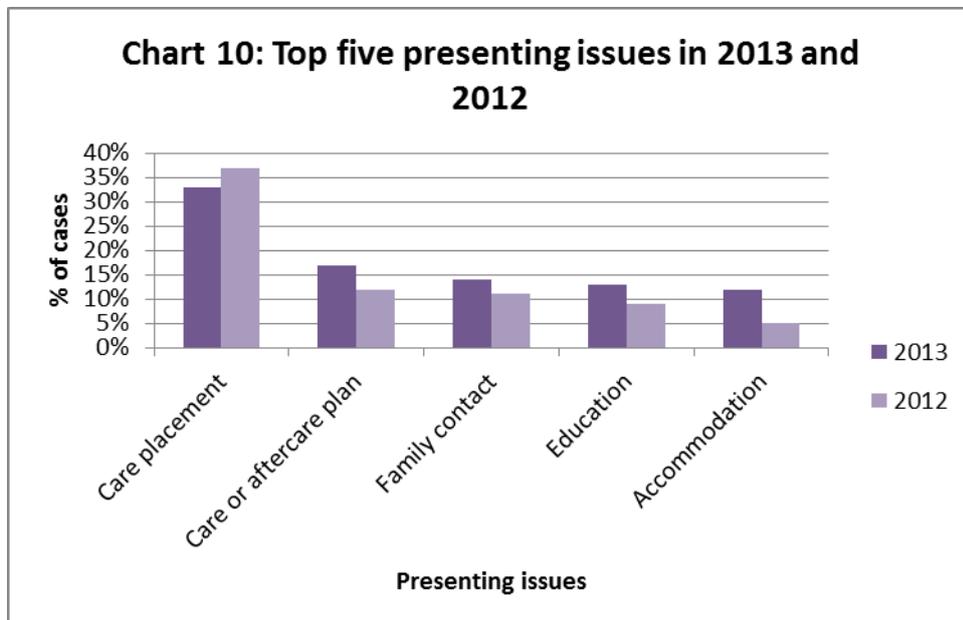


Chart 10 shows that the percentage of Advocacy cases where care placement was the main presenting issue has fallen slightly from 37% in 2012 to 33% in 2013. The remaining four of the top five presenting issues have all increased between 2012 and 2013. The largest increase was recorded for education, which was the main presenting issue in 5% of Advocacy cases in 2012 and stood at 13% in 2013.

Similar to previous years, the nature of presenting issues varied for young people who were currently in care compared to those in aftercare or had left care some years ago (i.e. post leaving care). In particular, the issues of placement, family contact and complaints were most relevant for young people who were in care, whereas accommodation, financial and legal issues were more likely to be reported for young people in aftercare or post leaving care. The main presenting issues care or aftercare plan and education affected both young people in care and those who had left.

<sup>9</sup> The only difference being that the rank order of accommodation and education presenting issues are reversed in 2013. In 2012, accommodation was the fourth highest presenting issue, while education was the fifth.

Further analysis was carried out to identify the key themes for each of the top five main presenting issues. A case study is also given for each issue.<sup>10</sup>

### *More information on presenting issues*

## **1. Care placement**

As already seen, care placement was the main presenting issue for one third of all Advocacy cases in 2013 - 33% (79). Further analysis was carried out on these cases to provide further insight into the issues arising which led to advocacy support being sought. Most of the cases (n=73) came under one of three main categories as follows:

- 42% (33) related to particular aspects of the current placement
- 31% (24) concerned a proposed change of care placement, and
- 20% (16) were about a follow on placement

(The remaining 7% (6) of cases related to 'other' issues about the current placement).

Looking at the cases that fell into the first category (n=33), the most common issue that arose about a current placement was that it was deemed not to meet a young person's needs (15 cases). For example, three cases involved a child or young person with a disability deemed to be in an inappropriate placement. Other issues that arose under this category included the following:

- seven cases where a young person wanted to move home or wished to live with one of their parents
- four cases where a young person was looking to find out why they were in care

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<sup>10</sup> Each case study gives an overview of the main issues arising and summarises the work done by EPIC to address the concerns raised. In order to protect the young person's anonymity, all names have been changed along with other identifying information including gender, age, geographical location, family background and care history details.

- three cases where a young person was homeless (their circumstances came under Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991) and were seeking an appropriate placement or accommodation
- one case where a young person who had just entered foster care sought information about being in care and their rights while in care, and
- one case where a young person wanted to go into care as they felt they were at risk with their family.

The second main category related to a proposed change of care placement (n=24). The majority of these cases (n=20) involved a young person currently in a residential or foster care placement who had been told they were due to move to a different placement. In many cases, they reported that they did not know or understand the reasons for this. Two of these cases involved proposed moves to a placement outside the State. A further three cases involved a change of aftercare placement and one case related to a young person with a disability who was not in care but sought advocacy support about a proposed change of placement.

The third and final category related to the issue of follow on placements (n=16). Some of these cases involved young people in aftercare (n=7), typically where there was no aftercare placement identified after leaving care. A number of these young people said they were left with no option but to present as being homeless to their local authority. Six cases concerned the absence of a follow on placement being identified for young people leaving a Special Care Unit (n=4) or Children Detention School (n=2).

## **Case study 1: Care placement**

### ***Overview***

Sarah is 15 and has been living in foster care in the West of the country. After some time in her current placement, she was spending an increasing amount of time at home with her birth family, in agreement with the local social work team. This began by spending weekends at home and then in addition a few nights during the week. Sarah contacted EPIC looking for support as she wanted to return home on a full time basis. A court hearing was due to be held to make this decision.

### ***Outcome***

The court decided that Sarah could return home full time. She was happy with this decision.

### ***Key actions taken by EPIC***

- Met young person and a parent to discuss the issues and the young person's concerns.
- Liaised with young person's Social Worker and Solicitor.
- Advocated for Sarah in court after discussing this with her.
- Contacted young person after court hearing and offered to provide any further support if needed in the future.

## 2. Care or aftercare plan

The care or aftercare plan was the main presenting issue in respect of 17% (41) of all Advocacy cases in 2013. Three quarters of these cases (n=27) were related to issues concerning aftercare planning. Examples include being allocated an Aftercare Worker, agreeing an aftercare plan and package, aftercare placements and issues relating to a young person's transition from care such as continuing their education and finding accommodation. Examples of issues concerning a young person's care plan included a request to extend a current placement, wanting to know the reasons for being placed in care and other aspects of their care plan, such as family contact. In a few cases, there was some overlap where young people were looking for support in relation to an aspect of their care plan but were also seeking aftercare planning and support in the coming months as they prepared to leave care.

### **Case study 2: Care or aftercare plan**

#### ***Overview***

Leya is 18 and currently lives in supported lodgings in the Dublin Mid Leinster region. She has been in supported lodgings for the last year, which is her third care placement. She is a former separated young person. Leya is in her second year of a further education course and has been told that the funding for her education agreed in her aftercare plan is to be cut.

#### ***Outcome***

The decision to cut Leya's funding in her aftercare package was reversed and she was able to remain at college. She was also in the process of securing Irish citizenship.

#### ***Key actions taken by EPIC***

- Met young person to talk about her concerns.
- Spoke to Leya's Aftercare Worker.
- Linked Leya in with appropriate support services and other agencies.

### 3. Family contact

Family contact was the main presenting issue in 14% (33) of Advocacy cases in 2013. Three quarters of these cases (n=24) involved young people in care. The most common issue emerging was where young people were seeking more access with a sibling, birth parent or member of their extended family. A small number of cases (n=4) involved young people returning to live with birth family. Such cases involved EPIC Advocacy Officers communicating with young people's Social Workers on their behalf and attending meetings to represent their views, e.g. Child in Care Review Meetings. One quarter of cases (n=8) involved young people in Aftercare (n=4) or post-leaving care (n=4). Parental rights arose as a theme amongst these particular cases, where several young adults had a child who was in care themselves, as well as looking for more access with a sibling who was still in care.

#### **Case study 3: Family contact**

##### ***Overview***

Sean is 13 and has been living in residential care for the last two years in the Dublin North East region. He spoke to an EPIC Advocate while they were visiting the residential centre and said that he was unhappy about the frequency of family contact and wished to see family members more often. Sean's Social Worker met him and agreed to look at the issue of family contact again.

##### ***Outcome***

Family contact was reviewed by Sean's Social Worker. A decision was made for Sean to have more frequent contact with some members of his family. Sean was happy with this outcome.

##### ***Key actions taken by EPIC***

- Spoke to young person about his concerns
- Contacted young person's Social Worker to highlight the issues raised by Sean.

- Further contact with the young person to update him following the EPIC Advocate's conversation with his Social Worker.
- Follow up phone calls with the young person to see how he was and if any progress had been made in relation to family contact.
- Before closing the case, the Advocate checked that Sean had EPIC's contact details if he needed any support in future.

#### **4. Education**

Education was the key presenting issue for 13% (32) of Advocacy cases in 2013, which had more than doubled from 5% in 2012. Two thirds of cases involved young people who were currently in care (n=20). Some common issues arising included concerns regarding the impact of a possible change in placement on education (n=3), securing an educational placement for those currently out of education (n=4) and information/advice on training courses (n=3). Educational issues also arose for some young people in aftercare (n=3) and post-leaving care (n=6), which included access to funding and further information on education/training courses.

#### **Case study 4: Education**

##### ***Overview***

Tanya is 16 and has been living in her current foster care placement for a year in the Dublin Mid-Leinster region. She has been expelled from school and is looking for support to appeal this decision. Her Social Worker encouraged her to contact EPIC for support. This case lasted for more than one year.

##### ***Outcome***

The school expulsion was upheld following an Appeal Hearing. However, the young person's views were taken into account and particular school practices were examined by the Department of Education. Tanya secured an alternative school placement and was happy with this.

### ***Key actions taken by EPIC***

- Met Tanya to help her write a letter representing her point of view in relation to the expulsion.
- Contacted Tanya's Social Worker to discuss the issues of concern to her and discussed her case.
- Attended the Appeal Hearing and spoke on behalf of Tanya.
- Met young person to discuss what had happened at the Appeal Hearing.
- Invited young person to contact EPIC again if she needed any further support.

## **5. Accommodation**

Accommodation was the key presenting issue for 12% (29) of Advocacy cases in 2013, which had increased from 9% in 2012. Care status was known for 26 of these cases: three were in care; eight in aftercare; and nine were categorised as post-leaving care. A further three were categorised as 'other' (including two who were currently living at home with their family), two were not in care and one was unknown. These Advocacy cases typically involved young people aged 18 or over. However there were four cases involving young people aged under 18 – one aged 14, two aged 16 and one aged 17.

Homelessness was a key theme that arose for many of these cases, where the young person needed support to access emergency accommodation or was at risk of becoming homeless. In addition, EPIC Advocates provided support to young people who were looking for appropriate accommodation, including one young person whose aftercare package was currently being agreed by statutory authorities. Some examples of work carried out by EPIC Advocates in relation to these cases included helping a young person to write a letter, attending meetings with them, liaising with accommodation/homeless services and providing information on young people's rights and entitlements.

## **Case study 5: Accommodation**

### ***Overview***

John is 23 and had formerly been in residential care in the South of the country. He was passing by the office and called in seeking support after being evicted from his private rented accommodation.

### ***Outcome***

John was appointed a Solicitor who dealt with the legal issues arising from the eviction. After linking John in with the appropriate services, there was no further contact from him. The final outcome is not known.

### ***Key actions taken by EPIC***

- Met young person to discuss his concerns and establish the support needed.
- Contacted Social Worker in local hospital.
- Contacted Threshold to discuss submitting a dispute over eviction to the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB).
- Supported John to submit the dispute to the PRTB.
- Made contact with local Community Welfare Officer.
- Supported John to make a written complaint to An Garda Síochána.

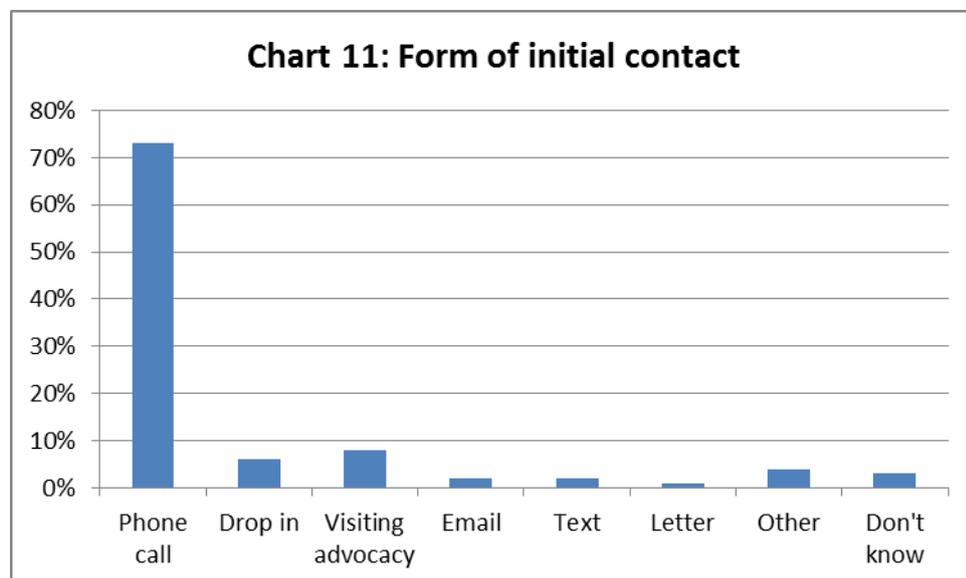
## Initial contact with EPIC

### *Person who initiated contact with EPIC*

Over half of Advocacy cases in 2013 were initiated by young people, 54% (130). Second to young people, 11% (27), of cases were initiated by Social Care Workers, followed by 8% (19) by Social Workers and 7% (17) by foster carers. Others who initiated Advocacy cases included voluntary organisations (14 cases), Youthreach (4 cases), Garda Liaison Officer (2 cases) and the Ombudsman for Children's Office (2 cases).

### *Form of initial contact*

Chart 11 shows the form that initial contact with EPIC took in relation to the Advocacy cases in 2013.



Almost three quarters of cases, 73% (176), were opened following a phone call from the person who initiated the case by far the most common form of contact. This was followed by the EPIC Visiting Advocacy Service, 8% (20) and 6% (14) by way of a young person dropping into the EPIC office. A small number of cases were initiated

by text message, 2% (6), and email, 2% (5). Other forms of contact accounted for 4% (10) of cases which comprised contact made with young people at information sessions or presentations by EPIC Advocacy Officers.

### **EPIC response**

Information was recorded on the initial response from EPIC following the opening of Advocacy cases in 2013. Arrangements were made by EPIC Advocacy Officers to meet young people in over one half of cases, 56% (135), while other contact was made with young people (typically by phone) in another 5% (11) of cases. Therefore, the initial EPIC response was to contact the young person in 61% (146) of cases. A further 12% (28) of cases involved EPIC Advocacy Officers contacting the young person's Social Worker or Key Worker as the initial response, while contact with made with the young person and their Social Worker/Key Worker in another 12% (28) of cases. The remaining cases involved contact with more than one person including foster carers and parents in some instances.

### **Duration of Advocacy cases**

The duration of Advocacy cases in 2013 was measured by calculating the number of days between the start date and closing date of each case. On average, Advocacy cases lasted for 120 days (approximately 4 months). Chart 12 shows the results compiled into categories for ease of analysis.

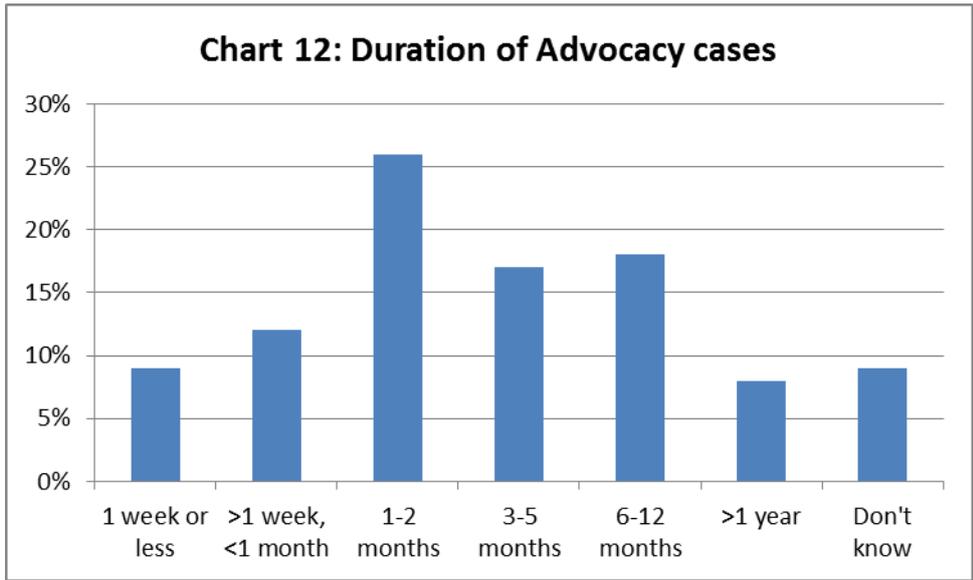


Chart 12 shows that just over one quarter of Advocacy cases, 26% (63), lasted for 1-2 months. A further 17% (40) of cases went on for 3-5 months and 18% (44) for 6-12 months. Almost one in ten cases, 8% (19), continued for more than one year.<sup>11</sup> Data was missing for 9% (22) of cases.

Over recent years, there has been a consistent trend where cases are lasting for a longer period of time. The number of cases that lasted for 6 months or more stood at 9% in 2011, this increased to 22% in 2012 and again to 26% in 2013.

**Rating of outcome of Advocacy case**

When each Advocacy case is closed, the EPIC Advocacy Officer is asked to give a rating for the outcome of the case. This rating is based on two factors: firstly, whether the young person’s concerns were addressed; and secondly, the young person’s satisfaction with the final decision. Chart 13 shows the results.

<sup>11</sup> These long term on-going cases were likely to comprise complex cases where a young person looked for advocacy support in relation to different presenting issues. In addition, certain cases could continue for a long period of time where legal issues were concerned and providing advocacy support to attend court hearings was part of the case.

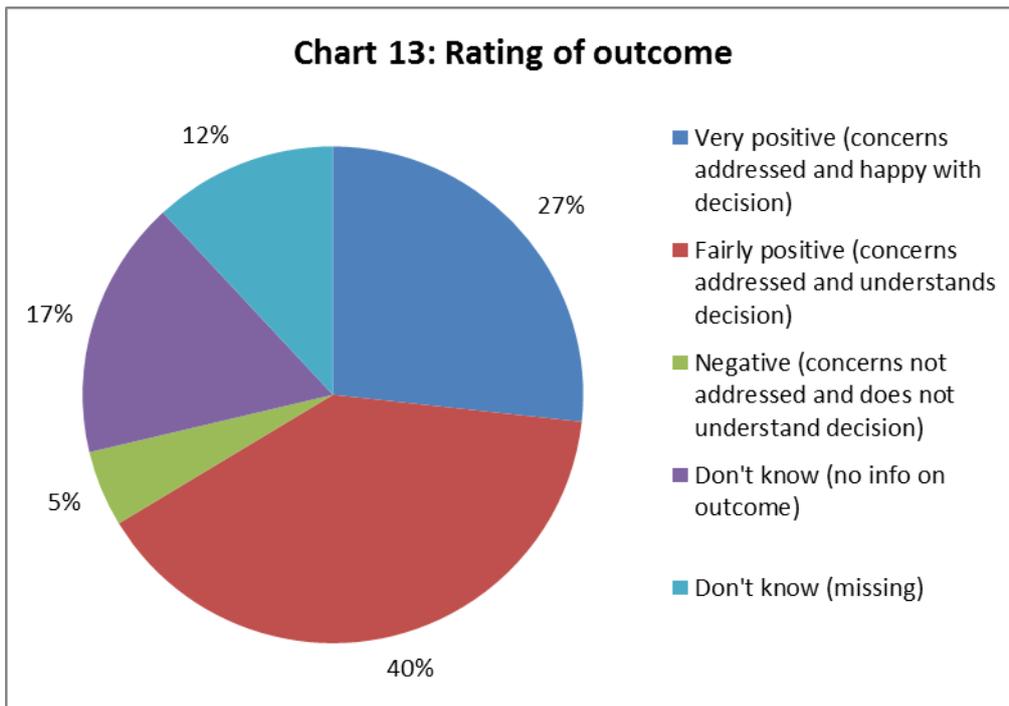


Chart 13 shows that 27% (64) of Advocacy cases were deemed to have a very positive outcome in that the young person’s concerns were addressed and they were happy with the final decision. A further 40% (96) of cases were said to have a fairly positive outcome given that the young person’s concerns were addressed and that they understood the decision (although they may not have been happy about it). Just 5% (11) of cases were deemed to have a negative outcome.

It is important to note that information was not available for almost one third of cases, 29% (70). There were two reasons for this: firstly, the Advocate may not have known the final outcome when the case was closed, which accounted for 17% (42) of cases (e.g. the young person may not be engaging with the Advocate); and secondly, missing data in the case file on this variable, which represented 12% (28) of cases. It is reasonable to suggest that some of these unknown cases may have had a negative outcome, especially where a young person chose to disengage from the EPIC Advocacy Service. More information is needed to establish the reason for unknown or missing data in this regard. However, based on the data that is available for Advocacy cases in 2013, a positive outcome was reported for the majority of Advocacy cases. Therefore, engaging with the EPIC Advocacy Service was likely to

help children and young people to have their concerns addressed and at least be able to understand the final decision made.

## CONCLUSIONS

This report has presented data on the 241 Advocacy cases that were responded to by EPIC in 2013. It considers the profile of the young people who contacted EPIC for support and the nature of their presenting issues. The top five presenting issues remain the same as those for previous years, which indicates that certain difficulties are coming up repeatedly for individual young people in care and with care experience. The growing demand for the EPIC Advocacy service is clearly shown by the substantial increase in the number of cases from 123 in 2012 to 241 in 2013. While some of this increase can be attributed to the employment of additional Advocacy Officers and thus a greater capacity to work with young people, the rise in the number of referrals to EPIC during this time shows a real increase in the need for advocacy support amongst this group of children and young people. This is also reflected in the growing complexity of Advocacy cases which is shown by the increasing duration of cases over recent years.

The expansion of EPIC's Advocacy service in the Dublin Mid-Leinster and Southern regions has contributed to a greater awareness of EPIC's Advocacy service amongst young people and practitioners alike. EPIC welcomes the increasing opportunity to provide information, support and advocacy to children and young people who are currently or have formerly been in care on a national basis.