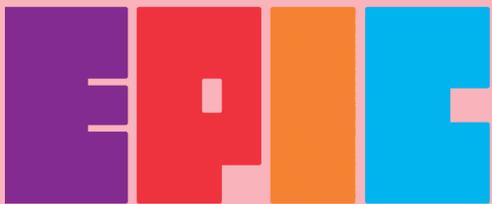


# Impact Report

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# 2022



empowering people in care



# Empowering People in Care

 [info@epiconline.ie](mailto:info@epiconline.ie)

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

 Mon- Fri 9am-5pm

 01 872 7661

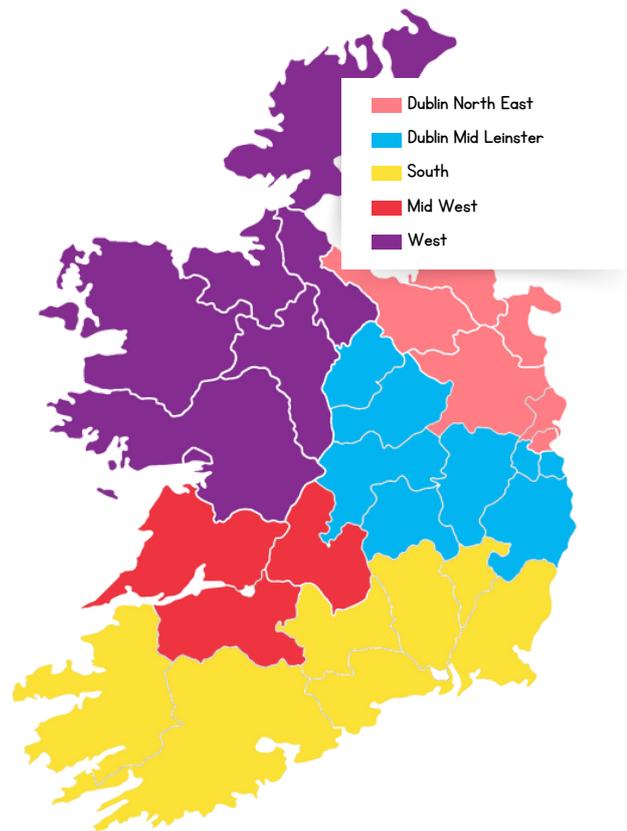
## Our Offices

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

 EPIC Cork  
Millerd Hall  
Millerd Street  
Co. Cork T12W8CW

 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 2022, there were 5,759 children in the care of the state in Ireland, and 2,949 young people in aftercare services. They are not always visible, their voices are seldom heard, and they can be overlooked in public policy discussions that directly affect their lives.



Thank's for



being

epic

# Acknowledgements

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Across all of EPIC's work, collaboration and partnership with colleagues from both the statutory and voluntary sectors is essential. We would like to acknowledge and appreciate the many dedicated professionals with whom we had the privilege to work with over the course of 2022, who share our commitment to care-experienced children and young people.

EPIC thank our core donor, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for enabling the ongoing provision of our National Advocacy Service to care-experienced children and young people in 2022, as well as a participation programme and research and policy work. We were also delighted to receive funding from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Tusla Education Support Service for two new projects. These grants support a first of its kind participative research study on the experiences of children in care and young care leavers with disabilities, and an education project aimed at building the capacity of Principals and teachers to support children in care in their classrooms. We wish to acknowledge the Lakeside Fund for supporting the scoping exercise that informed the development of our education project. EPIC expresses our appreciation to all those who supported the work and ambitions of EPIC in 2022 including the staff of our corporate partners, Oracle Ireland, Emerson UK & Ireland, and Alexion - you made Christmas a little brighter for many of the children and young people that EPIC works with.

This year, we are proud to give thanks to Triona Waters for entrusting EPIC with a legacy fund in honour of her late daughter, Brita Waters. Brita was a dedicated Child Protection Social Worker with Tusla, and is missed dearly by her family, friends, and colleagues. Through [the Brita Waters Legacy Fund](#), children in care and young care-leavers continue to be supported in Brita's name through the provision of education and emergency grants. EPIC is humbled to play a small part in honouring Brita's memory.

Lastly, we extend special recognition to the remarkable children and young people who engaged with EPIC in 2022, whether through our National Advocacy Service, our Youth Councils or Care Community. Your contributions, experiences, and achievements serve as a constant source of inspiration and motivation for us every day.

You are epic!



L-R: EPIC Advocate, Adrian Sheehy, with EPIC Youth Council member, Alan Fay, at the Dublin Pride march 2022

# 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.



# We are EPIC

---

EPIC, Empowering People in Care, exists because some children and young people need extra help or support arising from their experiences in care. We are independent, with a clear purpose and mandate - to advocate for the rights of care-experienced children and young people.

Our team works with children in care, young care leavers, and anyone with experience of being in the care of Tusla up to the age of 26.. EPIC works to ensure that their voices are represented and considered in decisions that affect their lives, and that their experiences inform policy and practice. We also create safe spaces for children and young people to come together to work on projects 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 child's right to be heard and to participate in decision making.

## Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

# How we work

---

## 01 Independent Advocacy Service

EPIC operates the only National Advocacy Service for children in care and young care leavers. Our team of Advocates provide direct 1:1 advocacy to assist children and young people to have their views and concerns represented in decisions related to their care. They also work to empower them to speak for themselves, resolve the issues and problems they experience, and access the services and resources they need to bring about positive change in their lives.

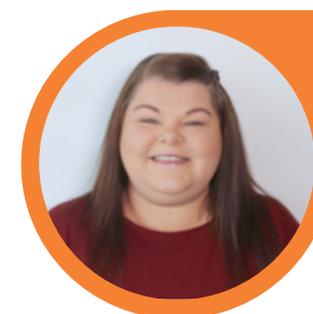
## 02 Youth Engagement and Participation

EPIC is committed to promoting positive care identities and building a strong Care Community. We aim to achieve this by providing spaces for connection, fun, and growth, as well as opportunities for action and learning by working on campaigns and projects. Our Youth Councils are representative groups of care-experienced children and young people that work with EPIC on specific issues at national level, contributing to our advocacy and engagement with Government and media.

## 03 Research and Policy

EPIC works to ensure that the rights of children in care are upheld in national policy and legislation. We are committed to influencing policy, legislation, and practice to ensure better outcomes for children in care and care leavers. We also conduct participative research to document the diverse experiences of children in care and care leavers. Our research and policy are informed by the data generated by our Advocacy Service caseload and aims to provide an evidence base to support national decision making on alternative care.

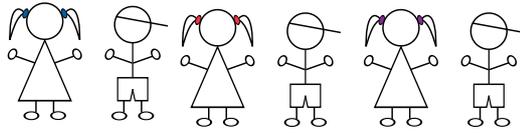
# Staff team in 2022



# Children in Care

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5,759



Children were in the care of the state.

813



Children entered care, with 666 children entering care for the first time.

5,112



Were in foster care placements.

439



Children and young people were in residential care or special care placements.

843



Children were awaiting an allocated Social Worker at the end of 2022.

2,949



Young people were in receipt of aftercare services.



## National Advocacy Service

7 full-time &  
2 part-time  
EPIC Advocates  
supported by two  
Advocacy Service  
Managers

In line with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, EPIC believe all children and young people with care experience should have access to independent, professional advocacy services. Through our National Advocacy Service, EPIC Advocates work to empower children and young people to have a say in matters that affect their care, ensuring that their views are considered in decision-making about their lives.

As part of EPIC's work, we provide a direct 1:1 advocacy service for children and young people who are currently living in state care or who have experience of living in care. This includes those in residential care, special care, and foster care, as well as children accommodated by the state under section 5 of the Child Care Act, 1991 and those sentenced or remanded by the courts in Oberstown Children's Detention Campus. EPIC also works with young people preparing to leave care, in aftercare services, and with young adults with care experience up to the age of 26 years.

The work of an EPIC Advocate can vary and is multifaceted. From providing information or practical support to navigate services, to higher-level advocacy, where an EPIC Advocate conducts court accompaniment or attends a child or young person's Care Review. All EPIC Advocates are professionally qualified and subject to garda vetting.

During 2022, the Advocacy Service caseload returned to pre-pandemic levels, emphasising the growing need for independent advocacy services. While the easing of COVID-19 restrictions marked a return to regular services in many parts of the care system, issues stemming from the pandemic remained and agencies grappled with backlogs and waitlists. Additionally, there was a 17% increase in the number of children and young people requesting an advocacy service for the first time.

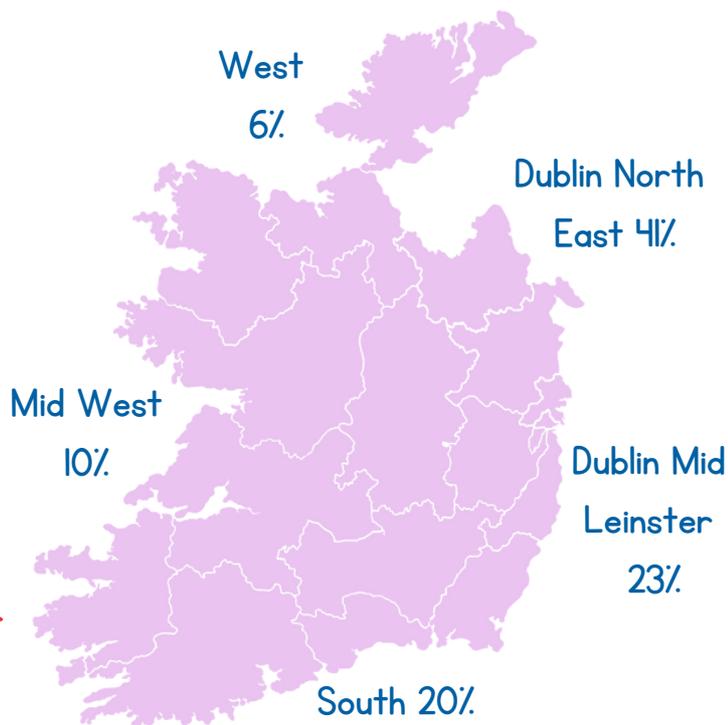




# National Advocacy Service

# 848

Advocacy cases



409 children and young people engaged with EPIC for the first time

44% of requests for an EPIC Advocate were made by children and young people

# 564



Individual children and young people were supported



# National Advocacy Service

252

Male



009

Trans /  
Non-Binary



303

Female



042

Under 11



217

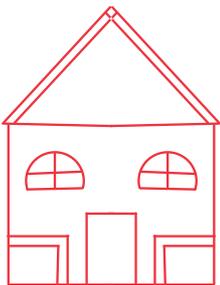
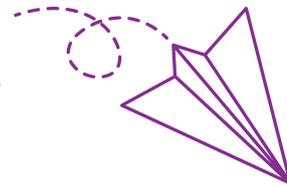
12-17yrs



305

18+yrs

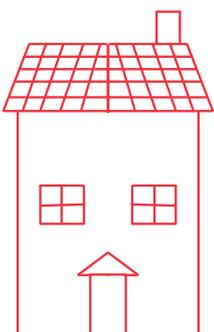
## Main presenting issues



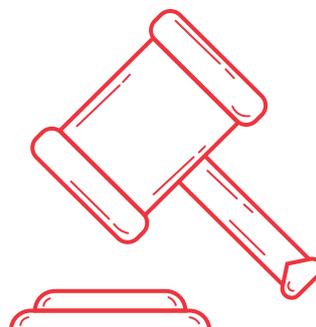
Accommodation



Access to  
Services



Care  
Placement



Legal  
Query

# National Advocacy Service

A dedicated team of nine EPIC Advocates, supported by two Advocacy Service Managers, worked with 564 children and young people on a total of 848 advocacy cases in 2022. The highest proportion of advocacy cases related to children and young people in residential care, which has consistently been the primary placement type of the children and young people with whom EPIC works. This was followed by care-leavers living independently, children in general foster care, and those in situations of homelessness.<sup>1</sup> The five primary presenting issues that advocacy was sought for in 2022 were accommodation, access to services, care placements, legal matters, and contact with family.

While accommodation continued to be the primary presenting issue to EPIC's Advocacy Service in 2022, there was a slight reduction in these cases when compared with 2021 data. This in isolation could be viewed positively, however, cases with homelessness as the main presenting issue doubled, from 22 cases in 2021 to 48 in 2022. In addition, one in eight of the children and young people we worked with in 2022 presented to our service while homeless.

Access to services continued to be amongst the main presenting advocacy issues, with the number of children and young people seeking assistance in this regard rising by 45%. One in nine children and young people in the Advocacy Service caseload in 2022 had been assessed as having an additional need. The type of need varied, and in some cases, children and young people had been assessed as having more than one need. It is possible that these findings underestimate the actual prevalence of additional needs amongst children and young people who engaged with EPIC. Additional needs may not always have been disclosed, particularly in relation to mild learning difficulties. In some cases, it is also likely that a child or young person may not have been assessed, highlighting pressure on the state's ability to provide timely interventions, including critical therapeutic and health services for children in care with additional needs.

Care placements, family contact, and legal matters also featured among the five main presenting issues during 2022.

[1] The definition of homelessness used here 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 in insecure accommodation with relatives or friends.



Drawing by Jonathan, aged 14



# National Advocacy Service

While some of these cases reflected the pressure in the alternative care system - a lack of suitable care placements, inconsistency in service provision, and an emerging crisis in the recruitment and retention of social workers - others related to wider societal issues. These include the housing and cost of living crises, limited resources for survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and the legal uncertainty and lack of clarity on rights and entitlements for unaccompanied children seeking international protection and young people from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive.<sup>2</sup>

The 2022 Advocacy Service caseload reflects the diverse, and often complex challenges that care-experienced children and young people can encounter. The service delivered by our team of Advocates is critical to our national policy and advocacy work. It enables us to recognise, track, and respond to ongoing and emerging trends, as well as the day-to-day issues experienced by the community of children and young people who seek and receive support from our National Advocacy Service.

Further analysis and information on presenting issues and our National Advocacy Service during 2022, can be found in our Advocacy Service Report.

[2] Unaccompanied children are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. Unaccompanied children are under the care of Tusla in Ireland and therefore, may refer to EPIC for Advocacy support. Their unique circumstances often involve navigating a distinct, complex array of issues regarding their rights and entitlements.



## National Advocacy Service



Request an EPIC Advocate at [epiconline.ie](https://epiconline.ie)



[info@epiconline.ie](mailto:info@epiconline.ie)



01 872 7661



Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm



Cork, Dublin, Limerick & Mayo



**EPIC Advocates**  
work with children  
in care & young care leavers  
across Ireland



# National Advocacy Service

652

meetings with children and young people



203

meetings with professionals

272

meetings with young people and professionals



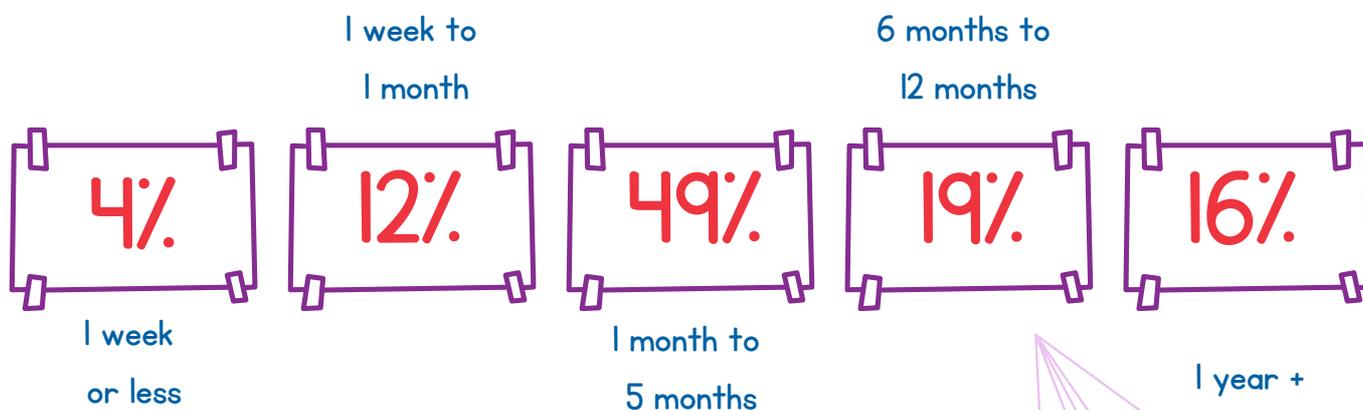
053

court hearing attendances



032

on-site Advocacy Service visits to special care and Oberstown



Duration of advocacy cases



# EPIC's Advocacy Service in Action

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Case Study 2022, Emma, aged 20

Emma left care two years ago. She is the oldest of her siblings, and her younger siblings remain in care in separate placements in different counties. Emma has not seen her siblings since leaving care and did not know how to arrange visits to see them.

## Main Presenting Issues

- Emma sought advice regarding her right to sibling access as an adult.
- Emma had been unable to make contact with her siblings' allocated social worker to communicate her request to see her siblings.
- The COVID-19 pandemic had stifled Emma's ability to access her siblings and she wanted to arrange an access plan as restrictions were being lifted.
- Emma's siblings are very important to her, and the lack of access was affecting her mental health.

## Key Actions Taken by Emma's Advocate

1. The Advocate assisted Emma to write a letter to the relevant social work department where she explained how important family time was to her, and how much she wanted to see her siblings having not seen them for over a year.
2. Emma's Advocate contacted the social work department on Emma's behalf over several months to establish sibling visits with the department. The Advocate escalated Emma's case to a principal social worker, who worked with the siblings' social worker to resume access.

## Outcomes

The letter from Emma and the engagement by the Advocate with the social work department and principal social worker resulted in Emma and her siblings' social worker making a plan to resume access visits. An access plan was established, and Emma's Advocate offered support throughout this process. Once Emma was happy that her family access had resumed, she was able to progress independently, and the case was closed. Emma now meets her siblings on a regular basis and really enjoys their family time together.



## Spotlight: Advocacy Services for Children Under 18

In 2022, our team of Advocates assisted 259 children under the age of 18 across 353 cases. 46 children were under the age of 12. Within this caseload, we observed how broader societal issues had a significant impact on children in care. For instance, COVID-19-related restrictions paused activities like family visits. Furthermore, cases were complicated by the shortfall in essential professionals within the care system, particularly social workers and aftercare workers. Notably, there were significant increases in cases related to complaints (up 75%), aftercare plans (up 47%), and access to services (up 39%) when compared to 2021.



Care Placement



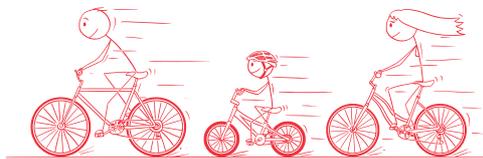
Complaint



After care



Access to Services



Family contact

A significant proportion of EPIC's caseload featured children presenting with complex profiles, and these cases were lengthier in duration, averaging six months from case opening to resolution.

Consistent with previous years, care placement remained the main presenting issue for children in care seeking independent advocacy services. In terms of the type of placement from whence children sought advocacy, the most prevalent was residential care, followed by special care and foster care.



Drawing by Sophie, aged 14



## Spotlight: Advocacy Services for Children Under 18

Cases related to complaints often involved Advocates assisting children to navigate the Tusla TellUs system. The nature of complaints varied, but included frustration with the delayed return of services which had been restricted during COVID-19, and the lack of allocation or reallocation of key professionals. Cases relating to aftercare planning also demonstrated frustration at the reduced service in this area and the impact of insufficient aftercare workers.

Significantly, 2022 saw the start of the war in Ukraine, while the global displacement crisis continued. This resulted in increased numbers of separated children and unaccompanied minors coming to Ireland in need of care and protection. Their unique circumstances involved navigating a distinct, complex array of issues, coupled with legal uncertainty and lack of clarity on rights and entitlements under emergency response directives.

Family access consistently ranks as a prominent category in EPIC's Advocacy Service caseload. Cases related to family contact remained consistent with 2021 data, possibly indicating delays in the reinstatement of access visits.

### Advocacy Service for Children Under 12

The two main presenting issues amongst this group in 2022 related to contact with their families and access to services. Advocacy services were sought in relation to visiting birth parents, siblings living in other care placements, and siblings who had left the care system. Meanwhile cases which related to access to services were largely focused on securing appropriate health and disability interventions.

The Child and Family Agency's policy is not to place a child under 12 in residential care.<sup>3</sup> This explains why care placement as a presenting issue is less prominent within this age group. However, 63 children 12 years and younger were in residential placements at the end of 2022.<sup>4</sup> This is reflected in the Advocacy Service caseload for under 12s, with 18 cases amongst this age group involving advocacy that assisted children in communicating their wishes to move to a foster care placement.



Drawing by Emily, aged 8

3. <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/270443-alternative-care/>

4. [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Review\\_of\\_Adequacy\\_Report\\_2022.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Review_of_Adequacy_Report_2022.pdf) (page 64).



## EPIC and CLM Partnership: Free Legal Advice Clinics

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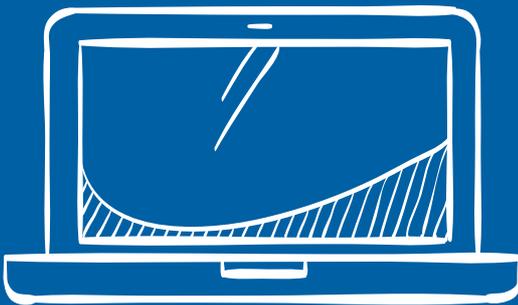
2022 was the second year of EPIC's partnership with Community Law and Mediation (CLM). In line with our strategic objective to meet the needs of care-experienced children and young people through enhanced partnerships, this project provides free legal aid clinics to care-experienced children and young people. This collaboration aims to empower those availing of the service to know and understand their rights and seek remedy.

The level of need for legal advice amongst care-experienced children and young people with whom we work remained consistent during 2022. CLM held 12 monthly clinics, supporting 33 children and young people across 41 legal issues including health, housing and accommodation, education, access to services, immigration, asylum, and to navigate difficult, sometimes abusive, relationships.

The project brings together the expertise of both organisations - CLM's 45 years of work supporting communities to use the law to improve their lives, and EPIC's 23 years of advocacy with care-experienced children and young people. The combination of a CLM Solicitor working collaboratively with an EPIC Advocate provides a best practice model by ensuring holistic, wrap-around support to the child or young person. Advocates assist with the preparation for the legal clinic, attend the appointment, and provide follow-up to ensure the child or young person understands the information provided, the parameters of their situation, and assist them should they decide to act on the advice given.

Feedback from the children and young people who used the service highlights the importance of access to free, independent, legal information and advice, delivered in a safe space. It is also evident that the service can offer remedies which enable children and young people to overcome difficult or challenging periods in their lives. The importance of this service was recognised by Tusla in 2022, who committed to fund the next three years of the project starting from 2023,<sup>5</sup> and to promote the clinic with Tusla staff across Ireland.

# EPIC and CLM Partnership: Free Legal Advice Clinics



**033** Children and young people availed of a free appointment with a CLM Solicitor

**012** Free legal clinics held with CLM Solicitors

**008** Under 18's availed of the service

**041**

Legal matters were addressed



## Main presenting issues

- Domestic Violence
- Guardianship and Custody/Access/Parental Rights
- Freedom of Information Requests
- Civil Complaints
- Family Law



# EPIC and CLM Partnership in action

Case Study 2022, Olivia, 23

## Background

Olivia, a care-experienced young woman had lost full custody of her children during a very difficult time in her life. During this period, the children lived with their father and his mother (their paternal grandmother), and Olivia's relationship with her children's father broke down. Olivia overcame the challenges she had been experiencing and requested an Advocate from EPIC's Advocacy Service as she felt her life was back on track and that she was able to care for her children again.

Olivia had been granted legal aid. However, she was not satisfied with the legal representation provided by the solicitor and had made a complaint in that regard. No other solicitors were available to take on her case, and she had been on the waiting list for legal aid since August 2021.

## Main Presenting Issues

- Due to the lack of representation available, Olivia was representing herself in court as she worked towards having her children returned to her.
- The father had left his mother's home, and the children were being cared for by the paternal grandmother with no legal basis for the arrangement.
- Despite Olivia's efforts to advocate for herself and taking the necessary steps indicated by the District Court Judge to regain care of her children, proceedings were not going well for Olivia and it seemed likely that the children would remain in the care of the paternal grandmother.

## Key Actions Taken by Olivia's Advocate

1. The Advocate allowed Olivia the space and time to explain in detail the impact the situation was having on her.
2. Olivia's Advocate gave her the opportunity to discuss the options available to her, and supported her to identify the best decision in her specific circumstances.
3. Having listened to Olivia's wishes, the Advocate suggested that she access the CLM legal clinic due to the legal nature of her advocacy case. With her consent, the Advocate booked Olivia an appointment.
4. Olivia's Advocate helped her to prepare and collect the most useful information pertaining to her specific situation ahead of her consultation with the CLM solicitor. Olivia's Advocate helped her



# EPIC and CLM Partnership in action

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to prepare for the appointment, which the Advocate attended with her, and to collect the information and documentation pertinent to her situation.

6. Olivia's Advocate then conducted a debrief with Olivia to make sure she to ensure she had a full understanding of the discussion and any tasks she had to follow up on, as well as commitments made by the CLM solicitor.
7. The CLM solicitor advised Olivia to outline her circumstances and the seriousness of any potential decisions made by the court without her having legal representation to the local Legal Aid Board (LAB). The solicitor also advised Olivia to maintain appropriate, regular contact with the LAB. The CLM solicitor committed to contacting the LAB responsible in Olivia's local area to highlight her situation.
9. The Advocate continued to work with Olivia on updates to the case and her support needs in advance of a legal decision on her situation.

## Outcomes

Following her engagement with EPIC and CLM, Olivia was able to pursue her case with the local LAB office, and the urgency of her situation was highlighted by CLM.

In March 2022, a solicitor was appointed to Olivia's case by the LAB. From the outset, Olivia found the quality of this representation to be excellent. A section 20 report was requested by the court because of the LAB engagement. Section 20 reports examine the welfare of a child and how the child can best be supported. The report gave a very positive testimony about Olivia. By April 2022, Olivia was returned full custody of her children. The case was then closed

The last update the Advocate received from Olivia was that she had been allocated a council house with the appropriate space for her and her two children. She was looking forward to making a loving and safe home for all of them for years to come. She had just started a new job and was looking forward to the experience and responsibility that this would bring. Olivia was immensely grateful for the support and advice provided to her by her EPIC Advocate and the CLM solicitor with whom she consulted.



# Youth Engagement and Participation

2022 was an exciting year at EPIC as we committed to strengthen and diversify our youth engagement and participation work. In addition to the impressive portfolio of activities conducted by the EPIC Youth Council, for the first time, an under 18s Youth Council was established, and an EPIC Care Community.

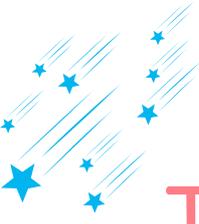
These new participation pathways were developed to create opportunities for children and young people to engage with EPIC in ways that work for them. Our goal was to create safe and inclusive spaces where care-experienced children and young people can meet peers, develop new skills by working on projects or campaigns they care about, and have opportunities to influence national decision-making processes that directly impact their lives and care experiences.

## The EPIC Care Community

The EPIC Care Community is a space for children and young people to come together to foster connections with other care-experienced children and young people across Ireland. In the Care Community, children and young people learn about their rights and how their voices can serve as catalysts for change. Community members can get involved in opportunities for action by working on projects that promote positive care identities and participating in events and activities of interest to them.

In 2022, our Youth Engagement and Participation team welcomed nearly 40 children and young people from around Ireland to the EPIC Care Community. They hosted social meetups in Cork, Dublin, and Limerick, and coordinated our participation in Pride, with the first ever EPIC Bloc at the Dublin Pride march – see the Spotlight Chapter on page 35. Members were also invited to sit on the Planning Committee for Care Day 2023, and some joined a Care Day photo-voice project.



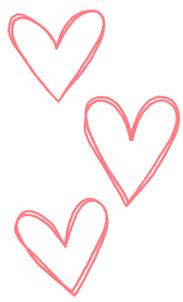


# The EPIC Care Community

2 full-time  
Participation  
Officers + 1  
Participation  
Manager



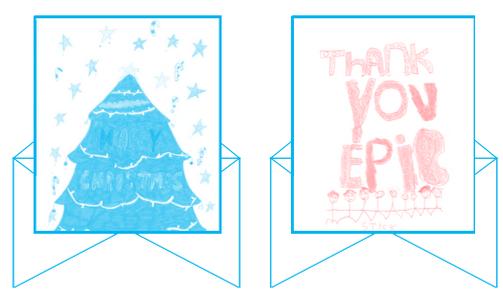
The EPIC Care Community was created!



# 005

Care Community social meetups across Cork, Dublin and Limerick

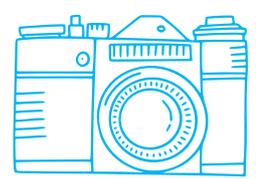
Two national creative calls to design EPIC's 'thank you' card and Christmas cards



12 Days of EPIC Christmas Cards Campaign

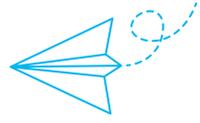


Care Day 23 Planning Committee convened & theme developed



# 002

photography and story exchange workshops held





# The EPIC Care Community



First ever EPIC Bloc at Dublin Pride!

One awesome hand painted Pride banner made with love!

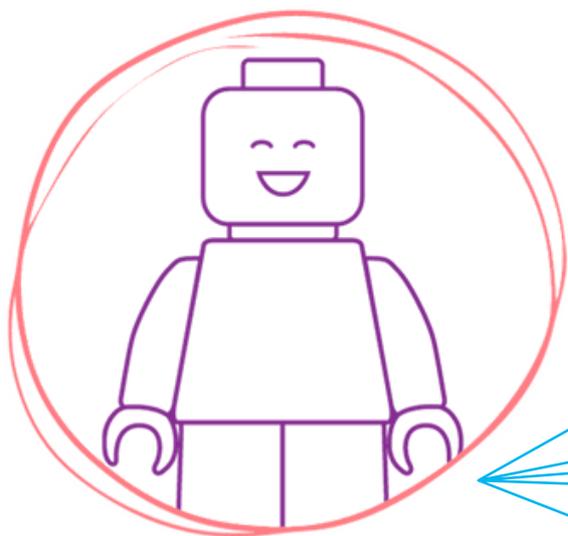


Key message =  
"EPIC Courage"



...and a Pride  
podcast  
special





## An interview with Cian, member of our Care Community and UI8's Youth Council!

What have you enjoyed the  
most about being involved in the  
Care Community?

Getting to know all the  
young people.



I believe you were on the Care  
Day Planning Committee. What  
was that like?

I worked on a theme called  
'stick together stand together'  
that was based around Lego.  
Being on the Planning Committee  
was really fun because I know  
all the young people and children  
were looking up to us.



Name: Cian

Age: 15 years old

Favourite Food? Pizza

Favourite Colour? Blue

Favourite thing to do?

Build Lego

How did you first get involved  
in the EPIC Care Community?

I found being in care very hard  
and my dad helped me request  
advocacy from EPIC's Limerick  
Advocate, Joe Walsh. I then joined  
the Care Community in 2021.



Tell us about the photography and story exchange workshop you did...

I really enjoyed the workshop in Cork and my items were my first cuddly toy rabbit and 3 toy cars out of the 1000 cars I have in the collection. We took photos of our items and we told everyone why they are important to us. This project was for Care Day 23!

What was your best EPIC moment in 2022?

Planning Care Day!



What would you like to see more of in EPIC's youth engagement and participation work?

I would like to see more engagement with the Care Community.

Funniest EPIC moment?

People telling stories at the workshop in Cork.

Be yourself and reach for your goals and live life to the max.

Life is good!



Cian's message for other children and young people in care in Ireland.

# Youth Engagement and Participation

## The Hear Our Voices Conference: The Rights and Determination of the Best interests of the Child in Parental Separation and in Care Proceedings

The Hear Our Voices conference was hosted under the auspices of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of Europe at Farmleigh by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Justice and Equality on the 3 October 2022. Conference participants included policy makers, practitioners, and government officials from across the Council of Europe and its Member States.

The Conference objective was to examine how to determine and promote the rights, voice and best interests of the child and young person in the context of parental separation and care proceedings. Lemn Sissay, a care-experienced poet, writer and broadcaster from England delivered the keynote address at the conference. This was followed by a "fireside chat" with EPIC Youth Council members, Lauren O'Toole, Jamie Adams and Alan Fay, and Fostering First Participation Ambassador, Arsen Martina. In conversation, they spoke to Lemn about stigma and the care system, the importance of the voices of children being heard, and what they feel is needed to ensure better experiences and outcomes for children in care and young care leavers. See the Research and Policy chapter on page 37 for more information on the Council's national advocacy work.

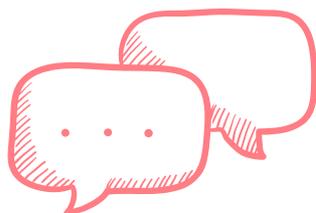


L-R: Poet, Playwright and broadcaster, Lemn Sissay, with Arsen Martina, Participation Ambassador with Fostering First Ireland, and EPIC Youth Council members, Lauren O'Toole, Alan Fay, and Jamie Adams at the Hear Our Voices Conference in Farmleigh



# The EPIC Youth Councils in Action

The Councils contributed to and advised on policy submissions, research and communications resources



Members met with Minister Simon Harris, the Higher Education Authority, and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to call for the inclusion and prioritisation of care leavers in the new the National Access Plan for Equity in Higher Education 2022-2028

## Campaign Win!

Care-leavers named a priority group a priority group in the NAP 2022-2028



### Public Engagements

- National Access Plan Launch
- Briefing on foster care to the Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Council of Europe 'Hear Our Voices' Conference hosted by Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth + Department of Justice
- Union of Students Ireland College Awareness Week Panel Discussion
- SETU Waterford Seminar
- Education and Training Board Ireland Annual Conference





# The EPIC Youth Councils in Action

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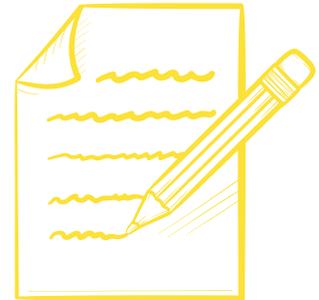
Under 18's EPIC Youth Council established!

009



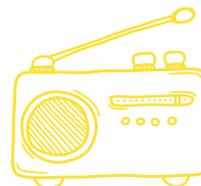
new members welcomed...  
6 under 18's and 3 over 18's!

Youth Research Advisory Committee convened to inform research design and approach for a participatory research study on care and disability



Members contributed to podcasts for International Women's Day, Pride, Care Day and a live Education special at South East Technological University (SETU) Waterford

Our Youth Council reached the public with



opinion pieces in the Irish Times and the Journal.ie, Drivetime interviews, TV news, and national and regional print and broadcast coverage



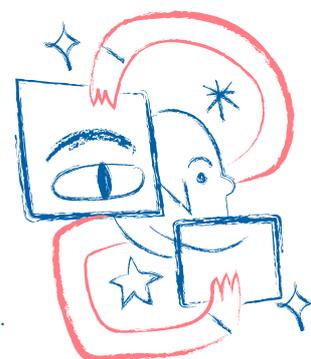
## Care Day 2022 – It takes a village!

On 18 February 2022, care-experienced children and young people across Ireland celebrated their seventh annual Care Day with support from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Tusla, and the Ombudsperson for Children’s Office – among many others!

Care Day was established in 2016 as a moment to celebrate the positive experiences and contributions of children and young people in care or with care experience. Since then, EPIC and the Youth Council have used Care Day to raise awareness of care experiences, reduce stigma, and celebrate the achievements of care-experienced children and young people. Care Day is also about creating 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.

The theme for Care Day 2022 took inspiration from the African proverb, ‘It takes a village to raise a child’. The EPIC Youth Council wanted to extend the 2022 celebration to people who have a positive influence in the lives of children in care. They also wished to highlight how important these relationships are in shaping care journeys.

Council members each recalled people in their lives who had a significant impact on their outlook and sense of self-worth. They were siblings, foster carers, teachers, relatives, social workers, coaches, neighbours – all of whom hailed from their “village.” They invited other children and young people to celebrate the important people in their care journeys, by sending EPIC voice notes about their village members.



## Care Day 22



“Hi, here is my Mint Ford Sierra RS Cosworth, 3 door. I started talking to locals in my area and from this the shop assistants gave me cardboard boxes so I could build the Sierra. I got my idea from a YouTube video. Using my pocket money, I bought parts and a steering wheel for the Sierra. Some staff (\*in the residential care home) helped me with building the car. It takes a village to raise a child because, without the kindness of the shop assistants and staff members I would not have been able to get the material to build the Sierra. As you can see from the pictures the Sierra is not fully finished yet, but I am hoping to do this soon.” ~ AC

### Simple acts of listening, encouraging, or understanding

In addition to a focus on people who have positively influenced their care journeys, the Council also called on people to realise their potential to be an ally in the life of a child or young person in care - to become a #CareAware champion!

Council members launched the #CareAware solidarity action with a PR drive and photocall outside the GPO in Dublin, under the creative direction of photographer Mark Stedman. This pre-Care Day action also marked the first in-person Council activity since COVID-19 restrictions came into effect in 2020.

### Our wonderfully creative Care Community

Care Day participation activities included several creative actions. From scavenger hunts to writing and baking competitions, there were lots of opportunities for children and young people to have fun and celebrate on and off-line. EPIC was delighted to see a Care Day campus action at TU Dublin-Tallaght, an incredible art exhibition by children in care in Mayo, and beautifully decorated Care Day spaces in children’s residential care homes across Ireland.

As members of the Five Nations, One Voice alliance, EPIC Youth Council members also co-hosted a digital village event entitled, “Conversations with the Care Community.” Together with their care-experienced peers from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England, they discussed themes of education, transition, and accessing information. The Alliance also produced a podcast about the event, which added to the two Care Day podcast specials that EPIC produced!

# Care Day 22

## A global celebration

People all over the world shared their support through videos and photos, including the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman, the CEO of Tusla, Mr. Bernard Gloster, and the Ombudsperson for Children, Dr. Niall Muldoon. Collectively, we got #CareDay22 trending on social media and we reached thousands of people through our celebration!

EPIC was thrilled to see members of the Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, as well as other political representatives participate in the #CareAware call, alongside civil society organisations, individuals, universities, and schools. Local Tusla teams in Limerick, Mayo, Meath, Cavan, Monaghan, Tipperary, and Louth also participated in online activities to promote the Care Day message.

## Empowering People in Care

To wrap up a very successful Care Day celebration, EPIC Youth Council members, Jamie Adams and Lauren O’Toole, joined former Council member, Danielle McGarry, EPIC CEO, Marissa Ryan, and Professor Emeritus in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin, Robbie Gilligan, for a briefing in Leinster House hosted by Senator Lynn Ruane. They spoke about the unique challenges children in the care system face, their own experiences of care, and put forward recommendations for change. Together, they called on politicians present to join their village, and to become care aware.

EPIC acknowledge everyone who contributed to the success of Care Day 2022, in particular the DCEDIY for funding our Care Day activities. The EPIC team give BIG thanks to the children and young people driving Care Day and its message, and to those who participated and celebrated with EPIC and beyond!

“We used the idea of our school being a village in itself, full of allies. The young people who attend our school are at the centre of all that we do. The words written by the young people, at the bottom of the display, are words that they associate with our school.

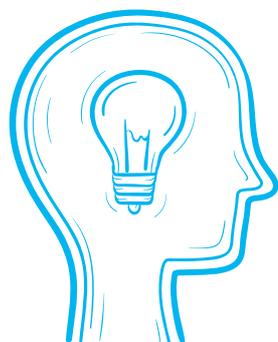
Each handprint, reaching towards the young people in the centre, was done by a member of school staff and represent our roles/subjects.”

Ballydowd School’s Care Day Village





# Care Day 2022: "It takes a village"

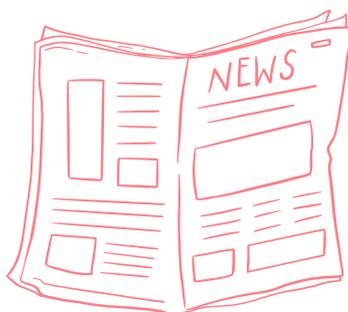


Social Care students at TU Dublin Tallaght held a campus-wide action <3

An amazing art exhibition by children in care in Mayo



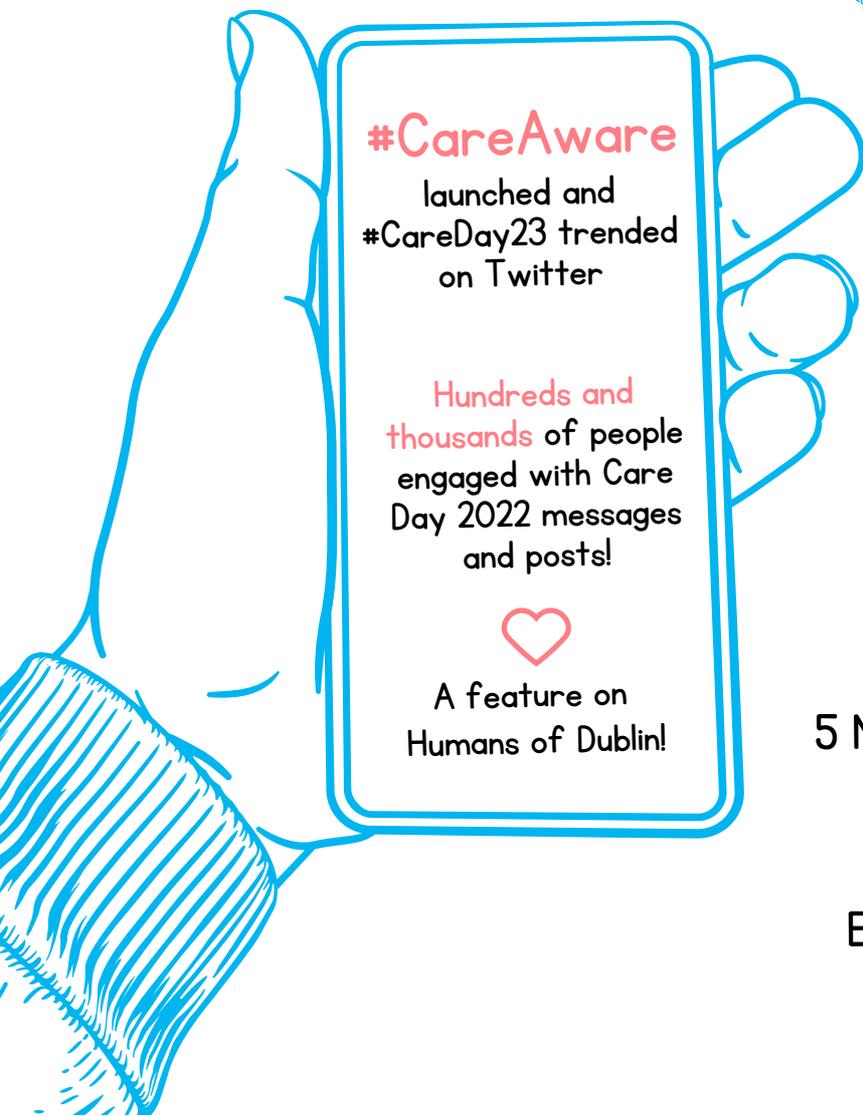
We had Care Day bakers, writers, painters & space decorators!



An exclusive in The Irish Times



'More support needed for care system leavers entering higher education'



**#CareAware**

launched and #CareDay23 trended on Twitter

Hundreds and thousands of people engaged with Care Day 2022 messages and posts!



A feature on Humans of Dublin!



5 Nations, I Voice 'Conversations with the Care Community' co-hosted by EPIC Youth Council members!

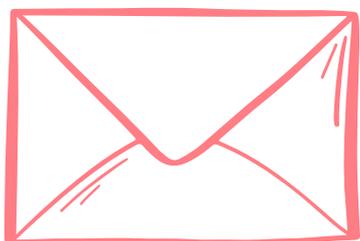


# Care Day 2022: "It takes a village"



## #CareAware

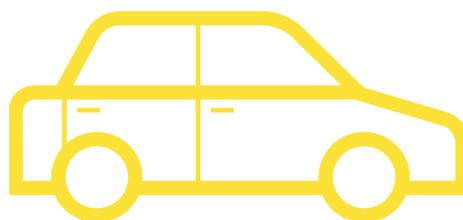
Photocall with Youth Council and a Regional PR Drive



Current and former Youth Council members briefed members of the Oireachtas in the AV Room on care experiences and issues.



Messages of support from #CareAware champions Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, Roderic O'Gorman, CEO of Tusla, Bernard Gloster, and the Ombudsperson for Children, Niall Muldoon



& 1 Mint Ford Sierra RS Cosworth, 3 doorbuilt thanks to AC's village!



## Spotlight: EPIC Pride

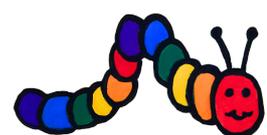
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At EPIC, we believe that love is love, and that no one should be judged or discriminated against based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2020, a sub-group of EPIC Youth Council members began a project called Coming Out in Care. It aimed to fill a gap that LGBTQI+ Youth Council members identified through their care journeys – a lack of resources and information specifically for LGBTQI+ children and young people in care, and the professionals working with them. Council members leading on this project officially launched their new resources at a Care Day 2021 webinar that explored the challenges faced when coming out or transitioning while in care.

Building on this project, we committed to advance intersectionality, solidarity, and to work with minorities in the care system in our Strategic Plan 2022-2027. We aim to achieve this through participative research on the intersections of care experience with areas of equality, diversity and inclusion, and by joining social movements and coalitions that work to advance the rights of marginalised communities. In 2022, EPIC began this work by joining the Trans Equality Together coalition and facilitating the first ever care-experienced youth bloc at the Dublin Pride march to demonstrate that EPIC is a safe and inclusive place for LGBTQI+ children and young people.

In early 2022, a group of young people from the EPIC Youth Council formed a Pride Planning Committee and decided on the message they wanted to share. Over the course of several weeks, a dedicated Pride crew got creative, hand painting their banner and adorning it with motifs of butterflies and caterpillars to represent trans experiences and show solidarity with trans youth.

In the run up to Pride, EPIC Youth Council members shared video messages of support and solidarity and encouraged our care aware supporters and champions to join us for the day.



## Spotlight: EPIC Pride

EPIC Youth Council member, Kai Brosnan, shared his views on a Pride Special Care Experience Podcast. Kai chatted about his journey in the care system as a young trans person, the importance of LGBTQI+ spaces in a post-lockdown world, and the importance of friendship when coming out in care.

On a sunny morning in June, we proudly set out with our LGBTQI+ Care Community and Council members under the banner 'They tried to bury us, but they didn't realise we were seeds'. It was a day brimming with excitement and positivity, with some marching in Pride for the very first time, while others marched for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pride month is a powerful symbol of acceptance, equality, and inclusivity. It is a moment for hope and solidarity, as well as a time to remember the long history of protesters who fought courageously for LGBTQI+ rights for the generations to come. The Pride march is also an opportunity to show solidarity, and to raise awareness about LGBTQI+ experiences and rights.

EPIC was delighted to share this day with youth groups and organisations from across Ireland at a pre-Pride breakfast organised by Belong To and Youth Work Ireland. We also had the good fortune to meet Minister O'Gorman at the breakfast and to wish him a happy Pride.

Having a care-experienced youth bloc at Dublin Pride was a first for EPIC. As part of our commitment to advance intersectionality, solidarity, and to work with minorities in the care system, it is the beginning of a much wider programme of rights-based work with care-experienced children and young people impacted by multiple marginalities, inequality or discrimination.





## Research and Policy

Goal Three of our new Strategic Plan details our commitment to producing agenda-setting policy and research, informed by lived experiences. Under this Goal we set ourselves three primary objectives.

### Build and use our evidence base to inform our policy work

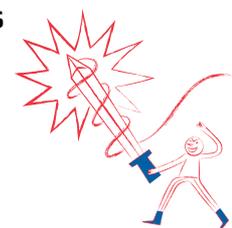
This involves developing policy positions directly informed by our National Advocacy Service and Youth Engagement and Participation Programme (YEPP), and the establishment of a Children and Young People's Policy and Research Forum. To this end, during 2022, EPIC produced four policy submissions and contributed to two Oireachtas Briefings to the Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

EPIC Youth Council member, Lauren O'Toole, delivered EPIC's opening statement at a Briefing on issues related to foster care, with additional input from Lauren, her fellow Council member Rory Brown, and EPIC CEO, Marissa Ryan. Both Lauren and Rory emphasised the crucial role foster carers play and the need for them to be properly supported and recognised. They urged the government to allocate additional budgetary resources to the foster care allowance, and to ensure training in trauma-informed care and counselling are available for foster families. Lastly, they called for independent advocacy services for children in care to be enshrined in legislation.

Later in the year, EPIC Advocate, Brenda Kneafsey, and EPIC CEO, Marissa Ryan, delivered a briefing to the Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on supports for care-leaver parents whose children are in care. EPIC believe the state has a particular duty to care-leaver parents as these parents were themselves once children in state care.



EPIC Youth Council members, Lauren O'Toole and Rory Brown, with EPIC CEO, Marissa Ryan, at a briefing on foster care to the Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth.





## Research and Policy

Brenda detailed experiences of young care-experienced parents that EPIC work with, and the complex systems and multiple agencies they must navigate, often with limited or no support. We called for better recognition of care-leaver parents, tailored supports and services, and improved collaboration between relevant state agencies.

Our submissions to the Government and statutory agencies in 2022 included a joint submission with the Irish Foster Care Association on a review of the National Aftercare Policy, as well as submissions on the Draft General Scheme on the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill 2022, and to the consultation on the Youth Homelessness Strategy. In our Pre-Budget 2023 Submission, we addressed priority issues relating to the lives of children in care and care-leavers that require enhanced fiscal support. We urged the government to direct public funds to support the recruitment of child protection and welfare specialists, to invest in specialist mental health supports and interventions for children in care, dedicated accommodation, and in the backbone of our child protection system - foster parents.

### Collaboration with research institutes and universities

EPIC is committed to identifying and developing partnerships, funding, and resource opportunities for research that will improve the lives and care experiences of the community EPIC work with. We were delighted to co-launch [One More Adversity: The lived experience of care leavers in Ireland during the COVID-19.](#)

This research was led by Professor Robbie Gilligan and Dr. Eavan Brady from Trinity College Dublin, who approached EPIC to partner on the study as the only national organisation providing direct advocacy services to this cohort. The study explores the experiences of care leavers in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic. It documents the challenges and opportunities they faced, and what resources they drew on as they navigated life in lockdown.



Many care leavers told us they had found resources in themselves and their networks that had built up their confidence and helped them get through. Something as simple as a new hobby or interest could make quite a difference.

One More Adversity

The lived experience of care leavers in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic



In 2022, EPIC progressed a research proposal that was awarded a grant by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. The successful application will develop participative develop a participative research project that will gather evidence on the lived experiences of children in care and care leavers with disabilities. The origin of this body of work is a Care Day webinar on disability and the care system hosted by EPIC in 2021. At the event, EPIC Youth Council members and guests highlighted some of the challenges, and positive practices, they have encountered as children living with disabilities in care, including the lack of research on their lived experience.



# Research and Policy

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Independent researcher, Deborah Erwin, is conducting this study on behalf of EPIC, and with ethical approval granted by Tusla's Research Ethics Committee in August 2022, field work has commenced. The study has four main aims and is due to be published in 2023.

1. To develop an understanding of the experiences of children and young people with disabilities while they are in care and aftercare.
2. To enable these children and young people to directly participate in awareness raising, in line with their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
3. To generate evidence to support policy makers and practitioners to progress implementation of the UNCRPD amongst children and young people in the care system.
4. To explore the level of knowledge amongst children and young people in care on the UNCRPD.

## Engage and influence government stakeholders

Our last objective under our strategic goal to produce agenda-setting policy and research informed by lived experiences, is to use this to advocate for national change to policy and practice. This work also involves engaging with key stakeholders, and in 2022 we presented at a range of policy conferences including The Independent Guardian Ad Litem Agency (TIGLA) Conference on Family Reunification and the Tusla Child Law Conference.

Central to this objective, is ensuring that the voices of our Care Community are heard where it matters (Strategic Goal Two) and EPIC will achieve this by providing our Youth Councils opportunities to speak directly to decision makers about the care system.

EPIC's main campaign focus for 2022 was having care leavers recognised as a priority group in the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028 (NAP). This work, which was led by EPIC Youth Council members, Clara O'Shea Collins and Rory Brown, and EPIC CEO Marissa Ryan, is detailed by Rory in the following Spotlight chapter.

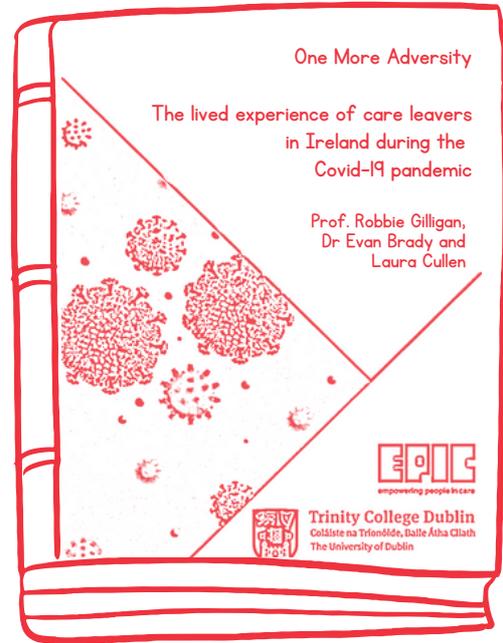


L-R: Marissa Ryan, CEO, and EPIC Youth Council Members, Rory Brown and Clara O'Shea Collins.

# Policy and Research

1 part-time Policy Manager & 1 part-time Research Officer supported by the CEO

Research on the experience of care leavers in Ireland during the Covid-19 Pandemic with Trinity College Dublin launched



004



Policy submissions made



Coverage in The Irish Times and The Irish Examiner on issue of care leavers and homelessness

- Joint Submission with Irish Foster Care Association on Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care Review
- Submission on the Draft General Scheme on the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill 2022
- Pre-Budget 2023 Submission
- Submission to the Consultation on Youth Homelessness Strategy

Op-ed in the Irish Examiner by Marissa Ryan on our Pre-Budget Submission

# Policy and Research

EPIC staff contributed to national and international conferences and seminars

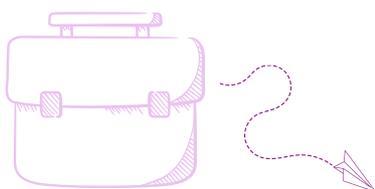


## Coalitions

Trans Equality Together

Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness

Political engagements and advisory groups



The Independent Guardian Ad Litem Agency (TIGALA) Conference

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Department of Justice and Council of Europe 'Hear Our Voices' Conference

Education Training Board Ireland Annual Conference

CREW European Seminar: Challenges and opportunities in light of the principles of child-friendly justice

Tusla Law Conference

Oireachtas Briefing on Foster Care

Oireachtas Briefing on Supports for Parents of Children in Care

National Access Plan Advocacy: Meetings with Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Higher Education Authority

Membership of the National Youth Justice Advisory Group

Stakeholder Advisory Group for the DCEDIY Longitudinal study, 'Care Experiences: Journeys through the Irish care system'.



## Spotlight: NAP Campaign Improving Care Leavers Access to Third-Level Education

During COVID-19, many aspects of EPIC had to go online, including Care Day when we celebrate care-experienced people. In 2021, our Care Day activities included a range of webinars on different topics, including education. My fellow Council member, Clara, and I hosted this webinar in which we talked about the issues we faced in education, from primary school to third-level education. This was the beginning of great conversations about the barriers that face care leavers in education and the lack of awareness many stakeholders have about these barriers.

These conversations were only the beginning. At the end of 2021, myself and Clara participated in a seminar on access to education for care leavers hosted by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Tusla - the Child and Family Agency, Munster Technological University (MTU), and EPIC. Our fellow Youth Council member, Mark Hennessy, MC's the event. This seminar explored education and development opportunities for care-experienced people in further and higher-level education, with MTU leading the way after launching a university-wide initiative across their Cork and Kerry campuses to provide tailored support to students with care experience in partnership with EPIC.

During the seminar, Clara and I discussed the many positives and challenges that we and the wider care community face continuously on our journeys through education. We also provided key recommendations as to how college campuses can become more inclusive.



L-R: Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, Simon Harris TD, and EPIC Youth Council member, Rory Brown, at the launch of the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028 at TU Dublin.



## Spotlight: NAP Campaign

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During this time, EPIC made a submission to the government consultation on the next National Access Plan for Equity in Higher Education, 2022-2028 (NAP). EPIC advocated that care-leavers should be named as a priority group in the next NAP to ensure they are properly supported to access and progress in higher and further education. It was noted that previous actions taken to address the underrepresentation of other vulnerable and marginalised groups have proven effective in improving access and attrition rates. This demonstrates that targeted interventions, measures, and supports can increase representation of marginalised groups in higher and further education, and result in better education outcomes for those they seek to benefit.

As we entered 2022, much progress had been made the previous year in getting care leavers noticed in the education sector, with many stakeholders taking an interest in the issues we were raising. EPIC secured meetings with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the Higher Education Authority, and Minister Simon Harris. These meetings were quite insightful and productive, and Clara and I got to speak and portray several issues at each of these meetings.

In each of these meetings, I spoke about the need for multiple supports prior to accessing higher education, during education, and beyond, as it had been a downfall throughout my, and many other care leaver's journeys through education. I also spoke about the significant disadvantages care leavers face in comparison to their non-care-experienced peers, such as the lack of family support, the patchiness of aftercare supports, how there was no room for failure or gap years, and the stress of finding accommodation and becoming an adult at 18.

Clara added to these points, again reinforcing that herself and myself were exceptions of the care leaver community due to our own self resilience. She added that there needed to be a standardisation of supports for care leavers, and that supports needed to be highlighted and signposted for care leavers. Clara also spoke of the lack of transition for care leavers.



L-R: Megan Berry, Traveller Outreach Officer at Maynooth University, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, and EPIC Youth Council member, Rory Brown, at the launch of the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028 at TU Dublin.



## Spotlight: NAP Campaign

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From being a child to suddenly being an adult, the challenges of staying in a course when you've limited networks and difficulties building relationships due to trust issues, and the limited choice care leavers have in terms of courses as care leavers need to enter a job/profession almost immediately upon graduation. Clara also spoke for the need for Designated Support Officers for care leavers on campus, and points of contact within higher education. It was from these meetings and raising these points that Minister Harris confirmed that care leavers would be named in the next NAP. For me and Clara, this felt huge as we had been working on this for over a year and it was the first-time care leavers were going to be given priority in higher-level education. It was a big win for us especially with Minister Harris fully on board stating that his department had a duty of care to anyone in the care of the state and so he wanted to act on the issues we raised by including care leavers in the National Access Plan for 2022-2028.

Being named in the NAP is important for many reasons. Care-leavers will now have enhanced supports and services made available to them, and the Department and third level institutions will be collecting and publishing data on this group for the first time, which will inform future public policy. It will also allow organisations like EPIC to identify good practices and argue for expansion where necessary, as well as to highlight gaps.

I was invited by Minister Harris to help launch the plan at TU Dublin in August 2022. This was quite an emotional day for me. It was the first time I had been part of a piece of work from the beginning to the end with a positive outcome, and it was the first time I felt the government had listened to my voice. The launch was quite amazing as it received much media attention nationally and regionally, especially my story which I presented at the launch. In my speech, I spoke about the barriers I faced going through higher level education and how this new Plan would begin breaking down those barriers.

This piece of work was quite long and took over two years to reach the outcome that we wanted. It is something I, and the Council, are proud of as it was the start of breaking down the barriers for care leavers in education and hopefully ensuring care leavers of the future don't need luck and resilience to progress their educational journeys.

Rory





# Finance, Governance and Transparency

EPIC is governed by a Board of Directors, with a minimum requirement of five members. The Directors sit for a three-year term and may be re-elected for a second, and final, term. The Directors serve on the Board on a voluntary basis and are not remunerated. A total of €191.70 was paid to Directors by way of re-imbursed expenses in 2022 (nil in 2021).

The Directors work through a series of sub-committees and formal Board meetings. In addition, they are committed to holding an annual strategy review workshop and participate in EPIC public events.

In 2022, the Board held six formal meetings, in addition to the Annual General Meeting, as well as consultations and workshops for our strategic planning process.

## Board Sub-Committees

The Board of Directors re-structured the Board sub-committees to align with our new five-year Strategic Plan, that was launched in September 2022. The Board sub-committees are:

### Formal sub-committees:

- Strategy and Purpose
- Governance and Risk
- Finance and Fundraising

### Ad-hoc sub-committees (as need arises):

- HR
- Research Ethics





# Finance, Governance and Transparency

Each sub-committee has a Terms of Reference approved by the Board, an elected Chairperson, and programme of work on which they report to the Board as a whole.

## Board recruitment, induction, and training

Board recruitment is an ongoing process, which involves members of the Governance and Risk Committee in partnership with the Chair and Vice-Chair. New Board members are invited to participate in an induction process on a targeted basis to ensure that the skills and experiences of the Board are relevant and strategic.

The induction process includes interviews with the current Chair, CEO, and an independent Board member. The Governance and Risk Committee also conduct due diligence on new Directors.

Each Director is encouraged to improve their knowledge of EPIC and the sector through formal and informal training. Presentations by EPIC staff or partners are arranged each year to inform the Board on areas of interest.

All Board members must complete Children First Training within six months of joining the Board.

## Conflict of Interest

As part of our Board Handbook, EPIC has a Conflicts of Interest Policy. The Board of Directors are required to complete a conflicts of interest declaration when taking up their position on the Board. At the beginning of each board meeting, members are invited to disclose any conflicts of interest which may arise before any agenda items are considered by the board. Any instances which may arise can be recorded in the minutes. Board members are invited to update this declaration annually.

## Code of Governance

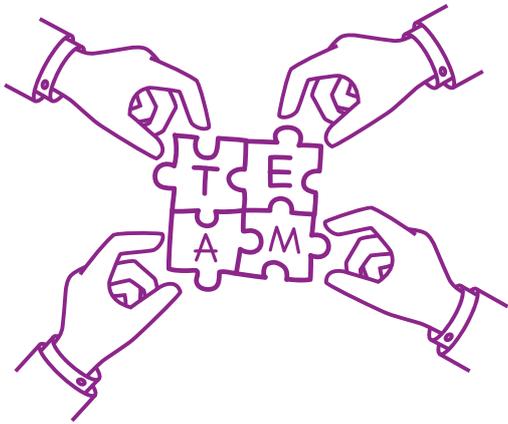
Following the implementation of the Code of Governance, EPIC have embarked on a continuous improvement plan to ensure that ongoing maintenance and improvement of our standards.

This plan is formally reviewed by the Board twice a year to review progress and add further work.



# Finance, Governance & Transparency

1 full-time COO & 1 full-time Advocacy Administrator



020 members of staff

004 new team members

## Board of Directors

- Dr Fiachra O'Suilleabháin
- Mr John Feehan
- Ms Val Kerr
- Ms. Deirdre Mullen
- Mr Barry O'Sullivan
- Maeve Doyle
- Michelle O'Connell
- Aidan Stacey
- Conor Brophy

Chair + Vice Chair

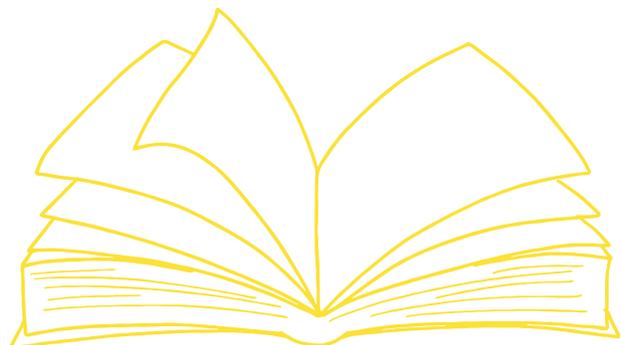
## Staff team

- Adrian
- Brenda
- Caroline N
- Caroline R
- Conor
- Edel
- Eilis
- Fiona
- Joe
- John
- Karla
- Kate
- Kizito
- Marissa
- Mark
- Michele
- Peter
- Sadhbh
- Suzanne
- Therese

Joined in 2022

Our Strategic Plan 2022-2027 was published!

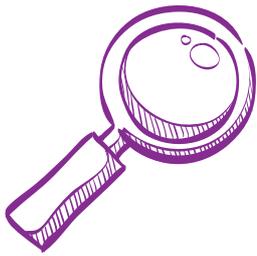
009 Board members





# Finance, Governance & Transparency

Secured funding for two new projects

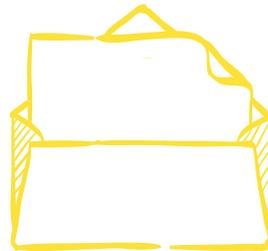


Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission funded Disability Research Project

Tusla Education Support Service funded Education Project



Audit accounts published - clean audit report issued!



009

lobbying returns



010 Organisational Codes and Policies



reviewed and updated!



## Spotlight: A Strategic Roadmap

A significant milestone for EPIC in 2022 was the publication of a comprehensive [five-year Strategic Plan](#), as referenced throughout this report, which lays out our organisational priorities and ambitions for the future.

In March 2022, the management team enlisted the expertise of Kelleher O'Meara to work with EPIC on the strategic planning process. A co-creation approach was adopted which involved the facilitation of workshops with EPIC staff, and consultations with EPIC's Youth Council, Board, and key external stakeholders. This approach provided invaluable feedback on the work of EPIC, how it is perceived, as well as areas for improvement.

With the organisation approaching its 25th year of operations in 2024, the development of the new Plan allowed the team to reflect on the history of EPIC, celebrate its accomplishments, and identify its inherent strengths. It also enabled a comprehensive assessment of the external factors shaping the operational landscape in which the organisation exists, including political, economic, social, technological, legislative, and environmental dynamics.

Through this collaborative planning process, EPIC developed a renewed vision and mission, and agreed the intrinsic core values and strategic goals that will guide the organisation for the next five years. The Plan underscores EPIC's unwavering commitment to human rights and to the voices of the children and young people we serve. Through this strategic roadmap, our aim is to enhance our accountability not only to the children and young people we work with, but also, to our valued partners, supporters, and funders.

We thank all our stakeholders that contributed to this process for their honesty and constructive input. We look forward to continued partnership, collaboration, and conversations to ensure Ireland is a society where every child in the care system is valued, respected and heard.

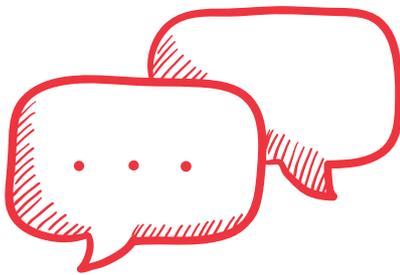




# Strategic Goals

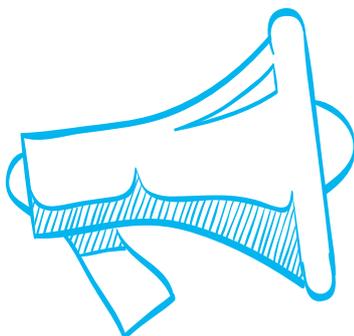


**01** Providing quality, effective and independent rights-based advocacy directly to care-experienced children and young people up to the age of 26



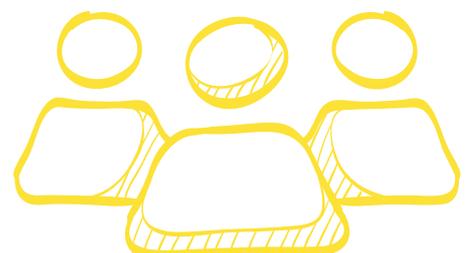
**02** Ensuring the voices of our Care Community are heard where it matters

**03** Producing agenda-setting policy and research that is informed by lived experiences



**04** Raising awareness, educating and campaigning for transformational change in society

**05** Being a vibrant, well governed and resourced organisation



# Company Information

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## Directors

Deirdre Mullen – Fiachra O’Suilleabháin – Barry O’Sullivan – Val Kerr  
John Feehan – Maeve Doyle – Michelle O’Connell – Aidan Stacey  
Conor Brophy – Bernard Kennedy (Appointed 14 June 2023)

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## Strategy and Purpose Sub-Committee

Conor Brophy (Chair) Fiachra O’Suilleabháin – Barry O’Sullivan – Val Kerr

## Governance and Risk Sub-Committee

John Feehan (Chair) – Barry O’Sullivan – Aidan Stacey – Michele Brady

## Finance and Fundraising Sub-Committee

Fiachra O’Suilleabháin (Chair) – Aidan Stacey – Maeve Doyle –  
Barry O’Sullivan

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Charity Number: 20055080

Company Number: 381973

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## Registered Office and Principal Address Addresss

7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7, Ireland

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## Auditors

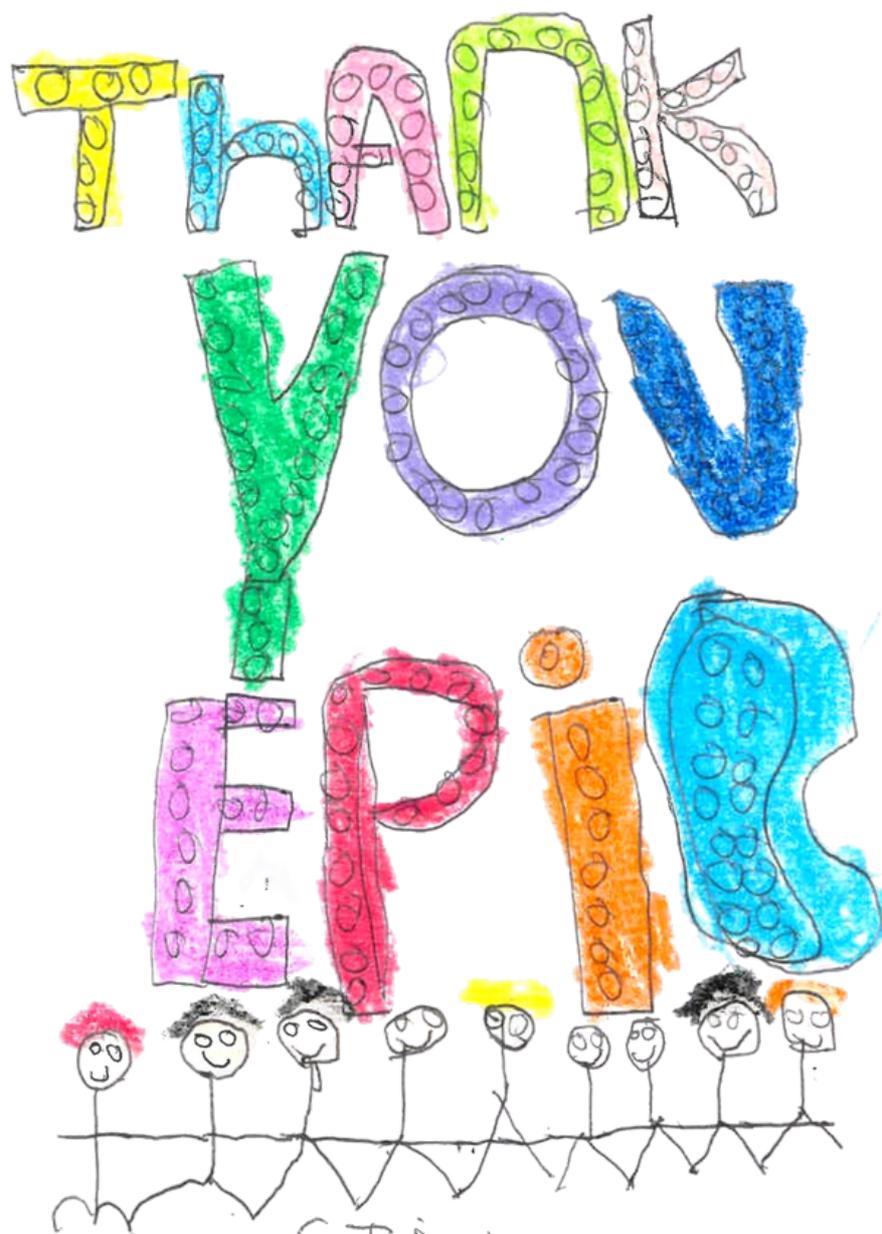
Whelan Dowling & Associates  
Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditors, Unit 1+4, Block 1,  
Northwood Court, Santry, Dublin 9, Ireland

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## Bankers

Allied Irish Banks plc.  
7/12 Dame Street, Dublin 2, Ireland





STICK  
TOGETHER  
STAND  
TOGETHER



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

**TÚSLA**

Ireland's Child & Family Agency



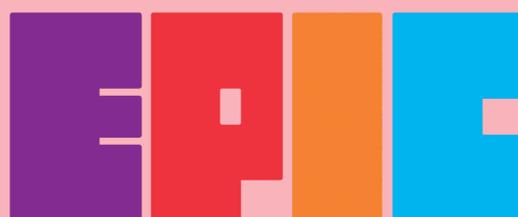
Drawing by Cian, aged 14

7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7  
Co Reg no: 381973  
Reg Charity no: 20055080  
Chairperson: Barry O'Sullivan

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[www.epiconline.ie](http://www.epiconline.ie)  
[info@epiconline.ie](mailto:info@epiconline.ie)  
01 8727661

- 
-  @epicireland
  -  @epicempoweringpeopleincare
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  -  [thecareexperience.libsyn.com](http://thecareexperience.libsyn.com)



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