



STRATEGIC PLAN

2022 - 2027



empowering people in care



EPIC IS LIKE ONE BIG
FAMILY OF PEOPLE THAT
ACTUALLY UNDERSTAND
WHAT YOU'VE BEEN
THROUGH AND SUPPORT
YOU NO MATTER WHAT.



Clara

A Member of the EPIC Youth Council

Foreword

We are proud to publish this new strategy which lays out our commitments for the next five years. At EPIC, we believe firmly in accountability – to our partners, our donors, our staff, and most importantly – to the children and young people who are at the heart of our mandate. In a changing public and political environment, our new plan sets out our vision, as well as who we are, what we will achieve, and how we will do it. The dedication of the Board and staff to ensuring EPIC is well-governed and resourced to meet our commitments underpins this new strategy.

EPIC believes that policy is most effective when it is designed through inclusive processes, and implemented in partnership with communities, civil society organisations and government. As such, this strategy was developed through engagement with our staff, Youth Council and Board – all of whom informed EPIC’s priorities and ambitions for the future – and input was also received from key external stakeholders. The planning process was an opportunity to examine the past and the present of the organisation, reflect on and celebrate its achievements and strengths, and explore the environment in which we work.

EPIC has a unique mandate, and on behalf of the Board of Directors and the Management Team, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to EPIC and the children and young people we work with and for. The UK Poet, Lemn Sissay who grew up in care in England, delivered a Ted Talk address in 2013 entitled “A Child of the State Too”. A passionate activist for improving the care system, Sissay issued the following call to action, “Let’s change how we see children (in care), how we talk to them and about them. Their stories are sacred...They’re like Harry Potter, a foster child, like Lisbeth Salandar, institutionalised and adopted, like Jesus – the son of a single mother, like Muhammad, orphaned. They are superheroes. They are stars. A child in care is a solution, an opportunity for us to display our services at their best...”

We are honoured to rally to this call.



Marissa Ryan (she/her)
CEO, EPIC



Barry O'Sullivan (him/he)
Chair, EPIC

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Who we are

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

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

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

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

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.

EPIC's Vision

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

EPIC's 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.

Our Living Values guide our work, as well as how we work.

We are:

Empowering
Rights-based
Inclusive
Ambitious



OUR PILLARS

01 Advocacy

The core of EPIC's work is to provide a National Advocacy Service to children and young people in state care, and young people aged 18-26 with care experience. Our purpose is to ensure that the views of the child or young person are represented and considered in matters relating to them.

02 Research and Policy

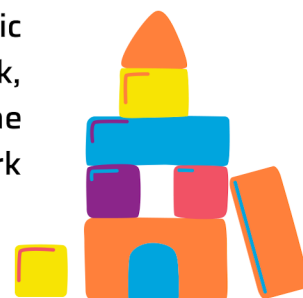
EPIC's research and policy work raises awareness of the issues affecting children and young people in state care and provides an evidence base informed by their lived experience. This directs our national advocacy on care in public policy.

03 Engagement and Participation

As experts in their own experience, EPIC is committed to empowering children and young people in care or with care experience by ensuring their voices are heard where it matters, promoting positive care identities, and building a strong Care Community.

We want to see a Care Aware Ireland and through public engagement and participation we aim to achieve this by providing spaces for connection, fun and growth, as well as opportunities for action by working on campaigns and projects to bring about the changes our Care Community want to see.

Our Youth Councils, which currently consist of young people with care experience aged 13-26, act as consultative groups that inform the EPIC Board and staff on specific issues, support our policy, research and advocacy work, and provide advice on the strategic direction of EPIC. The Youth Councils also conduct their own programme of work on transformative change in the care system.





Our focus is our work with children and young people up to the age of 26 who have experienced the care system. We are funded by TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency, who are, under the Child and Family Act 2013, charged with “Supporting and promoting the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families.”

We value both our relationship with this agency and its staff and leadership, and our autonomy to fulfil our duty to care-experienced children and young people and to advocate for change. We also have a key relationship with the Minister and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

The context in which we operate is influenced by political, economic, social, technological, legislative and legal, and environmental factors. We have reviewed this landscape to inform the development of this Strategic Plan.

Political

Shifting political ground means that it is important for EPIC to build alliances across all political parties, both government and opposition, and among independent voices, and to ensure that issues of importance for care-experienced children and young people are firmly on their agendas for change, now and in the future. Building our profile and relationships with those audiences will be important to achieve our aims.

The Department to which we relate is new and has a broad mandate; it is also dealing with dominant issues such as the Mother and Baby Homes legacy, the ending of Direct Provision, and recently, the Ukrainian refugee humanitarian response.

Economic

The uncertain global and national economic environment resulting from the impact of the war in Ukraine, Ireland's emergence from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the implementation of Brexit means that pressure on government spending may increase during the lifetime of this Strategic Plan. This, coupled with increasing competition from pressing political and policy issues such as housing, places organisations like ours at the front line of potential cuts in public spending which has the potential to put our operational funding at risk.

Rising inflation and significant increases in the cost of living will put pressure on foster families' allowances, which could impact their availability. Tight budgets may also impact TUSLA's funding and switch the emphasis from early intervention to crisis interventions, and stall efforts proposed to balance public and private care provision on cost grounds. EPIC's reliance on TUSLA for core funding makes us vulnerable to budget cuts and potentially impacts our sustainability.



Photo L-R: Megan Berry (Pavee Point), Minister Simon Harris (Dept of Further and Higher Education, Innovation and Science) & Rory Brown (EPIC Youth Council) at the launch of the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation & Success in Higher Education. August 2022.

Social

Care is seen as a social rather than a political or rights issue and remains a source of stigma for many care-experienced children and young people, as being in care is often portrayed negatively in the media. EPIC's Care Day is important in growing greater understanding and expressing a positive message around care and the experience of children and young people in care. Care Day also has the potential to build on the movement for a progressive and diverse Ireland which is growing as our nation embraces a greater acceptance and welcome for diversity, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as a broader understanding of what constitutes a family.

Technological

On the technological front, there are both opportunities and threats - opportunities to use technological capabilities to enhance our data and information gathering capacity to support our advocacy work, as well as building our online profile, and connecting with more young people online; however, the threat to children and young people's mental health from online grooming and bullying is a real one, alongside the digital divide which has the potential to increase inequalities.

Legislative and Legal

We will be mindful of the legislative and legal environment as we implement this Strategic Plan. This includes the Guardian Ad Litem Act 2022, the Youth Homelessness Strategy, the Assisted Decision Making Act, reform of the Family Courts, the regularisation of undocumented migrants, foreign birth registration and the commitment to end Direct Provision, as well as the reviews of the Child Care Act 1991 and adoption legislation. The development of a Youth Justice Strategy, and access to higher education for care leavers are among the important areas of public policy where EPIC is engaging.

Environmental

Major trends on the landscape for EPIC which impact the children and young people with whom we work include the lack of sufficient care placements and the reliance on private residential care provision; challenges in the recruitment and retention of social workers and social care workers; declining numbers of foster carers'; inadequate mental health services; and the ongoing impact of Covid-19.



Photo: Members of the EPIC staff and Youth Council, February 2022.

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

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

GOAL 1



PROVIDING QUALITY, EFFECTIVE AND
INDEPENDENT RIGHTS-BASED ADVOCACY
DIRECTLY TO CARE-EXPERIENCED CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO AGE 26

Objective	Outcome
1.1 Ensure more care-experienced children and young people know about EPIC's National Advocacy Service and their rights while in care or aftercare.	Increased visibility and understanding of EPIC's Independent Advocacy Service among care-experienced children and young people and key stakeholders, and increased awareness amongst children and young people about their rights while in care.
1.2 Build the case for independent advocacy to be enshrined in law.	The case for independent advocacy to be enshrined in law has been progressed at political level.
1.3 Meet the needs of care-experienced children and young people through enhanced partnerships.	Partnerships with key organisations and coalitions working on priority issues have been established by EPIC.
1.4 Deliver a best-in-class direct advocacy model informed by the experience of children and young people.	EPIC will have commissioned an independent evaluation of its Advocacy Service and implemented agreed recommendations, and will have reviewed and refined its casework system and referrals process on an annual basis.

GOAL 2



ENSURING THE VOICES OF OUR CARE
COMMUNITY ARE HEARD WHERE IT
MATTERS

Objective	Outcome
2.1 Grow and diversify EPIC's participation work.	The participation team will have established and implemented a diverse and inclusive participation programme informed by the views of children and young people.
2.2 Design and deliver opportunities for action with children and young people.	Care-experienced children and young people will have been provided opportunities and supported to speak directly to decision makers about the care system.
2.3 Strengthen partnerships and collaboration for impact.	The visibility of children and young people in care will be increased through collaboration and partnership, and the number of stakeholders participating in Care Day will have increased.

GOAL 3



PRODUCING AGENDA-SETTING POLICY AND RESEARCH THAT IS INFORMED BY LIVED EXPERIENCES

Objective	Outcome
3.1 Build and use our evidence base to inform our policy work.	EPIC will have published policy positions informed by its advocacy caseload and participation programme, and will have established a Policy and Research Forum for Children and Young People.
3.2 Collaborate with research institutes and universities.	EPIC will have commissioned, produced and participated in research about children and young people in care, and will have identified and developed funding and resource opportunities to support research.
3.3 Engage and influence Government stakeholders.	EPIC will have proactively used its policy and research to advocate for national change to policy and practice.

GOAL 4



RAISING AWARENESS, EDUCATING AND CAMPAIGNING FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN SOCIETY

Objective	Outcome
4.1 Enhance public engagement and visibility to cultivate a care aware society.	EPIC will have built its profile so that the public know who we are and what we do, and strengthened its relationships and alliances to support its policy and campaign agenda.
4.2 Advance intersectionality, solidarity, and work with minorities in the care system in Ireland and abroad.	EPIC will have promoted diversity and inclusion by having: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• increased its engagement with seldom-heard groups• accessible offices or meeting spaces in all locations.• accessible materials available.

GOAL 5



BEING A VIBRANT, WELL GOVERNED AND RESOURCED ORGANISATION

Objective	Outcome
5.1 Maintain good governance and effective ways of working at staff and Board level.	EPIC's staff and Board will have ensured compliance with organisational policies, codes of practice and legislation.
5.2 Build capacity of staff through continued professional development.	The EPIC team will be fully equipped and supported to work to the highest standard.
5.3 Protect existing resources and identify opportunities for growth in line with the Strategic Plan.	EPIC will have maintained, diversified, and increased its resources to deliver on its mission.
5.4 Ensure the EPIC team is diverse and inclusive at all levels.	EPIC will have a diverse and inclusive team that reflects modern Ireland.
5.5 Frequent reviews of EPIC's primary task and cohort for the duration of this Strategic Plan.	EPIC will have a clear definition of its cohort, and the EPIC Board will have overseen the implementation of this strategy.



empowering people in care

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AS YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE WE NEED TO
STAND UP FOR OUR RIGHTS AND THE
EPIC YOUTH COUNCIL IS THE FAMILY AND
SUPPORT WE NEED TO DO THAT. THIS IS
A NON-JUDGEMENTAL, ENCOURAGING
AND EMPOWERING SPACE THATS FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE BY YOUNG
PEOPLE IN CARE.



Angel

A Member of the EPIC Youth Council

