

# impact report

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empowering people in care

2021



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



# Acknowledgements

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The staff and Board of EPIC would like to thank Tusla, the Child and Family Agency for funding EPIC's core activities, as well as everyone that supported EPIC throughout 2021. To progress our mission and achieve better outcomes for the children and young people at the heart of our mandate, collaboration with a wide variety of individuals, organisations, and services in both the statutory and voluntary sectors is vital. We acknowledge the many professionals with whom we worked over the course of the year that are dedicated to meeting the needs of care-experienced children and young people, and who work to ensure their needs are met and voices heard. We particularly acknowledge the children and young people in both our Advocacy Service, and our Youth Council, who engaged with EPIC during 2021. Their contributions, experiences, and successes inspire and motivate us every day.



## **EPIC's Vision**

That all children and young people in care and after care have an empowering, positive lived experience of care.

## **EPIC's Mission**

To advocate for the rights of children and young people in care and after care and enable their voice to influence positive change in their own lives and in the care system.

## **EPIC's Values**

- The right of children and young people to be heard, have a voice, be consulted and access information.
- Meaningful participation of children and young people in their care and the care system.
- Meaningful participation of children and young people in EPIC.
- Accountability.
- Solutions oriented.



# Who we are

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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.**

# Staff team in 2021

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# How we work

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## 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**

Our National Youth Council, which is composed of young people with care experience aged 18-26, is a consultative group that informs EPIC's Board and staff on specific issues and supports our policy, research, and national advocacy. The Youth Council campaigns for transformative change in the care system and participates in a programme of activities to build positive visibility of children and young people with care experience in our society.

# Children in Care in 2021

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5,863   
Children were in the care of the State.

962   
Children entered care, with 792 children entering care for the first time.

3,059   
Young people were in receipt of aftercare services.

5,266   
Children and young people were in foster care.

459   
Children and young people were in residential care settings.

735   
Children and young people were awaiting an allocated Social Worker at the end of 2022.



# National Advocacy Service

EPIC's National Advocacy Service works to empower children in care and young people with care experience to have a say and be heard in issues that affect their lives. The Advocacy Service is also critical in informing the development of our programmes and policy. It enables the organisation 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 the EPIC National Advocacy Service.

During 2021, a team of nine EPIC Advocates, supported by two Advocacy Managers, supported 491 children and young people on a total of 777 advocacy cases. The nature of an Advocate's role can vary. From providing basic information or practical support, to a higher level of engagement, where an EPIC Advocate supports or represents a child or young person in a Child in Care Review, Child Protection Case Conference or in Court Proceedings.

In 2021, the majority of new advocacy cases related to children and young people who were living in residential care, followed by those who were homeless<sup>[1]</sup>. Accommodation continued to be the main presenting issue that children and young people sought advocacy for, reflecting the escalating housing crisis in Ireland and demonstrating the increasing difficulties that young people with a care background face in finding and securing appropriate accommodation. Separately, Advocates worked on a total of 22 cases where homelessness was the main presenting issue, a reduction from 34 cases in 2020.

<sup>[1]</sup> 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.



# National Advocacy Service

Despite the decrease in homelessness as a main presenting issue, the data indicates a growing number of care-experienced children and young people were experiencing homelessness while seeking advocacy on different issues. In 2021 the number of individual children and young people who were homeless when accessing EPIC's Advocacy Service increased from 62 (2020) to 76 in 2021, while 125 new advocacy cases, were opened by or on behalf of children or young people who were homeless but that required advocacy in relation to a different main presenting issue, an increase of 36 cases in 2020.

Due to the ongoing pandemic and associated lockdowns and restrictions, issues related to mental health and well-being, family contact and access, and a loss of regular social outlets and services continued, and for some they intensified. In addition, the complexity of service delivery in pandemic conditions caused delays, complications, and frustration for both service providers and care-experienced children and young people.

A highlight for the team in 2021 was EPIC's new partnership with Community Law and Mediation to pilot free legal advice clinics for the children and young people engaging with the Advocacy Service. Through the advocacy caseload year on year, the need for access to independent legal advice, especially in the complex area of family law, had been documented. In response, this new initiative with CLM was developed to address this gap in service provision and to bolster EPIC's advocacy work with expert legal advice and guidance. This new partnership is featured in our spotlight feature on page 14.



# National Advocacy Service

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



777



Advocacy cases  
were opened



114 in Mid-west & Western region

297 in Dublin North-East

192 in Dublin Mid-Leinster



174 in Southern region

Over 50% requested by children & young people themselves!

491



Individual children and young people were supported

215  
Male



271  
Female



005  
Transgender



028

Under 11



206

12-18yrs



257

18+yrs

# National Advocacy Service



039

On-site Advocacy & info sessions




042

Court hearing attendances



**Top presenting advocacy issues**

1. Accommodation
2. Care Placement
3. Aftercare
4. Family contact
5. Legal



**Care Status**

- In care: 227
- Aftercare: 113
- Post-care: 130
- Other care status: 7
- Not in care: 14



**Accommodation**

Residential care

Homeless - 76 YP

Independent living

Foster care

Special Care Unit



030



Community Law & Mediation

Children availed of a free legal clinic with CLM

New partnership!!



040



Legal matters were addressed

011



Advocates received training

# Case Study

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## Background

Joyce was in the care of Tusla for most of her childhood. As such, she qualified for aftercare services when she turned 18 until her 21st birthday. During this time, Joyce was supported to apply to her local housing authority for housing support. When she was 23, Joyce self-referred to EPIC due to the extremely difficult and challenging environment she was living in at that time and spoke of how the stress of her housing situation was negatively impacting her mental health.

## Main Presenting Issues

- Joyce remained on the waiting list of her local housing authority but in the meantime had no safe place to live. Joyce had no family members to support her or that she could reside with temporarily, and had no means to rent or secure accommodation on her own due to high rents in the area.
- Joyce was also concerned that her precarious housing situation would affect her ability to complete her college course.

## Key Actions taken by Joyce's Advocate

- On her Advocate's advice, Joyce agreed to submit an Exceptional Social Grounds (ESG) application to her local housing authority seeking priority housing.
- With Joyce's permission, her Advocate contacted her previous Aftercare Service and they agreed to support her application. They wrote a letter to the local housing authority confirming that Joyce had been in the care of Tusla and advocated for priority housing for her alongside her Advocate.

## Case Study

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- Joyce and her Advocate made a list of other professionals and services she felt comfortable to approach to ask for letters to support her ESG application. This resulted in support letters from Joyce's college and her GP being obtained.
- Once the supporting documents had been gathered, Joyce and her Advocate completed the ESG application together.
- Her Advocate also assisted her in writing her own advocacy letter in support of her ESG application.

### Outcome

Joyce gained a greater understanding of her rights and entitlements regarding her housing needs and learnt about the ESG application scheme which she was not aware of previously. She also gained a greater understanding of the housing process overall. Shortly after submitting her application, Joyce was granted priority housing with her local authority. Joyce communicated to her Advocate her relief and happiness with this positive outcome and thanked her Advocate for their support and guidance. Joyce also communicated the importance of a stable home while completing her 3rd level course, and the positive impact this security had on her mental health overall.

# Spotlight: EPIC and Community Law and Mediation Project: Independent Free Legal Advice Clinics

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Children and young people in the care system can experience a variety of challenges in their daily lives while in care and as they leave care upon turning 18. They can also find it difficult to access legal information and advice that could equip them to navigate the challenges they encounter, seek remedies, and have their rights vindicated.

EPIC partnered with Community Law and Mediation (CLM) to pilot free legal advice clinics for care-experienced children and young people in response to this need. The partnership combined the expertise and strength of both organisations - CLM's 45 years' experience working with communities empowering them to use the law to improve their lives, and EPIC's 22 years' experience of working directly with care-experience children and young people.

On a monthly basis throughout 2021, virtual legal clinics were facilitated by a CLM Solicitor. To ensure holistic, wrap-around support, all appointments were pre-booked by EPIC Advocates. The Advocate would then support the child or young person to prepare for the legal session, attend the appointment with them, and provide follow-up to ensure they understood the information given, the parameters of their situation, and support them in any next steps should they decide to take further action.

Feedback from the children and young people who used the service highlights the importance of access to free, independent, legal information and advice in a safe and understanding space. They spoke of the difference being supported to understand the legislation, their rights, and what options they could pursue made, and of how it enabled them to move on from or overcome difficult or challenging periods.

# Spotlight: EPIC and Community Law and Mediation Project: Independent Free Legal Advice Clinics

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Through the legal clinics, children and young people were empowered and equipped to exercise their rights across a range of areas including family law, domestic violence, education, child protection, child law, aftercare provision, housing and tenancy rights, immigration and asylum, and criminal law.

In addition to the children and young people that participated in the clinics, the project also had indirect beneficiaries including birth children, foster parents, and partners of those who attended the clinic. For example, by securing tenancy rights through the clinic, one young man also ensured his partner did not fall into a precarious housing situation or homelessness.

In total, 40 legal matters were addressed during 2021. Thirty children and young people were supported to understand the legal implications the problem they faced and were assisted in identifying legal remedies and other available options.





# Participation

2 full-time Participation Officers supported by the CEO

- ### Youth Council Activities
- Care Day 2021 & 5 Nations Commissioner/ Ombudsman Q&A
  - EPIC+IFCA review of Tusla Aftercare Policy
  - LGBTI+ Project
  - Advising on design of new EPIC advocacy resources
  - Conducting media work

021  EPIC Youth Council Members

7 online Youth Council planning meetings  
9 virtual social catch ups!

- ### Youth Council Activities
- Contributing to policy submissions
  - Briefing Tusla's Board
  - Chaired & Presented at DCEDIY/Tusla/MTU/ EPIC Conference on Supporting Education & Development Opportunities for Care Experienced People.



5 members in the West



3 members in the South



- ### 2021 Council Graduates
- Azeezat
  - Ciara
  - Danielle
  - Dillon
  - Luke
  - Roisin

You are missed!

# Youth Participation

Throughout 2021, the EPIC Youth Council continued to meet regularly online, and they conducted seven planning meetings to discuss their strategic direction and what they want to achieve as a Council. Youth Council members participated in a variety of different projects and events during the year. They began the year with a Care Day Q&A session with Children's Ombudspersons and Commissioners in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England in February, and concluded it with participation in a seminar on access to education and training for care-leavers, hosted by DCEDIY/Tusla/Munster Technological Universities (MTU) and EPIC.

In April 2021, MTU launched a university-wide initiative across their Cork and Kerry campuses to provide tailored support to students with care experience. Following from this, the seminar aimed to explore education and development opportunities for care-experienced people in further and higher-level education and training settings. Clara O'Shea and Rory Brown from the EPIC Youth Council delivered presentations on the positives and challenges that they and the wider care community face on their journeys through education and provided key recommendations as to how college campuses can become more inclusive. The event was also MCed by EPIC Youth Council member, Mark Hennessy.

Earlier in the year, as part of a wider body of joint work between EPIC and the Irish Foster Care Association, Council members participated in a review process of Tusla's Aftercare Policy to inform a submission to Tusla's National Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care Review. As a children's rights organisation, EPIC have a duty to create safe spaces and opportunities for care-experienced children and young people to have their views heard and given due consideration. Through a series of focus groups and a survey mechanism developed by the Participation team, Youth Council members and other young people engaging with EPIC were invited to give their opinions in relation to aftercare and associated supports and make recommendations on changes to the policy and practice that would better meet the needs of young care leavers in Ireland.



# Youth Participation

In 2021, the Youth Council also launched new EPIC LGBTI+ resources for children and young people in care and the professionals who work with them. This project was done in partnership with BeLong To and was led by the EPIC LGBTI+ Youth Advisory Committee. The Project resulted in an animated video for professionals working with children in care, and information leaflets for LGBTI+ children and young people in care. These resources were designed and developed by the LGBTI+ Youth Advisory Committee with support from a graphic designer to make sure they were inclusive and youth friendly. A video was also developed where Dillon Nolan and Kai Brosnan from the Committee explained the process and journey undertaken - see our Spotlight feature on page 19 to learn more.



# Spotlight: LGBTI+ Resources

In February 2020, EPIC reached out to the Youth Council to see if members who are LGBTI+ would be interested in working on a project in collaboration with BeLong To that involved creating resources for LGBTI+ children and young people in the care system. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was initially paused and continued into 2021 as a result. Two young people from EPIC's Youth Council, Kai Brosnan and Dillon Nolan came forward to work on the project alongside BeLong To. Kai outlines their journey here:

My buddy Dillon and I joined together with two BeLong To members to form a Youth Advisory Committee to lead on the project and the creation of the new resources. As members of the LGBTI+ community, we shared some of our own experiences, tips and ideas to inform the early stages of the work.

Project meetings were conducted online and were facilitated by EPIC staff. In the initial stages, a plan of what resources were needed, how we wanted to present them, what topics we wanted to cover, and finally, how we wanted to release the project was discussed. Soon after, it became certain that the 10-week window we aimed to complete the work in was unrealistic if we were to develop the resources to the standard, we wanted for them.

So, the 10-week project soon turned into nearly a year of dedicated work from all involved. With the help of graphic designers, two leaflets, one on gender identity and one on sexuality, were created using the focus group's animated ideas, quotes, and the text we had agreed.

As well as this, an information video was created giving tips to the professionals working with children and young people in care who may be questioning their gender identity or sexuality, as well as pointing them towards BeLong To's training resources for professionals. A main point that the focus group wanted to get across was that coming out is not a child protection issue, and that privacy should be respected regarding this matter.



# Spotlight: LGBTI+ Resources

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Due to the sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed during the project, the focus group had access to a counsellor with LGBTI+ experience should any triggering topics arise. Despite the many challenges such as the sensitive nature of the project, the global pandemic moving the project online, and a few changes to the staff team working with the project, all members of the focus group and EPIC staff continued to show huge dedication to the completion of this project.

In advance of Care Day 21, myself and Dillon travelled to Maynooth to record a short video to explain the project and the journey undertaken to develop it. This video was screened as part of the LGBTI+ Care Day webinar which was one of a number of different webinars that had been organised for Care Day 2021. Dillon and I hosted this webinar, and it had a huge number of professionals from all across the country and England tune in to hear what we had to say, and many positive messages came through on the chat function. We were also delighted to hear that our webinar had the highest viewership out of all of the Care Day webinars, as it was at this webinar that the resources we developed together were launched!!

Shortly after the webinar, Peter and Sadhbh, two of the EPIC staff, facilitated doing a short explainer video in Phoenix Park to accompany the release of the resources. Although this signified the end of a long, but very worthwhile project, the excitement for all who were involved still continues by seeing the leaflets that so much hard work went into being out and getting a great response. The leaflets were spotted at conferences, and throughout many residential care homes across the country. They have triggered a great response, with many people saying that such information and support for young LGBTI+ young people were well overdue. Dillon closed the project by briefing EPIC's Board on the experience and giving recommendations for future work in this area. Massive thanks to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for funding this work. It has meant so much, to so many of us, in lots of different ways.

Kai

# Care Day 21



Care Day was established by young care-leavers in February 2016 as a global celebration of the positive experiences and contributions of children and young people in care or with care experience.

1581  
attendees!!!!



## Care Day Webinars

- Accommodation
- Justice
- Disability
- Education
- LGBTI+
- Ethnicity

006

Webinars hosted

## Care Day21 stats

- 90 competition entries
- 200 Care Day packs sent
- #CareDay23 trending on Twitter
- 11.8k profile visits!

150



Children and young people participated in EPIC's Care Day activities

004



Competitions held

# Care Day 2021

With support from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Tusla and the Ombudsperson for Children's Office - amongst others! - EPIC and the Youth Council celebrated their 6th Annual Care Day in 2021. Despite the virtual nature of Care Day due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, the celebration and message grew, reaching new people in Ireland and countries across the world.

Care Day was established in February 2016 as a moment to celebrate the positive experiences and contributions of children and young people in care or with care experience - some of whom rise every day and overcome challenges many of us will never experience.

The idea for Care Day itself was developed over a weekend camping trip in Scotland with young care leavers from Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales as part of the "5 Nations, One Voice" Alliance. While discussing their different care experiences, they agreed that the public were not fully informed about care systems, and that this contributed to their shared experience of stigma and negative perceptions and stereotypes about children and young people who are or have been in care. The group envisioned a day that would highlight their achievements and celebrate children and young people with care experience, while also educating the public about the care system itself. They believed that this might address some of the misconceptions the public may have, while also improving their understanding of the obstacles both they and their peers can face. Another primary objective of Care Day was to create a sense of community across the world for those with care experience, to help children and young people support each other and be proud of who they are and what they have achieved.



# Care Day 2021

EPIC's Youth Council played a significant role in organising the 2021 Care Day celebration and schedule of events under the theme: Equality through Equity. Through a series of webinars hosted by EPIC, Youth Council members, alongside academics, professionals, and activists, explored and made recommendations on how society can ensure more equitable outcomes for children and young people who come through the care system. The webinars focused on the intersection of care and other equality issues, including LGBTI+ rights, race and ethnicity, education, disability, justice, and accommodation.

In addition to the webinars, #CareDay21 participation activities included several competitions in the following categories: Scavenger Hunts, Writing and Poetry, Art and Drawing, and Baking!

#CareDay21 trended on social media with people all over the world sharing their support through videos and photos, including Minister Roderic O'Gorman, and the CEO of Tusla, Mr. Bernard Gloster.

EPIC acknowledge everyone who contributed to the success of Care Day 2021, in particular DCEDIY who generously funded EPIC's Care Day activities. The whole EPIC team give thanks to the children and young people driving Care Day and its message, and to those who participated and celebrated with EPIC.





# Policy and Research

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



Meeting to advise Minister O’Gorman and DCEDIY on the establishment of a national support service for parents of children in care



One research partnership established and commenced with Trinity College Dublin’s School of Social Work and Social Policy



Aftercare discussion paper developed



Pre-budget Submission delivered



Policy submissions made

# Policy and Research

## Public Engagements

- University College Cork
- University of Galway
- Mary Immaculate College
- Trinity College Dublin
- University College Dublin
- Munster Technological University
- Maynooth University
- EUSARF 2021

## Consultations

- Regional HIQA consultations
- Tusla's Development of Strategic Residential Care Plan
- Family Justice and Courts Service on reform of Family Courts



Submission to the consultation on Ireland's draft State Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child



Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child



Submission to the consultation on the scheme to regulate undocumented migrants



Submission to the Higher Education Authority

# Policy and Research

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During 2021, EPIC focused on building and diversifying its policy and research programme through partnership and collaboration. It is EPIC's view that policy is most effective when it is designed through inclusive processes, and implemented in partnership with communities, civil society organisations and government. The intersection of care and other issues such as disability or immigration status also places an onus on EPIC to work collaboratively with others and to respond to consultations that offer opportunity for improvements to policy and practice related to care-experienced children and young people.

As a children's rights organisation, 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. EPIC made a submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child with recommendations for change on policies and practice relating to care. EPIC's key recommendations covered the lack of data and research on children in care and their outcomes upon leaving care; aftercare services; educational outcomes; sibling access; the privatisation of care; and mental health and therapeutic intervention. EPIC's submission was reviewed and endorsed by Youth Council members who co/signed the submission.

As part of EPIC's ongoing work to address care-leavers access to further and higher education, a submission was made to the Government consultation on the next National Access Plan for Equity in Higher Education, 2022-2028 ). EPIC advocated that care-leavers should be named as a priority group in the next National Action Plan 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 priority groups in higher and further education, and result in better education outcomes for those they seek to benefit.

# Policy and Research

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Lastly, EPIC produced a Leaving and Aftercare Discussion Paper to highlight concerns and provide recommendations to DCEDIY and Tusla on how aftercare supports can be improved to ensure that children with care experience are given the same life chances as children in the general population and are supported to achieve their full potential. EPIC highlighted that in advance of the review of the Child Care Act, 1991, a robust interrogation of policy and practice must be undertaken to ensure the correct supports are put in place to help young people leaving care to navigate this challenging period.



# Research Spotlight: Collaboration with Trinity College Dublin School of Social Work and Social Policy

In 2021, Professor Robbie Gilligan and Dr Eavan Brady, from the School of Social Work and Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin, secured seed funding from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to conduct a research study on the lived experiences of care leavers in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study set out to investigate and document the diversity of experiences and challenges faced by those aged 18-27.

As the only national organisation providing an independent advocacy service and participation programme to this cohort, EPIC was approached by the Researchers to partner on the study.

To support the early stages of the project, EPIC shared its knowledge and insight to inform the research design. EPIC also offered advice and guidance on reaching seldom heard groups as the Researchers wanted to ensure a diverse sample in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, previous care setting, current accommodation status, and geographical spread. EPIC also acted as a gatekeeper by identifying and supporting individual young people who wished to participate.

The study presented a unique opportunity to learn about the specific experiences care leavers encountered during the pandemic, and to document what resources and supports they utilised as they faced new challenges and opportunities during this uncertain time.

This research is due to be published in 2022 and will be launched by Trinity and EPIC.



# Finance, Governance & Transparency

1 full-time Office Manager & 1 part-time Advocacy Administrator supported by the COO

004



New Board members

001



New CEO appointed

003



New staff 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
- Aoife Gilligan-Quinn

## Staff team

- Andrea
- Adrian
- Brenda
- Caroline
- Darragh
- Edel
- Fiona
- Joe
- John
- Karla
- Kizito
- Marissa
- Mark
- Michele
- Patricia H
- Patricia T
- Peter
- Sadhbh
- Susan
- Suzanne
- Terry

042



Team meetings held



003



Lobbying returns filed

Audited accounts published

# Governance

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EPIC was delighted to welcome four new Board members during 2021 - Conor Brophy, Aidan Stacey, and Michele O'Connell, following a skills analysis of Board membership.

## **Aidan Stacey - Commercial Director at the Irish Wheelchair Association**

Aidan is responsible for public fundraising, retail, advocacy, customer care and communications at the Irish Wheelchair Association. With prior experience in the Dublin Simon Community, the Irish Heart Foundation, and as Global Head of Fundraising for GOAL, Aidan has raised over €30 million in fundraising income during his career. The knowledge and expertise Aidan brings to EPIC's board will support the organisation to review and manage its expenditure, identify opportunities, and continue to abide by best practice.

## **Conor Brophy - Managing Director of Strategic Communications at Teneo**

Conor is responsible for supporting clients to tell their stories in an accessible, memorable, and impactful ways, and his role encompasses all aspects of communications strategy, from stakeholder engagement to media relations. Prior to joining Teneo, Conor was a financial journalist and radio presenter with Ireland's state broadcaster RTÉ and a weekly columnist with the Sunday Business Post among others. With plans underway to build EPIC's public engagement capacity through the recruitment of a Communications Manager, Conor's experience and knowledge of both public relations and strategic communications will enrich EPIC.

## **Michelle O'Connell - Principal at Michelle O'Connell Solicitors & State Solicitor**

Michelle has been the Principal of Michelle O'Connell Solicitors since January 2017 and has held the position of State Solicitor for North Tipperary since March 2015. In addition to her role as State Solicitor, Michelle has been involved in childcare proceedings, acting predominately for Guardian Ad Litem advocating for the voice of the child to be heard in these proceedings, and has experience and expertise in Family Law, and general practice. Michelle brings a wealth of legal expertise to EPIC's Board and a keen understanding of the importance of the voice of the child being represented and heard in proceedings relating to their care.

# Governance

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## **Maeve Doyle - HR Business Manager at University College Cork**

Maeve has over 20 years HR experience in various roles supporting a number of areas within UCC across a range of HR functions including management of the employee lifecycle, resource planning and the management of employee relations and wellbeing issues. Maeve is currently the HRBM for the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences where she works closely with the Head of College and Schools within the College to ensure the delivery of best practice HR to support the College in achieving its goals and objectives.

The Board held seven formal meetings in 2021 and continued to work through a number of sub-committees during the year. They also oversaw the commencement of the new strategic plan preparation in December, with a re-structuring of Board sub-committees to be conducted on completion of the new strategic plan. The key focuses of these committees were:

### **Governance**

- Implementation of EPIC's Governance Development plan
- Compliance with the Charities Governance Code

### **HR, Finance & Audit**

- Support in HR matters arising throughout the year
- Review and monitoring of the charity's finances, including approval of the annual budget
- Liaison with EPIC's auditors and oversight of the annual financial audit







**empowering people in care**

7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7  
Co Reg no: 381973  
Reg Charity no: 15742.  
Chairperson: Barry O'Sullivan

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

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