



Embrace Our Stories

Photography Exhibition

To host this collection, email carolinereid@epiconline.ie



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



Embrace Our Stories, #CareDay23 Launch, CHQ Building, Dublin

This speech was delivered by Kai, EPIC Youth Council member and exhibition participant at the Dublin launch of the collection on 16 February 2023.

Theme for this year

The theme for this year, 'Don't judge a book by its cover, embrace our stories instead', was thought of by the members of the EPIC Youth Council when they came together last year to start planning Care Day 2023. After last year's theme 'It takes a village to raise a child', Council Members saw the huge impact and level of engagement Care Day received when using a common phrase that the public can relate to. Initially we spoke about the negative impact that stigma and stereotypes around the care system can have on us. We spoke about the power of books telling stories that draw people from all stages of life in, and for a lot of people, provide a level of temporary escape. It's through these talks amongst Council members that this year's theme was chosen.

Everyone on the Youth Council shared different ideas and perspectives for how this should look, and we were able to put our ideas together, with help, to create the powerful exhibition you see here today. The exhibition gives us a chance to share our stories through our lenses and our voices. By listening to our stories, you can see the strength and resilience that care experienced children and young people have. Resilience isn't always a quality people want. It comes from having no choice but to be strong when facing adversity. However, by celebrating Care Day, and celebrating our lives, and our achievements despite these adversities, it allows us to be soft, it allows us to be human, and it allows us to challenge the stigma and stereotypes that some of us grew up hearing.

Why care day is important to me

The stories that you see around the room are only a snapshot of the stories of care-experienced young people, and Clara and I are only two people out of an amazing group of Youth Council members. We all have different experiences and feelings. Recognising this, I would like to tell you a little bit about what Care Day means to me.

Personally, I've always seen Care Day as a little milestone. It allows me to reflect back on how much I've grown, healed, and achieved in the past year. Two years ago, I co-hosted one of the EPIC webinars leading up to Care Day. It's something that I had, and still have so much self-pride for accomplishing. This year, I'm able to recognise how much my confidence has grown in the two years allowing me to stand here as myself and talk in person today.

It's also a chance for me to challenge my own personal stigma which I hold against myself. After years of growing up in residential care and being told both directly and indirectly how I had less chance of being successful in life compared to my peers, I'd be lying if I said that I didn't still hold some of that against myself. When I first started college, I had someone tell me to 'not put too much pressure on myself, I needed to mind myself and be aware I probably wouldn't make it anyway'.

If there's one thing I wish younger me knew about, it would be the existence of both EPIC and Care Day. Hearing the stories of other care-experienced people, and seeing the positive lives they live, and extraordinary accomplishments they've achieved, I know it would have given me so much more hope and allowed me to know that I'm just as capable as any of my peers, despite what I had been led to believe. I'm now a second-year social care student in TUD and know that one way or another, I'm going to graduate from a degree I'm passionate about and live a life I'm proud to live.

I look around at the members on the Council with me, and every day, but particularly Care Day, they remind me that we are not our experience. Our experience will always be a part of us, but who we are is so much more than that. I look at the Council Members that I've been lucky enough to call friends over the years, and their lives, their stories, and their achievements never fail to fill me with so much pride and hope. It's through taking the time to meet with and listen to the stories of care-experienced people that we can begin to erase some of the stigma we prove wrong every day.

With that, on behalf of the EPIC team, I'd like to formally close the event by thanking you all for coming here today, particularly the Ombudsperson for Children and Kate. We are thrilled to see such support for care-experienced children and young people. Please take some time to look around our exhibition and scan the interactive QR codes to hear our stories through our voices. Remember, YOU are EPIC!

Kai