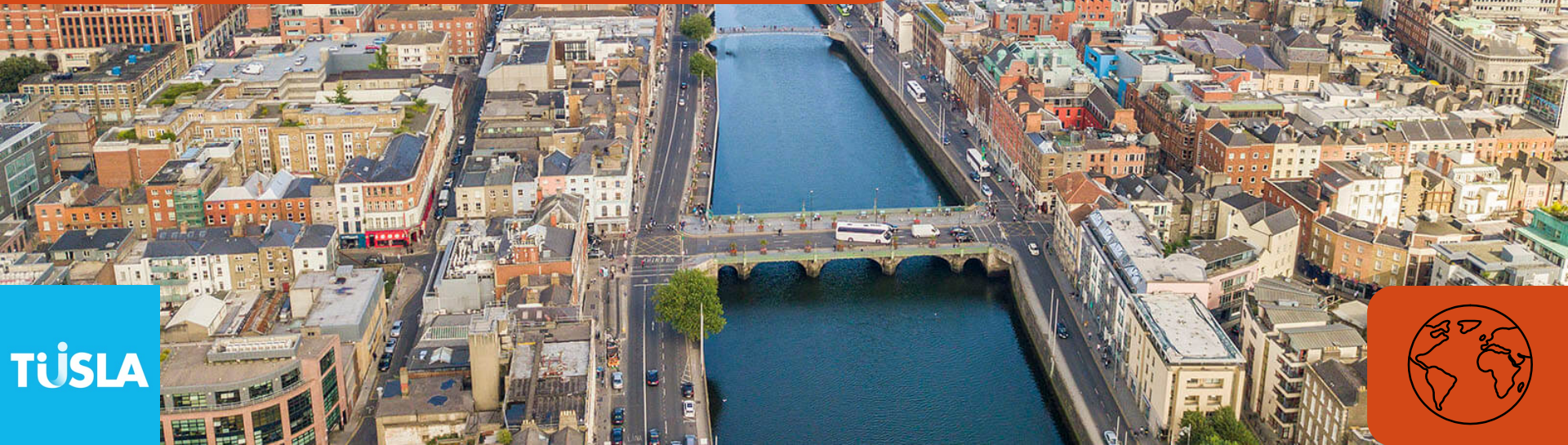


# THE SOCIAL WORK TEAM FOR SEPARATED CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM IN IRELAND



TÜSLA



# AFTERCARE SERVICES FOR SEPARATED CHILDREN LEAVING CARE IN IRELAND



28 January 2021

Thomas Dunning

Principal Social Worker

TUSLA The Child and Family Agency



# History

## of Tusla Child & Family Agency's Team for Separated Children Seeking Asylum

**1996 – 1999** First recognized separated children arrive in Ireland. (1, 1, 10, 97)

**2000** – Strange anomaly turns into a full blown **CRISIS!** 520 UAMs arrive to an unprepared State. Initially UAMs are housed in DOJ/Immigration emergency hostels for asylum seekers.

**2001** – **CRISIS CONTINUES** when 1085 UAMs are identified! Social Work Team for Separated Children (SCSA) becomes formalized. Children, 13 - 17, provided their own hostels. Children 12 and under get placed in foster care. Two -tiered system of care in place. Nationally, Aftercare is ad hoc per each local area.

**2010** – Implementation of an **EQUITY OF CARE PRINCIPLE!** Closed children's hostels and redirected funding to open 3 children's homes for orientation period. Recruited foster care and supported lodgings families for matching UAMs to onward placements.

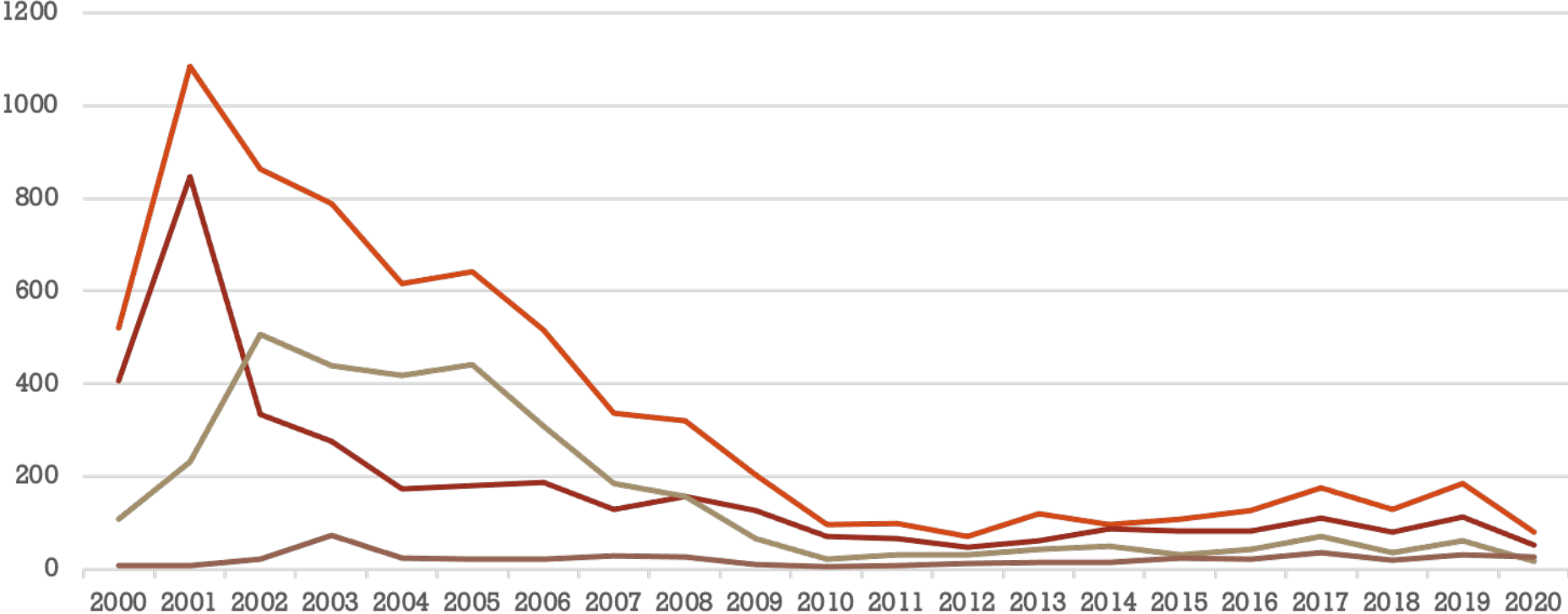
**2016-2020** – Began work with the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) to receive UAMs under EU relocation agreements from Greece, Malta and Calais . We currently have seven 4 -to-6 bed children's homes (residential units) and about 40 foster families that we support.

**2021** – About 60 UAMs in care and over 100 Aftercare clients. Opening our 8<sup>th</sup> 6-bed home specifically for UAMs in April.

Year	Total Referrals to TUSLA's Team for SCSA	Placed in care	Completed Family Reunification service provided, regardless of placement in care status.	Inappropriate Referral / Other (Deemed to be an adult)
2000	520	406	107	7 (1.35%)
2001	1085	846	231	8 (0.74%)
2002	863	335	506	22 (2.55%)
2003	789	277	439	73 (9.25%)
2004	617	174	418	25 (4.05%)
2005	643	180	441	22 (3.42%)
2006	516	188	308	22 (4.26%)
2007	336	130	185	29 (8.63%)
2008	319	156	157	26 (8.15%)
2009	203	126	66	11 (5.42%)
2010	96	70	21	5 (5.21%)
2011	99	66	31	7 (7.07%)
2012	71	48	31	12 (16.9%)
2013	120	62	43	15 (12.5%)
2014	97	86	49	14 (14.43%)
2015	109	82	32	24 (22.02%)
2016	126	82	42	21 (16.67%)
2017	175	111	70	36 (20.57%)
2018	129	81	35	19 (14.73)
2019	184	113	61	31 (16.85%)
2020	80	51	18	26 (32.5%)
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7177</b>	<b>3670</b>	<b>&gt;3260</b>	<b>455 (6.34%)</b>



# TUSLA UAM/SCSA Referrals 2000-2020



- Total Referrals to TUSLA's Team for SCSA
- Placed in Care
- Completed Family Reunification service provided, regardless of placement in care status
- inappropriate referrals

# Four Primary Service Streams



1. Child Protection - Duty & Response – Young persons arriving at the airports and seaports (or International Protection Office) requiring welfare assessment and then either reception into care *or* family reunification - or both.
2. Children In Care – Young person brought into state care and placed in either residential or foster care; unexpected arrivals or programme (Relocation / resettlement)
3. Fostering and Supported Lodgings – Recruitment, assessment and support of caregivers
4. Aftercare – Over 100 active cases; legislation, eligibility requirements and government policy impact planning. Positive outcomes.

2001 →

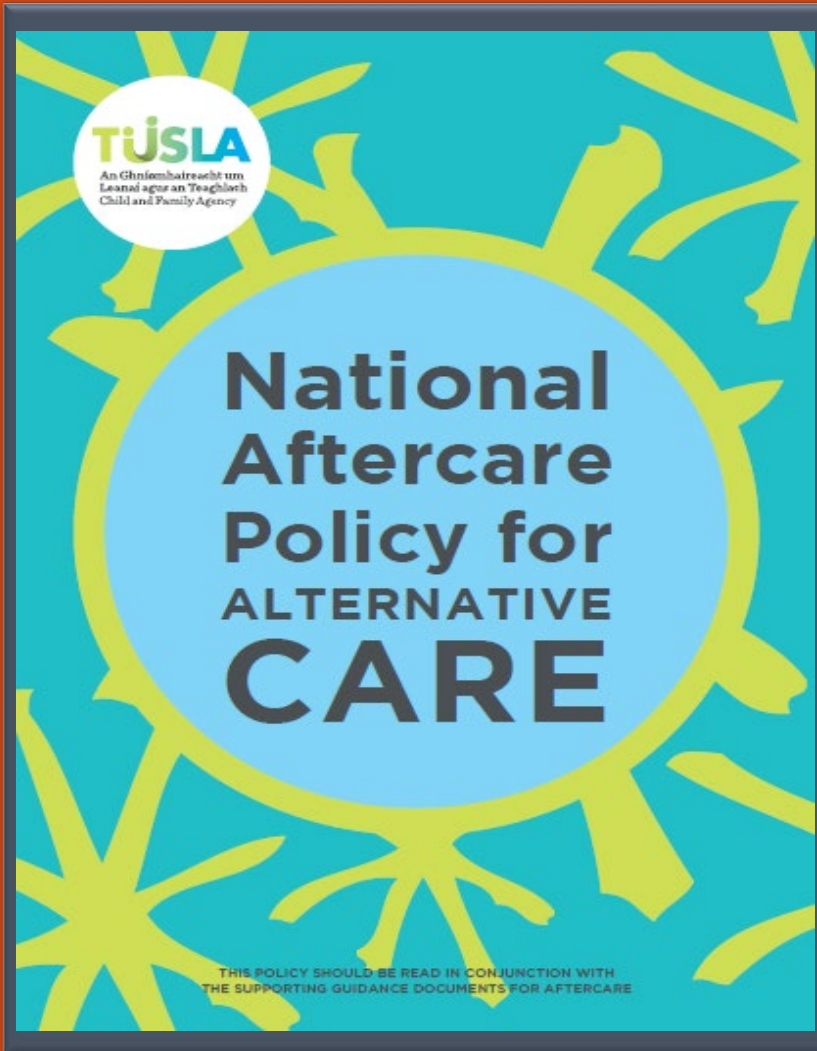
**NATIONAL STANDARDS  
FOR  
CHILDREN'S  
RESIDENTIAL CENTRES**

2001 →

**NATIONAL STANDARDS  
FOR  
FOSTER CARE**

The Child Care Amendment Act 2015, lead to a strengthend legislative basis for the provision of Aftercare services.

2017 →



This document is for all staff, carers and key personnel involved in caring for and supporting young people in their transition from childhood into adult life.

Aftercare services are in the main an adult service but are integral to the continuum of alternative care.



Aftercare services are support services that build on and support the work that has already been undertaken by many including, foster carers, social workers and residential workers in preparing young people for adulthood. Everyone has a key role to play in preparing young people to reach their developmental milestones. Therefore the provision of aftercare services should not be seen as an event, but a service that builds on the skills and capacity that young people have learned and developed during their time in care.

# Aftercare Statistics for the Separated Children Team

- Currently we have about 108 aftercare cases allocated to aftercare workers.
- The Leaving & Aftercare Service has 7 Aftercare Workers and is led by one Social Work Team Leader (Aftercare Manager).
- 95% of Aftercare are in fulltime education or employment.
- Pre-pandemic: Drop -in Clinic (10- 12 calls on average per month), still providing drop in support remotely by text, audio or video link.

## Organisational Structure

Tusla Child and Family Agency is responsible to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

National Service Director (Area Manager)

Principal Social Worker

Team Leader  
*Duty*

Team Leader  
*Children in Care*

Team Leader  
*Foster Care*

Team Leader  
*Aftercare*

Social Workers<sub>s</sub>

Social Workers<sub>s</sub>

Social Workers<sub>s</sub>

Aftercare  
Workers<sub>s</sub>

# Basic approach to leaving care

The legislation as outlined in the Child Care Amendment Act 2015 guarantees that every eligible care leaver, be they a child or an adult, is entitled to *an assessment of needs AND an aftercare plan.*

When a child in care turns 17, the allocated professionally qualified child protection social worker makes a referral to the Aftercare Service for a needs assessment. The young person is introduced to the aftercare worker responsible for the needs assessment. If it is deemed the young person is going to be allocated an aftercare worker, it is often the assessing aftercare worker who will take on the young person (but not always), and then the allocated aftercare worker joins with the social worker on the case so there is a period with both professionals working with the young person on their leaving care and after care needs and planning.

## Providing Aftercare in the context of separated children seeking asylum.

Because a care leaver's residency permission does impact their ability to access some aspects of aftercare (and other state) supports these young people are considered under two main categories.

☒ *Young people with some form of status/residency*

**OR**

☒ *Young people who's final determination on their protection application is still pending*

As the circumstances may change during the course of our intervention, parallel planning even three or more courses of action can be required, especially if return is a possibility.



# The Good Stuff...

- ☒ Young people with some form of status/residency permission

If a care leaver has been granted a Declaration of Refugee Status, Subsidiary Protection or Permission to Remain in Ireland, AND if they meet the eligibility criteria\* for an Aftercare package of service, then everything is fine and is exactly as it would be for any young person leaving care in Ireland. This means an allocated aftercare worker and */F* they are in full time education, financial support of €300 per week to meet living expenses.

\*The primary *Eligibility Criteria* for an Aftercare Package of service includes having been in care for 12 months before your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.



# Challenges

- ⊗ Young people who's final determination on their protection application is still pending

A young person who is still in the international protection process at the time they leave care (when they turn 18 years of age), their legal status in the State becomes that of an 'adult asylum seeker/international protection applicant.' This cohort of people in the State are limited in terms of what public services can be accessed. However, the state does have some supports in place such as accommodation and medical support and even in some cases, access to the labour market. They are still entitled to an assessment of need and an aftercare plan, but not the financial piece but help with paying for PLCs. They are entitled to remain in their current care placement until the end of the school year following their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday before transferring to the adult accommodation service.

A young person turning 18 without having made an application for international protection is considered to be in the state illegally and may be removed.

Aftercare Drop -In Services (M -F, 9-5) are available to all care leavers regardless of their residency permission or eligibility for Aftercare .



# Challenges

☒ When return is a possibility...how can you help?

The needs assessment should help to identify what the young person thinks about return as a possibility or an option – either voluntarily or by removal.

Create space for the young person to share their safety plans should they decide to go back to their country of origin, a third country, or stay in Ireland underground. While we could never assist a young person to commit a crime, we do have responsibility to ensure they practice self-care regardless of what situation they may be.



# 4. Ageing Out and Leaving Care

Building a positive working relationship with the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) has been another great development for serving young people preparing to leave state care.

The implementation of an 'Equity of Care' principle required placing UAMs in foster families around Ireland.

A new policy regarding the accommodation of young people transferring into the state's accommodation services for adult asylum seekers was also being developed at the same time.

Rather than continuing to move UAMs that turned 18 years old into single men's or single women's hostels, a joint inter - departmental policy was developed to identify specific family centres within the adult accommodation system that might have local aftercare supports already in place to meet the needs of UAMs transferring into the local area. The towns of Cork, Sligo, Galway, Limerick and Waterford were identified as being able to best meet the needs of the UAMs with active aftercare and advocacy social networks. Young people were then matched with the local area based on their needs, interests and availability of placements.

# One Very Important Suggestion

EU Member States should each establish a designated team of professionally qualified social workers and social care workers/ aftercare workers to address the needs of the separated child and unaccompanied minors both in care and leaving care in their countries.

The work of these expert child protection social work teams should be underpinned by an Equity of Care principal ensuring all children in care of the state receive the same standard of care and protection - absolutely and unquestionably regardless of their immigration status or residency permission; thus ensuring that child protection laws enjoy the same application, respect, and *deference* as immigration laws.

# AFTERCARE TEAM, HAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR:

- ☒ Supporting the care leaver throughout the international protection (asylum) process:
  - ❖ Attend all interviews and any appeal hearings and any court appearances even post 18 years with the care leaver's consent.
  - ❖ Make representations on the young person's behalf to support their application – if appropriate to do so.
- ☒ Referring and planning for specialist services when necessary
- ☒ Following up on general welfare
  - ❖ Psycho-social-emotional-physical/ medical-spiritual-educational-legal
  - ❖ Onward placement planning after leaving care
  - ❖ Family reunification application and following arrival of family members.

# Suggestions

- ❌ Developing rapport and trust with the young person.(Follow through)
- ❌ Age determination procedures that are non-invasive and child-friendly conducted by professionals with child development expertise.
- ❌ Immediate local language education and preparation for mainstream education (youth and education cultural induction)
- ❌ Liberal application of benefit of the doubt

- Awareness of the issues surrounding separated children, both specifically and generally
- Understanding the administrative landscape.
- Professional trust, respect and skills should always be taken into account
- Cultural competency (Knowing that you don't know! Ask.)
- Assume good will of others (police, professionals, carers) working on the child's case.



# 'In Syria I used to hate school but here it's really different

Sixth-year students describe their asylum journey to Ireland and loneliness on arrival



Mohammed Almassry, Samir Faizi and Osman Noori, originally from Afghanistan and Syria and now sixth-year students at CBS Westland Row school, addressed fellow students on Thursday at a 'Walk in my Shoes' event. Photograph: Dave Meehan

