

Focus Ireland

Effective Political Advocacy & Campaigning
Neurological Alliance of Ireland

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Right to Aftercare Campaign

- Stage one of any campaign is to build case internally and then communicate externally. What is this campaign all about and why aftercare?
- Focus Ireland is working to secure a statutory right to aftercare for young people leaving care in Ireland.
- Why? A high incidence of care leavers using our services: Research in 2000 – found that 2/3 of the young people in State Care who took part in the study were homeless within the first two years of leaving care.
- Some major improvements in services but many people seeking our support today still come from a care background. Without support many young people leaving care can develop additional problems such as homelessness, exploitation, prostitution, drug abuse and/or getting involved in crime.
- For example: A total of 29 people who accessed Focus Ireland's Caretakers hostel came from a care background. If they had received the right support when it was needed they may not have developed so many problems.
- Meanwhile, figures from a review of Focus Ireland's prison Inreach service show that a third of the prisoners on remand at Clover Hill Prison (Out of a total of 76 inmates linked in with Focus Ireland's In-Reach service) come from a care background.

Campaign Objectives

- Primary Objective: To gain a statutory right to aftercare to enable young people leaving care to bridge the gap from care to home.
- Secondary Objectives: The campaign also includes a number of additional objectives:
 - Demonstrate the effectiveness of aftercare in a financial and social setting and work towards ensuring more consistent provision of quality aftercare nationwide (as required) within the existing policy and legislative framework. Protect funding for existing services.
 - To build Focus Ireland's profile across key audiences and position us as a leading organisation in providing services and solutions for young people leaving (and in) care.
 - Lobby for the roll out of an effective national Out-Of-Hours service linked to a more substantial service response to the individual cases presenting to this service.
 - Lobby for the provision of sufficient funding for day services to cut the number of young people reaching the crisis point of the Out-Of-Hours service.

Stage 2: Make your case.

- Focus Ireland identified a campaign to secure a legal right to aftercare was a key strategic target to help block pathways into homelessness.
- Stage 2 - explain our case rationally by communicating to a range of key audiences the benefits of aftercare and show the VFM of this case across key audiences:
- Primary Audiences: Minister for Children and his department/Govt, key opposition spokespeople, young people in care, staff, partner organisations, HSE, targeted media and funders.
- Secondary Audiences: General public, rest of the Oireachtas, general media, donors, corporates, rest of voluntary sector.
- Meet Your Audience Where They Are! Focus Ireland worked to get a number of key experts/high profile people on board for the magazine "Bridging the Gap: From Care to Home".
- The Magazine was published in Nov 2008 - Launched in the media by Paul McGrath. Issued to all key stakeholders.

Stakeholders



Political Engagement

- Keep politicians informed and onside as much as possible. However, don't shy away from criticism as required. (Iron fist in velvet glove.)
- Focus Ireland worked in partnership with Minister for Children's office to keep informed at all stages of campaign.
- This entailed providing extensive briefing information prior to meetings with Minister Andrews. Ensured Minister had copy of magazine before issued.
- Secured Minister Andrews to launch the Annual Report of our Caretakers project and aftercare service in South Dublin.
- Informed Dept that we were set to draft suggested amendments to 1991 Child Care Act required to secure a right to aftercare.
- Developed and road tested this approach with key experts.



Lobbying/Political engagement continued

- Lobby all TD's but concentrate on those with particular interest on the issue. (or develop an interest for them!)
- Mail shot direct appeal to Oireachtas members.
- Arrange face to face meetings/briefings prior to key stages of the campaign. Seanad/Dail. Ensured strong focus on aftercare in both chambers.
- Our work continues with the new Government. Minister Francis Fitzgerald launched our new aftercare service in Waterford.
- Keep positive. There will be lulls in campaign but rest assured the situation would be worse if you were not taking action.

Customer Engagement:

- EMPOWERMENT: One of Focus Ireland's key values is empowerment.
- Focus groups at development stages of campaign to inform young people and gain their input. Held policy workshops.
- Young people were involved in media work to promote campaign:
- Paul McGrath photoshoot to launch the policy mag. People using our services wrote articles.
- Press conference to announce submission of proposed amendments to Child Care Act included our customers.
- Extensive report which aired on Capital D on RTE 1. Showed the moral and financial case for a right to aftercare and interviewed 2 people.
- Customers wrote letters to media on the campaign issues.
- Young people introduced to the Minister at Waterford launch.



Right to Aftercare Internet Campaign

- Focus Ireland launched an Internet campaign calling for people to email former Minister for Children, Barry Andrews TD.
- The campaign launched by two young women Norelle and Niclette from Focus Ireland's aftercare services.
- Engaged people and built support through the media and also directly through communicating with people who have signed up to support it.
- Provided opportunity for Minister for Children to reply on the issue at that time so we could plan next stage.
- "Focus Ireland recently submitted a series of proposed amendments to the 1991 Child Care Act for the consideration of the Minister for Children Barry Andrews as part of its campaign to secure a right to aftercare. The Minister is currently considering the case for a right to aftercare and will respond in due course. "



Campaign Update

- **LEGISLATION:** The Child Care Bill (2009) was passed through the Oireachtas in July 2011 without the amendment on Aftercare that we campaigned for included.
- This was a setback for the campaign but not a defeat. Minister Francis Fitzgerald, who spoke in favour of the amendment last year when she was opposition Senator, committed to returning to the issue.
- The Minister indicated to the Dáil that the need for legislation is still under consideration:
- “I note that in the North more detailed regulations on aftercare have been built into statute. That is something I wish to examine to see whether there is a need to have further legislation on aftercare.

The advice currently is that section 45 of the Child Care Act does imply the statutory right to aftercare where anywhere an assessment of need has been made. However, I wish to examine that.”

- Partner organisations held a seminar this week comparing legislation in other counties – Northern Ireland. Focus spoke at this event.

What has been achieved?

Always review your campaign to see what has been achieved and if it needs to be revised to adapt to a shifting political, social and economic environment.

- Issue is on the agenda and key stakeholders understand value of aftercare.
- Provide a voice for young people and help to avoid future tragedies.
- Funding has been protected from the most severe cuts.
- A review of existing services took place which allows better planning.
- A new aftercare National Policy was developed and is to be implemented.

Next Stage: Where to from here?

- We will continue our campaign to secure a legal right to aftercare. (Get new TD's on board. Develop relationships with new advisors, dept officials, Minister.)
- Build supporters in opposition: Caoimhghin O Caolain TD/TD Charlie McConville FF/ Senator David Norris.
- Build support of Govt. backbenchers: Patrick Nulty TD, Simon Harris FG.
- Need to play the long game:
- Monitor and support implementation of National Aftercare Policy.
- Makes it harder to cut funds to existing services.
- Continue to advocate for care-leavers "at the coalface" to protect them from other cuts/policy roll out: EG: Cuts to Jobseekers payment for Under 20s.
- Template for right to aftercare will be in place when this recession ends! Keep message out there.