

The logo for TúsLA, featuring the word 'TúsLA' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The 'ú' has a dot above it, and the 'L' is stylized with a horizontal bar.

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Office of the Director of
Services and Integration

Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services for Young People and Young Adults

2023-2026

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Foreword

I am very pleased to publish the Tusla Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services for young people and young adults 2023-2026. This plan is the third phase of the Agency's overall approach to improve Alternative Care services across the continuum of care, for children, young people and young adults who cannot or have not been able to live at home for periods of their lives.

An important element of childhood development is preparing for adulthood in a way that ensures a successful transition to independent living. For most children in Ireland progression through this developmental stage takes place within their families of origin. However, children who have been in care, compared to their peers, can face an accelerated transition to adulthood, especially those who have not had enough time to develop relationships with carers to create a stable placement or ensure supports are in place for their future.

Many of the children, young people and young adults in our care have had traumatic life experiences, including exposure to significant neglect, abuse, domestic violence, substance misuse, and educational disadvantage. These traumatic experiences are further complicated by the child's experience of separation, and of not being cared for by their parents, which requires the Agency to respond in an appropriate way that meets their needs. This impacts on their transition into adulthood and the Agency is committed to supporting them on this journey. Aftercare support is critical as leaving care is a major life event involving a transition to self-sufficiency.

Tusla – Child and Family Agency has a statutory obligation to produce an aftercare plan. The Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child Care (Amendment) Act, 2015 places a statutory responsibility for the provision of aftercare services.

Tusla has experienced a significant increase in demand for services in recent years, including aftercare services. There are 2,999¹ young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services. Fifty-five per cent of these young people and young adults are 18-20 years, 21% are 21-22 years, while the remaining 24% are under 18 years. Challenges Tusla faces in Aftercare is to grow and strengthen our current service provision to ensure equitable, transparent, and consistent services are delivered to young people and young adults regardless of the area in which they live.

¹ Based on data for Q3 2022, latest available.

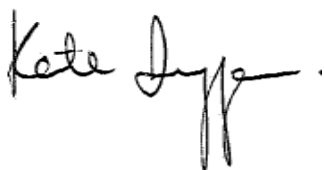
As young people and young adults accessing services grow, staffing and resources in the Agency also expand. The reliance on interdepartmental work and cross agency work continues to develop to meet increasing challenges in growth.

Meeting accommodation needs of young adults' is identified as one of the main pressure points in the system particularly in relation to the more vulnerable young adults who have additional needs and require further long-term care.

The evidence shows that to better respond to these needs we must forge strong relationships with our colleagues in other state departments to ensure that young adults with care experience are recognised as a vulnerable group and prioritised for access to services such as accommodation, multi-agency support, access to specialist services to name a few.

I would like to thank the young people and young adults we work with, their foster carers, our staff and our external partners for their invaluable contributions to the development of this plan. The wealth of information and learning gathered during this process cannot be underestimated, and the time and commitment of all stakeholders involved must be acknowledged.

We look forward to working with all stakeholders in the implementation of the recommendations to ensure that young people, young adults, their families, their carers and extended support networks have a more positive experience of our services, achieve better outcomes and that our staff feel valued and supported in their roles.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Duggan' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kate Duggan

Interim CEO (Designate).

Executive Summary

Tusla - The Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility to protect children and promote their welfare under both the Child Care Act, 1991 (3), Child and Family Act 2013 (8). The Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 also places a statutory responsibility on the Agency to provide an aftercare service for young adults with care experience. The legislation provides a framework for service delivery in terms of setting out key requirements including eligibility for services and the requirement for each eligible young person and young adult to have an assessment of need and aftercare plan.

The Agency is currently structured to deliver services across 17 areas, located within six regions. The Agency is committed to ensuring that aftercare services provided in these areas are robust to meet the growing need of young people's transition to adulthood.

There are 2,999² young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services. Fifty-five percent of these young people and young adults are 18-20 years, 21% are 21-22 years, while the remaining 24% are under 18 years. Slightly more males (51.2%; 1,534) than females (48.6; 1,458) are in receipt of aftercare services. Of the remaining seven young people, six report as gender neutral while gender was not declared for the other young person.

The number of young people and young adults being provided with aftercare services has increased in recent years with 225 (8%) more young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end of Q3 2022 compared to the end of 2019. The rate of increase has slowed with a slight decrease at the end of Q3 2022, indicating a possible levelling off of the number young people and young adults being provided with aftercare services. It is important to note that this increase is not in line with the number of admissions of children to care. Over a four- and half-year period, the number of children in care has decreased with 360 fewer children in care in 2022 compared to 2017. During this same period our aftercare services have experienced an increase of 1,049 young adults accessing services.

Aftercare Services to these young people and young adults are provided by Tusla and some key partners in Non-Governmental Organisations. These include Focus Ireland, Don Bosco Care, Cross Care, and Smylys who hold dedicated caseloads.

² Based on data for Q3 2022, latest available.

The purpose of this strategic plan is to:

- (1)** Ensure an Agency wide understanding of the current trends in Aftercare Services and the factors contributing to same.
- (2)** Understand what is working well and what the challenges are.
- (3)** Identify key recommendations to shape the future of service delivery and provide a roadmap for the changes required.

The plan has been developed through a process of internal and external consultations (350 stakeholders). This included consultation of the lived experiences of those accessing and providing aftercare services, reviewing trend and data analysis, and learning from literature review.

The findings of the consultation phase highlighted key priority areas for improving aftercare services in Ireland such as the need for greater interdepartmental work, resources, structures and need for consistency in practice.

Recommendations for the provision of Aftercare Services 2023-2026:

This plan identifies five overall high-level recommendations, with sub-recommendations, supported by a detailed work plan, to achieve the overall ambition of the Agency, to strengthen current service provision in aftercare to ensure better outcomes for young people leaving care.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Interdepartmental Work to provide a multi-agency response to young adults with care experience.

Recommendation 2: Review existing service provision and parameters of accessing services to consider broadening the scope of service delivery.

Recommendation 3: Enhance Accommodation Provision.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen Organisational Structures and Enablers to better support staff in equitable and consistent Service Delivery.

Recommendation 5: Implement a consistent model of practice in Aftercare Care Services.

1.0: Background and Introduction

An important element of childhood development is preparing for adulthood in a way that ensures a successful transition to independent living. For most children in Ireland progression through this developmental stage takes place within their families of origin. However, children who have been in care, compared to their peers, can face an accelerated transition to adulthood, especially those who have not had enough time to develop relationships with carers to create a stable placement or ensure supports are in place for their future. Despite the supports offered to young people in State care many find the transition to independent living challenging. Aftercare support is critical as leaving care is a major life event involving a transition to self-sufficiency.

This provision of aftercare is recognised internationally. According to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), approximately eight million children and youth around the world live in alternative care settings and in Ireland this figure stands at approximately 6,000 at any given time. Interventions put in place in the latter stages of care help ensure that care leavers can make a successful and positive transition into adult life.

The aim of the aftercare services is to provide a range and continuum of services to assist young people and young adults who are preparing to leave care and those who have left care to enable them to achieve a successful transition from their placement to independent adult life in the community. An assessment of need for an aftercare service is undertaken before a young person reaches the age of 18 years and services are provided from 18-21 years of age (this can be extended to 23 years of age to complete a course of education or training).

As previously mentioned, Tusla has a statutory obligation to develop an aftercare plan. The Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 places a statutory responsibility for the provision of aftercare services. Aftercare is categorised as Alternative Care (section 1:1 for further information).

Based on an assessment of need, the aftercare plan seeks to provide the young person and young adult with ongoing support to help them achieve their potential and make a successful transition to independent living. The most important requirements for young people and young adults leaving care are for secure, suitable accommodation as well as further education, health and well-being, employment or training and family support. The identified needs that are met by relevant agencies (e.g., Health Service Executive, Department of Employment & Social Protection, Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government) are not replicated by Tusla.

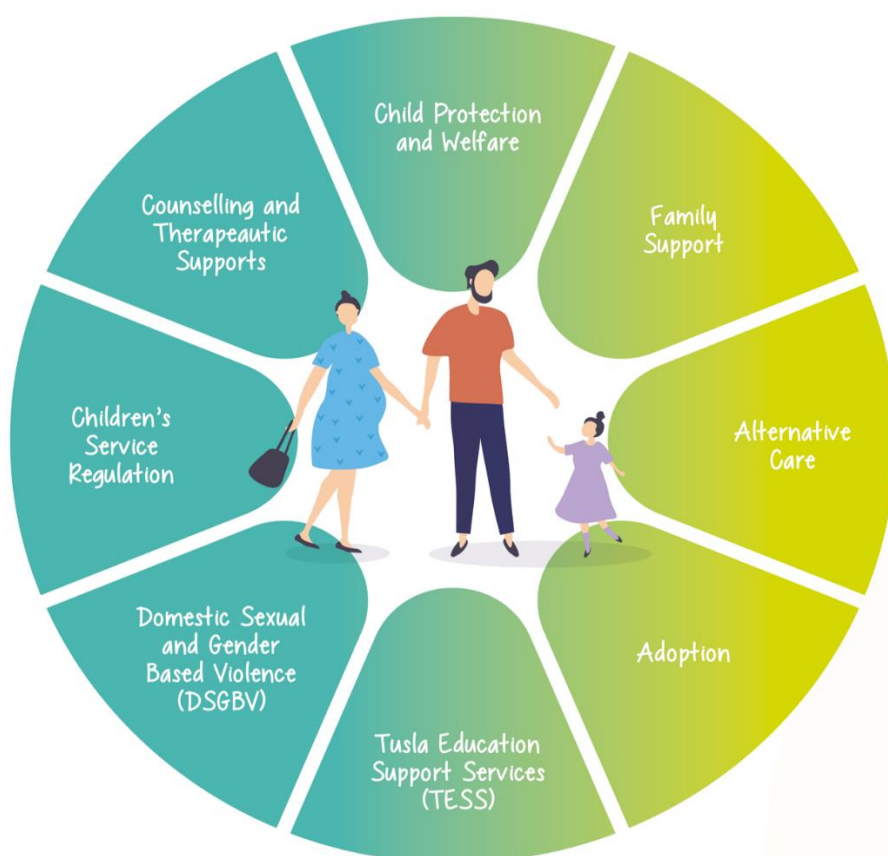
While aftercare is an adult service, a lot of important preparation work takes place prior to the child achieving the age of 18 years. Social workers, foster carers and residential staff have key roles in supporting young people in their preparation and transition for adult life.

The child's social worker is responsible for the statutory care planning process, and it is within this process that formal preparation for leaving care occurs. While very much dependent on each case, this process can commence from the age of 16 years.

Over recent years the Agency has worked to develop aftercare services. The National Aftercare Policy 2017 focussed attention on service delivery and work commenced on the agreed standardised aftercare service delivery framework in Tusla. This framework established dedicated aftercare teams in all 17 operational areas, and aftercare service within a national team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Each team has an Aftercare Manager and dedicated aftercare workers who hold dedicated caseloads. There has been a 381% increase in the number of dedicated aftercare service staff since 2017 (44 dedicated aftercare service staff in 2017 and 151 dedicated aftercare service staff in 2022).

Figure 1: The range of services delivered across Tusla - Child and Family Agency

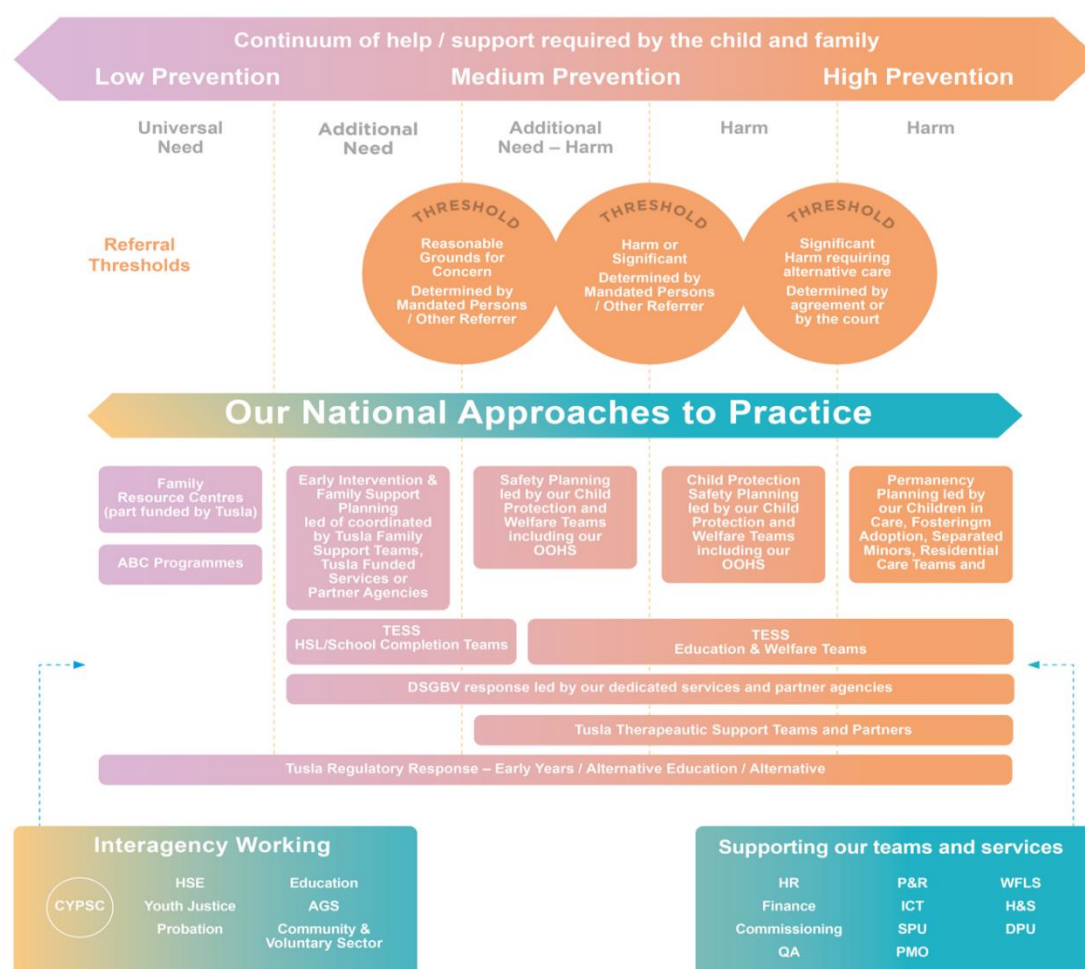


The Agency currently provides a range of services, outlined in Figure 1, across 17 Areas, the six geographical regions (Dublin NorthEast, Dublin MidLeinster, West NorthWest, MidWest, SouthEast and SouthWest). A dedicated aftercare service for separated children seeking international protection is also part of the Agency's response to providing aftercare.

The Agency responds to children, young people, families, and communities across a continuum of response pathways, which are designed to promote consistent and integrated responses, to ensure that each child receives the most appropriate response, at the right time in the right place and from the most suitable service.

For children and young people who turn 18 years old in care or who have been in receipt of alternative care services for 12 months between their 13th and 18th birthday they are considered eligible for an aftercare service. This criteria can include a period of time in receipt of Section 5 Services under the Child Care Act 1991. Periods of time in detention can also be included as part of the eligibility. The integrated pathways across the continuum of care are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Existing Integrated pathways across the continuum of care.

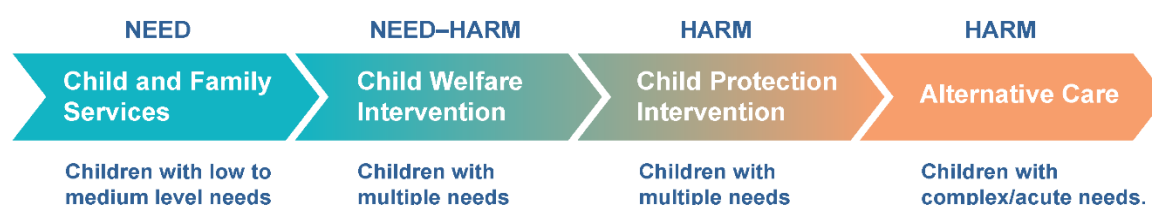


1.1: Alternative Care

Alternative care is the term used to describe state provision of care for children and young people who cannot remain in the care of their parents. It also includes the provision of services to young people when they turn 18 years of age. This service is termed **Aftercare**.

Section 45 of The Child Care Act 1991 places a statutory duty on Tusla to form a view in relation to each person leaving care as to whether there is a “need for assistance” and if it forms such a view, to provide services in accordance with the legislation and subject to resources. Young people who have had a care history with Tusla are entitled to an aftercare service based on their assessed needs. This legislative provision is strengthened by The Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 which defines the core eligible age range for aftercare, 18 years up to 21 years. This can be extended until the completion of a course of education in which a young person is engaged, up to the age of 23 years. This legislative provision imposes a statutory duty on Tusla to undertake an assessment of need for an eligible child or eligible young person and young adult. The aim is to create an explicit, as opposed to implicit, statement of Tusla’s duty to satisfy itself as to the child’s or young person’s need for assistance by preparing a plan identifying the needs for an aftercare support.

Figure 3: The continuum of care by need – highlighting that those most in need require Alternative Care and subsequently an Aftercare Service.



1.1.1: Tusla the Child and Family Agency has the statutory obligation to:

- Regard the best interests of the child as the paramount consideration – Section 9 (1), (2) of ‘The Child and Family Agency Act 2013’ and Article 3 of the UNCRC.
- Ensure that the views of the child are taken into consideration, ascertained and given due weight – Section 9 (3), (4) of ‘The Child and Family Agency Act 2013’ and Article 12 of the UNCRC.
- The welfare of the young person and young adult is paramount.
- The young person and young adult has the right to informed, meaningful consultation.
- Young people and young adults will be provided with all relevant information to enhance their participation in decision making regarding their future life plan.

2.0: Aftercare Strategic Plan 2023-2026

2.1: Purpose of Aftercare Care Strategic Plan (2023 – 2026):

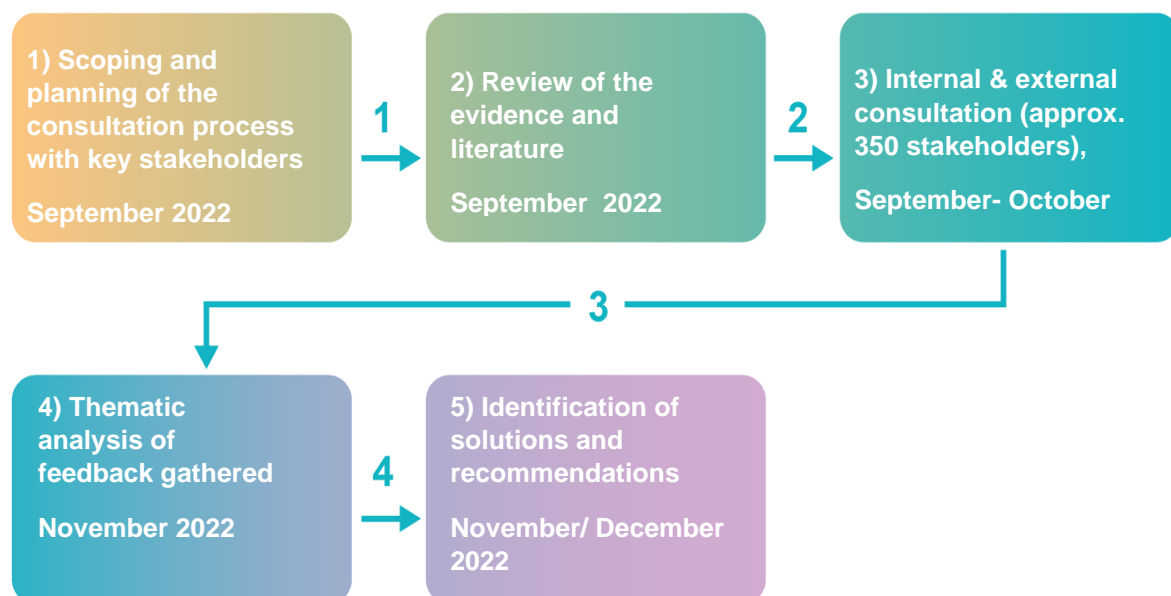
The purpose of this strategic plan is to:

- (1) Ensure an Agency wide understanding of the current demands and pressures on the Aftercare Services and the factors contributing to same.
- (2) Understand what is working well and what the challenges are.
- (3) Identify key recommendations to shape the future of service delivery and provide a roadmap for the changes required.

2.2: Informing the Aftercare Strategic Plan (2023 – 2026):

The plan has been developed through a process of internal and external consultation (350 stakeholders) including hearing the lived experiences of those accessing and providing aftercare services, trend and data analysis, and literature review. The development of the strategy was project managed through the five phases, outlined in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Project management approach adopted and timelines for the development of the Aftercare Strategic Plan -2023 -2026:



2.2.1: The Consultation Process

The consultation process included face to face and online engagement sessions with a range of stakeholders, and substantial efforts were made to include as many views as possible from a broad spectrum of key stakeholders. Approximately 350 key stakeholders engaged in the consultation including:

- Young adults, 16 years and older with care experience.
- Foster Carers caring for young people 16 years plus and young adults with care experience.
- Tusla staff representing all key categories of staff.
- Legal representatives and Guardian ad Litem.
- The Health Information and Quality Authority.
- The Department of Equality Children Disability
- Irish Youth Justice Integration and Young People.
- The Irish Aftercare Network
- The Irish Foster Care Association.
- Empowering People in Care, Advocacy Service.
- Academics representatives.
- Non-governmental organisations (NGO's).

During the consultation feedback was sought on: 1) what is working well; 2) what is not working well; 3) suggestions for improvements along with any suggestions in relation to how the Agency can improve foster care for children and young people.

2.2.2: Relevant Data

A secondary analysis of key data and performance metrics was also used to inform future planning and recommendations including the following:

- (1) Tusla performance reports.
- (2) Foster care operational data.
- (3) Financial data relevant to foster care services.
- (4) Human resources data relevant to foster care services.
- (5) Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) Inspection Reports and compliance levels.
- (6) Secondary analysis of feedback from children and young people about their experience of foster care in Ireland.

2.2.3: Sample Models of Aftercare Internationally

International research and practice evidence shows that for some young people leaving care, the transition to independent adulthood can prove challenging and outcomes can be poor in comparison to their peers who have not had care experience (Dixon and Stein, 2005, Stein and Munro 2008, Maycock et al 2014, Dixon et al 2015, Mendes and Snow 2016, Dixon and Ward 2017). The transition from care to adulthood is accelerated and compressed for many young people leaving care (Stein, 2006). This transition can involve multiple changes for young people including those related to their status, relationships and support, and housing situation (Bengtsson, Sjöblom, & Öberg, 2018; Hiles, Moss, Wright, & Dallos, 2013; Stein, 2006; Sulimani-Aidan, 2014).

In recent years, some of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have strengthened access to aftercare services, including France, Ireland and Scotland and United Kingdom. This means that the support young care leavers can expect to receive, depends much on where they reside. In New Zealand, there are provisions to allow young people to remain, or return to living with a carer until 21 years of age. There are also provisions to allow young people to access transition supports and advice until 25 years of age. The quality of out-of-home care and the opportunities provided to build human and social capital, influence the level of support young care leavers need which varies across countries. Young care leavers need assistance with matters that other young people can rely on their families for, such as, advice and support, help securing accommodation and employment, and attending medical appointments. They also need reliable contact with positive role models.

Pecora et al 2003, Courtney et al 2007, Maycock et al. (2007) highlighted the over-representation of care leavers in marginalised and vulnerable adult populations including those who are homeless, unemployed, in prison and experiencing mental health difficulties. These findings are based on comparisons with peer groups who have not been in care.

These research studies also found a correlation between improved outcomes and good stable care experiences and access to aftercare services that support the needs of the young adults on their journey through the early stages of adulthood. Access to education was also identified as a factor in improved outcomes. There has been a growing awareness internationally of challenges faced by children and young people in care in relation to their educational progress (Jackson, 1994; Jackson and Martin, 1998; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007). When compared to their majority population peers, children and young people with care experience tend to have poorer educational outcomes (Sebba et al., 2015).

A review of the literature on aftercare services in other jurisdictions has highlighted different approaches in service delivery such as Interdependent Living Services, Transitional Youth Services. Integrated Systems and Networks of Care looks at the interconnectedness of services with family support service, child protection services, alternative care models and aftercare. It refers to Aftercare and Independent Living Services in the context of continued support to young people and families as part of a transition 'out of services.

Aftercare services are provided to young people and families to help them transition from one part of the service to another. Individual group, family, recreational and life skills support would be provided on as a needed basis. As a part of this transition, youth and families will also have access to all other components of the programme e.g., respite. The goal of the Aftercare and Independent Living Services is to help the young person and their family to maintain all that they have achieved; reduce the probability of a replacement; and ensure the successful transition of the youth and family to the future service if such is necessary. As the youth ages out of care the system, this service provides ongoing support and intervention to promote independent living.

Young Adult Services: Bridging the Gap works with young people aged 16- 24 years who have mental health concerns and who have experienced care with this barrier to services. Staff work with the young people to help them access services, learn new skills and strengthen their support network. The programme provides individual and group skills training using evidence based Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). This modality focuses on crisis management emotion, regulation, interpersonal effectiveness and learning how to live in the moment.

Interdependent Living Services works with young people ages 16 years- 22 years who have developmental disabilities, mental health concerns and social, emotional, and behavioural challenges to develop adaptive skills necessary to increase their self-reliance and independence. The programme offers a continuum of services ranging from 14-hour staff support and supervision to living with a supportive roommate who helps the young person and young adult learn the necessary independent living skills to full independent living. Young people and young adults can move in a step-down fashion from one type of living arrangement to another. Young people and young adults are given assistance on finding appropriate living arrangement or job placement, working on life skills, improving social skills, and building healthy relationships and networks.

The Transitional Youth Services in California offers programmes that strength educational opportunities, employment, housing options, health care and personal and community relationships for young people who are transitioning from care to adulthood including assistance to go to and remain in post-secondary education, learn to see, and secure employment, acquire stable housing and contribute positively to their communities.

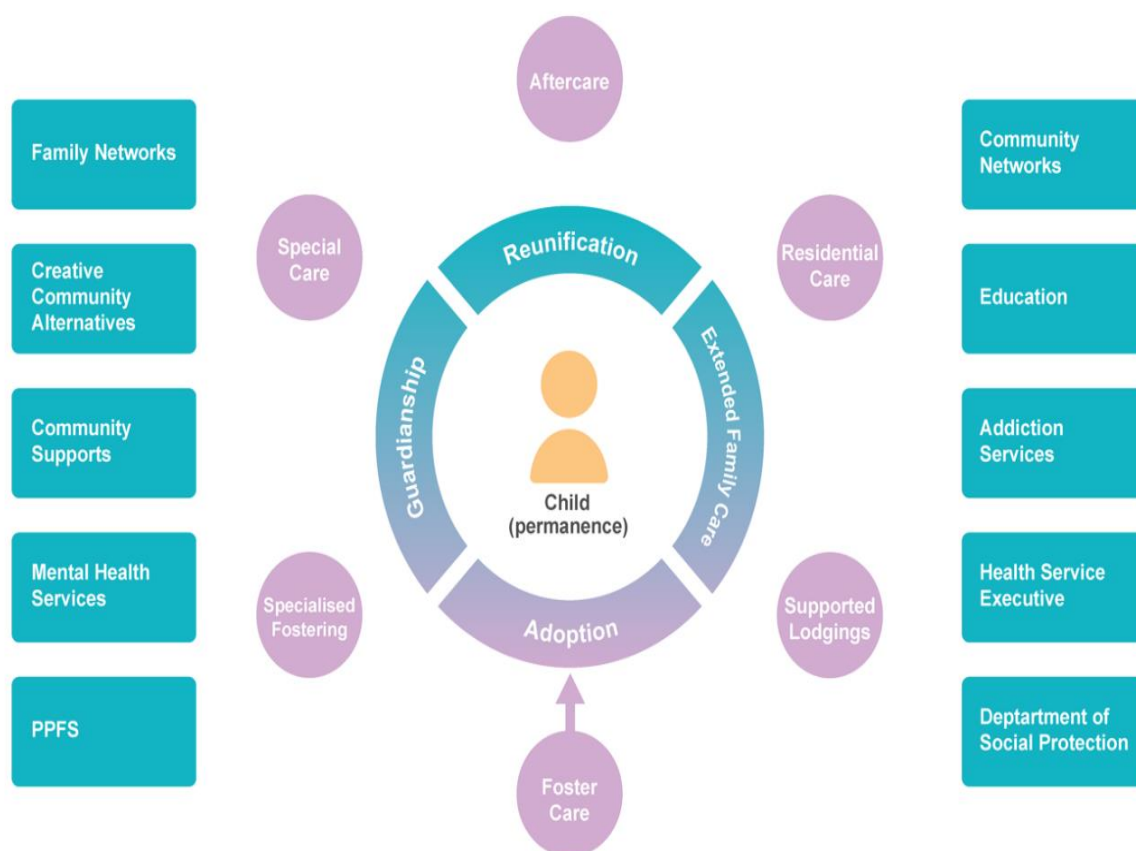
Young people have access to intensive case management, individual therapy, in the moment life coaching, youth advocate support and peer to peer support. The services include:

1. **Youth Advocate Services** which can help with legal documents, ensure they can attend whatever programmes they need, assist them in completing applications for college, job applications, scholarship applications, assist in finding housing and provide 24-hour support with issues and emergencies. The advocates can provide transportation to doctor's appointment, interviews and court appearances as well as assist in other areas of helping the young people make a successful transition.
2. **The Peer Advocate** is a former young person and young adult in care who provides similar advocacy support as the youth advocates. The peer advocate is also available to provide advocacy support to all of the young people regardless of age who live on the campus.
3. **The Youth Employment Programme** offers young people the chance to acquire work experience learn basic skill and earn money though part time on campus jobs. The programme offers mentoring to young people so that they can learn the skills needed to gain and maintain employment.
4. **The Transitional Housing PLs Foster Care Programme** provides housing and service to non-minor dependents between the ages of 18 years and 21 years. Participant can live in supported living environments where they receive help to move forward on the five key life domains: employment, education, living situation, community effectiveness and personal effectiveness.
5. **The Online Resource Centre** provides life assistance and community services information for emerging adults in the area. It provides help to those who have worked with the service once they leave and if they require assistance.

3.0: Provision of Alternative Care Services

Alternative Care in Ireland is a complex construct, and this complexity creates a need for systems thinking when seeking to understand all that is required when providing a holistic service to children, young people and young adults. The figure below represents some of the key components and partners required to provide such an all-encompassing and holistic care service. The inner circle illustrates the options where children and young people are not in state care³.

Figure 5: Key components and partners involved in the delivery of alternative care.



³ Figure 5 is for illustration only.

3.1: Children, Young People and Young Adults in Alternative Care in Ireland

There are 2,999⁴ young people in receipt of aftercare services. Fifty-five per cent of these young people are 18-20 years, 21% are 21-22 years, while the remaining 24% are under 18



years. Slightly more males (51.2%; 1,534) than females (48.6; 1,458) are in receipt of aftercare services. Of the remaining seven young people, six report as gender neutral while gender was not declared for the other young person.

The number of young people being provided with aftercare services has increased in recent years with 225 (8%) more young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end of Q3 2022 compared to the end of 2019. The rate of increase has slowed with a slight decrease at the end of Q3 2022, indicating a possible levelling off of the number being provided with aftercare services.

3.2: The Provision of Aftercare Services

The Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child Care (Amendment Act) 2015 are the main legal provisions for Aftercare. The eligibility criteria for an aftercare service is set out in the Child Care (Amendment Act) 2015, stating that a young person is eligible for an aftercare service if they have 12 cumulative months in care between their 13th and 18th birthday, this can include a period in a detention centre or in receipt of services under Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991.

Aftercare is a voluntary service and requires the engagement of the service user. Like other adult services it can be declined by the young adult, and this is an area that often presents as challenging for staff working in aftercare, particularly with some vulnerable young adults, however young adults in aftercare have the right to disengage if they wish.

⁴ Based on data for Q3 2022, latest available.

Formal preparation for leaving care commences at the age of 16 years and this work takes place as part of the care planning process, and an aftercare plan is developed 6 months prior to the young person's 18th birthday. The plan can be reviewed if circumstances change or if the young person/ young adult requests a review.

Tusla aftercare services provides a service for all young people and young adults eligible for a service. Under eligibility the young person is entitled to an assessment of need which takes account of all aspects of their lives, including health, education/ training, family networks, personal and social development, financial needs, accommodation and their need for an allocated aftercare worker. The assessment of need forms the basis for the aftercare plan and this plan is the young person and young adults plan which aims to support them in their transition to adulthood. The plan once agreed, identifies the work that the aftercare worker will do with the young person or young adult to ensure that the transition is seamless and supportive for the young person or young adult, taking account that this can often be an emotional time them.

Aftercare workers key role is supporting the young person and young adult accessing all the services they need to support them in the process of leaving State care. Aftercare workers provide support in securing accommodation, support care leavers accessing financial supports, support to secure education, training, and employment. Aftercare workers advocate and support the young person or young adult in accessing services they need., Providing emotional support to the young person or young adult is a key function of the aftercare workers role.

Other practical services the Aftercare worker provides include:

- Support in identifying accommodation.
- Supporting learning in relation to budgeting.
- Supporting completion of application forms for jobs.
- Social welfare,
- Making referrals to the interagency steering committees.
- Medical cards.

The aftercare worker has the lead role for providing services to those who are 18 years with care experience, prior to this the allocated social worker has the lead role which is supported by the aftercare worker/ service from the age of 16 years.

3.2.1: Key Elements in the Aftercare Service Provision

Aftercare services offer a wide range of supports which may include interagency steering committees, drop-in services, signposting services, advice, guidance, financial advice and support, allocation of a worker, advocacy with others on behalf of the young person and young adult. The participation and consent of the young person and young adult is paramount in the provision of aftercare services.

(1) Interagency Steering Committee

Aftercare steering committees are established in the 17 operational areas within the Agency. Currently in 2023, there are 26 Aftercare Interagency Committees in operation. The establishment of such committees is to fulfil the commitment of Tusla to provide a comprehensive aftercare service to young people and young adults in receipt of an aftercare service. The aftercare steering committees provide a forum for planning, implementing and monitoring a comprehensive, integrative aftercare plan for young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare. The approach taken is a multidisciplinary, multi-agency approach.

The aftercare steering committee is a service available to young people in care and young adults in receipt of aftercare. The aftercare manager determines the requirement to refer a case to the committee. The key role of the committee is to monitor the progress of all young people from 16 to 18 who are referred to the aftercare services to ensure that appropriate services and supports are in place in advance of a young person leaving care, and to monitor the progress of young adults from 18 to 21 years/23 years and to support re-engagement with relevant services. It provides a mechanism for other state agencies to engage with the aftercare services and to identify young people and young adults who require a multiagency response to their needs.

(2) Drop-In Services

Physical drop-in services are in place across many of the 17 Tusla geographical areas with 21 Drop In Services operating in 2023. In areas where no physical drop-in services are established other arrangements such as dedicated contact points are in place. This service is offered either remotely or in a face-to-face setting, depending on the need within the area. Any person with a care history may avail of the aftercare drop-in service for advice or guidance. There is no age limit on the service.

The purpose of the aftercare drop-in services include:

- 1) A point of contact for young people and young adults who have been in the care of Tusla.
- 2) A point of contact for foster carers and residential staff in the context of signposting and support.
- 3) A service that will allow those who have disengaged in aftercare services to re-engage.
- 4) An opportunity for a young person between 18-21 years to review their aftercare plan.
- 5) Support for accessing documentation or making applications,
- 6) To provide advocacy in accessing services.
- 7) Support for young people who require a referral to other services, signposting service, guidance, and provision of advice on entitlements.

(3) The Aftercare Worker

Aftercare Services have tried on assessment where possible to allocate an aftercare worker to all young people leaving care at 18 years. This has shown to have been a significant support to some young people and / young adults, however a burden to those who wished not to engage. As part of the assessment of need for aftercare services, the potential benefit of an allocated aftercare worker is considered. The allocation of an aftercare worker to a young person prior to 18 years will add value to the social work service provided, not to replace it. For those under 18 years who have returned home and those in care it is the responsibility of the referring social worker and aftercare worker to develop an aftercare plan in partnership with the young person and appropriate others.

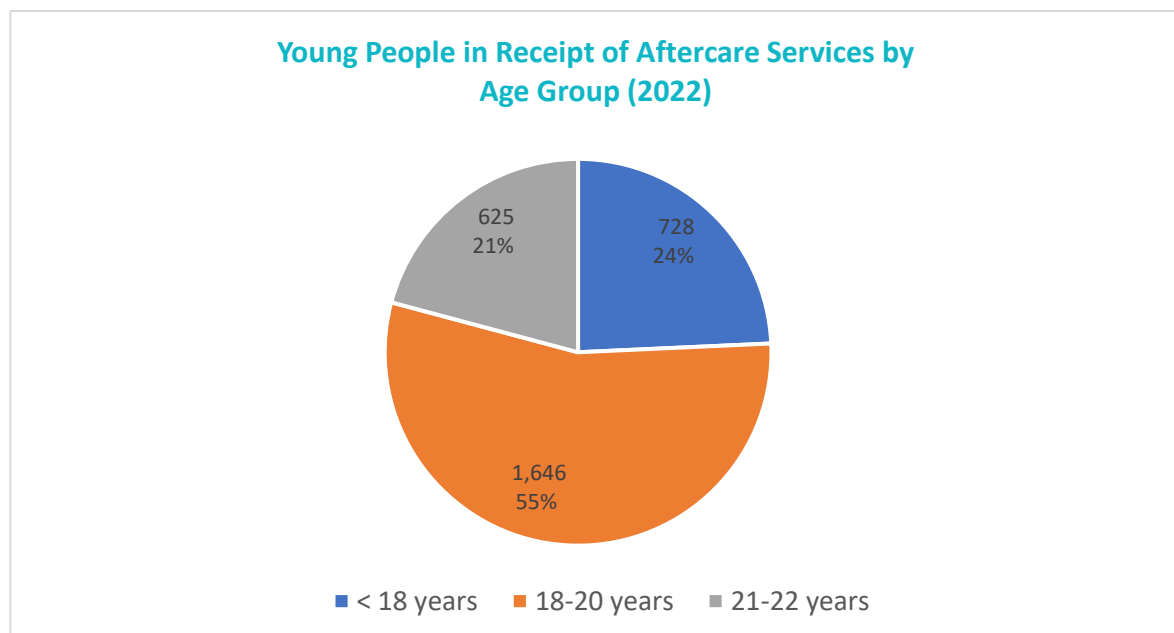
Those who may not be allocated an aftercare worker may include those who require a specialist service from another service provider e.g. The Health and Service Executive (HSE), those who refuse to engage with the service and have not identified a significant need for support, those who refuse to give consent to service provision, those who choose a drop-in service over allocation, and when a young person and young adult is to be held in detention for more than three months.

3.3: Key Data Trends in the Provision of Aftercare in Ireland

3.3.1: Key Data Trends in the Provision of Aftercare in Ireland

There are 2,999⁵ young people in receipt of aftercare services. Fifty-five per cent of these young people are 18-20 years, 21% are 21-22 years, while the remaining 24% are under 18 years (Figure 1). Slightly more males (51.2%; 1,534) than females (48.6; 1,458) are in receipt of aftercare services. Of the remaining seven young people, six report as gender neutral while gender was not declared for the other young person.

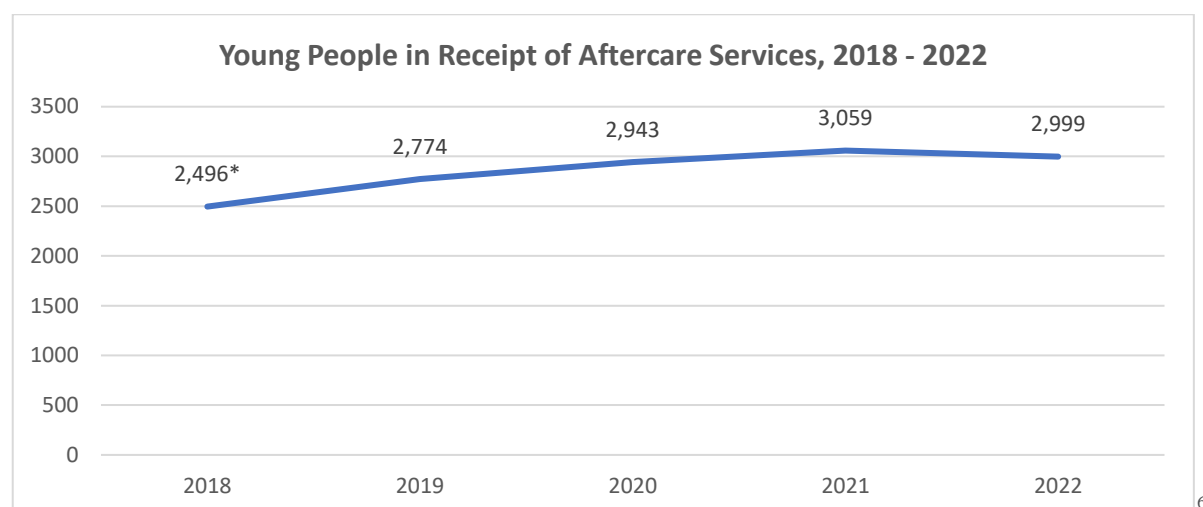
Figure 1: Young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services by age group, 2022 (Q3).



The number of young people and young adults being provided with aftercare services has increased in recent years with 225 (8%) more young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end of Q3 2022 compared to the end of 2019 (Figure 2). As can be seen from the chart below the rate of increase has slowed with a slight decrease at the end of Q3 2022, indicating a possible levelling off of the number being provided with aftercare services.

⁵ Based on data for Q3 2022, latest available.

Figure 2: Young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services at year end, 2018 – 2022 (Q3).



The levelling off of the number of young people in receipt of aftercare services is also consistent with the reduced number of referrals over the same period (Table 1). Over 90% of referrals are assessed as eligible for an aftercare service.

Table 1: Referrals for an aftercare service, 2019 - 2022 (Q3 YTD)

Year	# Referrals	# Referrals assessed as eligible for an assessment of need	% Assessed as eligible
2022 (Q3 YTD)	382	369	97%
2021	523	496	95%
2020	660	646	98%
2019	714	704	99%

⁶ *Data for 2018 does not include young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

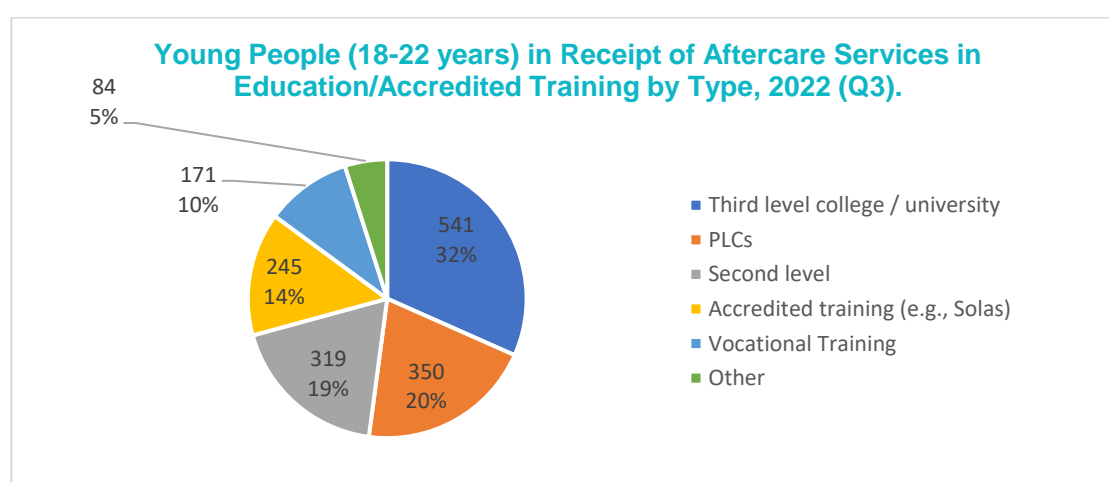
A breakdown of young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare care services at year end by age group for the period 2018 – 2022 (Q3) is provided in the table below.

Table 2: Young people in receipt of aftercare services at year end, by age group, 2018 – 2022 (Q3)⁷.

Year	< 18 years	18-20 years	21-22 years	Total
2022 (Q3)	728 (24%)	1,646 (55%)	625 (21%)	2,999
2021	720 (24%)	1,618 (53%)	721 (24%)	3,059
2020	700 (24%)	1,613 (55%)	630 (21%)	2,943
2019	666 (24%)	1,580 (57%)	528 (19%)	2,774
2018*	479 (19%)	1,491 (60%)	526 (21%)	2,496

Of young people, 75% (1,710) of 18-22 years are in receipt of aftercare services at the end of Q3 2022 were in education / accredited training. The largest proportion (32%; 541) of these young people were attending third level colleges / university with a further 20% (350) doing post leaving certificate courses (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Young people 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services in education/accredited training, 2022 (Q3).



⁷ *Data for 2018 does not include young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

A breakdown of young people 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services in education / accredited training for the years 2018 – 2022 (Q3) is presented in the table below. The overall percentage of young people in education / accredited training has remained relatively consistent over the period 2019 -2022 (Q3).

Over the same period the data also show a slight increase in the percentage of young people attending third level colleges / university and a decrease in the percentage doing post-leaving certificate course.

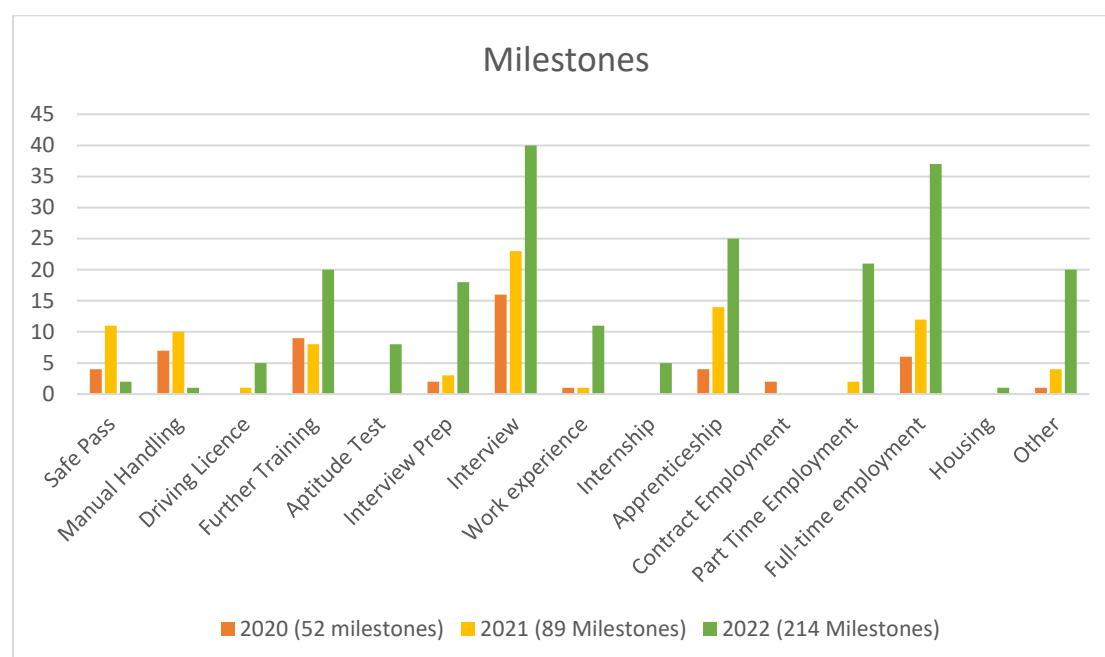
Table 3: Young people 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services at year end in education/accredited training, by type, 2018 - 2022 (Q3).

Year	2018 ⁸	2019	2020	2021	2022 (Q3)
Second level	270 (13%)	301 (14%)	328 (15%)	357 (15%)	319 (14%)
Vocational Training	112 (6%)	163 (8%)	201 (9%)	268 (11%)	171 (8%)
PLCs	327 (16%)	380 (18%)	371 (17%)	352 (15%)	350 (15%)
Third level college / university	385 (19%)	421 (20%)	511 (23%)	527 (23%)	541 (24%)
Accredited training (e.g., Solas)	156 (8%)	183 (9%)	214 (10%)	182 (8%)	245 (11%)
Other**	37 (2%)	85 (4%)	72 (3%)	102 (4%)	84 (4%)
Total (% 18-22 years in education)	1,287 (64%)	1,533 (73%)	1,697 (76%)	1,788 (76%)	1,710 (75%)

⁸ *Data for 2018 does not include young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection. **Other is not specified but generally includes disability schools.

Way 2 Work is an initiative that also provides a range of training to young people who have had a “care experience” during their childhood. They work closely with Tusla in working to provide alternatives to young people who do not see education as an option for them. Tusla provide grant funding to the Way 2 Work initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to support young people leaving care progress to the workforce.

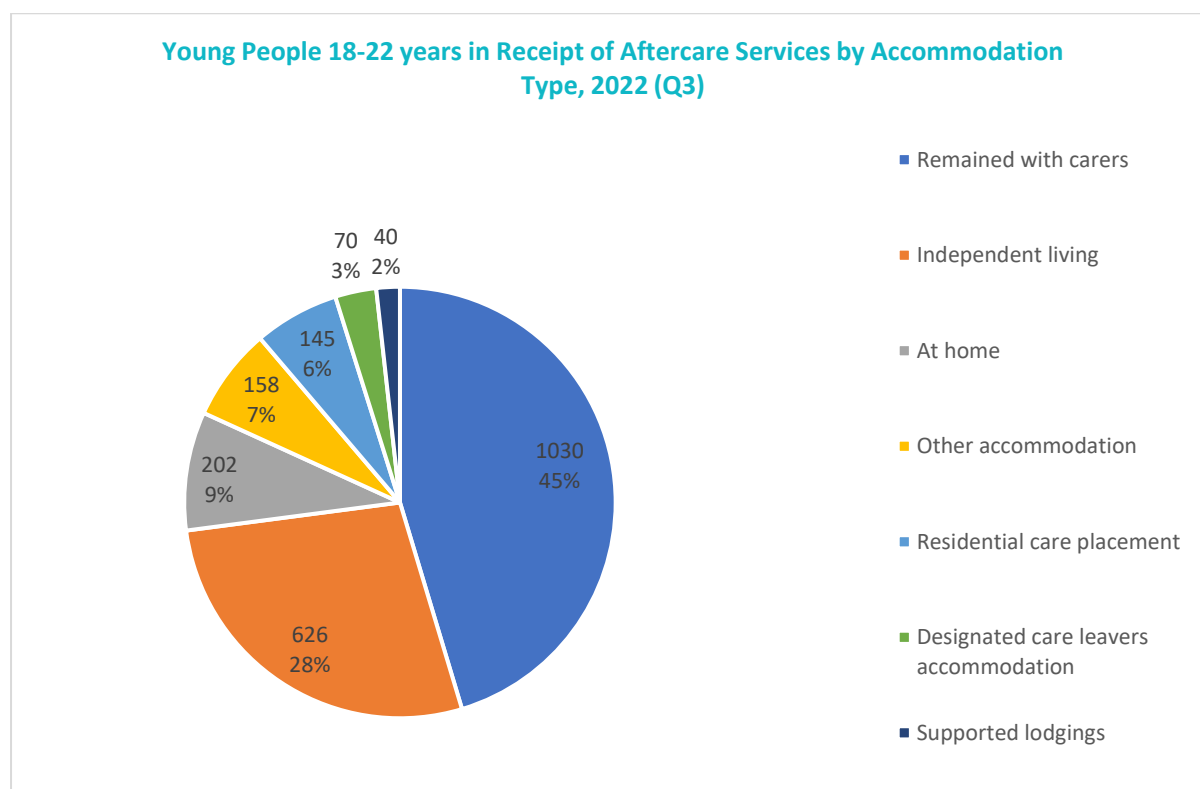
Figure 4: Mentoring Milestones - Year on Year Comparison; Way to Work.



Almost half (45%; 1,030) of young people 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services at the end of Q3 2022 were continuing to live with their carers, signifying that they continue to experience caring relationships and stable living arrangements (Figure 4).

A further 9% (202) had returned home, while one in four (28%; 626) had moved to independent living arrangements. “Other accommodation” includes psychiatric services, disability services, staying with friends, prison, homeless etc.

Figure 5: Young people and young adults 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services, by accommodation type, 2022 (Q3).



A breakdown of young people and young adults 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services at year end for the period 2018 – 2022 (Q3) by accommodation type is presented in the table below. The data demonstrates a slight increase (three percentage points) in the percentage of young people in independent living arrangements over the period 2019 – 2022 (Q3) while the percentage breakdown for all other types of accommodation has remained relatively consistent over the same period.

3.3.4: Increase in the financial cost of Aftercare Service provision.

In 2021, aftercare costs represented approximately 3.1% (26,937) of the total expenditure by Tusla. From 2015, the cost of this service has risen by 0.6% which represents the increases in number of young adults attending education/ accredited training.

The aftercare allowance is administered to or in respect of young adults who are in education/ accredited training. For those not in education/ accredited training they are eligible to apply for social welfare payments/ allowances with the Department of Employment and Social Protection.

Table 4: Young people and young adults 18-22 years in receipt of aftercare services at year end, by accommodation type, 2018 – 2022 (Q3).

Year	2018 ⁹	2019	2020	2021	2022 (Q3)
Residential care placement	98 (5%)	118 (6%)	127 (6%)	144 (6%)	145 (6%)
Remained with carers	939 (47%)	974 (46%)	1,051 (47%)	1,047 (45%)	1,030 (45%)
Independent living	529 (26%)	520 (25%)	579 (26%)	639 (27%)	626 (28%)
Designated care leavers accommodation	34 (2%)	59 (3%)	46 (2%)	54 (2%)	70 (3%)
At home	193 (10%)	197 (9%)	209 (9%)	213 (9%)	202 (9%)
Supported lodgings	44 (2%)	55 (3%)	41 (2%)	46 (2%)	40 (2%)
Other accommodation	180 (9%)	185 (9%)	190 (8%)	196 (8%)	158 (7%)
Total	2,017	2,108	2,243	2,339	2,271

Almost all (97%; 2,214) young people and young adults 18–22-years in receipt of aftercare services have an aftercare plan identifying the supports they require to transition into adulthood. As can be seen from the table below, this high percentage has been maintained over the four-year period 2018 – 2022 (Q3). A breakdown of young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services at year end with an aftercare plan, by age group is presented in the table below.

⁹ Data for 2018 does not include young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

Table 5: Young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services at year end with an aftercare plan, by age group, 2018 - 2022 (Q3)¹⁰.

Year	< 18 years	18-20 years	21-22 years	Total (% Total in Aftercare)
2022 (Q3)	314 (43%)	1,602 (97%)	612 (98%)	2,528 (84%)
2021	253 (35%)	1,558 (96%)	689 (96%)	2500 (82%)
2020	261 (37%)	1,571 (97%)	589 (93%)	2,421 (82%)
2019	291 (44%)	1,489 (94%)	485 (92%)	2,265 (82%)
2018¹¹	169 (35%)	1,308 (88%)	458 (87%)	1,935 (78%)

Similarly, over 90% of young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services, assessed as needing an aftercare worker, have an aftercare worker. This high percentage has also been maintained over the years and despite ongoing challenges with resources. A breakdown of young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services at year end with an aftercare worker, by age group is presented in the table below.

Table 6: Young people and young adults in receipt of aftercare services at year end with an aftercare worker, by age group, 2018 - 2022 (Q3).

Year	< 18 years	18-20 years	21-22 years	Total	% of Those Assessed
2022 (Q3)	290	1,449	420	2,159	93%
2021	245	1,367	468	2,080	94%
2020	236	1,393	422	2,051	92%
2019	208	1,319	362	1,889	90%
2018¹²	149	1,144	376	1,669	92%

¹⁰ Note: The requirement for an aftercare plan for those under 18 years is that it must be developed 6 months prior to the young person's 18th birthday. The provides some context to the data for those <18 years with an aftercare plan.

^{11/9} Note: Data for 2018 does not include young people reported by the Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking International Protection.

4.0: Analysis of Current Service Provision

Throughout the consultation phase, participants identified many challenges and opportunities for improvement, but also acknowledged many factors which contributed to participants positive experience of aftercare. Specific factors included the invaluable role of aftercare workers, dedicated teams, support from foster carers/ residential staff, supports for education/ accredited training and extended networks.

There were also many challenges identified, primarily the challenges faced in terms of accommodation, challenges in meeting the needs of young adults with complex needs, the number of staff need to meet the service demands and issues in relation to communication, decision making and joint working with other State Departments. Consistent approaches to service delivery were also noted as challenging. Specific feedback in relation to each of these factors is described hereunder.

" Young People themselves are a pleasure to work with. The stories they tell and share with you is very special and unique. It's an honour to have that connection and hold their story". Aftercare Manager, Tusla "Extraordinary young adults after all they have been through, they are incredible".

-Aftercare Manager, NGO.

4.1: Theme 1: Positive Feedback on Aftercare services

4.1.1: The Strength and Resilience of Young Adults in Aftercare

Throughout the consultation aftercare workers, managers, foster carers and social workers spoke about their admiration of the young people and young adults they work with. They described their experience of working with them as humbling and expressed how they feel lucky to work with them. Many described the resilience young people and young adults demonstrate in facing a new journey and how they commit to working with aftercare services.

4.1.2: The Invaluable Role of Foster Carers

Stakeholders consistently acknowledged the strength and value of foster carers, and how they demonstrate their commitment to the young people they care for by continuing to open their homes and lives to them when they reach the age of 18 years. There was a view that due to the introduction of permanency planning that foster carers will be supported better in the future.

4.1.3: Support Provided by the Aftercare Worker

Many spoke about the support they received from the aftercare service and the impact the aftercare worker had on their lives; they described the value of having an allocated aftercare worker and the importance of building a relationship with them. Young adults with care experience spoke about the importance of being able to pick up the phone and make a call when they need support. They also described the strength of their relationships with their aftercare workers and of their aftercare workers dedication and commitment.

“Support from Aftercare Workers is valued”.

“You are not alone there is someone supporting you”.

Young Adult with Care Experience.

4.1.4: Financial Support; Education/ Accredited training

Stakeholders spoke very positively about the aftercare allowance and how it has supported so many young adults progress in education and accredited training. Examples of further financial support was provided in terms of progression to PHD's and postgraduate degrees. Stakeholders described how this was a significant improvement to policy and practice since the introduction of the 2017 National Aftercare Policy.

4.1.5: Stability in Aftercare Teams

Some individuals noticed that there are higher levels of stability in aftercare teams compared with social work teams. There was a general consensus that staff liked working in aftercare and valued their role. Aftercare workers attributed their commitment to their teams and work to the young adults they work with and also the positive culture and leadership by the aftercare managers.

4.1.6: Support Services in Aftercare

Throughout the consultation process there was recognition of initiatives for aftercare and how they are valued by all stakeholders. These initiatives included the local drop-in services, the bursary scheme, collaborative initiatives with education partners in third level colleges, career guidance pilot schemes, accommodation initiatives in local areas and nationally. Many key stakeholders also spoke about the strength of the National Aftercare Policy and the work associated with its implementation in developing a robust service for young people and young adults.

4.1.7: Young People's Feedback on their Experience of the Aftercare Services

As part of the consultation young people and young adults spoke about their experiences of the aftercare service. They spoke of varied experiences in the transition from childhood to adulthood and the changes and challenges this brings and brought for them. They highlighted the value and importance of having a “good” aftercare worker who can support them in navigating the transition from both a practical perspective e.g., form filling, accommodation etc. to supporting them on an emotional level with the significant level of change in their lives. The importance of a consistent aftercare worker being available throughout their life meant it was easier to get the supports they needed when they needed them, this point was emphasised throughout the consultation. Young adults spoke positively about the financial supports they receive when attending 3rd level education or accredited training and welcomed the introduction of the standardised allowance however expressed concern for those not in



education or accredited training. They spoke of other challenges they faced in terms of securing accommodation, and they referenced the fact that the aftercare workers struggle with securing accommodation. The message that was conveyed the strongest is that accommodation is the term used to describe living arrangements however recognition must be given to the fact that *“accommodation is their home and their only home”*. It was explained that where young people are unable to rely on their foster carers for support

and local accommodation for young people leaving care was at capacity, they described their concerns about having no plan B. The vulnerability of young care leavers to become homeless was a concern expressed by young people.

Young adults spoke about the need for Tusla to have aftercare teams that are made up of multi-disciplinary support to assist them in navigating adulthood. Examples included career guidance, counsellors and budgeting experts. They spoke about the limitations of having a team of just one professional and that a multidisciplinary approach could be considered for the aftercare teams to allow young adults with care experience deal and address earlier trauma in their lives as adults. Young people who were availing of a leaving and aftercare service described how they were given information on important issues in preparation for reaching adulthood but that the supports needed to include more than information and form filling but support in a more holistic way.

Care leavers referred to initiatives that Tusla could consider for them specifically in terms of preparation for leaving care and aftercare and these included ensuring that all young people/ young adults have taken their driver theory test, driving lessons or have secured a driving licence. They said that such initiatives could make a big difference to them in terms of completing this in a supportive environment prior to leaving care and would widen their opportunities in the workforce in the future.

4.2: Theme 2: Challenges in Our Aftercare Services

4.2.1: Eligibility for Aftercare Support and Services

Throughout the consultation stakeholders consistently raised the matter of the eligibility for aftercare services. This issue was raised in several contexts, for those:

1. Young people who are not eligible for aftercare due to a shortfall of one or two months but had significant involvement in the child protection services prior to their admission to care.
2. Young adults at the age of 21 years who are not engaged in education / accredited training. The issue raised was described as a two-tier system and that the eligibility did not recognise the vulnerability of those not engaged in education/ accredited training who need additional support to the age of 23years.
3. Young adults who at the age of 23 years continue to need support of the aftercare services. It was acknowledged that not all young adults would need this continued support but should be made available to them.
4. Young adults whom the issue of extended care arose and who were not ready to move into an aftercare service. It was acknowledged that there are legal challenges in relation to how young adults at the age of 18 years are not ready for a transition into adult aftercare services and the options available to them in the context of extended care and the role of the Agency in this regard.

4.2.2: Accommodation

“We should not leave care with no accommodation” Care Leaver.

The provision of accommodation was a consistent theme throughout the engagements with stakeholders particularly given the risks associated with lack of a secure, safe, stable accommodation, and the impact that may have for the young person's ability to engage in education, employment and how attainment is challenging if you have nowhere to live.

Young adults with care experiences shared personal accounts of accessing homeless services, living in unstable tenancy arrangements and couch surfing. Professionals spoke about the challenges in securing accommodation and the stresses of working to provide some security to very vulnerable young adults.

There was acknowledgement that the statutory provision of housing and accommodation does not rest with Tusla, however as the State Agency with responsibility for aftercare, Tusla staff struggle to separate this responsibility when faced with the reality of the lives of young adults.

Throughout the consultation examples were provided of housing initiatives from around the country, e.g., Dial Housing, Supported Tenancy Frameworks (Galway), Step Down Accommodation Models, Supported Accommodation, CAS- Care Leaver Accommodation. All these projects were commended for the innovative practices in trying to meet the accommodation needs in aftercare. Ideas in relation to the expansion of other initiatives included increasing the capacity of the CAS accommodation framework, consider specific builds with the Approved Housing Authority and securing dedicated college accommodation for care leavers. Suggestions were also made about how we support more foster carers in continuing to provide care to young people when they reach their 18th birthday. Of note, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) has commissioned University College Dublin (UCD) to review the CAS programme and this report is due to be published in the coming months. *“No 18-year-old should have to free phone homeless services”.- Care Leaver.*

Throughout the consultation process this issue arose in the context of accommodation for cohorts such as young people seeking international protection, who are not eligible for an aftercare service due to their status and while the figures are low for these cases, they do cause considerable stress and anxiety for the young people in these circumstances. The Interagency Steering Committees respond to many of these cases however the issue of Tusla holding the sole statutory responsibility to respond to these cases is a concern. The lack of Corporate Parenting from the wider State system was highlighted as a particular challenge in responding to the most vulnerable young adults.

4.2.3: Preparation for Leaving Care

The consultation processes highlighted feedback in relation to the lack of a consistent approach for young people leaving care. Some stakeholders recognised the robust approaches that were taken to this significant piece of work that falls within the care planning framework, however others held the view that the policy and practice in this area was weak and allowed professionals not to focus on this area of work. It was highlighted that there was more focussed work and preparation for a young person leaving residential care services compared to other care placements and that this support was provided to the young person at an earlier age i.e., when they turned 16 years. It was explained that foster carers home is often the home of the young person when they turn 18 years and therefore, they are not considered as 'leaving care' while for others who do not have this experience it is felt they can leave their placement with a lack of preparation in this regard. Lack of consistency in the support provided between care services is an area which needs to be addressed further.

4.2.5: Consistency of approach to practice for care leavers across Ireland

Currently there is no national approach to practice for alternative care, unlike child protection and welfare services (Signs of Safety), or family support services (Meitheal). The experience of professionals working in aftercare and associated services and the experience of young adults with care experience and foster carers is that while the national policy focussed on standardising a service delivery framework the implementing of this operationally has not been consistent nationally. Stakeholders promoted the extension of elements of Signs of Safety as the practice approach for alternative care, enabling better integration between community and alternative care services.

In the consultation process staff reported they that adapt a relational approach to practice when working in aftercare. Workers reported that they felt a more trauma informed approach to practice was important for aftercare in recognising the challenges that young adults have faced in their lives. Staff and other professionals explained that framing an approach to practice would strengthen the work of the aftercare service in supporting staff deliver a service that meets all the needs of the young person and/ young adult.

Instances of aftercare planning not occurring in line with the policy was highlight as a significant concern with practitioners stating that they are not serving young people well when a plan is developed late. A social care manager described it as *"Final hour plans cobbled together"*. Other examples included the inconsistent and lack of strong practice in relation to the transfer of cases from one area to another when a young person and/young adult moves geographic area.

Resources was highlighted as the key reason that this does not work well and that the impact of this on young adults with care experience can be devastating in terms of trying to seek supports at a vulnerable time in their lives.

Financial support was also highlighted as an area that was not consistent nationally, care leavers gave examples of financial support for progressing further in education e.g., PHD, and master's while others reported that this was not supported in other areas. Inconsistencies also arose for those who remained living in residential care services.

It was widely acknowledged that inconsistencies remain in both the definition of arrangements and the implementation of business processes across the country. It was suggested that clarity and consistency of definitions and business processes and procedures should be introduced across all areas to ensure that all young adults in after care experience consistency in relation to information, access, allowances, and decision-making. Reference was also made in the consultation to the need for a dedicated national lead for aftercare to develop service provision nationally and avoid the local approaches to responding to deficits in services. It was considered that this would also support clear and consistent communication and messaging.

4.2.8: Support for caring young adults with complex needs including mental health supports.

Participants highlighted throughout the consultation the need to provide services including counselling and support services for young people and young adults leaving care with mental health needs. Foster carers stressed the need for more flexibility to access to mental health services, explaining that young people process childhood trauma at different stages and in different ways, young people in care have all experienced trauma because they have been in care and access to mental healthcare services needs to be flexible and adapted to meet their needs. Foster carers highlighted the issue of access to affordable counselling services, waiting lists for counselling services and the challenges that young adults face when transitioning from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult services. Staff and managers alike described how young people can often fall between the "cracks" as they do not fulfil the criteria for access to mental health supports, yet they exhibit self-harming behaviours and have complex needs because they have experienced childhood trauma. It was explained that "trauma work" needs to continue until the young person is at least 25 years of age, that care leavers require support over a long period of time and short-term or limited sessions of therapy or support are inadequate.

Young adults with care experience indicated in their consultations that there is a sense that it is when they are children, they have the opportunity to address their past experiences, however as young adults this is not available to them and some young people and young adults felt that recognition should be given to the readiness of people to engage in working on past trauma, therefore a more robust and responsive therapeutic supports should be provided in aftercare.

Access to therapeutic supports for young adults with care experience was a consistent theme throughout all the consultations, primarily the challenges and deficits in accessing these services, which was a source of significant frustration in trying to support young adults in aftercare. These supports were identified as including a broad range of practitioners, including but not limited to, career guidance services, counsellors, budgeting experts, psychologists, and mental health services.

4.2.9: Promote the importance of Social Support and Networks of Support

It was highlighted throughout the consultation that further work was needed to promote and develop social support networks that will sustain children and young people into adulthood. The need for people in their lives that they can rely on in times of need, both joy and hardship is seen as a core part of preparation for leaving care. As young adults are discharged from aftercare services the importance of these networks increases. Research indicates that the value of safe, stable and secure networks for everyone is important, but this is particularly relevant for young people and young adults who grow up in care.

4.2.4: Feedback about education services



Participants highlighted that all care leavers should be afforded support which is holistic and provided regardless of whether the young person and young adult was engaging in an educational or an employment programme. It was explained that young people leaving care “should have support with practical or tangible tasks as they become adults and engage with the wider world,” such as setting up bank accounts, budget management, filling in application forms, finding alternative accommodation, alternative educational pathways, and access to courses that will afford them real opportunities for employment.

It was explained that many care leavers engage with generic third level courses that do not lead to a fruitful path of employment in the future and that for the most vulnerable young people they are often not ready to engage in educational programmes and that other more feasible options should be made available to them.

4.2.10: Supporting Foster Carers

Foster carers spoke about the need for support in caring for young people when they reach the age of 18 years. They spoke about how the needs of young people do not change overnight and that as carers they continue to require supports to enable them to continue to care for them as young adults, explaining that *“young adults are very often anxious and nervous about the next stage of their lives”*. Foster carers also spoke about the need for financial support in instances where the young adult does not engage in education/ accredited training and where entitlement to many social welfare allowances is limited when they remain living with the foster carer. Foster carers highlighted the importance of how professionals engage with them about the aftercare plan and the importance of shared decision making and a more ‘partnership approach’ which includes both the input of the foster carers and the young person view into care pathway.

4.2.11: Communication

External stakeholders involved in the consultation process spoke about the need for Tusla to partner with key external stakeholders to commence a briefing or education programme creating awareness about aftercare. This was a particularly strong message from the colleges, universities, and approved housing bodies. It was acknowledged that some positive initiatives have been established with the colleges however, it was explained that further work is needed to create a greater understanding across all stakeholders about the specific issues facing Care Leavers as they transition to adulthood.

The importance of the Agency providing accessible information about all aftercare services, points of contacts and support services across all Tusla geographical regions was highlighted by young adults.

Foster carers highlighted that they were not pleased with the term Aftercare, they explained that it resulted in young people feeling abandoned and that the term had negative connotations. The importance of identifying a more constructive term to describe the services and supports provided to young adults moving on from the care system and transitioning to adulthood was requested.

4.2.6: Structure of the Aftercare Teams and Case Load Management

Capacity issues facing services also arose in this context with practitioners stating that the demands for the service are ever increasing and while there has been an increase of over 300% in staffing since 2015, the referrals to the service have also significantly increased which has led to creating a duty system and waiting list in some areas. Suggestions were made in relation to the expansion of the aftercare teams.

4.2.12: Information and Communication Technology Support

During the consultation process the lack of a national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) system was raised by staff. It was acknowledged that this work has commenced and a phased programme in progressing a permanent solution for aftercare has been identified, however it was felt that this requires prioritisation by the Agency. Currently some areas are using National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS) for information on young adults in aftercare. Equally creative ways of communicating with young adults with care experience was referenced with a need to develop more creative ways of interacting and communicating with them, utilising ICT platforms.

4.2.13: Research and Data on Aftercare

Research on aftercare in Ireland is limited. Whilst some academics have focused on this in recent years, it was suggested that Tusla could do more to promote and support additional research into what works best in aftercare in the Irish context and to undertake more detailed case reviews to better understand factors contributing to outcomes for young adults in aftercare. It was recognised that the data collated and reported on by Tusla continues to be a manual collection with a focus on quantitative data. the need for qualitative data was identified as needing attention in the development of the national ICT system.

5.0: Future Vision for Aftercare Services

Tusla is committed to promoting and achieving the best outcomes for young people in care in keeping with the role of the “good parent”.

We have high expectations for our Care Leavers, and we want them to have high aspirations and believe in themselves.

We want all young people in our care to be well looked after and prepared for adult life, we believe that they should have access to neighbourhoods of support. We will offer our Care Leavers practical and emotional support into adulthood to ensure they feel safe and experience

Neighbourhood of support



good physical and mental well-being so that they can fulfil their potential in life.

We are committed to maintaining support to Care Leavers through the delivery of programmes which enable young people to adequately prepare for leaving care and in ensuring consistency of support to these young people and young adults in aftercare from 18 years. Over the last five years Tusla has strived to build on the strength of aftercare services by ensuring that each area has a dedicated aftercare team and services to meet the demand.

The introduction of a National Policy for Aftercare, 2017 served to bring consistency to the aftercare services nationally and while was successful in some parts our services have experienced increasing demands in more recent years leading to individual responses from areas to creatively respond to the growing demands. This has led to inconsistency developing the vision of this strategy to ensure that going forward our young adults with care experience will be able to access a service that meets their individual needs regardless of where they reside.

5.1: The Agency's ambition to improve Aftercare services over the coming years is further detailed hereunder:

- All young adults who are assessed as needing an aftercare worker will be allocated an aftercare worker.
- Preparation for leaving care will be strengthened with a focus on building resilience and focusing on sustaining and enhancing social networks for all children in care.
- Tusla will support the development of a framework for the accommodation needs of young adults in aftercare with other State Agencies to respond to the increasing needs of young adults with care experience. Account will be taken of the work completed in 2020 for Commissioning Services for those with Complex Needs in Aftercare.
- Tusla will implement permanency planning for children in care to enable supporting young people who turn 18 years in foster care remain living with their carers. The needs of foster carers will be considered in this context. Focussing on the development of lifelong networks for children in care will also be central to this work.
- Tusla will review the current structures in the aftercare teams and consider the expansion of these teams to include multi-disciplinary professionals. Tusla will forge stronger working relationships and memorandums of understanding with other State Departments in ensuring that young adults can access specialist services as and when they need them. Consideration will also be given to a dedicated National Lead for Aftercare.
- Our services will be appropriately structured, consistent in approach, integrated, evidence based and scaled on a continuum of delivery, to meet the needs of the young people and young adults in aftercare.
- Tusla will develop a recording system for aftercare which will also support the Agency to gather data and report on and evaluate aftercare services at every level of the organisation.
- Creative means of communicating and engaging with young adults with care experience will be explored as part of the development of the ICT platform.
- Tusla will develop a national 'creating awareness framework' to ensure that key partners and services accessed and utilised by young adults with care experience are aware of the key issues.

- Tusla will continue to promote and support the values and cultures of leadership in our aftercare teams and across the Agency to support its aftercare provision.

Evaluation of progress will be monitored through both quantitative (performance data, including compliance with the strategic implementation plan, compliance with HIQA standards for those 16-18 years of age and qualitative data (annual survey/focus groups) from young adults, foster carers and all key stakeholders on progress made.

6.0: Key Recommendations for the Future of Development of Aftercare Services

6.1 Recommendation 1: Strengthen Interdepartmental Work to provide a multi-agency response to young adults with care experience.

6.1.1: Advocate to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to establish an interdepartmental approach for responding to the needs of young adults leaving care, to promote better access to accommodation and services.

6.1.2 Audit compliance of HSE/Tusla with the 'Joint protocol for Interagency Collaboration' for those young adults requiring access to HSE specialist services and establish a joint forum with HSE to explore how to improve access to primary care, disability, and mental health services for young adults with care experience.

6.1.3: Tusla will continue to work with NGO partners to establish services for more vulnerable young adults who are not currently living independently, accessing employment or accredited training.

6.2 Recommendation 2: Review existing service provision and parameters of accessing services to consider broadening the scope of service delivery.

6.2.1 Tusla will commission research to further examine the scope of service provision for care leavers with particular focus on those currently eligible for services until their 21st birthday and those who require support post 23 years.

6.2.2 Tusla will review the National Aftercare Policy and supporting documentation to take account of the findings from the consultation process and key recommendations made in this report.

6.2.3 Tusla will engage with key partners to create an awareness of aftercare services and the needs of young people and young adults with care experience across all State and NGO sectors.

6.3: Recommendation 3: Enhance Accommodation Provision.

6.3.4 Tusla will collaborate with key stakeholders, multi-agency partners, to inform best practice and identify potential areas for expansion in accommodation options for care leavers.

6.3.5 Tusla will continue to engage with Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage on implementation of Youth Homeless Strategy to secure dedicated accommodation and alternative housing options for young adults with care experience.

6.3.6 Tusla will support the further development of exiting housing initiatives e.g., CAS.

6.4: Recommendation 4: Strengthen Organisational Structures and Enablers to better support staff in equitable and consistent Service Delivery.

6.4.1 As part of the Structural Reform Programme, review the structure of aftercare teams and skill mix required to ensure that services are meeting the needs of young adults and young people engaged in our aftercare services.

6.4.2 Tusla will evaluate the career guidance programme in Waterford/ Wexford with a view to national expansion.

6.4.3 Tusla will ensure that aftercare teams are resourced to meet the growing demands on referrals to ensure that every young adult who is assessed as needing an aftercare worker is allocated a worker to support the development and implementation of the aftercare plans.

6.4.4 Prioritisation of the implementation of an integrated ICT system for aftercare to enable robust data collection to inform service planning and the utilisation of ICT platforms to enable better communication and engagement with those engaged in the aftercare services.

6.5. Recommendation 5: Implement a consistent model of practice in Aftercare Care Services.

6.5.1 Tusla will implement permanency planning for children in care to support carers and young people to remain living with their foster carers while focusing on the establishment of social support networks which will support care leavers into adulthood.

6.5.2 Tusla will undertake a pressure point analysis on the system to establish the areas that require additional support in meeting demands. This will take into account the population and demographics including factors associated with urban and rural populations.

6.5.3 Tusla will continue to engage with the DCEDIY on the longitudinal research for young people and young adults with care experience, to support an evidenced informed strategic approach to developing services that can adapt responsively within a dynamic social landscape.

6.5.4: A review and alignment of standard business processes and procedures will take place to ensure that all young adults with care experience have the same experience in relation to accessing services, information, communication, and decision-making.

7.0: References

- (1) Alternative Care Strategy, International Services Project, Dr. Kiaras Gharabaghi, 2016
- (2) Exploring diversity in the educational pathways of care-experienced adults: Findings from a life course study of education and care Eavan Brady*, Robbie Gilligan, *School of Social Work & Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland*

The logo for TUSLA, featuring the word "TUSLA" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letter "U" is stylized with a dot above it, resembling a traditional Irish harp. The background of the entire page is a teal color with large, overlapping circles in shades of pink and purple.

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

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