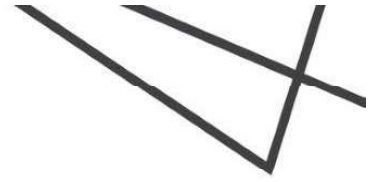


**Special
Advocate**

For Survivors of
Institutional Abuse



Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse

Annual Report 2024





**Report of the
Special Advocate for Survivors
of Institutional Abuse
March 2024 – March 2025**

To: Norma Foley T.D.
Minister for Children, Disability and Equality
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

I'll tell you about my people.
They are the bravest people I know.
For 50, 60, 70 years, their bones
have carried the stones of their past.
Their bodies have kept the score. And more.
So, every now and again, they buckle
from the belt of ago.
Can you blame them for wanting
wrongs righted? ¹

¹ Extract from "My People", a poem by Connie Roberts.

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1 FOREWORD BY PATRICIA CAREY, THE SPECIAL ADVOCATE



My work as Special Advocate since 25 March 2024 has brought into focus the significant number of issues facing Survivors, Affected Persons and their families.

All over Ireland from Dublin to Dingle, Galway to Greystones, Cavan to Cork you have raised concerns of exclusion from redress, full access to records, dignified burial, memorialisation and housing and health needs.

My role also encompasses those many Survivors living overseas, in the United Kingdom, Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

I wish to thank the 1200 of you in Ireland and abroad who have been kind enough to talk to and meet with me. I hope this Annual Report reflects the breadth and scale of the concerns you have brought to my attention. The quotes used are to illustrate a selection of your insights and experiences as expressed to me.

A Human Rights-based approach is required to ensure equal access to redress and supports and services for all Survivors. The principle of 'Leaving No One Behind', equality and fairness should underpin all redress measures including financial redress.

Delays and exclusions in accessing redress, records and the host of required services and supports have been brought forward by me to various government departments and policy makers.

I hope over time your entitlements will be acted upon as part of the State's response to decades of institutionalisation and forced family separation.

I look forward to continuing to engage with you in 2025. A key part of this engagement will be the establishment of an Advisory Council encompassing various strands of Survivors and Affected Persons.

We have also built links and met with a significant number of stakeholders, and these are listed in the appendix.

I wish to thank my small team; Alissa, Rachel and Ruth who have worked tirelessly over the last number of months both to establish the Special Advocate office and to connect with hundreds of Survivors and Affected Persons.

I thank too various government officials whom I have met in the last 12 months for their positive and open engagements.

My plan of work for 2025 will be based on highlighting the recommendations of this report and further positive links and communications with all concerned.



A Note on Language and Terminology

The Special Advocate and the team working with her understand the importance and sensitivities needed with language and terminology related to institutional abuse and forced family separation.

While we have considered the language used in this document and in all communications from the Special Advocate's office, there may be alternative language preferred by Survivors and Affected Persons.

The terms we have used are not intended to exclude anyone, and we welcome any input on how we can communicate in a more inclusive way.

Survivors and Affected Persons and their families are the most requested terms we have been asked to use. These terms include all those who spent time in all institutions and those who were affected by forced family separation through adoption, fostering and boarding out, those illegally trafficked to USA and other countries and those whose births were illegally registered.

Other requested terms we have been asked to use include: victim, illegally registered, illegally adopted.

Quotations

Throughout this report we provide quotations from Survivors and Affected Persons who have contacted the office of the Special Advocate over the past year. All quotations are presented anonymously to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals involved.

The only quotation which is directly attributable to a named person is an extract from the poem "My People" written by Poet Connie Roberts, used with her permission.

2 ABOUT THE SPECIAL ADVOCATE FOR SURVIVORS

“ *I wish you the best in this what I can see will be a demanding role. It is great for us to have a voice close to those who make the decisions which affect us all.* ”

“ *I didn't welcome your appointment and still have strong feelings about it, not against you as an individual but more from a systemic perspective. I'd like at some stage to have an opportunity to sit and chat with you about all things redress and beyond. Again, and I repeat, congratulations and the very best of luck* ”

“ *You don't represent me* ”

“ *What I need is someone to truly advocate for me—someone who will stand up for me, I need someone who genuinely fights for survivors.* ”

Background to the Special Advocate for Survivors role

The appointment of a Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse fulfils a core commitment in the Irish Government's Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions.

The Action Plan recognises that the response of government to the legacy of these institutions must be directly informed by the voices of those most centrally affected. It contains a number of measures designed to address broader experiences of institutional trauma.

The role of the Special Advocate for Survivors is to ensure that the view of Survivors and Affected Persons are central to the delivery of the State's response to the legacy of institutional trauma and forced family separation.

Following an open recruitment process overseen by the Public Appointments Service, Patricia Carey was appointed to the role of Special Advocate for Survivors by then Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman T.D. on 25 March 2024.

Read the Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions [here](#).

Objectives of the Special Advocate for Survivors role

- Facilitating extensive consultation with Survivors and Affected Persons and their families
- Providing opportunities for Survivors and Affected Persons to meet and share their own lived experiences
- Ensuring that the voices of Survivors and Affected Persons are central in key projects
- Reporting on the collective interests, experiences and issues of Survivors and Affected Persons
- Establishing and working with an Advisory Council of Survivors and Affected Persons, reflective of the broad range of experiences of Institutional Abuse

Remit of the Special Advocate for Survivors

The role of the Special Advocate is to **hear and promote the collective interests of Survivors and Affected Persons, as expressed by them**, and to **amplify their voices as a central, essential input to Government deliberations** on matters which affect them.

The Special Advocate is operationally independent of government.

The Special Advocate's remit encompasses Survivors and Affected Persons from the following groups:

- Industrial and Reformatory School Institutions
- Magdalene Laundries
- Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions
- Those resident in other institutions related to Ireland's network of Mother and Baby Institutions, including those operated by private individuals or religious congregations involved in or responsible for forced family separation
- People fostered or boarded out as children
- Those adopted, illegally trafficked or the subject of an illegal birth registration

It is also important to note that many Survivors have spent time in multiple institutions.

According to the Demographic Profile report relating to Former Residents of Institutions prepared in 2022 by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the following information relating to Survivors and Affected Persons is available.

The figures below represent institutions investigated through various State commissions of inquiry. We note that these figures do not represent the full scale of people who spent time in institutions or affected by forced family separation.

- Available records indicate that approximately **190,000** individuals (mothers and children as defined in the Commission of Investigation's terms of reference) may have resided at some time in one of the 14 named institutions or in one of the County Homes between 1922 and 1998. Of this number, it is estimated that over **58,000** people are alive.
- Available records indicate that approximately **42,000** individuals may have resided at some time in one of the many Industrial Schools or reformatories across the country. Of this number, it is estimated that **10,500** people are still alive.
- Available records indicate that approximately **10,000** women may have resided at some time in one of the 10 identified Magdalene Laundries from the foundation of the State in 1922 to the closure of the last laundry in 1996. Of this number, it is estimated that **1,000** people are still alive.

Family members of living and deceased Survivors and Affected Persons comprise approximately 15 % of those who contact the Special Advocate.

Limits of the Special Advocate for Survivors role

Certain actions are outside the scope of the Special Advocate's role. These are:

- Providing services on behalf of individuals
- Investigating the institutional experiences of individuals or complaints about services or providers
- Inspecting or regulating the quality or delivery of services
- Providing legal advice on individual cases

3 MISSION AND VALUES

A trusted office operating from the principles of transparency and integrity

Independence: We value our independence. As an independent position, the Special Advocate's focus is to act as a voice for Survivors and Affected Persons and their families.

Integrity: We will act with integrity and honesty, and challenge discrimination and inequality.

Openness: Meaningful and impartial consultations will be conducted with openness and transparency. Relevant information and documentation will be widely publicised and freely available.

Fairness: It is important to allow the full spectrum of views to be heard and all Survivors and Affected Persons will be supported to participate and share their views. Consultation processes will be focused on the needs of participants.

Full and Equal Participation: Each Survivor and Affected Person or stakeholder will be empowered with an equal opportunity to voice their opinions and raise issues should they wish to do so.

Respect: We respect and value people and will continue to promote inclusion, empathy and diversity. Consultations will be conducted to the highest ethical standards. It is important that Survivors can freely express their views without fear of personal criticism or undue pressure by anyone.

Confidentiality: Personal Information will remain confidential. The personal information of any member of the public who contributes to the programme of work will remain confidential. Individuals will not be identifiable unless this is previously agreed in the context of specific projects.

Accountability: Being accountable for decisions, actions, and the overall delivery of survivor engagement projects within the remit of the Special Advocate.

4 PRIORITIES FOR THE SPECIAL ADVOCATE IN YEAR ONE

Hearing from and building trust with Survivors and Affected Persons and groups, in Ireland and overseas.

Raising collective issues with government departments, officials and service providers who work with Survivors and Affected Persons.

Building and strengthening connections with service providers, stakeholders and support organisations working with Survivors and Affected Persons.

Establishment of the office of the Special Advocate and the provision of an effective, respectful and responsive service for Survivors and Affected Persons and other key stakeholders.

5 ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL ADVOCATE OFFICE

Special Advocate team

On 27 May 2024, three staff were recruited to the Special Advocate office following an open recruitment process managed by Pobal. These members of staff provide administrative support to the work of the Special Advocate.

In order to maintain the independence of the Special Advocate, the Special Advocate office is based and supported by the Pobal infrastructure under contract from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Communications

A key focus on the establishment of the office has been to create a respectful, transparent and efficient space for Survivors and Affected Persons to engage with the Special Advocate. The need for clear, accurate and up-to-date information and guidance was continuously highlighted by those who engaged with the Special Advocate office throughout 2024.

The Special Advocate is keenly aware of some of the barriers that can affect accessibility and participation. These barriers include digital exclusion, lack of awareness and the expectation that supports will be difficult to access.

The Special Advocate provides an accessible and extensive range of communications using Plain English to meet the needs of all Survivors and Affected Persons who wish to engage with the office.

The Special Advocate office is committed to an accessible and open communications strategy, sensitive to issues around literacy and digital poverty. Our communications promote inclusion, Plain English resources and ease of access to accurate information.

Following an initial communication in April 2024 by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to their mailing list, over 300 Survivors and Affected Persons made direct contact by phone and email with Patricia Carey to share their experiences, raise issues and to seek a meeting.

Since May 2024, the Special Advocate Office has developed a comprehensive range of communication methods, responsive to the needs of Survivors and Affected Persons and their preferred means of contact.

The Special Advocate office provides ongoing support to Survivors and Affected Persons and other stakeholders who contact the office seeking information and advice.

The Special Advocate office assists any way that it can, and where possible, we will guide individuals to the information they seek and direct them to any relevant resources.

This includes the operation of:

- A dedicated phone number for the office
- A dedicated Special Advocate email address for managing general queries over email
- A monitored postal address for communications by post. The Special Advocate receives correspondence from Survivors and Affected Persons and regularly sends out information to those who request it by post
- The Special Advocate website (**www.specialadvocate.ie**) launched in early 2025. Phase two of the website is currently under development and will launch in mid-2025. This website aims to be an informative and easy to use space to access relevant information and resources, news and updates. The development of the website continues to be a collaborative process, and the Special Advocate office will continue to engage with Survivors and Affected Persons and other key stakeholders to ensure the site meets the needs of the community it serves. The website has been designed to meet the highest level of accessibility standards
- A mailing list and quarterly newsletter. The office has established and continues to manage a growing mailing list of hundreds of Survivors and Affected Persons and other key stakeholders. In response to feedback from our mailing list, the Special Advocate published its first newsletter in January 2025. This newsletter will be issued on a quarterly basis. The newsletter will be a means to share information on the activities of the Special Advocate's office, to highlight available supports and resources, and to provide information on upcoming community events
- The Special Advocate office will continue to consider any other communication tools and platforms which might further facilitate the sharing of information to Survivors and Affected Persons and other stakeholders

Branding

“ *The bright, bold colour scheme is eye catching.
We want to make people pay attention.* ”

“ *I've spent so long in the dark,
I only want brightness in my life now* ”

Following the establishment of the Special Advocate office, a strong and distinctive brand identity and logo was created to promote the work of the Special Advocate, and to encourage engagement with the office. The development of this logo was done in collaboration with a group of Survivors and Affected Persons who kindly volunteered their time and expertise.

The shape chosen for the Special Advocate logo is based on the use of megaphones, to portray a strong and powerful voice, reflecting on the intention to amplify the collective concerns of Survivors and Affected Persons.

The body of the megaphone icon consists of multiple shapes coming together with distinct, overlapping blocks to symbolise the different backgrounds and experiences of different Survivors and Affected Persons.

A trauma-informed care approach

The Special Advocate office is committed to working using a trauma-informed practice approach. Having undertaken training with Trauma Informed Practice Ireland, it is important for the team to ensure consideration and implementation of practices that allow individuals to interact in a positive and supported environment.

The team have worked with Samaritans, Barnardos, Sage Advocacy, and various other service providers in Ireland and overseas to make sure they are up to date on various referral pathways for those who may require additional supports.

Advisory Council

Since her appointment at the end of March 2024, Patricia has spent her time meeting and engaging with Survivors and Affected Persons, various Survivor groups, as well as with partner and support organisations in Ireland and overseas working directly with those affected by institutional abuse and forced family separation.

Now that the initial round of engagements with Survivors has concluded, the Special Advocate will consider, plan, and publicise how and when the Advisory Council will be established and how it will operate in 2025.

We are confident that the Advisory Council will further ensure that the work of the Special Advocate is informed by the lived experience and needs of those most centrally affected.

6 ENGAGEMENTS

Since her appointment in March 2024, the Special Advocate has engaged with over 1200 people. This includes Survivors and Affected Persons, Survivor groups, as well as representatives from support groups, service providers, advocates, academics and other stakeholders.

6.1 ENGAGEMENTS WITH SURVIVORS AND AFFECTED PERSONS

Direct engagements with Survivors and Affected Persons are integral to the work of the Special Advocate. These meetings help provide a deeper understanding of the full range of perspectives on these deeply personal issues, and the specific needs of Survivors and Affected Persons, both now and into the future.

The Special Advocate regularly meets with Survivors in the following ways:

- In person in the dedicated private meeting space in Dublin
- In person meetings with individuals and groups in locations around Ireland
- Over the phone
- Through video-conference platforms such as Zoom or Teams

In order to represent the full range of experiences, and to hear the concerns of those living abroad, the Special Advocate has also travelled to meet with Survivors. These meetings provide an important opportunity to engage with Survivors, as well as the service providers and support organisations working directly with them, to hear their experiences and provide them with information and resources on available supports, as well as opportunities for redress.

Throughout her first year, when invited and available, the Special Advocate has also responded to a number of invitations to attend and speak at Survivor events and commemorations in Ireland, overseas and online. These events have included annual memorials, exhibitions, events with groups and other outreach opportunities.

6.2 ENGAGEMENTS WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

With the establishment of the new Special Advocate role and its wide-ranging remit, it was critical to engage with, and to understand, the range of services and supports offered by other key service providers, organisations, community groups, advocates, activists and academics.

Since March 2024 the Special Advocate has engaged with many stakeholders and service providers, with the goal of building and strengthening relationships, sharing information on resources, and amplifying the voices of Survivors and Affected Persons. An overview of these engagements is included in the appendix.

The Special Advocate welcomes opportunities to meet and engage with other related stakeholders to ensure that future work and projects are survivor-centred.

6.3 ENGAGEMENT WITH SURVIVORS AND STAKEHOLDERS LIVING OVERSEAS

Since her appointment, the Special Advocate has engaged with many overseas Survivors and Affected Persons as well as support centres and community groups with connections to and working directly with Survivors and Affected Persons living outside Ireland.

The Special Advocate has welcomed engagement with people living overseas, including those who have contacted the office from **Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Spain, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and from multiple states in the United States of America.**

The Special Advocate has also made several overseas trips to engage in a more in-depth way with Survivors and other stakeholders. She visited the UK on several occasions since her appointment, to attend meetings with Survivors, groups and service providers, and participated in events in London, Liverpool, and Manchester.

The Special Advocate also visited the USA in October 2024, to meet with Survivors and Affected Persons, with numerous US support organisations who are providing important services to the Irish Diaspora, as well as with Irish Consulates operating in Boston and New York.

6.4 ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND STATE BODIES

The Special Advocate meets with officials from the following government departments and state bodies on a regular basis to share updates and highlight the issues and concerns which have been brought to her attention and are of collective concern to Survivors and Affected Persons.

- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth - Mother and Baby Homes Action Plan Unit
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth - Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Executive Office
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth - Adoption Policy Unit
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth - Memorialisation and Historic Burials Unit
- Department of Education
- General Registry Office

Meetings and engagements with other Government Department officials and state bodies are arranged as required to discuss issues of concern. These include:

- Department of Social Protection
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

7 OTHER ACTIVITIES

The Special Advocate has been invited to sit on a number of official working and steering groups including the **National Centre for Research and Remembrance Steering Group** and the **Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 Review Working Group**.

Since her appointment in 2024, the Special Advocate has been regularly asked to provide advice and inputs in relation to the work of other organisations in order to advise and support how these organisations engage with Survivors and Affected Persons. The Special Advocate will continue to engage in this work, as appropriate, to ensure the voices of Survivors and Affected Persons are central in key projects and plans.

The Special Advocate has also engaged with international experts, academics, groups, and advocates working with people who have experienced institutional abuse and forced family separation.

The Special Advocate has received many invitations to attend, participate and speak at events over the past year. These have included Survivor memorials and commemorative events, academic conferences, panel discussions and seminars, and launch events for relevant research initiatives, in Ireland and overseas.

Attendance at these events by the Special Advocate has proved beneficial in the following ways:

- To promote and share information about the Special Advocate role and the work of the office
- To highlight the important issues raised by Survivors and Affected Persons
- To raise awareness of supports and resources available to Survivors in Ireland and overseas
- To share information about Ireland's response to institutional abuse
- To gather insights into different State responses to comparable institutional experiences in other jurisdictions
- To build and strengthen relationships with Survivors, Survivor groups, service providers and other relevant stakeholders working in this area

8 MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS

The Special Advocate has welcomed opportunities to engage with TV, print and radio media organisations and podcasts, in Ireland as well as overseas.

These have provided the Special Advocate with platforms to reach a wider audience in order to:

- Raise awareness and public understanding of the work of the Special Advocate office
- Encourage engagement and contact with the Special Advocate office
- Highlight and discuss issues of concern to Survivors and Affected Persons
- Promote and raise awareness of redress schemes, supports and resources and other relevant matters to Survivors and Affected Persons

Issues Raised with the Special Advocate for Survivors

“ *As a society we owe it to survivors,
whether they live in Ireland or have fled this country,
to address these issues properly once and for all* ”

“ *We need immediate action to support all survivors, the
Government has the power to put things right* ”

“ *It needs to be done now. Not tomorrow, now.
We need to stand shoulder to shoulder from now on and
highlight the truth, once and for all* ”

“ *Justice was never about writing a cheque, justice is about
making sure people are helped rebuild their lives - money
doesn't rebuild your life. As a society, we owe it to Survivors
whether they live in Ireland or have fled this country to address
these issues properly once and for all* ”

The following section of the Annual Report provides an overview of the extensive range of the issues raised directly with the Special Advocate for Survivors, by Survivors and Affected Persons and other relevant stakeholders.

This list is by no means exhaustive but demonstrates the depth and variety of matters that have been shared with the Special Advocate since the establishment of the office.

The Special Advocate offers her sincere thanks and appreciation to all who have engaged with the Special Advocate office to inform her work.

9 ISSUES RAISED WITH THE SPECIAL ADVOCATE

9.1 ISSUES RELATING TO RECORDS

“ *When the right to birth information was passed into law in 2022 I was literally over the moon, thinking that after so many years of excitement and disappointment, any questions I had would finally be answered....* ”

“ *Legislation is too late in my case; I am sure in hundreds of similar cases to mine. I would be of opinion that Files related to our Case would be either shredded, stupidly stored in damp rooms and then dumped. I am afraid no legislation will undo this harm as far as I am concerned* ”

“ *I want to advocate for full and clear unredacted access to information for all people concerned anything less is not acceptable...* ”

“ *I started searching for my birth father when I was a teenager, only to be denied any information for many, many years, but by pure determination I got enough information to take on my own search years later* ”

“ *Our community has experienced delays all our lives in getting access to our information* ”

“ *The Government know all about me on their files, but I have had to wait for decades until 2022 to find out about myself* ”

“ *What about survivors whose records are lost, destroyed already? Those records can't be protected or preserved?* ”

“ *I hope that the new legislation will ensure accountability for behaviour – especially the religious orders holding records.* ”

Access to the records relating to their experience in institutions and of forced family separation is the issue which is most frequently raised by Survivors and Affected Persons with the Special Advocate.

The rights of Survivors and Affected Persons to their information is key to an open, transparent and respectful response to institutional incarceration, confinement and abuse, and forced family separation.

There is an urgent need for full access to records and files, with many Survivors having spent decades already searching for information, and in some instances have died before gaining access to their records.

- The Special Advocate recognises the **Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022** which provides a right of access to original birth certificates, birth and early life and care information for people who were born in a Mother and Baby or County Home Institution, and those adopted, boarded out, the subject of an illegal birth registration, or who otherwise have questions in relation to their origins. There is a need for renewed promotion and advertising for the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 in Ireland and overseas to ensure people and service providers are familiar with this legislation and how to access its services. Further work is required to ensure all files are available to those seeking their own information. Tracing services need to be provided without undue delays for those seeking a trace.
- Since the establishment of the office, the Special Advocate has heard from hundreds of Survivors and Affected Persons who do not have access to the records related to the time they spent in institutions or related to their experience of forced family separation. In some instances, Survivors have indicated that they have been unable to access records relating to their birth and early life and care, education, health and medical records, and their placement for adoption in Ireland and abroad. This is due to the records being destroyed, moved, or in private or religious ownership.
- Survivors expressed ongoing challenges in finding accurate information in their search for details of family members, as well as difficulties in accessing records such as burial and death certificates for children that died in institutions. The Special Advocate receives frequent communications from Survivors and their family members seeking information and records relating to relatives, often as part of decades-long searches, with some unsure if a relative died or is still alive somewhere. This is causing ongoing pain and suffering to people seeking information and closure on their family search.

- Consistent feedback from Survivors and Affected Persons to the Special Advocate is in relation to the difficulties in understanding where to begin looking for and accessing records. Information on where records are held and how individuals and their families can access the records related to them is not clearly available, understood or explained in Plain English. This is further exacerbated when people are based overseas and are unfamiliar with Irish state structures, as well as for people with limited literacy and for those who experience digital poverty.
- Survivors and Affected Persons would welcome more supports to access and understand their records. The further resourcing of professionals trained in trauma-informed care who can assist Survivors would be of great benefit. There is a need for the development of clear, user-friendly, and accessible guidance and processes in how to and where to access records.
- Many Survivors expressed confusion on the many different types of records, where these are held and who can access them. Supporting Survivors and Affected Persons, and their families with understanding different access pathways and permissions in relation to sensitive personal data is something which needs attention.
- In communications with the Special Advocate, some Survivors have expressed the extreme hurt and trauma caused by 'incorrect' official records where information was either deliberately or mistakenly recorded incorrectly. The need for clear information for Survivors who are looking to address or 'correct' these official records, as well as accompanying trauma-informed processes and mechanisms around this, is required.
- Some Survivors have reported to the Special Advocate ongoing issues with information and documents they have received being redacted, even when documents directly relate to the individual and their families.
- Full access to all information, and other records which are still held in private or religious ownership related to institutional incarceration and forced family separation is of huge importance to Survivors and Affected Persons and their advocates. It is the position of the Special Advocate that the State must ensure full access to all records which are held in private and religious ownership.

- The Special Advocate welcomed the passage and enactment of **Section 4.3, Part 3 of the Maternity Protection, Employment Equality and Preservation of Certain Records Act 2024** in October 2024 by the Government. This new legislation concerning privately-held records related to Ireland's Institutional history makes it a criminal offense to destroy, fail to preserve, remove from the jurisdiction or fail to give the Director of the National Archives of Ireland an account of, privately-held records relating to Ireland's institutional and family separation system and the religious and other bodies that operated it.

This is a key first and significant step for the State. This critical legalisation will start the process of ensuring that no further records are destroyed or removed from the State and enshrine in law that record holders can be requested by the National Archives to produce a full inventory of records they hold.

- It is the position of the Special Advocate that all records in State, private and religious ownership must be brought together under one auspice to allow for ease of access for those to whom the records relate. Records need to be collated, conserved and digitized. Individuals to whom those records relate, should have access to their records in an unredacted format.
- The Special Advocate is acutely cognisant of the importance of all records being brought into state ownership and care as a matter of urgency. Ongoing issues and delays in records from government departments and other state bodies being transferred to the National Archives must be addressed. It is of the utmost importance that all departmental and records of relevant bodies outside the remit of the National Archives Act 1986 are transferred to the National Archives as a matter of urgency, acknowledging that legislation may be required for the transfer of certain records.
- To understand the past and ensure the principle of non-reoccurrence, the Special Advocate is calling for the opening of access to the broader records for researchers, advocates and families who wish to understand the wider context. All records related to Ireland's architecture of institutionalization, confinement and forced family separation, including all administrative, financial, historical, policies and procedures documents and records, must become available to a wider audience, in order to ensure we do not repeat the systems of past abuses.

9.2 ISSUES RELATED TO REDRESS

“ We should not have to wait any longer for any form of support ,
or keep fighting for justice and proper redress, enough is
enough, action from the government is needed, not empty or
broken promises! ”

“ Why can we not just get this right? It would be such a
win/win/win for survivors, perpetrators, and the government
alike. There is no downside to getting it right—none.
Money is both nothing and everything, but it is there and
should be offered willingly, or at least with good grace ”

“ It's not about the money, if I had a choice I would have met my
mother and never had to have receive the money ”

“ I can assure you that many survivors will be unable to recount
their time in these institutions, or look for compensation. They
will be re-traumatised and will not want compensation- just
information ”

“ I'm very unhappy with what's gone on to be honest. From my
perspective it has all just amplified the hurt ”

“ Please don't make women who have gone through and
survived such terrible experiences, and needed to relive them
as part of redress beg for the money. ”

“ Is this all I am worth?
[on receipt of redress payment] ”

“ Most of us that still breathe have been waiting a long time for
at least an acknowledgement of what happened to us ”

“ I wasn't sure I had the mental capacity to go through another
process that would involve raking over all my history again. ”

General feedback relating to redress and issues raised with the Special Advocate

The Special Advocate has heard from hundreds of Survivors and Affected Persons on their experience of, or their exclusion from, redress from the State.

Many Survivors shared with the Special Advocate their negative experiences with engaging with the processes of State redress schemes.

- For some, their past experiences of providing evidence and their treatment while engaging in a State redress scheme process is still a subject of deep hurt. A significant number of Survivors and Affected Persons have shared with the Special Advocate that painful memories of their experiences of institutional abuse and forced family separation were brought to the fore during the process. Survivors shared that their mental health was badly affected, and they found supports extremely limited.

It is critical that current and future processes for engaging with Survivors as part of redress are designed to be fully trauma-informed, all necessary supports for those that need them are provided and accessible at every stage, and are respectful of Survivors and Affected Persons.

- Many said communications around the process of providing evidence or giving information was unclear. Examples include that they should have been made aware of how the meetings with officials would take place, who would be present on the day, how evidence or information would be recorded and treated, and whether they could bring along someone to support them as part of the process. All Survivors should have the option to have someone present with them for support throughout the process.
- There was also a lack of transparency and confusion expressed on the part of Survivors around the treatment of evidence and information given as part of past commissions, such as evidence or information given to the 'confidential committee' as opposed to the 'investigation committee' in relation to the Mother and Baby Home Commission of Investigation report.
- Survivors and Affected Persons report being upset and angry at the requirement to sign legal waivers or strict non-disclosure agreements in order to receive redress. These have been described by some as a 'gagging experience'.
- *'It is not about the Money'*. For Survivors and Affected Persons, it has been emphasised many times with the Special Advocate that the process of applying for redress means much more than just a financial 'award'.

- For overseas Survivors and Affected Persons, the potential adverse consequences and serious impact of accepting redress on their social welfare, social security, housing benefits in other countries is of grave concern. From engagement with Survivors and the service providers supporting them, this issue is affecting Survivors in UK who are in receipt of means-tested benefits. A large number of UK-based Survivors are therefore 'effectively barred' from receiving this payment as it will affect and reduce their other core benefits.

Some US-based Survivors in receipt of their Mother and Baby Institutions payment scheme redress 'award' have shared their experiences of the removal or pausing of their medical insurance, social security payments as well as their medication benefits until their redress amount was depleted.

- The Special Advocate acknowledges and welcomes ongoing efforts being made by government officials both in Ireland and abroad to remedy this matter, as well as the important work being done by Survivor support organisations to raise awareness of these issues and advocate for solutions.

The Special Advocate welcomes the recent proposed legislation 'Philomena's Law' relating to the current redress scheme for UK-based Survivors of Irish Mother and Baby Institutions, which was introduced in the United Kingdom House of Commons in March 2025.

- Some Survivors who worked in unpaid labour while in institutions or while boarded out as children have called for the State to provide a pension to them.

Issues related to the Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex-Gratia Scheme

“

It is very unfair how they treated us. They gave us all a big apology which meant nothing but words because they did not match it with giving us the HAA card so we could get the health benefits we need and fast...

”

“

Our lives would be so different... I have been writing and emailing all Government Departments since 2014. We are missing out so much by not having our recommended HAA card... it would be like winning the lottery for me and my Survivor friends

”

“

Survivors face huge issues around their physical and mental health and require the Health Amendment Act Card (HAA Card) with no means testing. We are an aging community and need to be cared for and nurtured something denied us as children and as citizens of this state. The basic medical card is not enough.

”

“

I am sad there has been no happy ending, no resolution, only continuous suffering for so many.

”

The Special Advocate has heard from many Survivors of Magdelene Laundries, who have raised the following issues with the office:

- The inadequacy of the health supports provided as part of the Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex-Gratia Scheme is the most frequently raised issue with the Special Advocate by people with experiences of Magdelene Laundries. Justice John Quirke in his 2013 Report recommended that the Irish State should provide health services equivalent to those provided under the HAA card, which was given in the 1990s to people who contracted Hepatitis C from contaminated blood products. Magdelene Laundry Survivors have expressed extreme dissatisfaction with the medical card provided under this redress scheme.

- During consultation with Survivors and Affected Persons, it was brought to the attention of the Special Advocate that there is a lot of misinformation surrounding the Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex-Gratia Scheme. It is not widely known that the scheme is still open to receiving applications and that there is no time limit to apply to the scheme. The Special Advocate continues to encourage anyone who might be eligible for this redress scheme to apply.
- Some Survivors and Affected Persons advised the Special Advocate of their difficulties in finding information on how to apply, and that they have been directed to the Department of Justice for questions and application forms. There is still some information on official websites which is out of date. The Special Advocate acknowledges the movement from the Department of Justice to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) but notes it is important that all forms and information on the scheme should be reviewed to ensure that it is clear that applications can now be made through DCEDIY.
- A renewed official communications campaign, in Ireland and overseas, to promote the redress scheme, to advise that it is still open to applicants, and to direct people with queries on the scheme to the appropriate channels in Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth must take place as a matter of urgency to ensure all those eligible can apply, noting this is now a very small cohort of women. Engagement with key service providers to ensure information on the scheme is present and accurate on websites and in local offices, with posters, leaflets and application forms, is a critical part of this.
- Survivors of Magdelene Laundries also shared positive accounts and reflections of their experience of the Dublin Honours Magdelene event in 2018, and would welcome similar events based on this successful model.

Issues related to the Residential Institutions redress scheme

“

My father passed away

That said, his family would have still been entitled to an award according to the eligibility criteria in the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002. We made no application to the Board as we were totally unaware of the scheme

”

“

With the residential institutions redress scheme, you see I lost out there myself because I was afraid to tell my story, afraid I wouldn't be believed or heard, as so was my experience in these industrial schools, and country homes, it was drilled into us not to talk, for our own sakes or we'd be ostracised. Plus because my pain and loss and suffering and trauma was suppressed for so long, I was terrified of letting the lid off, afraid my feelings and emotions would engulf me So it would be awful if others who like me then, were afraid to speak up and out and if they did finally the scheme would be closed! It should be reopened to those who missed out.

”

“

For those who have missed out on applying, the money could give them the chance to have a better quality of life, on their own terms before they die

”

The Special Advocate heard from many Survivors and Affected Persons with experiences of Industrial and Reformatory School institutions in relation to the Residential Institutions Redress Scheme.

- A significant number of those Survivors who contacted the Special Advocate office were eligible under the Residential Institutions Redress Scheme but did not apply to the scheme for a variety of reasons. This is a subject of deep distress for many, who reported that this redress could have helped them considerably.

- Sadly, many Survivors and their family members reported that they did not apply because:
 - They were not aware of the existence of the Residential Institutions Redress Scheme
 - They were in prison or hospital, or resident in another institution and were not in a position to apply
 - They wanted to apply, however had no support or guidance to do so
 - They missed the application window deadline
 - They did not feel ready or able to engage in the redress process due to the abuse they experienced, or due to mental or physical health issues at the time
- Many Survivors shared with the Special Advocate their negative experiences with providing testimony as part of Residential Institutions Redress Scheme process, with some describing their experiences as *'upsetting', 'traumatic', 'adversarial', 'difficult', 'distressful'*.
- There is a need for wider promotion around access to records relating to the Residential Institutions Redress Scheme. It is not widely known that people who applied for redress to the Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB) can apply to the Board for a copy of their original application.
- Supports available under Caranua were only accessible to applicants who had already received redress under the Residential Institutions Redress Scheme.
- In relation to Caranua, many Survivors who contacted the Special Advocate reported difficulties with the Caranua process and application procedures for funds, describing it as *'fraught', 'challenging', 'unfair'* and a process which caused them further trauma.
- Some Survivors also raised a lack of awareness of the Caranua scheme prior to the closing date, especially those living overseas.
- In relation to the current proposed legislation ***'Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutional Abuse'*** Bill, the delay of passage of this Bill has been raised as a major concern by Survivors and Affected Persons and is one which requires speedy enactment.

- The Special Advocate is concerned that this legislation excludes those who did not receive redress as part of the previous Residential Institutions Redress Scheme, such as those who were ineligible under this scheme, as well as Survivors who for a variety of reasons were unable to or missed applying at that time. This is especially pertinent for many Survivors living overseas, or were incarcerated or hospitalised in other institutions and who were not aware of the existence of the redress scheme at the time.

It is important that all Survivors of Industrial and Reformatory School Institutions have equal access to the supports outlined in the legislation, and that this proposed legislation does not further exclude Survivors and Affected Persons from accessing these supports if they were not in the original cohort who received redress as part of the previous scheme.

Given the aging Survivor population it is unfair and exclusionary to further discriminate against those who through no fault of their own were unable to apply to, or unaware of, previous redress schemes, and this would further enforce a lack of justice for all Survivors. **This bill should refer to: Any person who was resident in an Institution specified in the schedule to the *Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002*.**

- The enhanced medical card proposed under the Supports Bill and the equivalent health payment for Survivors living overseas are both discussed in more detail later in this document.
- Frustration was shared with the Special Advocate by some Survivors in relation to a fund ringfenced for the purpose of memorialisation initiatives as recommended in the Final Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Ryan Report) published in 2009, and the delays in this being utilised.

Noting plans for the National Centre for Research and Remembrance, some Survivors are calling for a portion of the 500,000 euro in this fund to be made accessible to Survivors of Industrial and Reformatory Schools and other stakeholders for the purposes of local memorialisation initiatives and the organisation of Survivor community events. This is discussed in further detail later in the report.

Issues related to the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme

Since the opening of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme in March 2024, extensive feedback from hundreds of Survivors on the redress scheme has been received by the Special Advocate.

This feedback has been wide-ranging, covering the scope of the scheme, policy matters and the many exclusions in the scheme, in addition to feedback on the operation of the scheme and its advertising and promotion.

The Special Advocate encourages all those currently eligible for the redress scheme to apply.

The Special Advocate welcomes positive, regular and ongoing engagement with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Mother and Baby Home Action Plan Unit, and the Chief Deciding Officer for the payment scheme and her team in the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Executive Office.

Exclusions and policy matters relating to the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme

- “ For me it's not about money it's about equality everyone that was in those institutions, or were taken from their mothers in whatever way that was suffered trauma ”
- “ It's wrong of the government to have a hierarchy of suffering – I was lucky I had great adoptive parents but there were people who weren't so lucky and they should be looked after ”
- “ The 180 day rule says I am not affected by my time. But I can tell you I am. It will be with me till day I die. The never belonging always on the outside. ”
- “ The idea that the redress scheme arbitrarily dictates who gets compensation due to days spent in the institution seems cruel, unfair and discriminatory ”
- “ I have been excluded from the payment scheme on the basis that I didn't spend enough time there. This decision has brought me severe distress as I am still being penalised for something that happened to me 65 years ago ”
- “ As the child of a survivor, my dad, now deceased and niece of another survivor, still living in England I can say I am appalled that those now deceased have not been included in the Mother and Baby payment scheme, I am sure other families are also ”
- “ The 6 month rule for me and many of my cribmates has totally undone that sense of "deeply received apology" from the State ”
- “ I'm not happy with the treatment of exclusion of Bessboro and commercial work that was carried on. I'm letting you know I'm not going to pursue in court, etc, as no money is worth it, and certainly no money is enough after 46yrs ”
- “ It's good that the voices of the babies are being heard at this stage. We've been voiceless for our entire existence, and to be snubbed as part of the redress scheme only solidifies that sense of being not 'worthy' of recognition. The money is not the motivator for this correspondence. It's the principle of giving the same value/apology to all the babies who were forced into adoption regardless of whether they spent one day or hundreds of days in the institutions. The system should be fair for all. The recognition should be to all, if it's sincere. ”

The myriad exclusions and restrictive eligibility requirements which are currently part of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme have caused anger and distress to many Survivors and Affected Persons; has contributed to the further re-traumatisation of some Survivors; and has enforced a hierarchy of suffering according to arbitrary criteria.

- The Special Advocate has heard from Survivors and Affected Persons directly impacted by the eligibility criteria, and who have consequently been excluded from financial redress.
- The many exclusions raised directly with the Special Advocate by Survivors include:
 - Those who were boarded out, fostered out or placed ‘at nurse’ as children
 - Survivors who died before the State Apology on 13 January 2021, preventing the families of those who have died from making an application for compensation
 - Those children who spent less than 180 days in an institution
 - The people born in institutions and private settings which are not included under the legislation. This includes private nursing homes, orphanages, private and children's hospitals, and other institutions and organisations operating as part of Ireland's network of Mother and Baby Home Institutions
 - Those affected by work payments being limited to all County Homes but only two Mother and Baby Home Institutions
 - The exclusion of specific acknowledgment and redress for those who were subject to vaccine and baby formula trials
 - The treatment of multiple admissions, continuous stays in an institution and temporary absences, such as when people were temporarily moved to different institutions including hospitals
 - Those impacted by the concluding dates for eligible institutions
 - Those affected by the 10-year limit for time spent in institutions under the legislation
 - Those impacted by restrictions being placed on being able to make only one application to the payment scheme
 - Those excluded from entitlements to a medical card or overseas health payment due to spending under 180 days in an institution

- Many Survivors deemed eligible under the current terms of the scheme and who have received redress, have shared their strong feelings of distress and guilt in applying for and accepting redress, when others in the same institutions have been left behind.

The position of the Special Advocate is that all these exclusions are discriminatory and unjust, and that the State should re-examine and revise the current legislation with a view to expanding it to include those currently excluded.

Operational issues with the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme

“

To date, regardless of how many times I have asked, I have not received a straightforward answer to the question of how long it will take to receive a payment. Answers such as 'I don't know', or 'we just have a few more checks to do' are not acceptable. In fact, it is reminiscent of the type of answers I would receive during my time in Bessboro, where the power imbalance regarding information, that affected me personally, lay fully with the nuns in charge.

”

“

*This whole process has been very damaging for me and it seems it could drag on for many more months.
With every passing day, I sink deeper and deeper into depression, a place I swore I would never ever let myself slip into again.*

”

“

I'm finding all of this extremely stressful, not so much in relation to whether my application will or won't be successful, but because this whole process has, in my mind, called into question the veracity of the records I received through Birth Info and the little bit of light which those records had shone on the first 10 months of my life has now gone very dark indeed. As things stand now, I wish I'd never applied to the redress scheme at all.

”

“

I can't help but feel that the system is actually being operated ... with little account taken of the trauma that I and other survivors have already gone through in our lives.

”

Since the launch of the payment scheme in March 2024, Survivors and Affected Persons have shared extensive feedback with the Special Advocate and her office on the operation of the scheme and application process.

The Special Advocate welcomes the regular, positive and productive engagement with the Chief Deciding Officer for the payment scheme and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth officials operating the payment scheme to raise the issues shared by Survivors.

The Special Advocate notes, arising from concerns raised with the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Executive Office, that there are ongoing improvements and enhancements being made to the application process and communications process. Updates to the payment scheme website; a commitment to revising the application form to make this clearer and more accessible for applicants; and the further proactive promotion of the payment scheme to encourage applications in Ireland and overseas are some examples.

The Special Advocate welcomes further engagement on the ongoing issues around delays, the application process and the ease of navigating the portal, the transfer of payments of awards, the review process, as well as communications in relation to the scheme.

Some of the issues raised with Special Advocate include the following:

- Many have reported that they experienced significant delays, roadblocks, poor communications, and limited follow ups by the support teams operating the scheme during their application process
- Frustration and lack of information on the status of their applications and when their redress award will be transferred to their accounts
- Many applicants are using postal hardcopy applications as they were unable, or lacked the ability or supports, to operate the application portal
- Some Survivors have advised that they have made applications using Solicitors as they struggle to make a 'self - application' due to literacy issues
- Confusing and unclear guidance on the application process and the need for Plain English instructions, resources, guidance and supports to assist with the application process
- Many applicants are expressing frustration with the online portal system
- Applicants are sending documents by registered mail at a cost to them, due to requests to send hard copy documents and not being able to upload documents on the portal
- Access to personal records associated with redress scheme applications should be provided to Survivors and Affected Persons along with their Notice of Determination

- The need for more time to consider the Notice of Determination, without it being deemed a refusal. This is particularly relevant for those who by accepting redress may adversely affect their social welfare or housing benefits overseas.
- Anger at inclusion of a legal waiver as part of this redress scheme, and the inadequacy of the financial amount to cover legal advice under the scheme
- Need for a Trauma-informed care approach required for the entire scheme and those working as part of the scheme.
- Some Survivors would welcome the active promotion of information on available counselling supports, given the potential for re-traumatisation for some engaging in this process.

Communications and promotion of the scheme

- The Special Advocate notes the significant efforts undertaken to promote the payment scheme and to encourage Survivors to apply to the scheme since its launch in March 2024 by colleagues in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, as well as service providers working with Survivors in Ireland and overseas. This includes multiple rounds of advertising campaigns for the scheme via radio, in print media, online and via static advertising in Ireland and overseas.
- Survivors and support organisations in Ireland and overseas have reported that the communications and promotion campaign for redress has not been widespread enough. Many Survivors and Affected Persons, living both in Ireland and abroad, have not yet heard of the scheme. There are concerns that this is impacting take up of the scheme to date and many are conscious of past experience with previous redress schemes where people missed out due to being unaware of the redress opportunity. It is critically important that this doesn't happen again with this scheme.
- It is vital that all future communication plans, including the promotion and advertisement for the scheme, includes direct engagement with Survivors and Affected Persons as well as with the groups working most closely with them. This will ensure information is shared on the most appropriate and effective channels, platforms, methods and locations most likely to reach Survivors and Affected Persons.
- There is an important role for the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the network of Irish Embassies and Consulates to engage with Survivors and Affected Persons overseas and with Irish diaspora community organisations as well as service providers to promote the scheme.

9.3 ISSUES RELATING TO SUPPORTS FOR SURVIVORS

“ *The state needs to acknowledge and look after Survivors for their lifetimes* ”

“ *The separation from my mother and the trauma of being without motherly care for those months is etched into my formative experiences of the world* ”

“ *We are an aging community and need to be cared for and nurtured something denied us as children and as citizens of this state.* ”

“ *In the wider context Survivor support centres are poorly resourced and not really that well equipped to provide the level of support necessary to this cohort of people. Survivors have experienced so called redress measures which have been retraumatising and the resentment and pain such measures caused lives on.* ”

Survivors and Affected Persons engaging with the Special Advocate are continuously seeking information on available supports and services as well as sharing some of their experiences trying to access these services.

Housing needs of Survivors and Affected Persons

“

I was not cared for in my early life and fear as part of my end-of-life care that I will be re-institutionalised.

”

- A significant percentage of Survivors are residing in or are on waiting lists for Social Housing and live in areas of social deprivation. A major concern for Survivors and Affected Persons is to avoid secondary institutionalisation in later life in nursing or care homes. Therefore, it is critical that Survivors have access to good quality, affordable social housing and are fully supported to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible.
- The Special Advocate calls for Survivors and Affected Persons to be given additional weighting on all Local Authority social housing and Approved Housing Bodies waiting lists. Survivors should be offered the opportunity to self-declare their status as a Survivor of Institutional Abuse and accordingly receive an additional priority on all local authority and Approved Housing Body waiting lists. Consideration should also be given to prioritise Survivors in the allocation of the Social Housing which forms part of the National Centre for Research and Remembrance campus on Sean McDermott Street in Dublin.

Healthcare and Caring Supports for Survivors and Affected Persons

“ We didn't get early life care, we now need end of life care ”

“ Survivors face huge issues around their physical and mental health and require the Health Amendment Act Card (HAA Card) with no means testing. ...
The basic medical card is not enough. ”

Survivors including Mother & Baby institutions as they were not HOMES, Magdalene Laundries, all survivors whether they have received Redress or not or who are living abroad should automatically receive free-state healthcare for their lifetimes such as the services of the HHA Card for what they have endured

“ We had the disadvantage of never knowing our family medical history for the whole of our lives ”

“ Many Survivors have had to deal with the lasting physical and psychological trauma experienced of their abuse as children including the neglect of institutions around malnourishment and dehydration in their younger years.
These physical health issues may also be due to the sheer stress/trauma in their lives; firstly, from the abuse they endured in institutions and secondly while trying to cope with and adjust to life afterwards.
Too many have died at a younger age than their peers in the rest of the general population many having underlying health conditions. ”

The ongoing mental and physical health issues relating to people's experiences in institutions, and the need for appropriate and timely health supports, form a significant part of the feedback to the Special Advocate. This is an issue which is causing many Survivors immense worry.

- Access to adequate and timely medical care is a high concern for many Survivors and Affected Persons. Many Survivors and Affected Persons require a range of medical supports and services including:
 - Mobility aids, housing adaptations, home supports and nursing services to allow them to stay living in their homes and not re-enter institutional settings.
 - Shorter waiting lists for access to required surgery and all General Practitioner recommended medical procedures.
 - Dental, ophthalmic, aural, physiotherapy and psychotherapy services without restrictions, limitation or waiting lists.
 - Supports to enable palliative care treatment at home or access to a care home should that be the individual's preference.

- Some Survivors have reported to the Special Advocate the enormous trauma which they have endured as a result of physical, mental and sexual abuse. The health issues they continue to experience arising from the time they spent in institutions or while boarded out, whether through neglect, inadequate care while in these institutions, through exposure to poor living conditions, limited access to adequate nutritious food or as a result of being subject to vaccine or milk trials. Each survivor is unique and one size does not fit all when considering their experiences and what supports they may require.

- As previously noted, many Survivors fear re-institutionalisation in their later life. The Special Advocate calls for increased home care packages for Survivors and Affected Persons to support them to stay in their homes for as long as possible and avoid secondary re-institutionalisation, if this is their wish.

- Survivors of institutional abuse and forced family separation with limited, missing or inaccurate genetic family health history, or missing records relating to their health require specific treatment. The absence of accurate medical records may leave people vulnerable to undiagnosed genetic conditions and inadequate healthcare. The Special Advocate calls for a commitment by the State to carrying out research in relation to the provision of targeted medical care for those with limited, missing or inaccurate genetic medical history to ensure they receive timely and proper medical interventions and treatment.

In relation to the medical cards and the overseas medical payments which have formed part of State redress schemes for Survivors of Magdalene Laundries, and of Mother and Baby and Country Home Institutions, and which are proposed for Survivors of Industrial and Reformatory School Institutions, feedback in relation to both the 'enhanced' medical cards and the health payments has been extensive and almost universally negative.

- The health supports provided to Magdalene Laundry Survivors as part of the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Act 2015 have been described as a 'broken promise', falling far short of what Survivors need and feel they are entitled to. Survivors have expressed to the Special Advocate their ongoing anger and disappointment with the inadequate health supports provided to them. They report that the State has ignored the recommendations by Justice John Quirke in his 2013 Report where he advised that the Irish State should provide health services equivalent to those provided under the HAA card to Hepatitis-C survivors. The Quirke report found that 91% of Magdalene Survivors already have a medical/GP visit card and the medical card provided to Survivors under this redress scheme provide very limited other benefits.
- The Special Advocate office has also received extensive feedback relating to the 'enhanced' medical card which forms part of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme. Many Survivors have expressed their extreme disappointment at the limited additional benefits this 'enhanced' medical card entitles them to.
- The Special Advocate has also heard from Survivors and Affected Persons on their experiences when using the 'enhanced' medical card to pay for prescriptions or during appointments. It is alarming that many healthcare service providers are seemingly unaware of the existence or entitlements of the current 'enhanced' medical card for Survivors. There is confusion on what this 'enhanced' medical card is, and how this differs from a standard medical card. This is a matter which requires immediate attention.
- This lack of awareness has led to humiliating experiences for some Survivors and Affected Persons when using the 'enhanced' medical card in GP offices, Pharmacies, Opticians and other healthcare settings. A number of Survivors reported to the Special they have been questioned in public settings "*why do you have this card*" "*how did you get this card*". This is absolutely unacceptable. As a direct result, the burden was placed on these Survivors who were put in a position where they had to explain, in a public setting, the reason they hold such a card and their limited understanding of the functions and benefits of the card.

- Similarly, communications and the information which is available publicly on official websites on exactly what the 'enhanced' medical card entitles holders to is not adequate. There is currently no information on the HSE website in relation to the 'enhanced' medical card for Mother and Baby Institution Survivors. Many Survivors have shared their experiences of contacting the HSE call centre to find out about the medical card, and have reported that call centre staff lacked any knowledge or awareness of this medical card and redirected them back to the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme call centre.
- A similar 'enhanced' medical card and equivalent health support payment is included in the '*Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutional Abuse*' Bill. Those who did not apply or missed out on the *Residential Institutional Abuse Scheme* are excluded from accessing these supports and entitlements. This is particularly unjust considering, for many, the health issues faced are a direct result from their time in institutions treatment or may have been exacerbated by their treatment in institutions.
- Having met with Survivors and Affected Persons living overseas, many are extremely upset at the 3,000 euro offered for their healthcare needs, declaring that this amount is completely insufficient for their ongoing and deteriorating health requirements. **The Special Advocate calls for an increase to 10,000 euro for the Health Payment for those living overseas.**

The 'enhanced' medical card, in its current format, is completely inadequate to meet Survivor needs. This medical card gives extraordinarily little in addition to the ordinary medical card which a significant number of Survivors already hold. **It is the strongly held position of the Special Advocate that all Survivors and Affected Persons should receive the Health Amendment Act (HAA) card.**

Counselling and Well-being Supports for Survivors and Affected Persons

“ *I am looking for and longing for inner peace to enable me to move forward* ”

“ *My mother meant someone as a human, who suffered horrendous abuse. I am haunted by her crying when I was a child. The state and its elite hate their own citizens, they torture, starved, abused and let us take this to the grave. I'm sorry, I'm all over the place. I'm desperately upset that we've been treated again like we don't matter, our lives meant nothing. I'm ashamed to be Irish, today* ”

“ *I know we all have memories but as we age ourselves these seem to resurface greatly* ”

“ *My mother would often remind me and my two sisters not to ask our father about his early life as the memories were too painful. It was only late in his life (and only occasionally), would my father recall some memories that he would dare to share of his time in both institutions. The word 'brutal' interspersed his accounts. There was certainly physical and emotional abuse. As for sexual abuse that is not known, perhaps if true it would have been too much to share with his children* ”

The Special Advocate hears from a significant amount of Survivors about the lifelong impact their experiences of institutional abuse, incarceration, confinement and of forced family separation has on their mental health.

- Many Survivors report to the Special Advocate that they have been living with deeply painful and unresolved trauma for decades.
- Many shared that they have never spoken about what they have experienced with anyone, and some have said they carry with them lingering shame and fear. Developments such as engaging in redress schemes, accessing (or being denied) personal records relating to their experiences, engaging in consultations can bring back painful trauma for some Survivors.

- A significant number of the Survivors and Affected Persons who have engaged with the Special Advocate are based overseas and don't have access to counselling support services. Many have shared powerful accounts of their feelings of intense loneliness, depression, and they have no one to talk to about their experiences with others.
- The Special Advocate welcomes, for those who might require these supports, the targeted HSE National Counselling Service for former residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions as well as adults who experienced abuse in childhood including those who were resident in Institutions and other settings who are resident in Ireland. Similarly, Immigrant Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICAP) is funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE) to provide counselling and psychotherapy services for Survivors living in Britain.
- Further promotion and advertising of these supports is important to ensure that Survivors and Affected Persons living in Ireland and Britain are made aware of their availability and that they are free of charge; understand what these services cover; that these services can be accessed independently of redress schemes and that people can easily self-refer.
- Well-being and counselling supports should be available to all Survivors and Affected Persons through the expansion of counselling services to all Survivors and Affected Persons who may wish to access them, including online in the form of webchat and email.

Tracing Supports for Survivors and Affected Persons

The tracing services for all those seeking family members and connection with their families must be provided in a timely and consistent manner. Procedures and processes for tracing need to be clear and be communicated widely to all who wish to avail of tracing services.

Many Survivors and Affected Persons reported seeking a DNA tracing services, including genealogy supports in finding family members.

Survivors have said there is a lack of clarity on how to access DNA services and who is entitled to these enhanced tracing supports.

9.4 ISSUES RELATED TO MEMORIALISATION

“

We owe it to those that died to remember them in a spectacular way. Can we not do something to say how sorry we are to the hundreds of children that died and to the women who were let down by the State and Church?

”

“

I'm not crazy on the idea of a memorial, justice would be far more welcome in my opinion

”

Survivors and Affected Persons frequently raise with the Special Advocate the matter of memorialisation and the central importance of this for Survivors and their families as a means for healing. Furthermore, it is vital to ensure that Ireland and its people never forget the dark legacy of forced family separation, institutional abuse and incarceration operating in Ireland over the last 100 plus years.

The National Centre for Research and Remembrance (NCRR)

“

I would like to highlight the McDermott Street initiative is an outstanding concept... I very much commend the Irish Government for its commitment and generous funding. I acknowledge the efforts of all involved in creating a lasting legacy

”

“

Active involvement of survivors is crucial for ensuring inclusivity in any initiative, and their voices must be central to the design, implementation, oversight, and decision-making of all government-led efforts.

”

“

Survivors need to be front and centre in shaping the National Centre for Research and Remembrance, especially the memorial centre, garden, museum and reading room for looking at personal records

”

“

Please start efforts in collecting Survivor and community stories for the National Centre as soon as possible, while people are alive and remember these important stories & experiences

”

The National Centre for Research and Remembrance is intended to stand as a site of conscience to honour equally all those who spent time in Industrial Schools, Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions, Reformatories, and related institutions and with experience of forced family separation.

High-level plans for the National Centre were approved by government in March 2022. The National Centre will be located on the site of the former Magdalene Laundry in Seán McDermott Street in Dublin’s city centre. It is intended to be:

- A place for reflection and remembrance
- A museum and exhibition space, the development of which will be led by the National Museum of Ireland
- A research centre and repository of records related to institutional trauma in the 20th century will form part of the National Archives

Since her appointment in March 2024, the Special Advocate has sat on the Steering Group for the National Centre for Research and Remembrance. This consists of members of different government departments and representatives from other state and official bodies.

As a member of the Steering Committee, it is the position of the Special Advocate that Survivor voices must remain at the heart at every stage of planning, creation, and development of the National Centre. Commitments made by the Irish Government relating to Survivor-centered decision-making and co-creation, records, equal and inclusive memorialisation among others need to be honoured in this process.

The Special Advocate has welcomed the opportunity to discuss the National Centre for Research and Remembrance with Survivors and Affected Persons, and to hear their extensive feedback on plans for the National Centre during direct engagements and meetings with Survivors.

The Special Advocate and the Special Advocate office team were part of the project team which organised five Survivor engagement events in relation to the National Centre, alongside colleagues in DCEDIY, Office of Public Works, National Archives and the National Museum. These engagement events were held so that Survivors and Affected Persons, and their family members and advocates, could hear about and provide feedback on the work of the National Archives and National Museum in relation to the National Centre for Research and Remembrance.

These took place in Dublin, Galway, Cork, and online and in London between October 2024 and February 2025 with over 250 Survivors, Affected Persons and their families attending and participating in these events.

To date, Survivors who have contacted the Special Advocate have been largely positive about the development of a National Centre for Research and Remembrance. Survivors have shared extensive feedback, rich ideas and suggestions in relation to the National Centre site, the museum collections required to tell these stories, and how the archives and access to records will operate at the site. Some of the key themes which emerged from feedback at the engagement events include:

- More Survivor and Affected Person involvement in the oversight committees that are currently planning the National Centre.
- The desire to be part of the co-creation process in the development of the National Centre, particularly in relation to the museum collections, art projects and the memorial/reflective gardens.

- The importance in having a national memorial so that the Irish people don't forget about Ireland's dark legacy of institutional abuse, incarceration, confinement and forced family separation.
- That it is critical that all Survivors and Affected Persons and their experiences are included equally – and that no one is left behind.

There have also been some concerns and issues raised by Survivors in the context of the National Centre.

- The Special Advocate recognises that the establishment of the National Centre for Research and Remembrance is for some too little too late. Sadly, many Survivors have died and will never see the National Centre and it will be left to their families and friends to mark their lives and declare their right to be remembered in the centre.
- There are also concerns with how this National Centre can appropriately reflect the legacy and experiences of so many different types of institutional abuse in one museum setting.
- For others the National Centre is not a priority and comes too soon as the State has not yet included all in redress. Nor has the State concluded its full responses to all aspects of institutional abuse and forced family separation, particularly noting the exclusion of those boarded out, subject to vaccine trials and multiple other exclusions from various redress schemes.

A report on the feedback shared by Survivors and Affected Persons at recent National Centre engagement events and in follow up with the Special Advocate office and other project partners is currently being collated and will be uploaded to the National Centre for Research and Remembrance website, and will be circulated to all attendees and all interested parties.

Local Memorialisation

“ *I strongly believe this part of Irish history should not be forgotten it should be remembered by personal stories, documents and buildings at the very least* ”

“ *Local Memory is powerful.
The physical presence of these sites remain in the community.
The legacy of these spaces is important.* ”

“ *Survivors need to be honoured equally. Every county and every family. Local memorialisation cannot be forgotten specific to county and Institution.* ”

The Special Advocate has heard from many Survivors and Affected Persons who want appropriate, dignified, and sensitive local memorialisation at institutional sites across the country. The Special Advocate is aware from current research that there are over 360 sites which were in operation as part of Ireland’s 20th century system of institutions or ‘sites of containment’ operating on the island of Ireland. Institutions such as Magdelene Laundries, Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions, private nursing homes and orphanages, and Industrial and Reformatory School Institutions are included in this figure. ²

- Acknowledgment of local sites of conscience is critical to ensure what happened is not forgotten and is visibly remembered in communities across Ireland. This should happen in ways decided by Survivors who spent time in each institution and place. Appropriate local memorialisation is important not only for the Survivors themselves, but also the local communities who live near these institutions.

² Rún Ireland’s (In)visible Buildings Project, Draft Monograph November 2024

- The Special Advocate has heard from many Survivors and their families on the strong and long-held desire to visit sites, to spend time there and to reflect on and to remember their experience in these institutions. The Special Advocate recognises that for some visiting the sites of former institutions is a cathartic experience, and gathering together is important to some Survivors and Affected Persons and their families.
- Consideration needs to be given to supporting Survivors and their families in this at a local and national level, including those who have travelled from overseas, who might want to visit a site including information on visiting sites and whether memorials or spaces of reflection exist there, useful points of contact at the site, and whenever possible ensuring ease of access to important and highly sensitive areas such as graveyards where people might want to visit and remember lost ones.

Dignified burial and memorialisation

“

I cannot find out and cannot get answers. There is no death certificate or birth certificates for him. I need to find his place of rest so that I can go to him, talk to him at his graveside. This is so important and also so painful for me.

”

“

*He mattered. His life mattered.
What happened to him mattered.*

”

“

I don't know where she is, I walk around the field looking for some sort of sign that maybe, she might be buried there. My whole life has been looking for her, and in her death, this continues

”

The Special Advocate has received ongoing communications from Survivors and Survivor groups in relation to the need for dignified burial and the sensitive treatment of mass graves, unmarked graves and sites of burial across institutions in Ireland.

- This subject continues to cause immense distress, pain and upset to Survivors and Affected Persons who lack information and either a place of burial or a space for remembering family members.
- The Special Advocate notes ongoing progress at Tuam through the work of the Director of Authorised Intervention and regularly links in with the office of the Director of Authorised Intervention.
- The Special Advocate has been contacted by numerous Survivors and Affected Persons, and Survivor groups with experiences in other Mother and Baby Institutions in Ireland seeking support from Government to identify, locate and preserve sites of burial. Many have emphasised the pressing need for Government to investigate the children that died in Mother and Baby Institutions and to establish as much information about the location of burial sites at these institutions as possible. This includes through access to professional expertise and survey work, as appropriate.

- Many Survivors and Survivor groups are seeking permanent and appropriately situated areas at institutions to provide Survivors and their families with a space to remember, reflect and commemorate. Understanding the exact location of burial sites is critical to progressing this. Furthermore, consideration of this is particularly urgent in sites which are in private ownership and are currently under development.

Funding for memorialisation, commemoration and Survivor community events

- The Special Advocate recognises the Grant Scheme for Mother and Child Institutions Commemorative Events for Survivors of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions, operated by official in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The Special Advocate is aware of some examples of good practice by local authorities in working in collaboration with Survivors and Affected Persons.
- **It is the position of the Special Advocate that a cross-departmental fund should be available to all Survivors of institutional abuse and Survivor groups. This fund should enable access to a simple and streamlined application process for dedicated funds for the purposes of local memorialisation and commemoration initiatives, as well as Survivor community events, gatherings and meetings.**

It is inconsistent and inequitable that currently only one Government Department would have an available fund for events for Survivors and that other Departments would not.

- The Special Advocate also looks forward to the completion of the report by the Local Authority Memorialisation Working Group, led by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This will hopefully provide further supports and guidance on local memorialisation across Ireland. It would be helpful for additional supports such as toolkits and resources, to be developed and published, in order to support Survivors and Affected Persons, Survivor groups, local authorities, local community groups and other stakeholders to work together to organise successful and appropriate memorials and events.

- The success of the ground-breaking Dublin Honours Magdalenes event in 2018 is often referenced by Survivors as a welcome and positive experience they took part in. Consideration should be given to supporting future gatherings of Survivors following this model. Other groups of Survivors and Affected Persons should also have access to and supports to organise such gathering events. This is something to be considered as part of plans for the National Centre for Research and Remembrance.

9.5 OTHER ISSUES RAISED WITH THE SPECIAL ADVOCATE

Desire to share experiences, history and accounts and to build a shared sense of connection and community with other Survivors

“ *Shared pain can become strength in numbers and provide some solace and comfort, and that the decades of silence and shame is eradicated for one and all* ”

“ *My adoption story is as good as any could ever have hoped to have had. Even so there's some deep and indelible heritage bundled into the emotional body inherited from a time and atmosphere of severe neglect and general scorn that permeated the institutions so euphemistically branded as "Homes"* ”

“ *I owe it to my father to share his story if for no other reason but to highlight that he existed and survived an unforgiving and abhorrent institutional system.* ”

“ *It was great to meet other people who had similar experiences to mine and see how people have overcome the challenges* ”

Many Survivors and Affected Persons expressed to the Special Advocate a desire to share their life experiences of institutional abuse and forced family separation, and to be respected and heard.

- It is notable that many of the Survivors and Affected Persons who have contacted the Special Advocate over the past year are not part of any Survivor groups, and many have never spoken about their experiences with their family, friends or communities.
- Many reported to the Special Advocate their keen interest in having their accounts, experiences and testimony recorded as oral history so that these can be part of the official history of institutional abuse and forced family separation in Ireland.

- Survivors noted the critical importance that those who are currently underrepresented are actively engaged with so that their accounts are part of Ireland's official history. It is vital that the unique and differing experiences of Survivors of institutional abuse and forced family separation from different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds are respected, shared and understood. This includes people with disabilities, those of mixed race, those from the Traveller and Roma community, and that appropriate resources and supports are developed as appropriate.
- Another issue raised with the Special Advocate by Survivors was the loss of connection experienced between people they spent time in institutions and hopes that the National Centre, when established, might have a role to play to help people to reconnect with long-lost friends.
- A significant amount of people in contact with the Special Advocate expressed a wish for more opportunities to meet and build connections with other Survivors and Affected Persons, to share experiences and stories, and to foster a sense of community. In response to this, the Special Advocate office has committed to organise a series of community events to further this goal. The first event took place in February 2025, with a dedicated private screening for Survivors of 'Small Things like These' in Dublin. The Special Advocate office is engaging with those on our mailing list to identify ideas for the next event.
- For those living abroad, those who are isolated, those who have not widely shared their experience with others, and for those without digital access, it is increasingly difficult to link with other Survivors and Affected Persons.

Issues relating to accessing trusted and accurate information

“ *The experience of obtaining (relatively basic) information should not be this cumbersome.* ”

“ *I keep clicking on it nothing it won't let me I don't know what to do now. I'm just so stressed over this. I'm just sitting here crying.* ”

“ *I want the answers, the 'logic' given at the time by the State to facilitate such an inhumane system* ”

The Special Advocate office has repeatedly heard from Survivors of the challenges and difficulties experienced by people trying to access information relating to their experiences of institutional abuse and forced family separation. This includes finding and accessing their records, finding information on past and current redress schemes and the eligibility criteria and application process, as well as what types of supports are available for Survivors.

- Many Survivors and Affected Persons advise of having to consult multiple websites for information and direction to services. They report they are being sent back and forth between different websites and call centres for basic information. A situation which causes immense frustration and incurs unnecessary expenses and delays.
- Many report that despite efforts they struggle to find the information they are looking for through official channels, and how instead frequently resort to asking for help on social media forums or with other service providers for support with their query.
- The need for accurate, up to date, easy to find and easy to understand information is a central theme repeatedly brought to the attention of the Special Advocate. In the absence of an official, centralised 'one stop shop' of factual information relevant to Survivors, the Special Advocate is aware that misinformation and disinformation may be circulated which can cause issues, upset, confusion and delays.

- The search for information is even more difficult for people living overseas who lack an understanding of Irish government and public body structures, as well as people with literacy issues, and those experiencing digital poverty. Information should be written in Plain English, be accompanied by supporting resources and infographics. Information and services should be accessible across a range of platforms, available online, in print, and in person and by phone, depending on Survivor preferences and abilities.
- The Special Advocate is determined to play an important role in this space, via the various communication platforms discussed earlier in this report, with the goal of serving as a source of trusted information for Survivors and Affected Persons, their families and support organisations who work with them. The Special Advocate office continues to engage directly with Survivors and other stakeholders to identify what information Survivors require, in order to develop an accessible and easy to use repository of clear, factual and up-to-date information, designed to meet Survivor needs.

Consultation Fatigue – over consulted and under delivered

“ *The majority of us who participated in the consultation process supported an inclusive scheme where no one was left behind* ”

“ *I'm sick and tired of surveys, sick and tired of being asked to go to meetings to express views and share my trauma if these will just be passed over. What is the point?* ”

“ *We're not listened to and the recommendations we make are ignored* ”

Many Survivors and Affected Persons have advised the Special Advocate that they feel over-consulted by Government. By way of example, since 2020 there have been at least 9 government-initiated consultation processes with Survivors.

Survivors taking part spend time, money and effort to participate in these consultations, frequently on a volunteer basis and without compensation to cover expenses. As part of these engagements, Survivors provide thoughtful, considered inputs to processes and reports, often sharing deeply personal and painful accounts of their experiences.

Many subsequently feel under-delivered, let down and disrespected, when recommendations they have made have been ignored, and that they say their time was wasted by taking part.

Engagement with Government Departments and State Agencies

“

I'm a total loss what to do and it makes me teary and stressed. So I'm putting this all to you so that you can fully understand and maybe at least some healing here can happen if you can help. It has made me teary just to write this and push myself so far out my comfort zone in that I actually do expect to be ignored again. I hope not. I'm trying

”

“

My childhood was stolen by the very government that was supposed to protect me, and yet, here I am, still battling red tape just to access basic support. It should not be this difficult.

”

The Special Advocate has also received a significant volume of contact from Survivors and Affected Persons sharing their accounts of communicating with government departments, officials, and other state agencies. Survivors say they make contact in order to highlight ongoing serious issues which in their view require attention and action from the State.

Some have expressed frustration and dismay at communications with government departments and officials and state bodies. While receipt of correspondence is generally acknowledged, a significant number of people did not receive a substantive response to the important issues raised in their correspondence. This is particularly hurtful when Survivors have shared deeply personal accounts of trauma and abuse. This can also further confirm and reinforce feelings of distrust, apathy, hopelessness and cynicism for Survivors on the value of engaging with the State.

Some Survivors have also contacted the Special Advocate to raise concerns in accessing or engaging with various State services. The Special Advocate will continue to raise these issues with relevant officials and state bodies, as required.

9.6 ISSUES SHARED BY THOSE WHO WERE BOARDED OR FOSTERED OUT AS CHILDREN

“

It is not beyond the Government's remit to rectify the injustice of the current redress plan... Do not let boarded out children become the forgotten children.

”

“

I was forced to share a bed with a man some twenty years older than me. In the eleven I spent there he physically and sexually assaulted me. (he was the son of the foster father) I was also constantly beaten and molested by the foster carer, who was in his seventies. I was forced to carry strenuous farm work, I was badly fed, my main diet was soda bread and bacon and cabbage. I was dressed like a child from the 1920s, even though they were paid a maintenance and a clothing grant by the State. I suffered years of anxiety, which still manifests itself from time to time, one never forgets the trauma inflicted by those who were supposedly there to take care of us.

”

“

We need to highlight the truth once and for all

”

The Special Advocate has heard from many Survivors who were boarded out, fostered and placed at nurse as children.

- Many of those who have contacted the Special Advocate have shared their extreme disappointment, anger and hurt at the ongoing exclusion from State redress. The decision by the Government to not include boarded out children in the current redress plan has caused immense pain to these Survivors and further perpetuated the sense that these Survivors have been abandoned, forgotten and left behind by the State.

The Special Advocate calls for the urgent expansion of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme to provide fair and timely financial redress to this group of Survivors and Affected Persons.

- Many Survivors shared with the Special Advocate their powerful accounts of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, exploitation, neglect, the inadequacy of the State's inspection regime, and the forced labour undertaken. Furthermore, the denial of educational opportunities, life-long societal stigma, and the ongoing lack of birth and early life information available were highlighted as issues.
- Access to information about their early life and their time spent in these placements was highlighted as a major ongoing issue needing attention.
- Finally, some Survivors seek an apology from the State for those who were boarded out or fostered out as children and feel strongly that as it was the Irish State who arranged for them to live with families and supervised inspections while they were there, the Government should apologise to them and provide compensation.

9.7 ISSUES SHARED BY THOSE AFFECTED BY ILLEGAL BIRTH REGISTRATION

“ *These registrations were not just mistakes they were premeditated and deliberate* ”

“ *The falsification of birth records represent a dark chapter in the country's history* ”

“ *The state knew exactly what was going on. I have been lied to my entire life. I don't know who I am, I can't even access my basic medical history* ”

Since her appointment, the Special Advocate has engaged both with individuals affected by illegal birth registration and a group representing those affected. Some of the key issues raised with the Special Advocate include:

- In relation to the Illegal Birth Registration ex-gratia scheme, it is important to ensure that this ex-gratia payment is extended to any other additional cases of illegal birth registration which are identified in the future and that information about this scheme is promoted and made widely available.
- The Special Advocate has heard about delays in the allocation of social workers for tracing service and an ongoing uncertainty around the provision by state bodies of dedicated DNA and specialist genealogy services.
- While noting the apology in Seanad Éireann by Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman in May 2022, some illegal Birth Registrants have shared that they want a State apology in the Dáil which fully addresses the harm caused by and the impact of illegal birth registration on Affected Persons and their families’ lives.
- The importance of government departments and state bodies recognising and understanding the unique and complex situation of having both a social and legal identity is frequently raised with the Special Advocate office. There are ongoing issues around the language and terminology used in relation to illegal birth registration, particularly around the ‘cancellation’ of social identities which many find hurtful. The Special Advocate welcomes ongoing consideration by government officials on this point, noting that the upcoming Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 Review could provide a valuable opportunity to consider this change.

- Some concern has been expressed around the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 Review, and the need for illegal birth registrants to be included in this process. The Special Advocate has made a specific request that people affected by illegal birth registration are consulted as part of the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 review, along with all others affected by services under the Birth Information and Tracing Act.

9.8 ISSUES SHARED BY SURVIVORS AND AFFECTED PERSONS LIVING OVERSEAS

“

I can tell you as an Irish born person and a US citizen, telling this story to someone here in the US is embarrassing, shameful and gives every woman immense sadness and pain to hear what children and these young women had to endure. The church in particular and the government at that time should walk in their shoes for 80 years or more.

”

“

I've just been really depressed lately. Just memories coming up from my time in the institution. I didn't just lose my baby, I lost my family, my heritage and myself. There's really no one to talk to over here that understands

”

“

*I couldn't stay.
I wanted to, but the choice was taken away from me.*

”

“

People still living in Ireland are seen and treated as more important than the people who were forced to leave. The government forgot about us. Out of sight, out of mind. We don't have the same supports and a 3000 payment for health care is a joke.

”

The Special Advocate has engaged with Survivors and Affected Persons in a number of countries around the world since March 2024. Many Survivors left Ireland after their experiences of incarceration, confinement or abuse in institutions, or were illegally trafficked or adopted as part of Ireland's legacy of forced family separation.

Survivors of institutional abuse are an important part of the Irish Diaspora, who have frequently been neglected. The Department of Foreign Affairs, the network of Irish Embassies and Consulates across the world, and the many Irish centres and support groups operating abroad, have a key role to play in supporting Survivors and Affected Persons.

The Government of Ireland's Global Ireland Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020–2025³ notes the need for Ireland to –

'Recognise the need to heal the relationship with our emigrants who left Ireland in crisis as a result of discrimination or as victims of institutional abuse'

Particular issues relating to the distinct experiences of Survivors and Affected Persons living overseas raised with the Special Advocate include:

- The loss of identity experienced by some Survivors and Affected Persons overseas due to the consequences of forced family separation
- Experiences of loneliness, isolation and a desire to meet and connect with other Survivors and Affected Persons
- A desire to contribute their unique history and experience to the development of the National Centre for Research and Remembrance, as well as to visit and attend local memorial sites and commemorative events in Ireland
- Lack of awareness about redress schemes which are currently open; and issues in relation to application to redress schemes in terms of paperwork required. Serious concerns on the impact of redress on overseas Survivors, in relation to other countries tax or social welfare systems also noted. Deep frustration in relation to redress schemes which are now closed, from eligible Survivors who did not apply due to a variety of issues
- A serious lack of knowledge and awareness of various government initiatives such as Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022, the National Centre for Research and Remembrance
- Challenges in making applications for Birth Information and Tracing and redress due to digital poverty, identification requirements and administrative burdens, and a lack of knowledge of their rights and entitlements
- Unfamiliarity with Irish government structures and bodies, and a limited understanding of different official channels to seek information, particularly around accessing records

³ [Diaspora_Strategy_2020-2025.pdf](#)

- Barriers to engaging with State officials and bodies on matters relating to citizenship and passports

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section outlines a series of recommendations made by the Special Advocate for Survivors, across the following headings:

- Records
- Redress
- Supports for Survivors
- Memorialisation
- Other

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO RECORDS

- It is the position of the Special Advocate that all records in State, private and religious ownership must be brought together under one auspice to allow for ease of access for those to whom the records relate.
- Records need to be collated, conserved and digitised as a matter of priority.
- Individuals to whom those records relate, should have access to their records in full, in an unredacted format.
- To understand the past and ensure the principle of non-reoccurrence, the Special Advocate is calling for the opening of access to the broader records for researchers, advocates and families who wish to understand the broader context. All records related to Ireland's architecture of institutionalization and forced family separation including all administrative, financial, historical, policies and procedures documents, as well as archival materials and any records pertinent to the work of relevant state commissions and inquiries, must become available to a wider audience.
- The Special Advocate is acutely cognizant of the importance of all records being brought into state ownership and care as a matter of urgency. Ongoing issues and delays in records from government departments and other state bodies being transferred to the National Archives must be addressed and it is of the utmost importance that all relevant records are transferred to the National Archives as a matter of urgency.
- The Special Advocate calls for renewed promotion and advertising for the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 in Ireland and overseas to ensure people and service providers are familiar with this legislation and how to access its services.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO REDRESS

- All open redress schemes should be widely promoted, to encourage as many applications as possible. In this regard it is also important to highlight the need for extensive advertising, targeted towards the Survivors and the platforms and locations they engage with, and taking into account issues of digital poverty, accessibility and literacy.

Magdelene ex-gratia scheme

- A renewed official communications campaign, in Ireland and overseas, to promote the redress scheme and advise that it is still open to applicants, and to direct people with queries on the scheme to the appropriate channels in Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth must take place as a matter of urgency to ensure all those eligible can apply, noting this is now a very small cohort of women.

Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme

- The Special Advocate supports and strongly recommends the urgent expansion of the current redress scheme to include the following:
 - Those who were boarded out, fostered out or placed ‘at nurse’ as children
 - Those who spent less than 180 days in a Mother and Baby Institution or County Home as a child. Anyone who was a resident of an institution should be entitled to a payment regardless of the time spent therein
 - Survivors who died before the State Apology in January 2021
 - The people born in institutions and private settings which are not included under the legislation. This includes private nursing homes, orphanages, private and children's hospitals, and other institutions and organisations operating as part of Ireland’s network of Mother and Baby Institutions
 - Those affected by work payments being limited to all Country Homes but only two Mother and Baby Home Institutions
 - The exclusion of specific acknowledgment and redress for those who were subject to vaccine and baby formula trials

- Those impacted by issues relating to the treatment in legislation around multiple admissions, continuous stays in an institution and temporary absences, such as when people were temporarily moved to different institutions including hospitals
- Those impacted by the concluding dates for eligible institutions
- Those who spent over 10 years in institutions under the legislation and affected by the 10-year limit relating to the maximum payment under the redress scheme
- Those impacted by restrictions being placed on being able to make only one application to the payment scheme
- Those excluded from entitlements to a medical card or overseas health payment due to spending under 180 days in an institution

Vaccine trials

- The Special Advocate calls for further investigation and review of findings of Kiely report on Vaccine trials known to have been conducted on children in institutions in 1961, 1964, 1965, 1971 and 1973 conducted across a range of institutions and children's 'homes'.
- Provision of State support to Survivors to ensure full access to all records for those who were subjected to such trials.
- **A redress scheme to be established adjunct to the Mother and Baby Institutions Payments Scheme to include a medical assessment of the impact of trials for each individual affected and appropriate ongoing medical supports and redress for individuals affected.**

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO SUPPORTS FOR SURVIVORS

Housing Supports

- Creation of an additional housing need category, to ensure that Survivors and affected persons applying for social, affordable and approved Housing Body Accommodation are given priority / weighting in their applications for housing.
- Survivors should be offered the opportunity to self-declare their status as a Survivor of Institutional Abuse and accordingly receive an additional priority on all local authority and approved housing body waiting lists.

Healthcare and Caring Supports

- Provision of enhanced home care packages to allow those who spent time in institutions to stay in their homes for life and not be forced to re-enter an institution for later or end of life care.
- A commitment to carrying out research on medical care for those with limited, missing or inaccurate genetic medical history to ensure they receive timely and enhanced medical investigations and treatment from a range of medical professionals.
- A commitment that all research on, into and about those affected by institutional abuse and forced family separation will include Survivors and affected persons as part of the development, planning and roll out of such research.

Medical cards and health support payments

- All Survivors should receive access to the Health Amendment Act (HAA) card, which gives people access to more services than the 'enhanced' medical card.
- Similarly, that the equivalent overseas health payment awarded as part of the Magdelene ex-gratia scheme, Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme and the proposed Supports Bill, should be increased significantly as this amount is not sufficient to cover people's health needs. The Special Advocate is calling for this to be increased to 10,000 euro.

Counselling Supports

- Expansion of counselling supports services online in the form of webchat and email.
- Expansion of counselling supports to Survivors living overseas.

Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutions Bill

- Urgent enactment of the 'Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutions' Bill 2023, under Department of Education auspices. The scope of this legislation must be amended to include those survivors of Industrial and reformatory Institutions who were eligible but did not apply for an 'award' under the Residential Institutions Redress scheme.

Supports with Tracing and Genealogy

- The establishment of a free of charge, independently operated DNA and specialist genealogy information and tracing service for those affected by adoption, forced family separation, and illegal birth registrations. This service should be provided in all cases where current information and tracing of family services, are unsuccessful.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO MEMORIALISATION

National Centre for Research and Remembrance

- There needs to be further commitment to include Survivors and Affected Persons in all the decision-making about the National Centre by increased representation, meaningful co-creation of all spaces in the National Centre, and their ongoing involvement once the National Centre opens up to and including membership of the National Centre's Board of Directors.
- Consideration must be given to eligible Survivors and Affected Persons living in North East Inner City to have priority access to the Social Housing development on the campus.
- The Special Advocate calls for Survivors to be central in the decision making for the naming of new streets and walkways adjacent to the National Centre campus.
- Survivor-only days for attending the National Centre and financial support for travel to the National Centre by Survivors and their families should be considered.
- All staff at the National Centre should be fully trained in trauma-informed care.
- Key elements of the National Centre both Museum and Archives content must be mobile so that people outside Dublin and living overseas can see exhibitions and access their records.

Local Memorialisation

- The Special Advocate calls for urgent consideration to be given to identify, preserve and mark in a dignified and agreed manner, all remaining burial sites of children and adults who died in institutions.
- Review of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth memorialisation grant scheme, and consideration given to the establishment of a fund to allow applications from all Survivors and Survivor groups wishing to create local memorials and organise events for Survivor groups to gather.

11 APPENDIX

Engagements with Survivors and Affected Persons and Survivor Groups	
In Person Meetings with individual Survivors and Affected Persons (March 2024 - March 2025)	87 Survivors and Affected Persons
Phone/ Zoom Meetings with Individual Survivors and Affected Persons (March 2024 - March 2025)	189 Survivors and Affected Persons
Meetings with Survivors Groups (March 2024 - March 2025)	193 Survivors and Affected Persons 23 meetings with Survivor groups
Events, memorials, commemorations, information events organised by Survivors and Affected Persons and attended by the Special Advocate (March 2024 - March 2025)	487 Survivors and Affected Persons 12 events attended
Survivor Community event organised by Special Advocate (February 2025) The Special Advocate for Survivors organised their first community event in February 2025 – a private screening of ‘Small Things like These’ for Survivors and Affected Persons held in the Irish Film Institute.	41 Survivors and Affected Persons

Engagements with Survivors and Affected Persons and Survivor Groups	
National Centre for Research and Remembrance Survivor Engagement events <i>(October 2024 – February 2025)</i> The Special Advocate is on the Steering Committee for the National Centre for Research and Remembrance and chaired the in-person and online engagement events in 2024 and 2025. These events took place in Dublin, Galway, Cork, online and in London. These events provided Survivors and Affected Persons, their families and advocates, an opportunity to hear about the National Centre and provide feedback on progress to date.	Over 250 Survivors and Affected Persons
Total	1247 Survivors and Affected Persons

Engagements with Government Departments and State Bodies	
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth - Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme	
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth - Mother and Baby Homes Action Plan Unit	
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth - Memorialisation and Historic Burials Unit	
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth - Adoption Policy Unit	
Department of Education	
Department of Social Protection	
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	
Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI)	
General Register Office (GRO)	
Health Service Executive (HSE) National Research & Development	
National Archives of Ireland (NAI)	

National Museum of Ireland (NMI)
North-East Inner City (NEIC)
Office of the Director of Authorised Intervention Tuam (ODAIT)
Office of Public Works (OPW)
Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB)
National Centre for Research and Remembrance Steering Group
Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 Statutory Review Working Group
Changing Ireland Expert Advisory Group

Engagements with Service Providers, Stakeholder Partners, Survivor Groups – Ireland	
Barnardos	
Christine Buckley Centre	
Clann	
Coalition of Mother and Baby Home Survivors	
Connect Counselling	
Health Service Executive (HSE) National Counselling Service	
Irish Centre for Human Rights, University of Galway	
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC)	
Institute of International and European Affairs	
Justice For Magdelenes Research	
Know My Own (Bessborough)	
Office of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights	
One in Four	

Right of Place – Second Chance
Royal Irish Academy
Rún – Ireland’s (In)visible Buildings Project
Sage Advocacy
The Association of Mixed-Race Irish (AMRI)
Towards Healing
Towards Peace
Trauma Informed Practice Ireland
Samaritans Ireland
We Are Still Here (Sean Ross)
Westbank Orphanage Group
University of Limerick

Engagements with Service Providers, Stakeholder Partners, Survivor Groups – UK and Northern Ireland	
Belfast Truth Recovery Panel	
Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse, Northern Ireland (COSICA)	
Coventry Irish Centre	
Embassy of Ireland, United Kingdom	
Fréa – Renewing Roots	
Immigrant Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICAP)	
Irish in Britain	
London Irish Centre (LIC)	
Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)	

Engagements with Service Providers, Stakeholder Partners, Survivor Groups – Rest of World	
Aisling Irish Community and Cultural Center, New York	
Boston College	
Child Identity Protection (CHIP)	
Consulate General of Ireland, New York	
Consulate General of Ireland, Boston	
Emerald Isle Immigration Center, New York	
Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI)	
Irish Cultural Centre, Boston	
New York Irish Center, New York	

Engagements with Media by Special Advocate		
Name of Media Organisation	Purpose	Date
The Irish Times	Print Interview following the establishment of the Special Advocate role and discussion of remit of the Special Advocate office	May 2024
Live on Eire	Radio interview with Spanish programme following the establishment of role	July 2024
Boston Irish Reporter	Article promoting engagement event held in Boston College	September 2024
Irish Examiner	Print article following Special Advocate's 6 month press release	September 2024
Midwest Radio	Radio interview to discuss the establishment of the office, accessing records and the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme and its exclusions.	October 2025
RTÉ News at One	Radio interview discussing the emergency legislation for the preservation of privately held records.	October 2024
RTÉ News	Print interview following introduction of emergency legislation for the preservation of privately held records.	October 2024
The Irish World	Print interview following the establishment of role	October 2024
Offaly Live	Article following commemorative event in Sean Ross	March 2025
RTÉ News at One	Radio interview following introduction of 'Philomena's Law'	March 2025

12 CONTACT DETAILS FOR THE SPECIAL ADVOCATE FOR SURVIVORS

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