

Special Advocate for Survivors Advisory Council Meeting Note

Pillar 1, People who spent time in Industrial School and Reformatory Institutions

Meeting 1 Tuesday 3rd March, 2.30 – 4pm

Agenda item: Introductions

- The Special Advocate and pillar members in attendance introduced themselves and provided brief background information.
- Participants also outlined their motivations for applying to the Advisory Council and shared their objectives and expectations for their contributions to the Advisory Council's work over the coming year, including their engagement through these meetings.

Agenda item: Overview of the work of the Special Advocate, The Advisory Council and Pillar Structure.

- The Special Advocate provided pillar members with an overview of the role and the work of the Special Advocate office since the establishment of the role in March 2024 and further details around the key issues shared with her by Survivors, particularly around records, redress, memorialisation and dignified burial, and the need for ongoing health and housing supports.
- Since her appointment in March 2024, she and the team have engaged with over 1800 Survivors and Affected Persons, living in Ireland and overseas. Her remit covers people who spent time in Mother and Baby institutions, County homes, Magdelene Laundries, Industrial School and Reformatory institutions, people affected by illegal birth registration, people who were boarded out and Survivors living both in Ireland and overseas.



- The Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse is an independent, non-statutory role established by Government to ensure that the collective voices of Survivors and Affected Persons are central to the State's response to the legacy of institutional abuse and forced family separation.
- The role focuses on collective issues rather than individual cases and operates independently of Government in carrying out its functions.

Agenda item: Discussion on the purpose of the Advisory Council and opportunities for engagement with the pillar members for 2026

- The Advisory Council will meet and discuss identified shared concerns and key themes of collective importance such as access to records, redress, health and housing supports, memorialisation, and dignified burial.
- The Advisory Council supporting the work of the Special Advocate consists of 7 distinct pillars, covering a range of different experiences of institutional abuse and forced family separation.
- 38 people have been appointed to the Advisory Council, living in Ireland and overseas.
- The Advisory Council members have been appointed for one year.
- The Advisory Council does not consider individual cases, though it is understood and acknowledged that each pillar member may use their own experiences as reference during group discussion.

Agenda Item: An initial conversation about key themes and possible areas of focus for the pillar



The Special Advocate Introduced proposed topics for conversation, the following is a summary of the key issues discussed.

Issue 1: Records

- Pillar members raised the difficulty and lack of awareness on where records are stored and how to access them.
- For many, accessing records has been a long and arduous process. In many cases the records received were incomplete or key information relating to that own person was redacted.
- Pillar members raised the implication of redactions and incomplete records, where a failure to access key personal information can be a loss of heritage and identity.
- A discussion on how records often do not or cannot reflect different names of institutions, changing addresses, and the names of institutions or orders. This means that an individual is tasked with completing an application process multiple times or to multiple places.
- Where there was a movement of people from one institution to another, this can impact individuals when accessing their records or supports.

Issue 2: Redress

- Pillar members raised the recent Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutional Abuse and the exclusion of new applicants from receiving these supports. It was noted that this is unfortunate and unfair as the supports offered are needed and would be welcomed by all Survivors and Affected Persons.
- Members discussed previous redress schemes and highlighted how previous negative experiences have delayed or negatively influenced applications for future redress.

“Applying to the RIRB had such an impact on my mental health, I was told my experience was ‘not worth much’”

- The need for transparency and clear information on previous redress schemes is needed, especially around how Government money has



been spent (the example of Caranua, where Survivors have questions on what happened with any remaining funding or information on how the redress was spent)

- The importance of the recent passing of Philomena's Law for Survivors living overseas was raised, and how this needs to be implemented in a timely manner to ensure Survivors can receive their redress.
- Pillar members raised the recent passing of Philomena's law as an opportunity to promote the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme in Britain.

Issue 3: Access to health services, medical information and genetic history for Survivors

- Pillar members raised the impact of genetic bewilderment, and how this can impact interactions with the health service and other situations requiring medical and genetic information.
- There was a discussion related to the medical cards provided to Survivors through the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, and which will be included in the Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutional Abuse.

As the medical cards are only made available to those eligible for redress schemes and complete an application, Survivors who do not wish to sign a legal waiver are excluded. Pillar members suggested that this should be offered as a stand-alone support for Survivors.

- Access to genetic testing for Survivors and Affected persons is crucial for identity as well as health information.
- Pillar members shared the experience having of limited medical information when interacting with the health service and other state bodies.

Issue 4: Survivor representation in State Projects and Government response to Survivors

- Pillar members discussed Survivor representation in State and Government Projects, and the importance that we ensure the full scope of institutions, and the multi-institutional experience of Survivors and Affected Persons is included.



- Representation of minority groups and their experiences in institutions needs to be considered.
- The importance of Survivor involvement and an opportunity to 'address and correct the record' was raised, and pillar members highlighted the need for a Survivor-centred approach to be taken by Government.
- The experience of Irish Diaspora abroad was discussed, with pillar members raising the difficulty of accessing information and remaining informed on the supports, services and other information when living outside of Ireland.
- Pillar members raised the importance of retaining communication links to Ireland and remaining informed of the State's response to the legacy of institutional trauma and forced family separation.

Issue 5: Community and Identity

- Pillar members raised the need for community for some Survivors and Affected Persons.
- For some, there is a desire to be able to contact people with a similar institutional past, whether that was a similar pathway or the same institution.
- It was noted that Survivors of different racial or ethnic backgrounds may have had distinct and differing experiences while in institutions. The racial and ethnic experience of Survivors and Affected Persons should be acknowledged as part of the State's response. While the commission acknowledged the treatment of mothers and children with '*different racial and cultural heritage*' little has been done to address this beyond the 2021 State Apology.

Agenda Item: Next Steps and Future Meetings



Next Steps

- Special Advocate advised that it is her hope that the Advisory Council will be involved with, input into and support the work of the office, throughout the year.
- While there are 3 meetings which will be scheduled for each pillar, there will be a range of other ongoing work that would be greatly enhanced by the contribution, voice and lived experience of Pillar members. Participation and feedback into external projects will of be voluntary for all members.
- The Special Advocate office noted that the team are happy to provide and information/ documents in whichever format is most useful for members, please just let the team know.

Future Meetings

- The Special Advocate office will contact pillar members regarding the scheduling of the next meeting, and agenda items for discussion.
- It was also proposed that an in-person Advisory Council meeting may take place towards the end of 2026.

Ideas, thoughts and suggestions about what items and issues pillar members may want to include on the agenda for this meeting, as well as possible external attendees to invite to speak to issues, would be very welcome in coming weeks and months.

A note on privacy and representation concerns

- The Special Advocate advises that Advisory Council members represent themselves and their own experiences, insights and views on the Advisory Council.
- Notes of meetings will be a high-level summary of points of discussion and matters for follow up. Any member's personal information will not be included, and specific points will not be attributed to any single member.



- Copies of the note will be shared with pillar attendees for review and sign-off, and will be published on the Special Advocate website, for transparency and to provide an overview of the range of issues being raised across the Advisory Council pillar.
- Decisions on the naming of pillar members (for example as included by way of thanks in any published outputs, can be agreed in advance)

Meeting Follow ups

Action	Responsible	Status
Confirmation of details for next meetings of pillar	SA office	
Send on new information from the office, upcoming newsletter information on the Special Advocate's Podcast	SA office	

