

Special Advocate for Survivors Advisory Council

Meeting Note

Meeting 1, Pillar 5- People who were Boarded Out or Fostered

11 March 2026

Agenda item: Introductions

- Special Advocate and pillar members in attendance introduced themselves and shared some background information and further information about why they applied to the Advisory Council and what they hope to achieve as part of the Advisory Council work this year, through these meetings and engagement with Special Advocate Office.

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

- Special Advocate provided pillar members with an overview of the work of the 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.

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

- 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 a year.

Agenda item: Key themes and possible areas of focus for the pillar in 2026

The following includes a summary of the key issues discussed at the meeting:

Issue 1: Identity and Impact

- Members discussed the profound and enduring impact of being boarded out or fostered, particularly in relation to identity, connection, and belonging and harm experienced by many.
- There was strong emphasis on the need for connection and community, and on the importance of having a voice, including acting as a voice for those who are no longer alive to tell their own stories.
- Members highlighted the lifelong impact of secrecy and shame, noting how these experiences shaped personal identity and continued well into adulthood. This included significant and lasting effects on:
 - Relationships and the ability to trust or form attachments
 - Family life
 - Intergenerational experiences, with impacts felt by children and other family members
- Life was described as being “filled with questions about what could have happened,” reflecting unresolved trauma, loss, and unanswered questions about early life experiences.

Issue 2: Education and Public Awareness

- The group highlighted a need to educate the public about what these institutions were and what occurred within them, noting that many people still do not understand or are unaware of this history.



- Education was seen as essential both for acknowledgment and for prevention. Members expressed support for:
 - Improved public understanding of boarding out and institutional practices
 - Ensuring younger generations are informed about this history
- Members noted that a memorial could play an important role in public awareness, helping ensure that these experiences are acknowledged and that such practices are never repeated.

Issue 3: Records

- Members highlighted poor experiences, significant challenges, and inconsistency in how records are accessed and delivered by State bodies.
- Records received with altered information, including changed names.
- Records remaining heavily redacted.
- There was also a lack of information available regarding vetting and inspection of individuals who ran institutions.
- Oversight and accountability.
- Concerns about the absence of clear records relating to Vaccine Trials and Milk Trials carried out on children in institutions without consent, and the difficulty accessing information about these practices.

Issue 4: Redress

- Members noted recent referencing to people who were Boarded Out in a state apology and discussed what an appropriate redress scheme for this group might look like.

Key points included:

- A strong and urgent need for a Redress Scheme for those who were Boarded Out.
- It's not just about the money; you can't put a price on someone's suffering.



- The importance of recognition, acknowledgment, and validation.

Members agreed that if a scheme were introduced, eligibility based on “time spent” was generally seen as the most workable approach. However, it was strongly emphasised that:

- Some significant struggles emerged later in life, after time spent Boarded Out
- Lifelong impacts, particularly those shaped by silence and shame, are not captured by time-based eligibility alone
- The 'harm caused' eligibility of the RIRB process had been deeply harmful, with long-lasting emotional consequences, and stressed that such a process must never be repeated.

Issue 5: Memorialisation

The Special Advocate outlined plans for the National Centre for Research and Remembrance (NCRR), a site of conscience in Dublin intended to honour Survivors of institutional abuse and forced family separation.

Key points shared included:

- The NCRR will include a museum and archive
- The Special Advocate sits on the Steering Group alongside three Survivor representatives
- Commitments include Survivor/Affected Persons-only days and dedicated meeting spaces
- The proposed plans for the NCRR Museum are very welcome. It would be a wonderful space to read about places and life experiences that are shared with other survivors.
- It is important to keep memories alive in a creative and meaningful way. It would bring people and experiences back into visibility and to the public.

The importance of the Centre being staffed and operated by archivists was emphasised. The Special Advocate provided additional clarification on who will be able to access the records that will be held there

The Special Advocate's Office will circulate further information on the NCRR



Issue 6: Advisory Council Plenary Meeting

The Special Advocate discussed plans to convene a plenary meeting of all Advisory Council Pillars later in the year.

- The group agreed that it would be great to come together and some possible structures were discussed
- Rather than a general discussion, it would be helpful to focus on one or two things specifically

Members expressed strong support for the inclusion of a government presence, made up of senior representatives from relevant Departments, to:

- Participate in discussions
- Provide information and clarity
- Respond directly to key questions emerging across the Pillars

Agenda Item: *Discussion about future meetings and sharing information*

Date and Agenda for the Next Meeting (Summer 2026) and for an in person Advisory Council towards the end of 2026.

- Sharing information

Advisory Council Engagement throughout 2026

- 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 pillar members will be invited to attend throughout the year, (2 pillar meetings and one full Advisory Council meeting) the Special Advocate envisions that members will engage with Advisory Council pillar members across the year as part of her ongoing advocacy work, and other projects, events and initiatives.
- 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.
- Participation and feedback into external projects will of be voluntary for all members.



Meeting 2 in Summer 2026

- Special Advocate office will be in touch with pillar members regarding the scheduling of the next meeting, and agenda items for discussion.

Full Advisory Council Meeting 3 in Winter 2026

- Special Advocate provided some further information about plans for the plenary meeting of the Advisory Council at the end of the year, where it is envisioned that members from all 7 Advisory Council pillars would be invited to come together in person in Dublin for a full meeting.
- 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.

Agenda Item: Next Steps

- Share information about the DNA tracing as well as the upcoming BITA Review when available
- Members to suggest items that they would like to discuss at the next meeting.

Follow ups

Action	Responsible	Status
Rachel to send on additional information to pillar • Rún- Ireland's (In)visible Buildings • Letter from Special Advocate to Taoiseach • A copy of the Taoiseach's most recent Apology • National Centre for Research and Remembrance (NCRR) • Special Advocate Office public statement on proposed development in Bessborough • Special Advocate Office press release on the State Apology Hallow unless meaningful	Special Advocate office	Completed



redress and supports are put in place for all survivors • Special Advocate office mailing list.		
Rachel to send on additional information to pillar • BITA review. People affected by legislation. • DNA policy when it's received.	Special Advocate office	Will send over when made available
Special Advocate to contact Department of Children, Disability and Equality in relation to updated re. policy and procedures for Tusla and Adoption Authority Ireland around DNA and Tracing.	Special Advocate	Ongoing- Awaiting Department Response

