

Special Advocate for Survivors Advisory Council

Meeting Note Meeting 1, Pillar 7 – Survivors living overseas 31 March 2026

Agenda item: Introductions

- Special Advocate and pillar members in attendance introduced themselves, shared some background information and further detail 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.

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

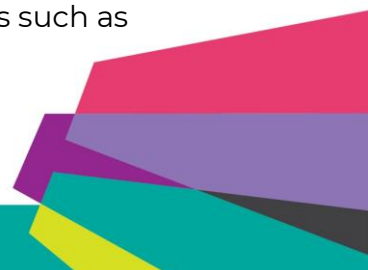
The following includes a summary of the key issues discussed at the meeting:

Issue 1: Records

- Pillar members shared their experience of applying for records and information from overseas. Many highlighted the difficulty and length of the record seeking process, including challenges with identifying initial pathways to apply for records, operational issues with record application processes, delays, redactions, poor communications from State bodies and Government Departments, lack of medical information and records. For people without supports or with literacy or digital poverty issues who are seeking to find their information, this is an even greater concern.
- The Special Advocate noted the review of the Birth Information and Tracing Act which is currently underway and that she would welcome the pillar's input into this process, when it is open for submissions.
- The significant challenges in communicating with religious and private organisations, and accessing records when these are held by private or religious bodies was particularly emphasised. These records must be handed over in full to the State. The Special Advocate referenced the Preservation Act passed in October 2024, which makes it illegal to destroy or move outside the State, these records and that religious orders must provide a full inventory to the National Archives. This is an important first step, but which needs to be built on.
- Many still have outstanding unanswered questions, despite years of searching for information and further supports and resourcing to assist people with their searches would be very welcome.
- It was noted that finding out information about family of origin (parents and siblings) and their own experiences of institutionalisation, can be very difficult to find out.
- Access to genetic/ family medical history and information was highlighted as an ongoing concern for overseas Survivors.

Issue 2: Redress

- The overseas health payment of 3000 euro included as part of recent open State redress schemes was described as '*paltry*'.
- The many unjust exclusions embedded in the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme were discussed, including the 180-day rule for children born in the institutions, and the ongoing exclusion of many institutions such as



Temple Hill. It is not fair or just to suggest that people under 180 days experienced less trauma than others.

- The impact of these exclusions on Survivors was highlighted. These have caused significant pain and harm to Survivors – and these exclusions were described as ridiculous and hurtful. Surprise was expressed during the meeting that the Irish State took this approach when designing the redress scheme, and it was hoped that this will be reviewed and rectified.
- The Special Advocate noted the upcoming Operational Review of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, and the survey currently under development which she would welcome the Advisory Council member's input on this.
- The recent legal challenges to the Redress Scheme were also noted.

Issue 5: Experiences of Adoption, Tracing and DNA

- Pillar members shared their own experiences of adoption, and of undertaking research into their birth and early life information, and tracing and in some cases reconnecting with family members.
- Discussion followed on tracing and search for family members, and complexities around this. It is unfortunately not always the case that connections and reconciliations with families of origin have a positive outcome, and this can be a challenging and emotional and life-changing process to negotiate, for all parties.
- DNA is a vital tool for many Survivors, in their search for relatives.
- Correspondence from State bodies which reveals sensitive / new information, or the health status of relatives highlighted as something which requires extreme care, and a trauma-informed care approach.

Issue 6: Memorialisation (Local, National and Overseas)

- Memorialisation, both at institutions across Ireland, and as part of the National Centre for Research and Remembrance
- It is extremely important to create a space which people can visit, reflect and remember. The National Centre will be a powerful statement and opportunity to 'tell our story'. There are many other museum or site of conscience projects which can be useful to consider approaches (such as the Holocaust Museum in New York).



- Pillar members discussed their own experiences over the years of returning to Ireland/ visiting institutions while trying to trace their own history. It was noted that this can be an emotionally overwhelming experience.
- It was noted that many institutions are in private ownership, or have been repurposed to another use. It was felt to be important that these sensitive Institutions around Ireland should have dedicated spaces for reflection and memorialisation which can be visited by Survivors and their family members. The Special Advocate noted recent news at Bessborough, the former mother and baby institution, with planning permission for housing developments granted by the Council and subsequent protests by Survivors and supporters.

Issue 7: Supports for Survivors living overseas

- Not always clear what supports or resources are available or applicable to Survivors living overseas, for example mental health or counselling supports for Survivors.
- It was highlighted that the supports required for Survivors living overseas may be different than for those living in Ireland, and some which are raised frequently by Ireland-based Survivors such as health and housing supports may not be as resonant. More work to understand these supports would be beneficial.

Issue: Issues affecting Survivors living overseas – eg Isolation, Relationship with Irish Identity

- The importance of being able to tell your story, and different ways to amplify Survivor issues and experiences was discussed. Pillar members highlighted some of their involvement in media projects, interviews, documentaries and books as part of this. The Special Advocate office would be happy to collate and circulate these links to other members.
- For overseas Survivors, isolation can be a significant concern.
- Irish Societies, Community groups and the network of Irish Embassies and Consulates overseas have an important role to play supporting Survivors in the Irish Diaspora. The Special Advocate outlined her engagement with Department of Foreign Affairs to date in relation to supports for Survivors living overseas, and will share with pillar members her submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs as part of the Global Irish Survey.
- The Special Advocate also noted that she will be speaking as part of the Global Irish Civic Forum on 30 April.



- Social Media groups can be an important tool and platform to build connections, share information and 'tell their story'.
- The Special Advocate referenced the Voices of Courage podcast initiative and will recirculate the podcast link for anyone interested.
- The loss of identity or connection with country of origin was highlighted, as well as associated challenges with attaining Irish citizenship or Irish passports.
- Pillar members shared their own personal approaches to telling their stories and experiences, and how to manage their journey over decades of searching for information – *"Leave the past in the past, but continue to fight the fight."* *"We get through, we are Survivors"*
- The importance of balancing righteous anger, with healing, empathy and reconciliation so that anger, exhaustion and stress doesn't consume one's entire life was discussed.

Agenda Item: Discussion about future meetings and 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.
- 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 also advised that she is currently drafting her second annual report, and would welcome further input from Advisory Council members on any additional important issues for inclusion.
- 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.



Meeting 2 in Summer 2026

- Special Advocate office will be in touch with pillar members regarding the scheduling of the next meeting, and to ask what agenda items pillar members would like to add 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 Dublin for a full meeting.
- There will be support for travel for attendees, and full information about this will be circulated to Advisory Council members to assist with their planning.
- 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 advised 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)

Agenda Item: Next Steps

- Special Advocate office will be in touch to share a note of this meeting, any follow up actions, and with more information about the date and details for next meeting and in person meeting.
- Share information about DCDE Consultation with Advisory Council members



Meeting Follow ups

Action	Responsible	Status
Confirmation of details for next meetings of pillar	Special Advocate office	
Send on additional information to pillar: • Department of Foreign Affairs Global Diaspora Directory • Submission to Department of Foreign Affairs by Special Advocate • Circulate information about books, documentaries (eg Missing Children, Banished Babies) • Podcast Link • Information on Mari Steed • Information on Rún Project and Map • Bessborough statement • Preservation of Records legislation • National Centre plans and information • Annual Report input	Special Advocate office	
Send on update on upcoming consultations / reviews • Update on Birth Information and Tracing review • Update on Mother and Baby Institution Payment Scheme operational review	Special Advocate office	