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Smyly's Aftercare Service: A History and a Celebration.

Review Commissioned by Smyly Trust Services.

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Aftercare: The support and services for young people who are leaving residential or foster care, after they reach the age of 18. It can begin as early as 16 up to 21, or age 23 if the person is in full time education. *Tusla - Child and Family Agency.*

Introduction.

It is pertinent to declare the writer's interest and connection to the subject matter. As the Manager of a Smyly Trust residential centre in 1986, I was instrumental in Smyly's initial development of their Aftercare Service. Later in the role of Director of Services, I was responsible for overseeing the running and development of their residential centres and aftercare service. This of course bestows a degree of subjectivity on my part. That said, I have strived to be objective, while remaining true to the impact of the closure on the people involved.

At a meeting with Tusla Child and Family Agency in February 2023, conducted by Microsoft Teams, Smyly Trust Services were informed that their Aftercare Service, in existence for 24 years, was no longer required. The Tusla Area Manager stated that they now had the capacity to meet the needs of all care leavers in the Dublin South / Dublin South East and Wicklow. There was no discussion on the matter as the decision had already been taken. Smyly Trust were given six months to close their Aftercare Service. Smyly's Chairperson and their Director of Services were shocked by this decision and the manner in which it was communicated. They were also informed that the three Aftercare staff affected by the closure were Smyly's staff and not Tusla's responsibility. The imminent closure of the service was subsequently communicated to service users and to staff, management and board of Smyly Trust Services.

On fuller reflection, Smyly Trust felt that recognition and acknowledgement of almost a quarter of a century's work was merited. This Review is a record of the history of Smyly's Aftercare Service and a celebration of its achievements. The review tracks the changes in the service over time and the ground-breaking developments of aftercare in the wider context of social care. It is informed by interviews with staff, management and service users, access to Smyly Trust documents and correspondence and to the relevant literature on the development of Aftercare over the period.

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History of Smyly's Aftercare Service

1985 - 1999

Smyly Trust Services is a voluntary care organisation comprising two residential centres and an aftercare service. The residential centres have provided medium to long-term care for children and young people since 1968. A central objective of the caring task has been to prepare young people for the practical and emotional demands of leaving care and to equip them for independent living. It has long been recognised that a dedicated service to support and guide care leavers is necessary. Voluntary organisations in the field have led the way in responding to the needs of this vulnerable group. As a provider of residential care in the south Dublin area, Smyly Trust Services began this journey in the 1980's, due to the initiative of their residential childcare staff. Young people who had left Smyly's care were invited back to visit and staff maintained contact, calling on ex-residents in their rented accommodation and hostels. While this was beneficial to the young people in their transition, it was clearly insufficient and not sustainable in the longer term. Many did not have family members to support them and struggled to maintain accommodation, find work or access further education.

In 1985, the manager of one of the residential centres wrote to the Housing Department of Dun Laoghaire County Council, seeking accommodation for care leavers. This appeal was successful and a two bedroom flat was allocated. The flat, located in central Dun Laoghaire was in poor condition. It was made habitable by the work of care staff and volunteers. In 1986 the first resident moved in. Over the years, the flat was an option as required, for male care leavers from Smyly Trust residential centres. A designated residential childcare staff would continue work with the young person in the flat. Overall responsibility for the flat was undertaken by an ad-hoc committee of managers and care staff at Smyly's residential centres.

The Child Care Act 1991 brought considerable changes for children in care. Tellingly it empowered Health Boards to provide aftercare, while it did not *require* them to do so. The lack of aftercare was increasingly on the social care agenda. Concerns were heightened with the publication of a study (Kelleher & Kelleher, 2000) indicating that 32% of young people who had left care in Dublin had experienced homelessness in the six months since leaving care. Smyly Trust raised the issue of funding with the Eastern Health Board (EHB) at successive budget meetings. In 1994, they submitted a proposal seeking funding to set up an Aftercare Service. The EHB personnel listened sympathetically, though no funding was forthcoming. The fact that Smylys were effectively providing an ad hoc service for their care leavers, in a flat that they had provided put them in a strong position to pursue their proposal. Funding was eventually made available to formally establish an Aftercare Service. One condition to this was that the service be made available to other male residential care leavers in the Dun Laoghaire area. This was readily agreed.

In September 1999, Smyly's Aftercare Service was opened with a full time Aftercare Worker. An office/resource base was established in central Dun Laoghaire, which was close to the flat. It was the first Aftercare Service for male care leavers in the East Coast and Wicklow, areas 1, 2 and 10 (later to become an Integrated Service Area). A service for female care leavers

had been established in 1993 (Aislinn Aftercare; initiated by the Sisters of Charity). Leaflets were circulated to residential centres and social work offices in the area. Word spread quickly and for the next few years the service was never less than busy.

2000 - 2005

In the early months, the Aftercare Worker visited a number of aftercare projects in Dublin and Belfast. The service opted to follow the Belfast model of aftercare provision. This proved most beneficial in establishing policy and procedure guidelines and formulating the initial programmes to meet the needs of service users. A care leaver from each of Smyly's residential centres moved into the Aftercare flat, to begin their 18 months preparation for independent living. Within the first year, there was contact from 18 ex-residents of Smyly's seeking assistance on a range of issues. Contacts were now established with Community Care Personnel, Social Welfare Offices and landlords in the area. There were also a growing number of referrals from Social Workers seeking accommodation in the Aftercare flat and/or an aftercare service for their young people ageing out of residential and foster care.

Many studies published around this time addressed the need for aftercare services. The Focus Ireland Report '*Left Out On Their Own*' (2000) and the Report of the '*An Overview of Youth and Adolescence in Ireland*' (2007) highlighted the link between being in care and youth homelessness. In the next few years the Aftercare Service grew exponentially. While the initial two residents placed in the flat were from Smyly's centres, the subsequent five residents came from other residential centres and from foster care. In November 2001, the managers of Smyly's and Aislinn Aftercare were invited by the Irish Foster Care Association to speak to foster parents. In recognition of the inequity that existed, Smyly's and the Health Service Executive (HSE) expanded their brief to include all young people in state care. An increasing number of referrals now came from foster care. By 2003 the service had worked with 46 young people since opening.

In 2003 the service underwent a full inspection by the Registration and Inspection Service. The subsequent report strongly endorsed the value of the work done and commended the service. The following year the Social Service Inspectorate called for Aftercare to become a duty of Health Boards. By now the Irish Aftercare Network (Smyly's Aftercare being a founder member) had provided a platform for issues relating to aftercare. At this time the Aftercare Service had consolidated its work to provide three distinct services, Accommodation, Outreach and Drop-in.

Accommodation

The Aftercare Service provided two residential places in the Dun Laoghaire flat. Residents entered into a formal licence agreement for 12 to 18 months and engaged in a personal programme involving independence training and one-to-one work over the course of their stay. Continued support was offered to young people, post discharge.

Outreach

The Outreach service provided support to young people who had made the transition from care and were in private rented/supported accommodation. This support involved liaison with other agencies/professionals including, the probation service, housing departments and education providers. Additionally, support was provided in connection with job applications, court appearances and sourcing financial aid or grants. As part of the outreach programme young people attended one-to-one sessions to assess progress on a personal action plan. The outreach service could offer financial and practical support to service users attending college or engaged in a FAS recognised apprenticeship. The development of this service was made possible by a six-month secondment, facilitated by a local residential care centre.

Drop-in Service

Provided information, advice, guidance and support on a range of relevant issues for care leavers. These included: welfare rights, job-seeking, CV preparation, accommodation, plus phone and computer access. The service also offered assistance to residential care centres and foster carers, in drawing up a pre-leaving care programme for young people. It was located in the resource base and service users could make an appointment or just drop in.

Given the growing demands for the service, Smyly Trust submitted a proposal for an additional Aftercare Worker in 2002. Funding for this post was finally agreed in 2005. The additional worker came into the post in November. In January of that year the Health Boards had been replaced by the Health Service Executive (HSE).

2006 - 2010

There were substantial developments in the service delivered in the next few years. The new staff member took a lead in integrating a revised Needs Assessment Programme which furthered the individual work with service users. There was a renewed focus on training with the flat used as a training facility for young people in independent life skills programmes. Staff training included a course on nutrition with Aislinn Aftercare and Smyly Trust residential staff. Staff also completed courses on racism and intercultural studies. Around this time the emerging needs of foreign nationals were coming to the attention of the service.

In addition to the Aftercare flat, the service was given a one year lease on an apartment in Killiney, this lease was later extended to 3 years. This increased the residential capacity to three care leavers. In 2008 the service was tasked with tracking care leavers to avail of funding from the Education Finance Board. This proved to be the busiest period to date. The service needed to suspend (on hold) all new referrals as it was completely overstretched. It opened again in October and the referrals flooded in. A Smyly's residential staff member was made available to help with the workload on an ad hoc basis.

Aftercare Service Users (Smyly's Aftercare Quarterly Statistics May 2009).

Component of Service	Number of young people accessing service
Residential	3
Preparation for Leaving Care/ Outreach	11
Resource / Drop -n	12
On Hold (can access the service at any point up to the age of 21)	23
New Referrals	13
Cases Closing	31
Total	93

The end of this period saw a number of significant developments in the provision of aftercare at a national level. Not least of these was the Ryan Report (2009) which was pivotal in the publication of a National Aftercare Policy in 2011. A number of recommendations specific to Aftercare were made, one of which was the allocation of ten new Aftercare posts. Smyly's had reason for optimism as they had sought funding for an additional Aftercare Worker to meet the ever increasing demands on the service. In 2011, the service had received the highest number of referrals since opening. Their application was rejected.

From the inception of the Aftercare Service there had been a cooperative approach between Smyly's and Aislinn Aftercare. This sharing was at an operational level and in the development of policies and procedures for Aftercare. In 2005, a formal proposal for a merger of these services was submitted to the HSE. This document presented compelling reasons for the merger, outlining inefficiencies, inequities, and duplication of resources in the status quo. In a series of meetings with the HSE, both services detailed the distinct benefits that would be gained by the merger. For successive years the HSE, while in agreement with the proposal, declined to sign off on the plan.

2011 - 2015

In 2012, a successful application was made to Southside Partnership to secure a Tus (government employment initiative) one year work placement. The applicant had a background in psychiatric nursing and social care training. This placement was extended by availing of JobBridge, another government backed internship scheme. The applicant availed of further in-service training and was a key resource in enabling the service maintain its capacity. The

following year a staff member's maternity leave was covered by a HSE secondment arrangement.

Drop-in and Outreach Services remained busy with the highest number of referrals for the past few years. Ten service users were engaged in further education, the largest number to date. The primary issue for service users continued to be finding suitable and affordable accommodation, a big loss being the shortage of supported lodgings in the area and the removal of the traditional bedsits from the market. Many landlords were refusing to accept tenants who were in receipt of community welfare rent allowance.

Within this period, Aftercare gained much attention at a national level. Groups such as National Network of Aftercare Workers, Irish Aftercare Forum, Children's Rights Alliance, EPIC, Care Leavers Ireland and Action for Aftercare made their voices heard. Following publication of the Ryan Report (2009) and culminating with the Aftercare National Policy, it was a time of great change. Aftercare was no longer an afterthought. The culmination of this was enshrined in Section 45 of the Child Care (Amendment Bill) 2015, which imposed a duty on Tusla to provide an assessment of need, as aftercare plan and resources to meet the needs identified therein to those who met the eligibility criteria. Aftercare was now on a statutory footing. These developments were welcomed by all Aftercare services and practitioners.

In response to the Ryan Report (2009) the government issued a 99 point implementation plan. This was instrumental in the establishment of Tusla in 2014. All the HSE's Children's Services were then subsumed into Tusla Child and Family Agency. Aislinn Aftercare now became a Tusla service. The Smyly/Aislinn partnership had already developed a comprehensive needs assessment programme and Aftercare plans in line with the National Aftercare Policy (Tusla). A Central Referral Committee was established and Smyly's service was now open to female care leavers. The following year Smyly's Aftercare and Aislinn Aftercare partnership, was formally established and incorporated into Tusla's Integrated Service Area of Dublin South / Dublin South East and Wicklow.

In the Autumn of 2015, Smyly Trust Services undertook an organisational review. Much had changed in the 20 years since their last review. The review from 2015 explores a number of innovative ways of modifying the current services to meet changing needs. It also raises concern regarding the erosion of the organisation's independence across the Smyly's three services. It calls for a clear statement to Tusla that the Aftercare Service should remain within the ownership of Smyly Trust Services and that a separate stream of funding from the ISA's Aftercare budget, be pursued to facilitate this. It was also feared that the therapeutic community treatment informing the practice of their residential centres was also being eroded, with various examples of how the service's autonomy was being diminished. In the light of future developments, this conclusion was prescient.

A new departure for the Aftercare Service was the demand made by the influx of foreign nationals. A small number of non-Irish care leavers had availed of the service in recent years. Foreign nationals now constituted approximately 36% of referrals. The later years of this period saw the beginning of a national accommodation crisis, marked by a shortage of private rental accommodation and alarming rates of rent increase. Finding somewhere to live had long been the greatest challenge for those leaving state care. This was now almost insurmountable. The last 3 years of this period had seen the largest number of service users accessing single night homeless accommodation in Dublin city centre since the Aftercare Service was set up.

2016 - 2020

In 2016, one in four care leavers was discharged to homelessness, according to the homeless agencies reports. An earlier quoted study (Kelleher & Kelleher, 2000) found that 32% of young people who had left care in Dublin had experienced homelessness in the six months since leaving care. Given the national crisis, there were significant developments in homeless services in this period. There was now an increasing number of care leavers being discharged into homeless services. Many service users of Smyly's Aftercare refused to use single night homeless accommodation in inner city Dublin. They were instead opting to pay for private hostels, sofa surfing or sleeping rough. Smyly's Aftercare staff spent much of their time helping service users access homeless accommodation and assisting them in the transition. Service users reported in detail their experiences of homelessness. This move was traumatic, as their years in care and aftercare had not prepared them for the culture of homeless living. Staff now briefed service users on the fundamentals of keeping themselves and their belongings safe (sleeping with your phone in your underpants, shoes in your pillowcase). They also provided guidance on avoiding the illicit drug and excessive drinking cultures that are prevalent among a large number of the homeless population.

In 2016, it was also a year of staff changes in the service, as a full-time post became a job share post and the three-year internship came to an end. The service now consisted of an Aftercare Manager and two job-share Aftercare Workers. A staff member's maternity leave presented difficulties, as Tusla would not facilitate the necessary cover to maintain the service delivery. Some service users had to be reassigned to other aftercare providers. It was necessary to manage an already stretched budget to employ some ex-staff members to meet service delivery needs. The Aftercare team began to avail of a Therapeutic Consultant who had worked with Smyly's residential staff for many years. This support was greatly valued by staff. The National Aftercare Policy came up for review this year and as part of that process, Tusla facilitated consultation workshops across the country. They also acknowledged the valuable contribution made by voluntary organisations to aftercare provision and included these organisations in the process.

During 2017 and 2018 the number of care leavers accessing the Residential and Outreach services remained steady. The Drop-in numbers were on the rise.

Contacts made to Smyly's Aftercare Service 2019

Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
17 Drop in	28 Drop in	25 Drop in	66 Drop in
25 By phone	19 By phone	45 By phone	38 By phone
Total 42	Total 47	Total 70	Total 104

The steady increase was due in part, to a growing number of foreign nationals accessing the service. Many shared the same basic needs as care leavers relating to accommodation,

education and welfare issues. Some needed assistance in accessing homeless accommodation. Others sought help in applying for Irish citizenship or looking to have their status recognised by the state, in addition to family reunification applications.

The Covid-19 pandemic arrived and 2020 became a year of survival. Marginalised groups were impacted more than most. The Aftercare Service sought innovative ways to provide support. Staff continued to meet up with their respective service users while maintaining social distancing and safety protocols. The periods of lockdown called for a heavy reliance on social media. While this allowed the service to continue, the isolation experienced by service users became a priority. Contact by phone and zoom sessions were frequent, along with outdoor meetings.

In 2020, the flat was refurbished for the third time since the beginning of its use as transitional accommodation. This was undertaken by Smyly's staff who took responsibility for ongoing maintenance. The service had hoped to celebrate its 21st anniversary that year. Covid determined otherwise.

2021 - 2023

The impact of Covid-19 continued into this period. This is reflected in the quarterly statistics in a year of lockdowns and restricted movement. Phone calls mainly concerned accommodation and Social Welfare payments.

Contacts made to Smyly's Aftercare Service 2021

Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
15 Drop in	8 Drop in	10 Drop in	28 Drop in
65 By phone	73 By phone	58 By phone	26 By phone
Total 80	Total 81	Total 68	Total 54

The shortage of suitable housing and unaffordable rents in the private sector led to ever increasing homelessness, especially in the Dublin area. Increasing numbers of the Aftercare service users were now among these statistics. In 2021, the local authorities introduced the Housing Assistance Programme (HAP), plus a specific homeless HAP payment for young people transitioning from state care at risk of homelessness. While this scheme had certain shortcomings it was a significant improvement on the rent supplement scheme. A small number of service users in the local area benefited from this, two of whom accepted offers of local authority housing.

The Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), which allowed social housing bodies to purchase properties and rent them to care leavers, provided accommodation for two service users in 2022. A further application was submitted for this service in 2023. In general this scheme has worked well. The Peter McVerry Trust was particularly successful in establishing a number of forever homes for young care leavers across the country. It was less successful in the Dun Laoghaire area where very few properties were available. Those properties identified were generally above the purchase cap allowance by DLRCC.

Smyly's transitional accommodation became an ever more valuable resource for care leavers in the Integrated Service Area. Tusla had now acquired a flat similar to Smyly's, on the same road. Overall numbers in the Drop-in service remained steady in 2022, although walk-ins were lower. The average quarterly number of phone contacts per quarter was 70, while the walk-in number was nine. Covid lockdowns had resulted in a societal shift towards remote communication. Many of the contacts were from family members or ex foster carers concerned for the service user's mental health and withdrawal during the lockdowns. The service continued to offer a level of support, conscious that it was the only point of contact for many care leavers.

In February 2022, a serious health condition resulted in the Aftercare Manager's long-term absence. Efforts were made to secure cover for him. This was refused by Tusla. The manager's post remained vacant for the duration of his absence. Friends and colleagues were much relieved, when following successful treatment he was back to work in September. For the period of his absence an Aftercare Worker was acting manager. This facilitated keeping the service going at capacity despite 50% staff shortage. This year recorded the highest number of service users engaged in education/training (67%), secondary, post leaving and university, while 9% continued in apprenticeships.

The final statistics for Smyly's Aftercare Service are for the first quarter of 2023, when the number accessing Drop-in was 28 and Outreach 25. In the same period there were 1,128 people between the ages of 18 to 24 in emergency accommodation in Dublin. The percentage of care leavers in this figure was now in the region of 40% (Focus Ireland, Peter McVerry Trust).

Sense of an Ending

On the 2nd of February 2023, Smyly Trust Services were requested by Tusla to attend a meeting. The meeting was conducted by Microsoft Teams, with the stated purpose to discuss Aftercare and the requested absence of the Aftercare Manager. Opening the meeting, the Tusla Area Manager thanked everyone for joining and set out the context for the meeting, making the following points:

- There is a trend that the number of children in care has reduced and will continue to reduce this year.
- There are fewer young people requiring Aftercare support.
- Tusla have been building their own capacity to the point where they can manage in-house.
- They no longer need Smyly's Aftercare Service and no longer need to outsource aftercare.
- This was no reflection on the quality of Smyly's Aftercare service but rather that the needs have changed.

- Smyly's service was given six months to close.

Smyly's Chairperson asked if there could be discussion on this or had the decision been made. The Area Manager confirmed that the decision had been reached. Smyly's Director of Services pointed out that there were a large number of current and past service users that the service continues to support. Smyly's Chairperson asked how this might be best managed for service users and staff. The Area Manager stated that Tusla would now take over service users' cases and that the Aftercare staff team in question were Smyly's responsibility.

There was further discussion on issues relating to funding, staffing, management of Aftercare flats in Dun Laoghaire and timeframes to consider. Tusla Area Manager and Principal Aftercare Social Worker then left the meeting. Smyly Trust and remaining Tusla personnel dealt with other business of the meeting.

Marking Service Closure

A gathering was held in June to mark the closure of the service. It was attended by many current and past service users, aftercare and residential staff, board members and a range of professional and personal supporters of the Aftercare Service. Speeches were made and strong emotions expressed. The Board of Management of Smyly Trust Services conveyed the sense of powerlessness felt by the decision to terminate the service, which was completely outside their control. Moreover, it is at a time when Smyly's strategic plan sought to expand their aftercare provision to meet the increasing needs.

My interviews and conversations with Smyly Trust management, staff and a member of their board evoked strong feelings, from sadness and resignation to anger and suspicion. There was a sense of something of value and worth being lost, discarded even. The attachment that the Smyly Trust and staff had for the work of the service was clear. As was the value that care leavers over the years had placed on the service. This was clearly voiced by the many service users that attended the gathering held in June, to mark the closure of the Aftercare Service. This view had been supported over time by inspectors, social workers, parents, and social care professionals. Tusla had also acknowledged the valuable contribution the voluntary providers have made to aftercare.

Given the overwhelming regard in which the Aftercare Service was held, prompted the question of why Tusla had taken the decision to close the service, notwithstanding the reasons given to Smyly's. This question yielded various comments, observations and opinions. Much of which was in the realms of speculation. Although some salient points emerge when considering a wider view.

It was the view of Smyly's management that the fundamental rationale for Tusla's decision did not stand up, as Tusla did not have the capacity to meet the Aftercare needs in the Integrated Service Area. This first came to attention on the handover of Smyly's Aftercare cases. At the handover of Smyly's Aftercare files (27), Tusla's Aftercare Manager remarked on the volume of cases. He advised that he would have to prioritise and place the majority of Smyly's Aftercare cases in Duty, (on-holds). Smyly's Aftercare had understood that Tusla would allocate their cases for active support. This had not happened.

Moreover Tusla's **Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services 2023-2026** refers to an 8% increase in young people in receipt of aftercare services at the end of 2022 compared to 2019.

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

Tusla Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services 2023 – 2026

Smyly's Aftercare staff further questioned how Tusla would respond to the 28 service users to Drop In, as Tusla did not have a similar open door policy. They also point to the loss to service users of stable and supportive relationships, built over time by a professional, experienced and committed team. The loss of the transitional accommodation option, which has been a cornerstone of support to care leavers over many years was a serious concern. Will Tusla replace this?

Given the various questions and suspicions expressed as to the reason for Tusla's decision, the author posed the question: *How did Tusla come to make their decision?*

The following observations were put forward as possibly influencing the decision:

- Tusla's insistence that Smyly's Aftercare Service would set aside the normal referral protocols in order to admit an emergency placement into the Dun Laoghaire flat; this had been contentious. The placement eventually proceeded, though it was not successful.
- Tusla had challenged the practice of Smyly's Aftercare offering a service to foreign nationals. These service users had met the criteria for eligibility for an aftercare service, many being care leavers from residential or foster care.
- When the aftercare service was first funded it was a new venture. Finance was organised by allocating an agreed additional amount to Smyly's annual residential budget. When Tusla took over the funding they took issue with this. The point was constantly raised at the annual Service Level Agreement meetings. Tusla personnel stated that Aftercare should be paid for by the Integrated Service Area (ISA) budget. Smyly Trust Services had no difficulty with this. It remained for Tusla to address the transfer. This never happened. There seemed to be a reluctance from the ISA to take on Smyly's Aftercare Service as they did not have sufficient funds.

The points above may have engendered a certain discontent on the part of Tusla, influencing their decision to close Smyly's Aftercare Service. It may also have had a wider significance concerning relationships with the voluntary sector, regarding service provision. This is the contention of Children's Residential and Aftercare Voluntary Associations (CRAVA), a recently formed association of 14 voluntary organisations. This group contends that Tusla has not demonstrated a commitment to meaningful engagement to work in partnership with voluntary providers. Moreover, Tusla's recent Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services for Young People 2023 - 2026, makes no reference whatsoever to the role of voluntary providers, currently or in the future.

Many groups and organisations have played their part over decades, in advancing Aftercare as a rights-based provision, now enshrined in legislation. Smyly Trust Services were pioneers in this development, being attuned to the needs of care leavers, as identified by their front-line staff. This was followed by persistent lobbying that resulted in the inception of their Aftercare Service.

Tusla has acknowledged the quality and consistency of Smyly Trust's contribution to aftercare provision. More importantly, those whom it served, speak of it with great respect and gratitude. The journey and achievements of that service and its unexpected and abrupt ending is now on the record. Smyly's Aftercare Service was formally closed in August 2023.

The Board of Smyly Trust Services wish to thank and acknowledge the work of Alan Hendrick (Aftercare Manager) and Linda Nixon, Lynn Holt and Marianne Mulreid (Aftercare Workers) for their dedication to Smyly's Aftercare Service and their commitment to care leavers for the past 24 years.

Summary

In this review of Smyly's Aftercare Services, I have outlined the origins of the service, its foundation and the scope of its reach, over its 24 year existence. Over this period the review tracks the changes in Aftercare provision, from a barely considered social need, to a statutory entitlement of care leavers. I have detailed the range of the service's activities and the number of care leavers it has served. Also the service's contribution to National Aftercare Policies. The review details the circumstances of the ending of the service by Tusla and the aftermath of the sudden closure in terms of the effect on the management and staff of Smyly Trust Services. This account stands as a record of the existence and achievements of Smyly's Aftercare Service.

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