

**Irish
Foster Care
Association**



Annual Report

2020

We were delighted to welcome Uachtarán na hÉireann, Michael D Higgins, to launch our conference in 2020.

President Higgins paid tribute to the Irish Foster Care Association and to the thousands of families across the country who have taken the decision to open their homes to provide loving care for the many children who are placed in the care of the State. He paid tribute to foster families and thanked them:

“for the light of hope and possibility that you shine into the lives of vulnerable children by giving them that greatest of all gifts – the knowledge that they are part of a loving family.”

“the decision to become a foster parent is not an easy one, but may I say, as President of Ireland, it is such a meaningful act of citizenship. The child you will be opening your lives and hearts to is a greatly vulnerable one. Despite their young age, their life experiences will often have been tough, complex and sometimes harrowing, thus requiring deep wells of compassion, patience and generosity from their foster family.”

President Higgins (2020)



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Trustees

Raymond Nolan, Chairperson; Mark Turner, Pat O'Flynn, Vice Chairperson; Neil Whoriskey, Company Secretary; Ailish O'Donnell, Treasurer; Rita Martin; Mary Hickey; Rick Panza; Inna Ryan; Jan Culley; Sandra Duffy; Tom Casey; Paula Farrell

Chairperson's Statement



Dear Members,

It is a great honour and privilege to write this address, my first as Chairperson of IFCA. I follow in the steps of our previous Chairperson, Mark Turner, who held this role for three years and who carried out his duties with integrity and honesty, and provided great leadership to IFCA, and I would like to thank him for his contribution to IFCA.

2020 was an extraordinary year for everyone and particularly for those involved in foster care in Ireland. In March 2020 our world turned upside down and we had to think creatively how we would manage this new normal of life in a pandemic. IFCA responded quickly to the challenges of the advent of Covid-19, establishing a subcommittee to the Board to respond to the continuous challenges which it presented. I would like to acknowledge with thanks our directors who contributed to this work. IFCA organised itself by moving all services online to support our members and the wider fostering community. A particular challenge which was surmounted by our management and staff was to move our annual national conference online.

We were delighted to see our members respond positively to these changes. I would like to thank all staff and volunteers for their effort and commitment in times of difficulty.

I am particularly pleased to see the launch of our National Advocacy Service which supports foster families in times of distress when experiencing complex issues. We now have four Advocates and an Advocacy Co-ordinator working in this area and it is clear from the number of referrals to the service that this is a much-needed service for members.

IFCA now has a new brand identity which reflects the open communication and collaboration between the Irish Foster Care Association and our members and stakeholders, the strong design and colours effectively positions us as the organisation that supports and promotes foster care in Ireland.

My vision for IFCA is the continued growth of services to support foster carers in the valuable role which they offer to our society. IFCA is also committed to continued collaboration with our stakeholders, without whom we could not achieve our goals.

During 2020, our key priorities were to continue to deliver our 2019-2021 strategic plan, of which a key focus is to deliver services to our members and the wider fostering community.

I would like to thank Chief Executive, Catherine Bond, her management team, all the staff and volunteers of the Association for their commitment to the Association. I would also like to thank my fellow Board members for all their time and expertise that they give to the organization. I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to all our partners and stakeholder that have assisted IFCA throughout the year. It is this commitment by all associated with IFCA that allows us to continue to offer vital services to our members and stakeholders in the fostering community.

Raymond Nolan.

Raymond Nolan

Chief Executive Review



We entered 2020 with great plans for the year, building on the successes of 2019. New volunteers for the National Helpline were recruited and our new and exciting Connectivity programme was making great strides in supporting foster carers and the fostering community. Fostering Fortnight was launched by Cork's Lord Mayor, John Sheehan, along with the launch of IFCA's new National Advocacy service, and plans for services were in train.

All of this came to an abrupt end with the recognition by the World Health Organisation of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and the public health guidelines and restrictions introduced to prevent the spread of the virus.

The IFCA team began to work remotely and foster families found themselves navigating new territories with home schooling, being creative to ensure that children in foster care maintained contact with their families, and social workers supporting foster families from a distance. The commitment demonstrated by everyone to support children in foster care was noteworthy.

IFCA's office remained open throughout and continued to be at the end of the phone for members and those seeking information, and thanks is extended to our administrators who made this possible.

We quickly adapted to home working, home schooling and remote contact and became familiar with the workings of Zoom to keep us all connected.

IFCA's activity for 2020 is testament to how we can all adapt to new experiences, (a regular experience for children in care), and services continued to be offered to members and those who support IFCA's work.

The National Helpline continued to support callers, recording 1,568 calls inward and outward. IFCA's new Advocacy Service has proved to be an invaluable service to those families who need support when they are involved in very complex issues in fostering. One hundred and thirty two cases were referred to the National Advocacy service as the year progressed, demonstrating the need for this service.

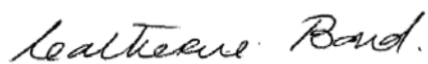
Support for foster carers during 2020 was critical and IFCA responded to many concerned calls about children's family visits & contact with their birth family. IFCA and Tusla worked in collaboration to ensure that children remained in contact with their family, using creative strategies, whilst ensuring the safety of foster families.

IFCA also liaised with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Tusla to support the introduction of emergency legislation for the assessment of foster carers for the placement of children in foster care on an emergency basis, if their existing foster care household fell ill with Covid-19.

Learning events and IFCA's Annual National Conference were hosted online. This new way of connecting, created a great opportunity for members to join in these events. We were delighted to see so many new faces at these events.

IFCA's 2020 Annual Report reflects the work of the organisation in response to supporting the fostering community. It highlights the unique needs and challenges which were presented to foster carers and children in care as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and how everyone supported each other during this period.

We would like to thank our funders and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth who provide great support to IFCA's work.

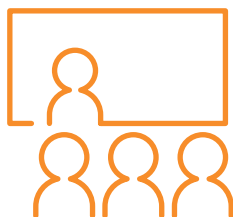
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Bond". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Catherine" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the surname "Bond".

Catherine Bond

A Year in Numbers

269

attended online training



June & July

busiest months for the Helpline

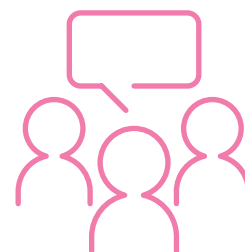
1,568

totals calls (in and out bound)
to the Helpline



132

cases referred to
National Advocacy Service



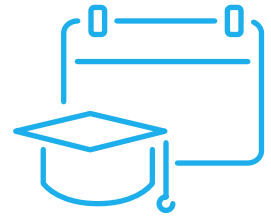
68

members attended
Breathing Space



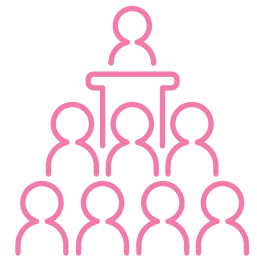
43

training sessions



123

adults at National
Conference Online



2

Foster Journals



1

new website, logo
and branding



Advocacy

IFCA advocates for our members in several ways, directly with government departments, Tusla and State Agencies, and through collaboration with other national organisations with issues of advocacy in common.

As we entered Covid-19 restrictions informed by government public health guidelines, foster families and children in foster care encountered new and challenging experiences as the weeks progressed. Home schooling was a new experience for many, which brought about pressures on foster families and children, maintaining the boundaries of being both foster parent and teacher. For some families, this pressure resulted in calls to IFCA's National Helpline, where foster families felt the strain of having to meet these new demands. This was conveyed to Tusla, who responded by requesting social workers to offer higher levels of support to foster carers. Some fostering teams contacted foster cares weekly by phone, and this was welcomed.

As the weeks ensued, with evolving and restrictive public health guidelines, family visits & contact became the next challenge for many. IFCA liaised closely with the CEO and management of Tusla to identify ways to support children's family visits & contact during lockdown, whilst balancing the health and safety of foster families and meeting the needs of foster children to remain in contact with their families. Tusla in collaboration with IFCA, agreed guidance for family visits & contact in March 2020, reflecting the ever-changing environment in which we found ourselves.

The risk that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs might be disbanded during the discussions to form a government in 2020, raised concerns for organisations who lobbied for the formation of this Department initially. This brought together collaborations of organisations to seek the Department's retention, of which IFCA was one. The importance of having a department dedicated to upholding the rights of children is essential, particularly for those who are in the care of the State. IFCA lobbied individually and collectively for the retention of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and welcomed its retention as a dedicated government department for children and youth.

Prior to the formation of the new Government, IFCA lobbied the then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, and opposition parties to include support for foster care in its Programme for Government. IFCA was successful in achieving this commitment. The 2020 Programme for Government, Our Shared Vision, offers a government commitment to the importance of foster care, explicitly stating *"Support the ongoing development of fostering services across the country"*, p81.

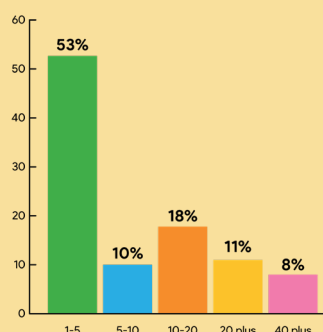
The renamed, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, consulted with IFCA along with other statutory and non-statutory organisations about a proposal to introduce a dual role allocated social worker for stable foster care placements in late 2020. This consultation continued into early 2021 with IFCA holding focus groups amongst our members. The outcome of the consultation was to inform the Department of some of the views and reservations of foster carers to this proposal, and this project is currently on hold.

In late December, IFCA with a collaboration of professionals involved in the promotion of educational outcomes for children in care had correspondence published in the Irish Times which highlighted this issue. This collaborative group also made representations to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This issue will continue to be a focus for IFCA.

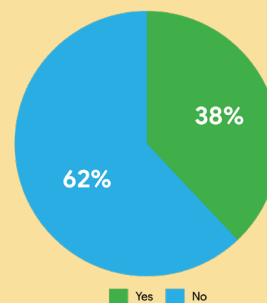
IFCA utilises member surveys, helpline information, regional gatherings and other member interactions to inform our advocacy work with key stakeholders.

We asked our members how they believe fostering can change lives, and this is what they told us...

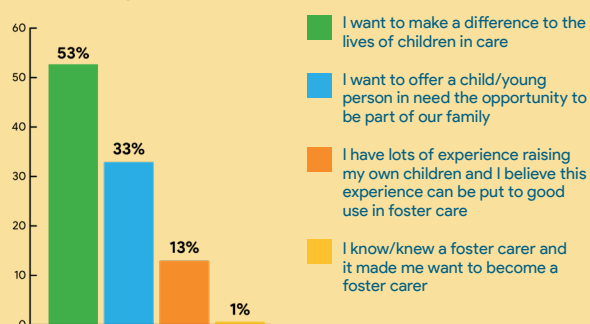
How many children have you fostered?



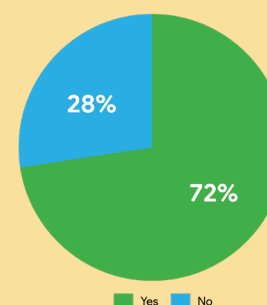
Are you caring for a foster child with a diagnosed disability?



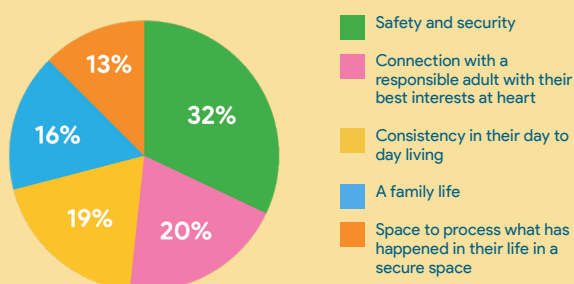
What makes you continue to foster?



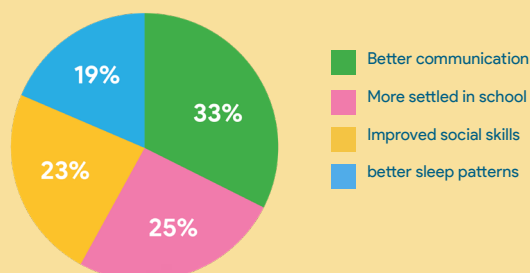
Would you recommend fostering to another?



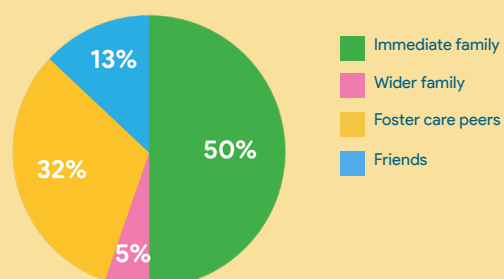
What do you think the benefits of foster care are for children/young people in care?



What changes have you seen in your foster child/young person after time spent in foster care?



Where do you receive informal, practical and emotional support in your fostering role?



Services Overview





National Helpline Service

In January 2020 the Helpline was an active hub of engagement, supporting callers and liaising with the new Advocacy Service. The recruitment of eight new volunteers to the Helpline also contributed to the National Helpline plans. This all came to a halt in March of 2020 when 'lockdown' came into effect due to Covid-19. Staff commenced working remotely and the Helpline was reconfigured so that it was up and running remotely. A priority for IFCA was the continuity of service to the foster care community.

To keep our volunteers actively engaged we held weekly meetings and updates along with ongoing training. Seven of our volunteers graduated in an online course in Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills Practices and all of our volunteers engaged in ongoing training and workshops throughout the year. To ensure that our volunteers remained supported, a workshop facilitated by Marianne Dwyer, Psychotherapist, offered volunteers a chance to come together again to reconnect following the summer break. We are very grateful for the work and support of our volunteers throughout 2020.

2020 saw new and emergent queries coming to the Helpline in relation to the challenges of Covid-19 and how this was impacting placements. Amongst the key themes were Family Visits & Contact and Allegations and Placement Breakdowns. Surprisingly, many callers contacted IFCA to say that they were doing well during lockdown and there was a sense of security in being cocooned in the first lockdown. However, as the year progressed, callers to the Helpline sought clarity on arrangements for engagement with family visits & contact. This uncertainty proved to be very challenging for carers and their families who were not vaccinated and for those who were at risk.

These emergent issues were highlighted with Tusla who liaised with IFCA on the development of a family visits & contact risk assessment protocol and which included a section which clearly denoted the voice of the foster carer. This risk assessment played a vital part in assessing

if family visits & contact went ahead or not and identified supports to be put in place to support children's family visits & contact.

Family visits & contact continued to be an issue for foster carers throughout lockdown. Issues arising focussed on foster carers not knowing about or being included in risk assessments. This proved challenging for foster carers who were concerned about the impact on their families health and family members who had underlying medical conditions.

Foster carers also continued to call the Helpline in relation to allegations made against them and requiring support. Support sought in respect of allegations made against foster carers was responded to by IFCA's National Advocacy Service.

An underlying theme in respect of placement breakdowns identified that these situations arose where there was a lack of direction and support to the foster family leading to crisis situations. Foster carers confirmed early intervention and support for the family and young person would have greatly improved the situation.

As the year drew to a close, it became evident that remote working would continue. IFCA invested in a new phone system that would facilitate our volunteers supporting our work remotely. The development of IFCA's new website in 2020 introduced a new chat function available for people to contact the Helpline.

The National Helpline continues to be the first port of call for many in a crisis or requiring support in their fostering role and we were proud to be able to continue to provide this vital support in a most challenging year.

2020 Highlights



National Helpline went remote
in March 2020

16%

of contact made
was via email



7 

volunteers graduated
with ICHAS Certificate
in Counselling and
Psychotherapeutic Skills

21%

of calls were from Dublin



26%

of calls referred
to National Advocacy Service



June and July 2020 were
the busiest months on
the Helpline with over

130 calls

to the Helpline each month

13%

of calls were from Cork



83%

of contact made
was via phone



Recruitment of new **Helpline**
and Advocacy Support Worker
in May 2020



504

new cases in 2020



Total calls
(in and outbound):

1,568



New website
chat set up



132

cases referred to the National
Advocacy Service



Family visits & contact
queries accounted for

15%

of all calls



Allegation queries and
support accounted for

10%

of all calls



26%

of secondary issues were
in relation to Tusla policies
and procedures



National Advocacy Service

Looking back on 2020 it is hard to see past the pandemic and the necessary responses that changed and restricted so much of our lives. In March 2020, just as the Advocacy Service was launched nationally our direction of travel was reset. Undoubtedly, the pandemic created new challenges for the advocacy service at all levels. This uniquely challenging environment demanded a resilience from our advocacy team, and they adapted with enthusiasm and creativity. Our small number of volunteers were also impacted by these changes, and their support and commitment to foster families was invaluable throughout. Despite the uncertainties we continued to put foster carer voices and experiences at the heart of our work, to raise their views on the vital issues that affect them and the children in their care.

As challenging as the pandemic was it also provided some silver linings. We made several strides in our ambition to become a more accessible and far-reaching service. We embraced digital technology in all aspects of our work, a process which has been accelerated since the pandemic. This has already offered many learning opportunities for our colleagues, maximising our attendance at virtual meetings and teleconferences across the country, crucially this could happen at shorter notice than would have been possible before.

While the growth and use of virtual technology was essential to our service delivery, the team were acutely aware that this was only a partial solution. Open and active communication is often the issue underpinning many of the difficulties experienced in foster care and there are times and issues that require face-to-face and in-person contact. Our work is based on dialogue and understanding different perspectives and views. While the service operated a no contact policy during Covid-19 public health restrictions, there were times, and in-line with government guidance, that we cautiously agreed to requests for in person meetings. A small number of risk-assessed meetings were held, when our presence was regarded as essential, these related to allegations, serious concerns, and potential placement breakdowns. All other meetings and contacts

were conducted by telephone, virtual platforms, and email. Interestingly, during the first wave of the pandemic foster families reported a renewed feeling of inclusion and mutual interdependence manifesting within their social work teams, many reported increased feelings of satisfaction and support from their social work teams. In addition, foster carers frequently reported that the children in their care experienced a period of relative stability. Suggesting that the quieter pace of life, fewer demands to engage with teachers, peers and professionals engendered feelings of ease and relaxation. There was a sense among some of the foster families that something new and refreshing was possible, a renewed feeling of trust from professionals. Many expressed the view that this experience could give social workers, foster families, and policy makers an opportunity to reflect on the learning arising from the pandemic to develop a more inclusive, partnership and relationship-based approach to foster care.

The nature of the issues supported through the advocacy service were often related, but not limited to allegations, communication issues and placement breakdowns. The issues and concerns behind these were often complex and multi-factorial. They are sometimes driven by stress and anxiety, feelings of loss and frequently not feeling heard. We acknowledge the complexity for all involved who are supporting children in care.

Our approach and values dictate that we always encourage a restorative and solution-focused approach, a process of dialogue and discovery.

An analysis of our cases throughout 2020 reveal that many foster carers were disheartened by a lack of consistency and respectful approach towards them. Often frustrated by delays in addressing their issues and concerns, there were frequent accounts of not feeling supported and understood by professionals. For some the experience of support itself left them feeling increasingly misunderstood. Others reported unrealistic and unreasonable expectations from

professionals, and an overly critical assessment of their care. Fears of punitive repercussions, such as the removal of children if they made complaints were expressed. A common theme emerged whereby foster carers felt they were regarded as problematic, rather than addressing and acknowledging issues related to the child in their care and that there was a lack of collaboration and consultation when making decisions that impact and shape their lives.

Throughout these extraordinary times, our team acknowledges the resilience, patience, and creativity of all the foster families with whom we had contact, we were often inspired by their continued commitment, care, and love for the children in their care. For us they represented the 'all in this together' attitude that was so often

mentioned by our leaders during this time. As we emerge from the pandemic, we are confident that much of what was learned in response can be harnessed to enhance foster families experiences so that they can meet the needs of our most vulnerable children and young people in our society.



Meet Donna and Conleth, a foster family case study

Donna and Conleth are experienced foster carers but were troubled by several issues related to the child in their care. They were very concerned that the child's behaviour was now destabilising the placement, the child was in trouble at school and had recently had a dispute with a neighbour, damaging their car. They had just been appointed a new social worker and in their view their insights about the child and their difficulties were not being heard, and they were being criticised for not understanding the child. A position they could not accept.

Conleth admitted that he tried to solve these problems with the new professionals, but he would end up getting angry, argue with them, feel personally attacked and fail to reach any positive conclusion. As a result of this, both Conleth and Donna believed that no-one was interested in them, that the social worker wanted the placement to end, and they were not prepared to listen to their point of view. The advocate spent time with Conleth and Donna and together they made a record of their concerns, and what they thought might work to support the child, what they hoped to achieve, and explored alternative views of the social worker. With their advocate they considered the various possible outcomes and solutions and prepared these in writing. Next, they requested a meeting during which Conleth was supported to express his views in a constructive way. Following this meeting, the advocate

gave them time to reflect and comment on the outcome of the meeting. They felt small progress had been made and that their views and concerns were beginning to be accepted by professionals. They accepted that there was agreement on some issues and that the social worker did not want the placement to end. Over time, with the advocate acting as a role model in preparing for and participating in meetings, Conleth became more confident in being able to express himself, focusing on facts and actions. He was eventually able to attend meetings and represent their situation with increasing clarity and confidence. The issues with the child remained complex, but both Donna and Conleth felt less pressurised, more connected and trusting of the professionals involved.

Learning and Development





Learning and Development

IFCA offers opportunities for learning and development to foster carers and fostering practitioners with the aim of building the knowledge and skills required to meet the needs of children in care with confidence.

Up to March 2020 we offered training and learning events tailored for the fostering community in a range of locations across the country. The onset of the pandemic and government restrictions around Covid-19 allowed us to commence the development of a range of online learning events. We worked with our panel of expert internal and external trainers and our range of training available online has grown exponentially.

Foster carers and fostering practitioners from all across the country responded very positively to participating in these learning events from the comfort of their own homes and offices. While online learning does not allow for the same kind of 'meetup' that face-to-face sessions offer, we have been struck by the way in which the fostering community has continued to embrace the sharing, support, camaraderie and learning through the online medium.

At these events, participants highlighted and discussed the concerns they have, the challenges they are facing and the rewards they experience in caring for the most vulnerable children in our society. Among the challenges raised by participants in training are:

- Difficulty accessing appropriate therapeutic services for children who have experienced developmental trauma;
- Foster carers taking their place in the process of Lifestory work with children;
- Difficulty accessing services and continuing to care for vulnerable young people with special needs beyond their 18th birthday;
- Caring for adolescents who present in challenging ways;
- Balancing the needs of the child and the family and self-care;
- Foster carers feeling heard within the wider child protection and fostering system;
- Challenges in communication and the processes around the investigation of complaints and allegations against foster carers.



Our learning model and ethos

We aim to provide learning and development opportunities that are not just one-off events but are part of an ongoing process. In this way fostering practice is promoted and supported in a community of learning - an environment of continuous learning, one which values the hands-on, 'lived' experience of fostering as well as experiential and reflective practice and theoretical, research-based approaches.

Our model of learning is based on four core competencies for foster care: Consistency, Accessibility, Responsiveness and Emotional Connectedness.

These competencies form the bedrock of the understanding and skills set needed by foster carers and fostering practitioners in meeting the needs of the children they care for. They are firmly established in IFCA's Journey Through Fostering 2020 (Foundations for Fostering Revised) which provides the first, pre-approval training for foster carers. From there, through a process of continuous learning, these core competencies, understanding and skills can be expanded, deepened and embedded into fostering practice.



CARE

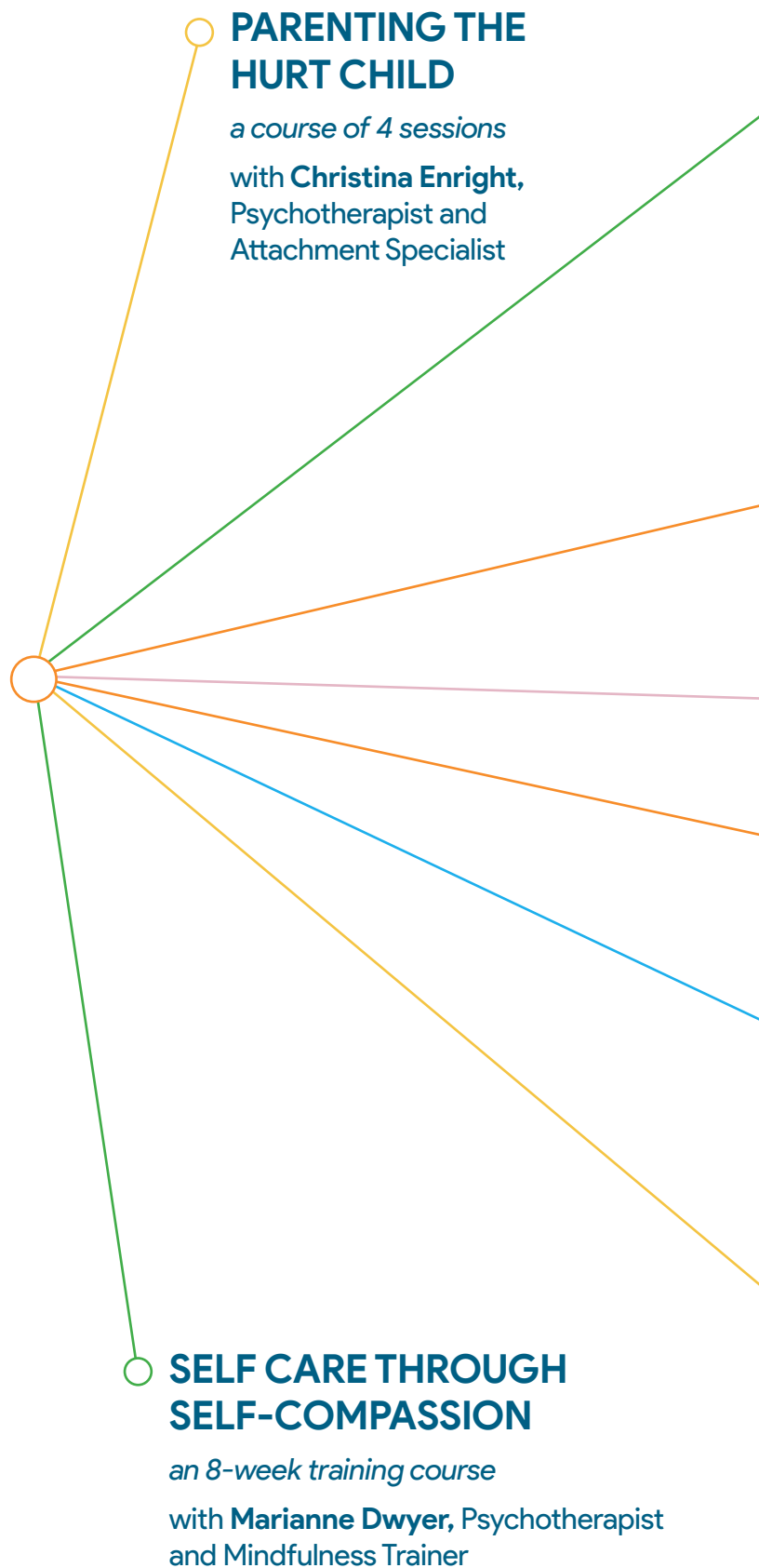
Consistency
Accessibility
Responsiveness
Emotional connectedness

2020 Training

There were 22 IFCA learning events during 2020*

43 sessions attended by 269 foster carers and fostering practitioners from all around the country.

*some courses were offered both nationally and locally.



PUTTING LIFE'S JIGSAW TOGETHER

a two-part training on Lifestory work with children

with **Bernadette Neville**, National Services Manager IFCA

A DEEPER LOOK AT TRAUMA CARING FOR TRAUMATISED TEENAGERS

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL, BEHAVIOURAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS

with **Christina Enright**, Psychotherapist and Attachment Specialist

ANSWERING FOSTER CARER'S QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL

with **Irene Browne**, School Principal and Foster Carer

BEING REVIEW READY: UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGING IN FOSTER CARER REVIEWS

a two-part training

with **Bernadette Neville**, National Services Manager IFCA

SELF-CARE THROUGH SELF-COMPASSION

a live two-session training encompassing the key elements of the 8-week training

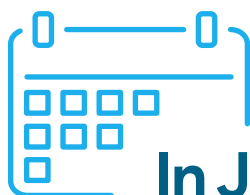
with **Marianne Dwyer**

SENSORY REGULATION AND ATTACHMENT FOR FOSTER CARERS

a five-week course

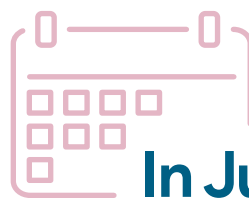
with **Eadaoin Breathnach**, Occupational Therapist and Attachment Specialist

2020 Highlights



In June and July,

foster carers and fostering practitioners hone their Zoom skills and participate in a range of national online learning events.



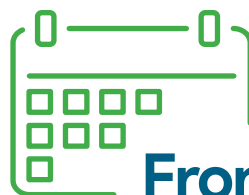
In June,

a timetable of online learning events is launched to ensure that foster carers can continue to avail of training despite the Covid lockdown. Our panel of trainers includes **Christina Enright, Marianne Dwyer, Bernadette Neville and Eadaoin Bhreathnach.**



Throughout the year

the Pre-approval Foster Carer Training Group is busy re-designing the Foundations for Fostering training. This is completed by year end with the training renamed Journey Through Fostering, and ready to progress to the next stage.



From September to November

while IFCA continues to offer learning events nationally, IFCA Branches and Hubs in Mayo, Wexford, Carlow/ Kilkenny and South Tipperary are busy organising online learning events for their members locally also.

Annual National Conference: Families Who Foster

In the face of ongoing uncertainty about the possible severity and duration of Covid-19 the decision was made to bring the National Conference online. The in-person conference programme was replicated as far as possible, offering a range of workshops and sessions to adults, young people, and children. The online format allowed us to invite speakers who, under normal circumstances, we would not be in a position to fly over to present in person. We were delighted to have Professor Andrew Turnell, principal author of Signs of Safety, and social worker and trauma expert Dr Aoife Bairéad as our keynote speakers. Alongside these were workshops of a very high standard from presenters closer to home. President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, opened the conference with a speech expressing his heartfelt appreciation and respect for foster carers. Roderic O’Gorman, TD, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth also spoke along with Bernard Gloster, CEO of Tusla. The Q&A was moderated by Bride Rosney and attended by the keynote speakers, Bernard Gloster and IFCA CEO, Catherine Bond.

One hundred and twenty three adults signed up for the online conference, along with 20 children and young people. The conference schedule included 12 adults’ workshops ranging from the experiences of birth children to the principles and application of therapeutic foster care. There were ten Around the Table sessions as part of the adults programme. The themes were: focussing, aftercare; fostering to adoption; supporting LGBTQI+ children in care; children’s legal rights, relative foster care; the needs of migrant children in care; the use of play as a therapeutic tool and the mental health of babies and their caregivers.

Peer gatherings for adults offered at the conference were Mindful Connection Circle, Peer Support and a Coffee Connection. The conference remained family-focused with a dedicated programme for children and young people. Feedback from conference participants afterwards showed that the online format, while not the same as gathering in-person, was worthwhile and provided perhaps unexpected benefits.



Staying Connected: At a Distance

As a result of Covid-19, it was even more important to ensure we continued to stay connected with one another. Staying Connected: At A Distance was developed as an opportunity for members to continue to avail of support from organisations as part of the Staying Connected programme. IFCA joined forces with CARI, Adoption Authority Ireland and Compass Child and Family Services and developed questions and answers on key issues which impact on foster children and foster families lives.

Breathing Space

Breathing Space was a supportive space for foster carers to come together to address placement endings and disruptions in foster care. This series of two-part workshops focussed on themes of grief, loss, self-care and resilience, as well as providing opportunities for participants to share their experiences in a safe and supportive space. Breathing Space workshops were facilitated by Noel O'Driscoll; psychotherapist and external facilitator, and members were invited to participate in experiential learning; exploring what supports and nourishes them, and to identify and develop individual ongoing resources and practices.

Breathing Space workshops ran from October 2019 – March 2020 and were held in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Laois, Wexford and Westmeath. The Breathing Space workshops saw sixty-eight members register to come together in a supportive and safe space to address their experiences of placement endings and disruptions in foster care.

Placement Endings and Disruptions in Foster Care

A new publication on Placement Endings and Disruptions in Foster Care was produced at the end of Breathing Space, which encapsulated the key themes explored during the Connectivity Project. You can access all our information booklets online at www.ifca.ie.

Peer Support

Recognising the value of peer support amongst foster carers, 10 foster carers trained in Facilitation Skills to provide a safe and confidential space for foster carers to share experiences and provide support for each other. The advent of Covid-19 has not provided an opportunity to offer this service during 2020.



Mindful Connection Circle

Anticipating the challenges to families during 2020, IFCA launched a series of mindful connections for foster carers. These sessions offered a mindful, confidential space for members to talk about and process their experiences of the pandemic, especially how Covid-19 impacted upon their experiences of fostering.

Foster Journal

Foster Journal Issue 9, 'Communicating care' and Issue 10, 'Life stories' were both completed in 2020. 'Communicating care' was drawn from presentations given at IFCA's 2019 conference in Limerick. The issue was dedicated to Shane Griffin, a care-leaver and strong advocate for children in foster care who passed away on New Year's Eve, 2019. In this issue we included Irish Times journalist Patrick Freyne's tribute to Shane, in which he reflected on Shane's life. This prompted us to continue in a similar vein for Issue 10, which was called 'Life stories'. In this issue we featured first-hand experiences of foster care during Covid-19, from a care-leaver, a social worker and foster carers.

Branches & Hubs

In 2020, IFCA had 12 active branches throughout the country, with over 42 volunteers. Branches were heavily impacted as a result of public health restrictions, limiting branch activities to online meetings.

Our branch volunteers have been both innovative and creative in ensuring members in their area were provided with events, when feasible within government restrictions and adhering to HSE advice on social distancing. Even with restrictions in place many of our branches persevered and held both online learning and coffee connections, facilitated by IFCA via an online platform.

IFCA is very grateful to have such a dedicated team of volunteers within our branches who help us facilitate and support foster carers in their areas.

Foster carers from IFCA Hub areas attended our online training and Connectivity events and Conference.



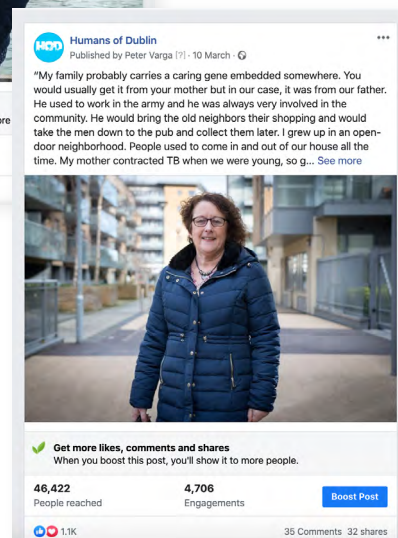
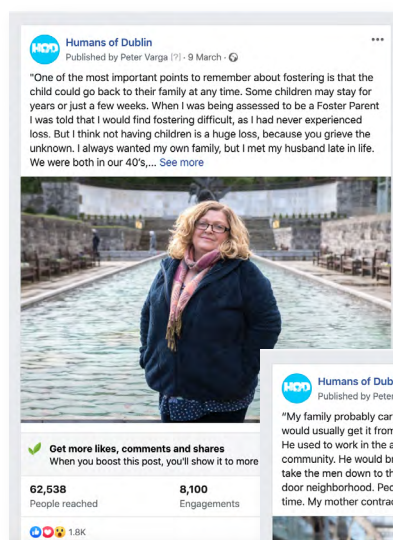


Fostering Fortnight

Fostering Fortnight 2020 kick started with a launch in Cork. The launch was well attended by Tusla and IFCA Members. Lord Mayor of Cork, John Sheehan spoke at the event along with Bernard Gloster, CEO Tusla and foster carers. Maura Derrane from RTE was also in attendance to support the event. All speeches were well received and it was particularly welcome to hear the direct experiences of foster carers.

Interviews took place with Catherine Bond and foster carers on the Sean O'Rourke Show, Ivan Yates on Newstalk, Cork 96FM, Dundalk FM, Community Radio Youghal, Community Radio Connemara, Liffey Sound, Tipp FM, Claremorris Community Radio, Shannonside and Radio Kerry. An opinion piece was published in the Irish Examiner.

IFCA partnered with Humans of Dublin during Fostering Fortnight to highlight some of our members stories to a wider audience. Two stories were posted on Humans of Dublin social media pages. It received an overwhelmingly positive response in the comments section from readers.



Art and Writing Competition

In partnership with EPIC, IFCA organised an Art and Writing competition for foster and birth children. We asked them to send in their photos, drawings and paintings to us with a chance to win a voucher. The older age groups were encouraged to write a story in 500 words about their life during the pandemic. We had a great response to both competitions.



**Irish
Foster Care
Association**

New Logo, Branding and Website

We were delighted to unveil our new logo and branding in 2020. The new logo was chosen for its strong use of colour and simple design to reflect two key elements of foster care – safety and communication. The safety element comes from the home (the open door), the foster home welcomes the foster child into their home and it becomes their safe place. Communication refers to that between foster families and the stakeholders involved in foster care and communication between the Irish Foster Care Association and the fostering community.

The logo positions the Irish Foster Care Association as the organisation that supports and promotes foster care in Ireland. We were also delighted to unveil a new website in early January 2021. This has been a long time in the making, but we are delighted with the new website which makes accessing information about foster care easier for users. Thank you to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth who funded this project.

Financial Statements





Where Our Funding Comes From

Tusla

Tusla continues to provide the core funding to enable IFCA provide its current range of supports to our members. The range of supports offered to IFCA's members are detailed in this 2020 annual report. We also received specific funding to cover some of the challenges we experienced as a result of Covid-19, which enabled us provide member support remotely. Total Tusla funding amounted to 65% of our overall income in 2020.

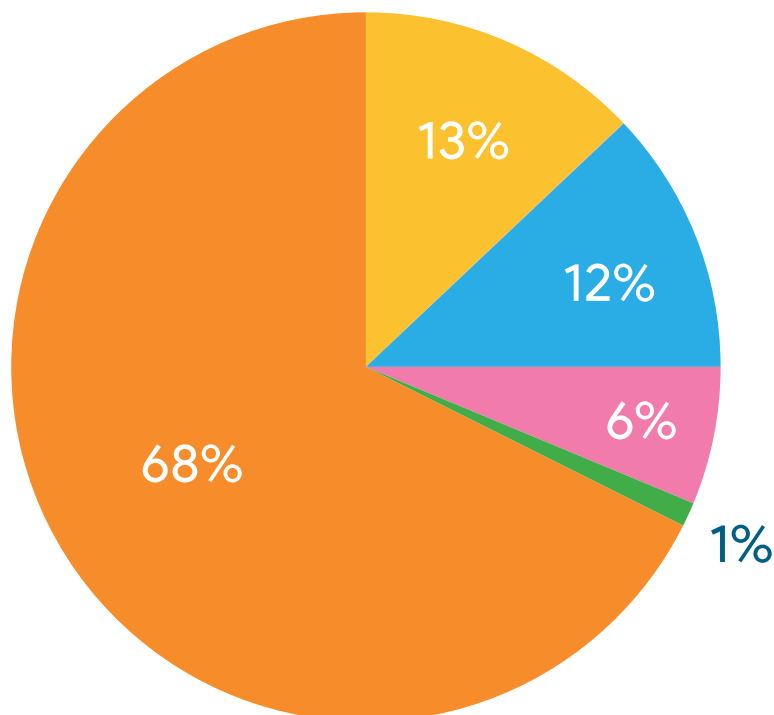
Pobal

We received funding from Pobal from 2 different grant schemes:

1. Dormant Accounts Fund (Measure 2) grant scheme which was provided to fund the design and delivery of workshops and counselling activities to support foster carers. This grant concluded in 2020.
2. SSNO (Scheme to Support National Organisations) grant which was provided to enable the development of our member support service. This grant funding will conclude in June 2022.

Pobal funding from both grant schemes represented 17% of IFCA's income in 2020.

How our funding is used



Membership Income

Another strand of IFCA's income is generated through its membership fees and legal insurance payments, with 10% of our overall income coming from our membership base.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

We were delighted to receive a once off grant from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to enable us develop our website and online training platform. This has enabled us to replace our website and implement a robust website that can be adapted as our members needs change in the future. The grant, which represented 5% of our total income, has also enabled us to expand our online training and deliver our conference online, which was particularly important given Covid-19 restrictions that were in place in 2020.

Sponsorship & Donations

A small, but very valuable, portion of our funding comes through donations and sponsorships. Covid-19 restrictions had a significant impact on this income stream in 2020, with a sizeable reduction versus previous years. This income stream represented 3% of our overall funding in 2020.



Irish Foster Care Association CLG

(A Company Limited by Guarantee and not having Share Capital)

Summary of Income and Expenditure for the Financial Year ended 31/12/2020

	2020 €	2019 €
Income		
Miscellaneous Income	152,278	164,414
Fundraising/Donations	11,914	28,613
Tusla Funding	567,244	555,542
Tusla Funding for regions/branches	41,701	24,328
An Pobal	163,915	130,904
Tusla - Training Development	-	33,883
	937,052	937,684
Expenditure		
Overheads	90,841	100,727
Payroll & Pension Costs	503,144	522,025
Telephone & Postage	20,798	25,448
Conference/Seminars/Meetings	12,300	93,597
Learning & Development	27,713	52,458
Equipment/IT/Website Costs	36,993	23,333
General Expenses	150,993	172,429
Foster Family social events	8,089	39,389
Depreciation	38,685	6,758
	889,556	1,036,164
Surplus/(Deficit) for the financial year	47,496	(98,480)
Other interest receivable or similar income	15	24
Surplus/(Deficit)	47,511	(98,456)

Irish Foster Care Association CLG
(A Company Limited by Guarantee and not having Share Capital)

Balance Sheet as at 31/12/2020

	2020 €	€	2019 €	€
Fixed Assets				
Tangible Assets	6,335		38,294	
		6,335		38,294
Current Assets				
Debtors	13,538		39,204	
Cash at bank and in hand:				
Branch/Regional	127,854		128,275	
Head Office	258,497		244,896	
	399,889		412,375	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(113,365)		(205,321)	
Net current assets		286,524		207,054
Total assets less current liabilities		292,859		245,348
Net assets		292,859		245,348
Capital and reserves				
Income and expenditure account		292,859		245,348
Members funds		292,859		245,348

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime and in accordance with Section 1A of FRS102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland'.

Thank You

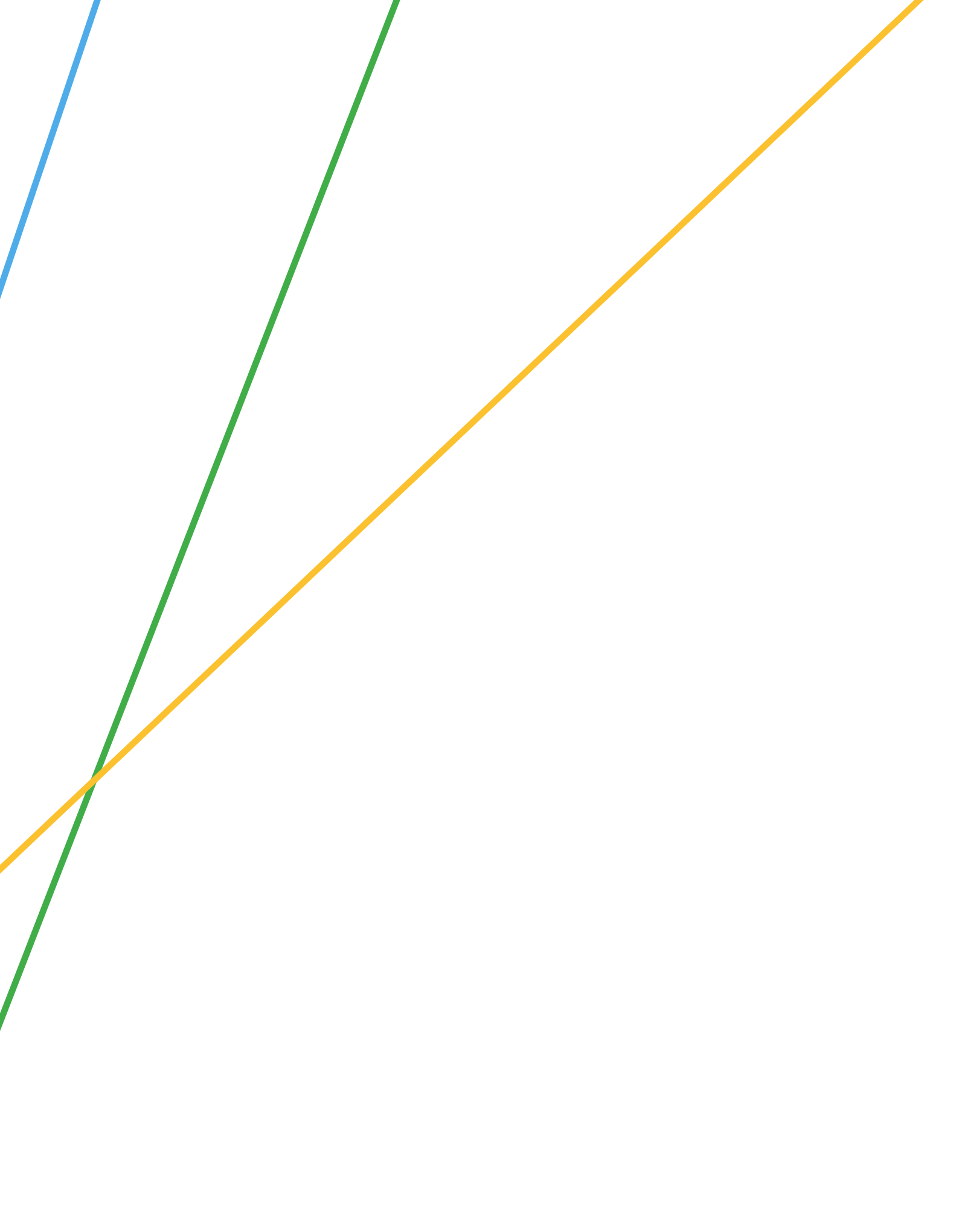
Thank you to everyone who helped us navigate 2020 and all its highs and lows. We are grateful to all our members, partners, supporters, volunteers, staff and helpers who support us throughout the year. Thank you! We simply couldn't continue our work without you.

IFCA kindly acknowledges the funding we receive from our partners to support our services.



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth







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