



Irish Foster Care Association
Pre-Budget Submission 2026

Fostering a Better Future

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About the Irish Foster Care Association

The Irish Foster Care Association is the national organisation that supports foster families and the wider fostering community. Our vision is that fostering is recognised, valued and supported.

Established in 1981 by a group of foster carers and social workers our primary objective as an organisation is to promote excellence in foster care by:

- Promoting partnership between everyone involved in foster care to work for, and in the best interests of the child in care.
- Providing support and learning opportunities for persons involved in foster care in Ireland.
- Creating a greater public awareness of and promoting foster care in Ireland.
- Advocating for excellence for all involved in foster care.

Foster Care Budget 2026 Asks

- 1. Increase access to therapeutic supports and interventions for children in care (Department of Children, Disability and Equality)**
- 2. Increase the Aftercare Allowance (Department of Social Protection)**
- 3. Provide Pension Security for Foster Carers (Department of Social Protection)**
- 4. Index-link the Foster Care Allowance (Department of Social Protection)**
- 5. Extend Back to School Allowance for all children and young people in State care (Department of Social Protection)**

CEO Foreword



Each child in care of the State should be supported to reach their full potential in a safe and secure home.

These children are in the care of the State because of circumstances outside of their control. Many are heavily traumatised due to difficult domestic factors and require a range of supports to help them grow and thrive in a new domestic environment, which can be enormously challenging for both foster carer and child.

As the membership organisation representing foster carers in Ireland, IFCA serves the foster care community to support and advocate for positive change.

Representing our members is core to IFCA's work, however, this work has broader benefits for the wider foster care community, identifying challenging and complex issues that may arise on the fostering journey.

We embrace, value, and respect diversity in our membership as essential in supporting strong working relationships amongst all those involved in foster care.

This is why, earlier this year, we surveyed our members in order to better understand the needs of those caring for foster children, and also the needs of the children themselves.

The findings were solemn and insightful. They found that whilst foster carers are proud of the vital role they have in these children's lives, quite often they need more support with services, finances and the teams around them.

Foster carers' needs underpinned IFCA's new strategy, launched earlier this year. It is a strategy written by and for foster carers and the fostering community. I look forward to working with our members to achieve the three main priorities set out in the strategy:

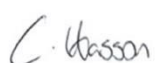
- 1. Influence change in policy and practice to ensure fostering in Ireland is recognised, valued and supported**
- 2. Provide and access responsive, solution – focused, and agile supports and services to our membership**
- 3. Enhance our organisational capacity, sustainability, and governance**

In April 2025, there were 5781 children and young people in care, with 87.3% in foster care (Tusla–Child and Family Agency). At the end of Q1 2025, there were 3817 foster carers across Ireland (Tusla). The number of children and young people entering into care is continually rising and the number of foster carers is declining.

Without urgent action and investment from our Government now, we will see the further decline of foster carers coming into the system, more foster carers unfortunately leaving the system, and the rise of children in care placements that are not suited to their needs. Quite simply, the Government can't afford not to act.

Our 2026 Pre-Budget Submission seeks to provide more supports for foster carers and children, in order to foster a better future for this critical community in Irish society.

As we launch this Submission, we look forward to collaborating with our members, partners in Government, colleagues in Tusla, and other sectoral stakeholders so that together we can unlock the full potential of these children.

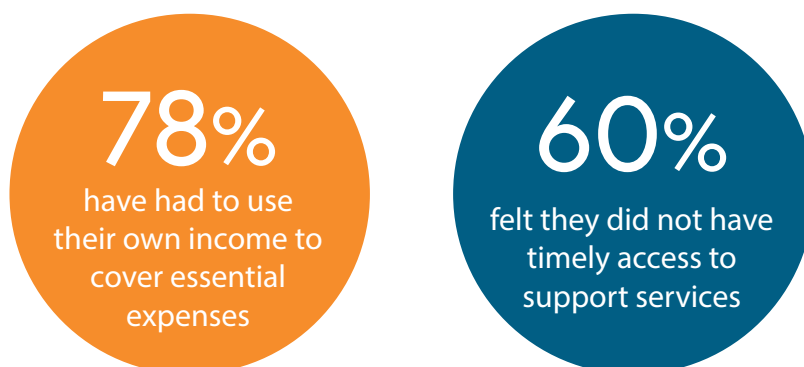


Corrinne Hasson, CEO

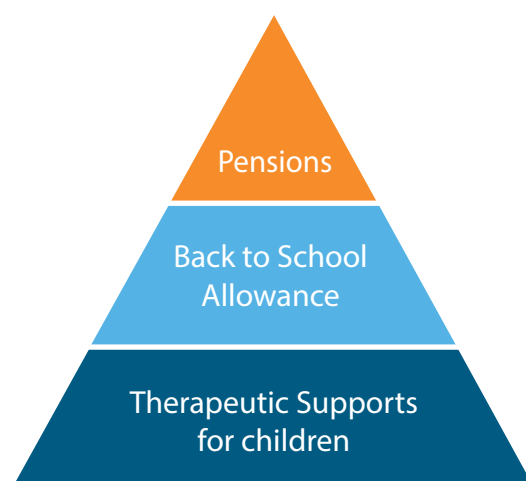
Foster Care General Figures

Foster Carers, Q1 2020	4192
Foster Carers, Q1 2025	3817
Children in Care, April 2025	5781

From our Survey with 303 respondents:



Top 3 priorities for Foster Carers were:



Ask # 1

Increase access to therapeutic supports and interventions for children in care

Issue – Children are waiting too long for assessments to be completed and therapeutic supports to be put in place, to meet their identified needs.

Children should not have to wait months, and in many cases years for an assessment, and to then wait a further period of time to access the therapeutic supports and interventions needed to assist them.

We know that when children receive the right therapeutic supports or services early in life, they have a much greater chance of reaching their full potential.

At present, there are only 6 Tusla area based therapeutic hubs providing much needed therapeutic supports, but this is inadequate, and we need more spread across the country in order to fully support children in care, and their foster families.

We know that staff recruitment and retention has been a challenge, and remains to be the case. This has been documented in HIQA's 'Overview Report on the Governance of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) Child Protection and Welfare and Foster Care Services,' Jan 2025. Therefore, we ask that every effort from the Government be made to support Tusla in their recruitment of staff for these area based therapeutic hubs.

Ask – IFCA are asking for the Government to increase funding to Tusla, so that they can increase the number of area based therapeutic hubs across the country, and to fully resource them.

'Availability of trauma informed therapeutic services available exclusively to children in care e.g. Occupational Therapist, Speech and Language Therapist. The system is not meeting his (foster child) needs, and it's so frustrating.'

Quote from Foster Carer, 1

Ask # 2

Increase the Aftercare Allowance

Issue – When a child in foster care turns 18, financial supports for the young person and their foster family are reduced, and in some cases stopped altogether.

‘The purpose of the Aftercare Allowance is to support young adults in pursuing full time education or accredited training’ (Tusla, National Policy: Financial Payments/ Allowances in Foster Care, Aftercare, Supported Lodgings and Adoption Maintenance).

When a young person remains in education, after the age of 18, an Aftercare Allowance of €300 is paid, and the Foster Care Allowance of €425 is ceased. This is a drop of €125 per week to meet the needs of the young person, and is wholly inadequate in the context of current third level education costs.

When a young person does not remain in education, after the age of 18, and remains in the foster home, no Aftercare Allowance or Foster Care Allowance is paid.

The needs of a young person at 17 years and 364 days do not disappear overnight. The support they require remains just as critical.

Ask – IFCA are asking for the Aftercare Allowance to be aligned to the Foster Care Allowance rate so that a young person can continue to be supported appropriately after the age of 18, regardless of them being in education or not. We want the Aftercare Allowance to be paid until a young person turns 23, at a minimum.

‘Aftercare is a top priority. Financial supports need to stay in place regardless of college/education. A lot of these kids have needs, and it is unfair when they choose to stay, no proper provisions are there for them.’

Quote from Foster Carer, 2

Ask # 3

Provide Pension Security for Foster Carers

Issue – Foster Carers who reach retirement age, often find themselves financially penalised by the State as they are unable to qualify for a contributory state pension, even when they have cared for children on behalf of the State for many years.

Many foster carers are unable to work, or have had to significantly reduce their working hours, due to the need for them to be fully available to attend appointments and meet the needs of the vulnerable children in their care.

Access visits, medical and therapeutic appointments, house visits from social workers are to name a few of the weekly scheduled events that occur, along with the requirement for the foster carer to be available to the child 24/7.

This investment, in a contributory pension, will provide much needed security for existing foster carers, helping to retain their vital expertise and commitment. Just as importantly, it will position fostering as a viable and valued option for many more people across Ireland who may not have previously considered it. By offering pension security, we are not only recognising the significant contribution foster carers make, we are also building a more stable, sustainable future for foster care in Ireland.

Ask – IFCA are asking the Government to urgently address the need for foster carers to have their contribution and service to the State recognised, and to implement a pension scheme that ensures time spent providing care will not come with a financial disadvantage in later life. One scenario, as indicated by foster carers, would be to give credits / stamps based on time spent caring for children in their home who are in the care of the State.

'The majority of foster carers do this for the love of children, not money. I would be far better off working full time. I would like to see recognition that Irish families can no longer survive on a one income household and have a mortgage, pay bills etc. I would like to see our time spent as foster carers contributing to our pensions. It's a worry I have about my future.'

Quote from Foster Carer, 3

Ask # 4

Index-link the Foster Care Allowance

Issue – The current Foster Care Allowance does not meet the financial needs of children in foster care.

Whilst we were pleased to see the increase in the Foster Care Allowance in 2024, it came after a very long wait from the last increase in 2009. Foster carers must be supported to care for the children in their homes through an allowance that reflects annual cost of living increases.

In our recent survey, with over 303 responses, 78% of foster carers said they had to use their own income or savings to cover essential expenses. When asked what these were, a large number reported: dental work, glasses / optician, transport, renovations to their home for the child in their care, and therapeutic interventions.

Foster carers should not be expected to find themselves in financial difficulty for the role they play in caring for a child in care of the State, but many have reported that they are. Index linking the Foster Care Allowance now will support the foster carers who find themselves spending other income or savings on essential items for the children in their care.

Ask – IFCA are asking Government to index link the Foster Care Allowance now to ensure foster carers receive financial support that reflects their growing financial demands, and will allow them to continue to provide the best care to their foster children.

*'Please see what we do, respect it,
and give us peace of mind to help the kids.
Index linking the fostering allowance would
allow me to worry less about how I can pay
our bills and support the kids.'*

Quote from Foster Carer, 4

Ask # 5

Extend Back to School Allowance for all children and young people in State care

Issue – Back to School Allowance is means tested for foster carers.

Foster children and young people in the care of the State should not be made to qualify for support through income thresholds.

They are in the care of the State because of circumstances outside of their control. Many are heavily traumatised due to difficult domestic factors and require a range of supports to help them grow and thrive in a new domestic environment, which can be enormously challenging for both foster carer and child.

Their needs should be met in full, and without additional barriers or conditions placed on the families who care for them.

Foster carers already take on enormous responsibility and open their homes to provide safe, stable, and nurturing environments. Requiring them to undergo a means test in order to access basic back to school supports is inappropriate and unfair.

It fails to recognise the unique status and needs of children in State care and the crucial role foster carers play in supporting them..

Ask – IFCA are asking the Government to remove the means testing conditions that have been placed on foster carers when applying for the Back to School Allowance.

'Please do not means test us for allowances that are meant for the children.'

Quote from Foster Carer, 5

Closing

To close, the Irish Foster Care Association is asking the Government to invest in Foster Care in Budget 2026.

Foster carers, their families, and the wider foster care community need investment in services, allowances, and pensions now.

We need to ensure we are all doing our part to retain our current foster carers, and to encourage more into the system, so that children in care can be placed in a stable home.

Fostering needs to be recognised, valued and supported.

Please support us in Fostering a Better Future in Budget 2026.



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