Catherine Egan Morley
Chief Executive's Closing Address
Irish Foster Care Association
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Working Together, Making a Difference
Chair, members of the Board, colleagues, foster carers, members and friends of IFCA, as we come to the end of our AGM, we have spent important time looking back at the work of IFCA during 2025. I wasn't part of IFCA during that year. I took up the role of CEO in March 2026. The work we have heard about today belongs to those who were here: our members, our Board, our staff, our volunteers and all those who contributed to IFCA during 2025. So, before I map out what I see as the way forward, I want you to join me in acknowledging that enormous amount of work.

As Chief Executive today, my responsibility is different. My responsibility is to lead what comes next. And that is what I want to talk about in these final few minutes.

I have created the organisational statement **Working Together, Making a Difference** because I believe those six words describe both the opportunity and the challenge in front of IFCA. Everything we have done so far in 2026 has been proofed against this statement. Every time we have made a decision, I have asked myself – *does what we are doing here feel like we are "working together, making a difference"*.

When I arrived in March, I began with a very deliberate 90-day process:
Listen. Stabilise. Strategise.

I chose to Listen first. Not arrive with all the answers. Not assume that what I could see from the outside was the whole story. Listen to foster carers. Listen to staff. Listen to Board members. Listen to members around the country. Listen to our partners and stakeholders. Listen to the frustrations as well as the ambitions. And sometimes, listen to things that were uncomfortable to hear.

Then I looked to stabilise. Because organisations cannot deliver effectively externally if they are uncertain internally. We needed clarity about roles, responsibilities, governance, decision-making and accountability. We needed to strengthen relationships and establish ways of working that could support the organisation we want IFCA to become.

Then strategise. Not strategy as a document that sits on a shelf, but strategy as choices.
What matters most? Where can IFCA have the greatest impact? What should we be doing nationally? What needs to happen regionally and locally? Where should we be influencing government? And, crucially, how will we know whether any of it is actually making a difference?

Those first 90 days gave me a much clearer understanding of this organisation.
And it also reiterated something I have always known throughout my career. IFCA has enormous potential. But potential is not enough. Potential has to become action. And action has to lead to impact. I cannot, and will not, during my tenure as Chief Executive, allow perfection to become the enemy of progress. No organisation is perfect, we will get some things wrong. But we cannot allow that to limit our potential for impact,

So today, I want us to mark a moment in time. Not a moment when we forget the past. Not a moment when we pretend mistakes were not made. And certainly not a moment when we forget the enormous

contribution made by people (some of whom are in this room today) who built and sustained this organisation over the past 40 odd years.

We should learn from our past. We should acknowledge where we got things right, and we should be honest about where we got things wrong. But we cannot continually define ourselves by what happened yesterday. There comes a point when reflection has to become learning, and learning has to become action.

For me, this is that point. From here, our question cannot continually be: *What happened before?*
Our question has to become: What are we going to build together now?

And I believe the answer begins with our values. Because leadership is not simply about what we do. It is about how we do it. Our values have to be visible in our decisions, our relationships and the way we treat one another. We clearly state the following values as underpinning IFCA:

- Solidarity
- Respect and Inclusivity
- Collaboration
- Integrity

Under my leadership, the future of IFCA must be defined by four things:
Values. Action. Accountability. Engagement.

Action means that when foster carers tell us something matters, we do something with that information. Advocacy must have purpose. Meetings must lead somewhere. Commitments must become delivery.

Accountability means being prepared to say specifically what we will do, to measure whether we have done it, and to be honest when we have not.

Engagement means IFCA cannot be an organisation that speaks *at* foster carers or simply *for* foster carers. We must increasingly be an organisation that works **with** foster carers. That is what *Working Together, Making a Difference* means to me. And that work has to happen at every level.

Locally, IFCA must be present. Our local networks matter because this is where relationships are built. It is where foster carers meet one another, where experiences are shared, where isolation can be reduced and where we hear directly what is happening for families. I want an IFCA that listens locally - and responds.

Regionally, we need to connect those experiences. Because an issue experienced by one foster carer may be individual. Our National Helpline and Advocacy Service is the place for this work of supporting individuals needs to happen. The same issue being experienced by foster carers across several areas tells us something different. Our job is to recognise those patterns, bring people together and ensure that local experience informs regional and national action.

Nationally, IFCA must be a credible, confident and constructive voice for foster care. That means engaging with Tusla and other national organisations. It means contributing to national policy development. It means bringing evidence and experience into the conversations where decisions are being made. And it means being willing to challenge when challenge is required – whilst also being mature enough to work in partnership where partnership can deliver change.

Our current funding model does not facilitate this, so my job is to ensure that it does. Hence the ask for additional resources for IFCA in our recent pre-Budget Submission.

And then there is Government. Since my appointment, we have been strengthening IFCA's engagement at political and Government level through the establishment of the first ever Cross Party Oireachtas Committee on Foster Care. Why is this structure particularly important? Because it brings together representatives of all parties and none to focus the effort towards achieving change. This is not a series of individual meetings with "supportive" politicians – but a structured, political engagement strategy. That work matters. Because some of the biggest issues affecting foster carers cannot be resolved locally. They require national policy decisions. They require resources. They require political understanding. And sometimes they require legislative or systemic change. IFCA must be in those rooms. But being in the room is not the measure of success. Our political system is built on "meeting the TD". Internationally, this is acknowledged as "unusual". I have no interest in courting individual TD's for support for Foster Carers, but I will actively engage with all of our political representatives to develop a coherent response to the issues faced by Foster Carers. I do not want us to measure ourselves simply by the number of meetings we attend, submissions we write, events we hold or statements we issue. Those things matter — but they are activity.

Our ambition must be impact. Did a foster carer get better support? Did a family feel less alone? Did policy change? Did somebody making a national decision understand something differently because IFCA was in the room? Did children and young people ultimately benefit because the adults caring for them were better supported? Those are much harder questions. But they are the questions a confident organisation should be prepared to ask itself.

As I noted earlier, we will not always get everything right. I am absolutely confident that I won't always get everything right. The Board won't. Our staff won't. No organisation does.
But I want us to become an organisation that can recognise that, address it, learn quickly and move forward. Because accountability is not about blame. It is about responsibility. And leadership is not about pretending that problems do not exist. It is about having the courage to address them.

There is significant work ahead of us.

- We have to continue strengthening the organisation internally.
- We have to deepen engagement with our members.
- We have to strengthen our local and regional structures in whatever form works best for our members.
- We have to continue building our national influence.
- And we have to demonstrate, consistently, that membership of IFCA means something.

None of that will be achieved by a CEO. It will not be achieved by a Board. It will not be achieved by a staff team. And it will not be achieved by members working separately from the organisation.

It will be achieved by all of us understanding that we have different roles — but a shared purpose. That is the organisation I am committed to working to build going forward.

We should be:

- An IFCA that listens.
- A IFCA that is discerning.
- An IFCA that acts.
- An IFCA that is accountable.
- An IFCA that engages.
- An IFCA that is confident enough to challenge and mature enough to collaborate.
- An IFCA that understands the difference between being busy and making a difference.

- And an IFCA where foster carers can see themselves, their experiences and their priorities reflected in the work we do.

For me, this is our moment to move forward. With ambition, but also with discipline. With confidence, but also with humility. With clear expectations of one another. And with an absolute determination that our work should make a tangible difference to foster carers and, through them, to the children and young people at the heart of foster care. That is the standard I have set for myself as Chief Executive. It is the standard I have set for our organisation.
And it is the invitation I extend to every member of IFCA:

- Work with us.
- Bring your experience.
- Bring your ideas.
- Challenge us when we need to be challenged.
- Participate.
- Engage.

Help us build the organisation that foster carers need IFCA to be. Because the next chapter of IFCA will not be written by any one person. We will write it together**.**
And if we get that right - if we combine our values with action, our action with accountability, and our accountability with genuine engagement - then we will do much more than talk about change.
We will be ***Working Together, Making a Difference***

Thank you to the Board for the opportunity to share these thoughts, and even though you all cringe when I say it……

Have your best day



Chief Executive Officer
October 3rd, 2026