

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2020**



Best Public Information Campaign



(L to R) Pictured are Foster carers Dean and Bonga with Shauna Armstrong (who was in foster care as child) and Patricia Finlay from Tusla at the launch of Tusla National Fostering Week at Dublin's Mansion House. Photo by Sasko Lazarov/Photocall Ireland.

Campaign

Tusla National Fostering Week

Description of Campaign

This public information campaign was undertaken to recruit more foster carers to Tusla, dispel the myths associated with foster care eligibility, and position Tusla as Ireland's go-to fostering service. It was the agency's first ever fostering recruitment drive since Tusla was established in 2014.

TUSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Organisation

Tusla

Background to the Campaign

Tusla-Child and Family Agency has a statutory responsibility to provide Alternative Care Services, to include fostering, under the provisions of the Child Care Act, 1991, the Children Act, 2001 and the Child Care (Amendment) Act, 2007. As such a key operational objective of the agency is to source foster carers for vulnerable children to provide the latter with a loving stable environment.

Tusla fostering teams across the country recruit, assess, train, and support foster carers. At the time that the campaign launched, there were 5,511 children in foster care and some 4,254 foster carers in Ireland. Tusla has an acute need for foster carers for emergency, long-term, and short-term placements.

Public appeals for foster carers are of a specialist nature. And research commissioned by Tusla also showed that a range of issues affect the recruitment of foster carers including:

- The high cost of living.

- Current housing supply.
- The increasing number of people in the workforce.

In Ireland, we compare favourably with other countries with 92% of children in State care placed in foster care. Tusla National Fostering Week in October 2019 carried the tagline, You Could be My Perfect Foster Carer. As well as the above, key challenges for Tusla National Fostering Week were:

- To ensure Tusla's fostering services and supports are more widely known as many people equate Tusla with being a child protection agency only.
- To persuade potential carers that fostering with Tusla is a rewarding and satisfying experience.
- To amend public perceptions/beliefs about fostering and generate support for it.
- To create positive sentiment towards the Tusla brand.

Statement of Objectives

Overall, Tusla National Fostering Week 2019, Oct 14th-20th, sought to create maximum publicity and visibility for Tusla fostering recruitment needs. The goal of the campaign was to persuade as many people as possible to contact Tusla about becoming a foster carer.

The main objectives of the campaign were as follows:

- To generate at least 350 public enquiries about Tusla fostering over the 11-week period from October 14th to Christmas Day 2019.
- To attract enquiries from our core 40-year-old+ target audience, but also to attract a new generation of foster carers.
- To attract enquiries from members of new communities now living permanently in Ireland.
- To promote Tusla as the go-to fostering organisation in the State.
- To alter misconceptions about fostering, and inform people about it.

The key messages used to inform audiences about Tusla fostering requirements included:

1. Tusla is seeking all types of foster carers to foster children who cannot live at home with their own family for a particular reason.
2. Tusla is the State's only organisation that provides a statutory fostering service to the public, and seeks carers for short/long term, emergency/respite fostering.
3. Interested applicants can contact Tusla through fostering.ie, by ringing freephone 1800 226 771 or by emailing fostering@tusla.ie
4. It only takes one person to change a child's life through fostering.
5. Tusla currently works with foster carers who are in a heterosexual or same-sex relationship, are of different ethnic/religious background, who own a home/rent, who are employed/unemployed, single/married, and with parents who both work.
6. Foster carers receive financial, professional, and emotional support from Tusla.

NB: Interest and applications for foster carers is traditionally low. In general, it takes more than 16 weeks for foster carers to be assessed as carers, following initial-enquiry stage. The enquiry-to-foster-carer-conversion rate is some 12% – which means that just 12% of enquiries result in the actual recruitment of one new foster carer.

Programme Planning and Strategy

Programme planning and strategy for Tusla National Fostering Week contained three different strategic strands:

1. Audience research and profiling
2. Communicating key messages to identified fostering audiences
3. A major launch event to kickstart the campaign

1. Audience research and profiling

The 'traditional' Tusla foster carer is aged 40+, female, and lives in urban and rural areas. They are heavily invested in their local community and like to volunteer to help make a change in society.

The campaign specifically targeted this audience. We also wanted to reach younger audiences, along with new Irish communities, and other social groupings, that hitherto would not have thought about fostering with Tusla. Pre-launch planning included conceptualised designs for a new creative image for Tusla fostering services that would appeal to several demographics.

2. Communicating key messages to identified fostering audiences

Overall, we identified a clear need to 'myth-bust' in our messaging and address prevailing public attitudes about fostering as many people were generally misinformed about fostering requirements. We stressed throughout that a given adult or family could be a perfect foster carer for a given child in need. We utilised various communications mechanisms to promote our key messages in the public space and used the following means:

Media relations: Tusla National Fostering Week provided an ideal platform for personalised storytelling through the experiences of existing foster carers. We developed a comprehensive earned media programme across print, broadcast, online and social media (155 pieces of coverage generated in total). The media relations element of the campaign was designed to drive interest among potential foster care applicants during Tusla National Fostering Week, and the weeks that followed, in national, local, and regional media. We engaged an external PR agency to help pitch Tusla foster carers' stories to the media.

Media interviews with foster carers were aired extensively by flagship radio programmes on regional/national stations across the country, and also appeared in numerous local newspaper/online sites. Media interest momentum was sustained nationwide during the entire week and continued into the following weeks. We succeeded in gaining overwhelmingly positive and extensive coverage in *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times* news and features' sections, editorial and news story coverage in the *Irish Examiner*, on Ireland Am on Virgin Media One, The Ray D'Arcy Show on RTÉ Radio 1, and Lunchtime Live on Newstalk.

Tusla identified and briefed Tusla foster carers in each county to take part in media interviews. Fostering social work staff were put forward for interviews locally and were provided with media training. We developed and distributed 26 tailored press releases for media in each county across Ireland. These separate releases included a list of public information events in each county and fostering statistics for children in care and carers there.

Video: We produced four short video testimonies with Tusla foster carers to showcase the benefits of fostering. The participants included a married same-sex couple, a single female foster carer, a Traveller couple, and an older female foster carer who has cared for more than 50 children. Three of these videos were promoted via Tusla's YouTube channel, and have been collectively viewed more than 158,000 times. A sample can be viewed below:

Grainne – Single Carer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItRvZHQsAG4&t=10s>

Joan – Experienced Carer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1d1G2W9xw4&t=7s>

Dean and Bonga – Same-sex couple carers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eX6QfX1qc0l&t=94s>

Website: The existing Tusla site [fostering.ie](https://www.tusla.ie/services/alternative-care/foster-care/) <https://www.tusla.ie/services/alternative-care/foster-care/> was given a major revamp with new design and layout, copy, graphics, and videos, and county events listing. A new [fostering.ie](https://www.tusla.ie/services/alternative-care/foster-care/) logo was created, along with a new online enquiry form for prospective carers.

Tusla fostering line: We established a new freephone national number 1800 226 771, as the central information service to prospective foster parents. This had never been in operation before. A new national email address, tusla.fostering@tusla.ie, was also set up.

Print: New national fostering leaflets, posters, a fostering awareness pin, and new pull-up banners for events – featuring campaign branding, messages, and call to action – were produced. These were distributed to all Tusla fostering teams across the country for their events as promotional aids.

Stakeholder engagement: We distributed briefing notes and social media content, to communications teams and other personnel in community/ voluntary organisations, funded partners, and to TDs/Senators/Councillors to ask for their support. Many stakeholders subsequently published material Tusla provided them with.

Public information events: Tusla nationwide fostering teams held public information events – coffee mornings, supermarket stands and local libraries events – to encourage new applications.

Advertising: The campaign was supported by print, radio, and social media advertising.

3. A major launch event to kickstart the campaign

Tusla National Fostering Week was launched by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Paul McAuliffe, in Dublin's Mansion House. The then Lord Mayor had a knowledge and interest in foster care from previous work. Speakers included the Lord Mayor, the CEO of Tusla, and the CEO of the Irish Foster Care Association, which supported the launch. The four campaign videos were shown and the carers who featured in them were in attendance, along with many other Tusla foster carers. The Mansion House was chosen for its convenient location for foster families, social workers in the greater Dublin area, and the media. Foster carers gave press interviews, and there was particular interest in foster carers Dean and Bonga, a married same-sex couple who foster. A testimonial from Shauna Armstrong, a care leaver, provided an exceptionally moving end to the launch.

The launch was covered extensively that day, and reports featured in TheJournal.ie, NewsTalk, Drivetime on RTÉ Radio 1, Virgin Media News through the day, the *Irish Examiner*, FM104 and *The Irish Times*. Approximately two dozen radio stations featured the launch on their news bulletins through the day.

Measurement

Tusla National Fostering Week, October 14th-20th 2019, achieved the stated campaign objectives. Spike in enquiry numbers:

- We had 411 enquiries in total from October to December 2019, overtaking our 350 target by Nov 20th.
- This means we recruited up to 50 new foster carers/families (enquiry-application-to-carer conversion rate being 12pc).
- In the Tusla north Dublin, Cavan/Monaghan/Louth/Meath region enquiries rose from 10 in Oct/Nov/Dec 2018 to 61 in Oct/Nov/Dec 2019.
- In the Tusla region covering Laois, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath, Kildare, west Wicklow, and south Dublin enquiries grew from 53 in Oct/Nov/Dec 2018 to 116 in the same period in 2019.
- In Tusla's west of Ireland region, enquiries increased from 21 in October 2018 to 55 in October 2019.
- As of February 27th, 2020, Tusla fostering number enquiries nationwide post-campaign totalled 590.

Enquiry targets: DOB data shows most applicants were aged 40+. We received substantial enquiry numbers from younger aged applicants. We also received enquiries from Irish residents originally from Hungary, Libya, Lithuania, India, and France among other nationalities.

Public awareness impact: A separate urgent fostering appeal for a young boy (<https://www.tusla.ie/scott/>) yielded an unprecedented 40 enquiries (not included in the 411 campaign fig above) over a 48 hour period in December 2019, demonstrating an enhanced public awareness of Tusla fostering.

Media coverage: 155 earned media pieces were generated, and comments/feedback on these showed huge goodwill toward Tusla fostering services.

Social media: There was strong engagement, with significant numbers liking, retweeting, posting, and commenting across Tusla channels.

Corporate interest: During the campaign, a major employer contacted Tusla's fostering line for advice on its own plans to introduce a new HR policy for staff who are foster carers.

Web analytics: During 10th-22nd October 2019, pages views of fostering.ie accounted for 20% of all page views for all of 2019 to date that year.

This strategic public information PR campaign added distinctive value to Tusla's corporate, and public service objectives.

The greatest impact is the actual recruitment of new foster carers for children.

KANTAR

PARAGON



RUEPOINT MEDIA