

## **IAS Launch Speeches from Parent Sinéad and Young Person Alix:**

Hello,

I'm **Sinéad**, a mother of a young person who has benefited greatly from the independent advocacy service in Galway.

We have accessed the service on and off for 2 ½ years.

I will talk about how the independent advocacy service has been for us.

### **What does it mean for our daughter?**

Before we had an advocate, our daughter was unable to answer questions at meetings, mostly answering with "I don't know".

The advocate has built up a good relationship with our daughter, and now our daughter trusts the advocate and sees that the advocate is there to help. We were happy to see that our daughter requested to meet with the advocate regarding a plan she had in returning to school after an absence, and she asked the advocate to attend the meeting with school to discuss her plan, in which she put her points across very well.

The advocacy service has enabled our daughter to self-advocate and knowing that the advocate is her voice has given our daughter the confidence to speak for herself. In the past, our daughter struggled to attend meetings but now she feels that she has support. She has moved from "I don't know" to "I have a voice".

### **What does it mean for our family?**

Before we had an advocate, we found going into meetings stressful. We felt responsible for speaking on behalf of our daughter as well as speaking on our own behalf. Because we were so emotionally involved, it was easy to get side-tracked and to forget important issues that you wanted to address.

Having an advocate changed the dynamics when we went to meetings.

We found it easier to have an advocate for our daughter so we could focus on our own priorities at meetings. Also, an advocate can sometimes ask more direct questions than the parents and can look for clarification.

This service should be available across the country to all young people and their families attending CAMHS.

It really should be available to anyone accessing professionals in relation to their children.

Young people should have a voice.

Families should not be left alone to support their children.

Thank you.

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Hello. My name is **Alix** and I'm 16 years old. I live in Cork, and I have been with CAMHS for three years. I have also been in YAP for over a year now.

I started with CAMHS four years ago for an initial assessment, at first, I didn't meet the criteria for their service but eventually I was accepted into the service. I have faced challenges both personally and with my care team while in the service. It took many appointments, doctors and other professionals to get the support that I am receiving now. I had to attend many meetings with different professionals that caused some overwhelm for me. Having an independent advocate to talk through these meetings and expectations would have been helpful for me at this stage of my journey.

Coming up against these challenges has emphasised to me the importance and the need for the independent advocacy service. I have often felt misheard and misunderstood, during of my journey with CAMHS. This has been caused by either a lack of communication or a miscommunication. Having an independent advocate would help me to talk through these issues and understand how to best communicate my needs to my care team to be better supported. My hopes for working with an independent advocate would be that they could work with me to prepare for important meetings with my care team so I can get the most out of the service and ensure communication is smooth.

I think the independent advocacy service is well overdue and much needed. Having someone who understands the system and CAMHS as a service will be very reassuring for other young people. I believe this extra support from the independent advocate will help to make young people feel safer, more confident, and more at ease. Young people just want and need to be heard and understood by the professionals they are working with. The more people listen to me, the more supported I feel. I want to be part of the change that helps other young people to feel listened to and understood.

The support I have received from YAP so far has been incredible. In the beginning I resisted the programme but as time has gone on, I have built trust and realised the benefits of it. I feel reassured knowing I have someone to talk to who supports and respects me. YAP has given me opportunities that I did not have before and has empowered me to speak up when it is needed. Being with YAP has taught me that my voice is important and valid. As a young person caught up in many services, I know that this can often be forgotten and overlooked. But I want to stand up here today to remind you all that young people deserve to have our voices and opinions heard especially when it comes to our own mental health. Because that is exactly what is **our** mental health, our recovery and nobody else's.

As someone with a lot of experience with services, I have many hopes for the future of young people. I have been disappointed by CAMHS in the past and this has left me feeling upset, confused, and frustrated -and I am not alone with this. I would love to see a change for the future of young people where nobody is left feeling like this. My hopes for the future can only look brighter if the correct changes are made to a system that isn't always right or fair. The independent advocacy service can play a huge part in this. YAP has made so many positive changes in my life so far and I believe other young people will experience this now with the independent advocacy service.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today.