

The Children's Court Advocate Service

Helping children have their voice heard when
decisions are being made about their lives.



Family separation and court proceedings can be difficult for everyone involved – especially children.

Children are often affected by decisions being made around them, but may not always have an opportunity to share how they feel or what is important to them.

The Children's Court Advocate Service provides children with a **FREE** safe, independent opportunity to express their views and experiences so they can be heard as part of the court process in guardianship, custody and access applications.

What is the Children's Court Advocate Service?

When families are involved in guardianship, custody or access proceedings, adults have opportunities to explain their views to the court.

This service helps ensure children also have an opportunity to express theirs.

A Children's Court Advocate meets with the child, helps them understand the process and prepares a report for the court outlining the child's wishes and views.

The Advocate does not make decisions about the case. Their role is to help ensure the child's voice can be heard.



Why this matters

- Court decisions can have a significant impact on a child's life.
- Children often have thoughts, feelings and views about what is happening around them, but may not know how to express them or who to talk to.
- This service helps create a safe space where children can be listened to and have their voices heard.

Our Role

The Children's Court Advocate will:

- ✓ Meet with the child in a safe and supportive environment.
- ✓ Explain the process in a way they can understand.
- ✓ Help them express their wishes and views.
- ✓ Prepare a report for the court outlining the child's views.
- ✓ Ensure the child's voice is heard as part of the process.

What we are not

- × We do not take sides.
- × We do not represent either parent.
- × We do not make decisions.
- × We do not decide what is in the child's best interests.
- × We do not replace legal advice or legal representation.

About the pilot

The Children's Court Advocate Service is a pilot initiative funded by the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration and delivered by Childhood Matters. We meet with children aged 5–18 involved in applications lodged in Clonmel and Waterford courts.

This is a FREE service.

All guardianship, custody or access applications made in Clonmel or Waterford court offices are eligible for this pilot service.

The pilot will help inform the future development of services that support children's participation in family law proceedings.

How we work

Our approach is:

- Child-centred.
- Trauma-informed.
- Independent and impartial.
- Developmentally appropriate.
- Based on evidence-informed practice.

Children are given time to build trust and understand the process. They are never rushed or pressured to share information.

Advocates are qualified professionals in line with the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964.

What this means for your child

Your child will:

- Have an opportunity to be heard.
- Be supported to understand what is happening.
- Be given information in a child-friendly way.
- Be treated with respect.
- Be supported throughout the process.
- Never be pressured to say anything they do not wish to say.

Transparency and Communication

We will:

- Explain the process clearly to all parties and children.
- Be transparent about how information is used.
- Explain to the child what information will be shared with the court.
- Discuss safeguarding concerns that may arise.

What is the Referral Process:

1. A referral is received.
2. We contact both parties.
3. Consent of both parents/guardians is required.
4. Relevant information is gathered.
5. We meet with the child (usually 2–3 times).
6. A report is prepared for the court outlining the views of the child.
7. The court considers the child's views as part of its decision-making process.
In some cases, additional steps may be considered to further support a child's participation in the process.
8. Opportunities for the child to meet with the Judge.
9. Opportunities for the Advocate to give the child feedback about the outcome of proceedings, where appropriate.



About Childhood Matters:

Childhood Matters provides integrated, clinically informed support for children, young people and families, helping them feel heard, understood and supported through times of challenge, transition and vulnerability.

- **30+ years** supporting children and families.
- Specialists in **trauma-informed and child-centred practice**.
- Expertise spanning **infant mental health, family support, therapeutic services and advocacy**.
- Trusted partner to organisations across the **health, education and justice sectors**.

Helping children feel heard when it matters most.

Children's Court Advocate Pilot Service is a Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration initiative delivered by Childhood Matters.



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt,
Gnóthaí Baile agus Imirce
Department of Justice,
Home Affairs and Migration



Childhood Matters Children's Court Advocate Pilot Service

Visit: www.childhood-matters.ie/childcourtadvocate

Clonmel Office:

Marketplace
Clonmel
Co. Tipperary
E91 N5V9

CCAClonmel@childhood-matters.ie
Telephone: 0526156088

Waterford Office:

48 The Glen
Waterford City
Co. Waterford
X91 HWF9

CCAWaterfordCity@childhood-matters.ie
Telephone: 051267705