



Committee of Public Accounts

Briefing Note

Thursday 17 December 2020

Introduction

The Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board (Caranua) is responsible for the management of a limited Fund of €110 million to improve the quality of life of individuals who as children experienced abuse and neglect in institutions managed by religious congregations on behalf of the Irish State; and who have received awards from the Residential Institutions Redress Board, the Irish courts or direct settlement with a congregation. Survivors who did not receive an award or settlement are not eligible to apply.

The role of Caranua is to address the current needs of eligible Survivors and improve their well-being, by providing funding supports for approved services in the areas of housing, health and education that are not readily available through public bodies.

The final transfer of funds from religious congregations was received on the 9 December 2019, meaning the full €110 million which was pledged to the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund was paid. Including interest of €1.38 million, a total fund of €111,381,921 has been made available.

Caranua commenced accepting applications in January 2014. Since then, Caranua has received applications from 6,661 individuals, of these 6,181 were survivors who were eligible to apply for funding supports. By 30 November 2020, Caranua has provided funding supports to survivors totalling €97,080,388 on 57,058 payments. Further information on the breakdown of these fund categories is provided in Caranua's Annual Report 2019/2020.

Funding supports to survivors	
Housing support	€68.1m
Health	€27.2m
Education	€1.4m
Exceptional Need	€0.4m

The Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 legislates that all operational costs must be met from the Fund. The Board of Caranua and management have worked determinedly to minimise operational costs and continue to do so during the wind-down phase. To the 30 November, €13,393,129 was used in the operation of the fund.

1. Outstanding/live cases

The last date for the processing of funding support payments is Friday 11 December 2020. Caranua is working with survivors to achieve this timeline and a further update will be provided at the committee meeting on 17 December 2020.

2. Orderly wind-down of Caranua

Caranua administers a limited fund that receives no additional public funding and therefore has a fiduciary responsibility to carefully manage the fund to ensure adequate resources are available to meet the requirements of survivors with open applications. As the fund is almost expended, the work of the organisation is now complete.

Caranua has taken a flexible approach towards survivors' applications; however, with limited funds remaining, survivors are aware that funding supports services will no longer be available. Over two years ago, in May 2018, plans for the orderly wind-down of the fund were announced. In early 2019, Caranua began contacting survivors with open applications to discuss person-centred timelines for completion. This completion process has remained in place since.

The timeline for completion of Caranua's work was extended to December 2020 to allow for the administration of the final transfer of funds from the religious congregations received in December 2019 and to allow survivors impacted by COVID-19 more time to complete their applications.

Caranua regularly engages with survivor support groups and other stakeholder groups on this matter and information is available on our website www.caranua.ie.

3. Transfer of functions/ongoing provision of services for survivors

Caranua has regular engagement with the Department of Education in relation to the wind-down of Caranua.

The term of the current Board ends on the 24 March 2021 or on the date of dissolution whichever is sooner. The dissolution legislation is a matter for the Minister for Education.

Following the passage of the closing legislation through the Oireachtas, the remaining assets and liabilities will transfer to the Minister for Education and Skills.

The ongoing provision of services for survivors of institutional abuse is not within the remit of Caranua and will require a cross-departmental strategy to ensure the best outcomes for survivors.

4. Inadequate control over grant repayments

Caranua must balance working with Survivors in a person-centred and compassionate manner and our obligations as a public body with regard to our fiduciary accountability. This has raised difficulties as our required process was seen by some survivors as bureaucratic, however it was necessary for Caranua to respond to the audit opinion of the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to controls.

The Board has ensured that appropriate procedures are in place and these are adhered to in the vast majority of payments of funding supports. The level of non-compliance with the Board's procedures continued to improve in 2019. However, as an organisation working with survivors, there have been occasions when it was decided to work outside of procedures to protect the welfare of a survivor.

C&AG Audit Findings	Caranua's response in Management letter
<p>The audit examined quotes that had been presented to the Board prior to payment for a sample of payments made in 2019. The sample found that while there was evidence of one or more quotes with every funding support payment made, in 30% of the cases sampled the required number of quotes had not been presented.</p>	<p>In cases where a required number of quotes must be presented by applicants prior to payment, the level of non-compliance dropped to 30% in 2019 from 33% in 2018 and 56% in 2017.</p> <p>Despite their best efforts, some survivors have difficulty obtaining the required number of quotations for accessing funding supports. Where possible, Caranua makes exceptions and accepts less than the required number of quotations so that the survivor can access funding.</p> <p>As part of Caranua's COVID support response for survivors, Caranua wrote to the Department of Education seeking permission to reduce the requirements in relation to quotations. The Department sanctioned this amendment.</p>
<p>For certain types of housing expenditure, proof of tenancy or ownership must be presented by an applicant. A sample of payments from 2019 selected for testing by audit did not have proof of ownership or tenancy in 17% of cases.</p>	<p>In cases where proof of tenancy or ownership must be presented by applicants, the level of non-compliance reduced to 17% in 2019 from 33% in 2018 and 55% in 2017.</p>

<p>In cases where post-payment invoices and receipts were required to be presented to the Board, there is evidence that such documentation had not been presented in 45% of cases sampled by audit in 2019.</p>	<p>In the vast majority of transactions, Caranua provides funding in advance for services and relies on survivors to return receipts to Caranua. Caranua cannot compel survivors to forward post-payment receipts, however, we take all reasonable steps to receive as many as possible.</p> <p>During the audit in all but one case where a post-payment receipt had not been returned by survivors, evidence was provided by Caranua that reminder letters had issued, the one exception related to a survivor who was in prison.</p>
---	---

5. Review of the effectiveness of internal controls

The Board initiated a self-evaluation of Board Effectiveness and Evaluation Review in December 2019. The Board discussed and accepted the findings on 16 April 2020. This is noted in the 2019 financial statements.

6. Late submission of 2019 accounts to the Houses of the Oireachtas

Caranua submitted draft 2019 financial accounts to the Department of Education and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in line with the requirements set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Caranua does not have a role in submitting the financial accounts to the House of the Oireachtas.

Examples of Caranua's work with survivors

A survivor impacted by Covid-19

Survivor whose children are unaware of the history of institutional abuse and does not want them to know.

Challenges

As the survivor made their initial contact with Caranua after 1st August 2018 deadline for new applications, this is a post-cessation application. The Director of Services reviews all post-cessation applications to identify exceptional needs.

The survivor had an accident which caused significant personal injury and led to a prolonged period of hospitalisation and rehabilitation; this resulted in limited engagement with their application during this time.

Caranua contacted the survivor in early January 2020 to discuss their application. The survivor explained their circumstances and the problems they were having accessing needed funding supports.

As a result of the accident, the survivor has complex medical and mobility issues and cannot drive, in addition, they had recently moved to a remote area and they had no support network in place.

Due to the family being unaware of the history of abuse, they could not assist with the application process.

COVID-19 restrictions meant an Occupational Therapist could not visit the property to carry out an assessment and the survivor's health issues put them in the high-risk category for COVID-19, therefore outside contact had to be restricted as much as possible.

Outcome

The Application Advisor Team offered additional assistance to the survivor and developed a personal plan for completing the application.

Caranua arranged for a virtual Occupational Therapist appointment to take place during which the survivor's mobility scooter was identified as no longer suitable to meet their needs and a new mobility scooter was purchased through funding supports. Due to a lack of space in the home, the mobility scooter was kept in an outside garage, through funding supports the garage door was adapted to open remotely so the survivor no longer needed another person present to assist them with access.

An accessible bathroom was installed with an accessible shower en-suite to the main bedroom to facilitate self-care. Caranua contacted all the suppliers on the survivor's behalf to make necessary arrangements and get the quotations for these services. The survivor received a total of €13,607 in funding supports.

The Applications Advisor team also assisted the survivor with Barnardos Origins family tracing service to connect with a family member with whom contact had been lost.

A survivor in prison

Survivor in prison during the initial stages of the application process. There were many attempts to progress the application but due to sporadic communication with the survivor, they were unsuccessful. The survivor was homeless before entering prison and had addiction issues.

Challenges

For a variety of reasons, survivors in prison find it difficult to access the Fund. Some of the barriers include the circumstances of the prison sentence, emotional and psychological state, length of time in prison, access to communication, literacy issues and the level of support from outside and inside of the prison to facilitate the application process; these factors all have a bearing on the survivors' ability to engage with Caranua.

Outcome

Caranua implemented a specific engagement programme for survivors in prison to overcome these difficulties. Two Application Advisors met with the survivor in prison to discuss the application process and available supports while in prison. The survivor received funding for clothing, underwear and footwear and funds were transferred to the prison tuck shop.

The survivor had an expected release date from prison, and a Caranua Application Advisor, the Prison Chaplain and probation services worked in cooperation to identify needs regarding housing and health supports. Upon release, the survivor was in living accommodation provided by a voluntary sector organisation.

Maintaining contact with the survivor was difficult but the application advisor continued to follow up regularly and provided support with the process.

Before the application was completed €12,823 in funding supports were allocated for kitchen, bedroom and living room furniture, electrical goods and exercise equipment.

A survivor living abroad

Survivor living outside of Ireland, with considerable mental and physical health challenges, and was involved in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship.

Challenges

The survivor has many day-to-day life issues and contact with Caranua was irregular and often at times of personal crisis. Moved accommodation multiple times and linkages with counselling and support services needed to be recreated in each location.

Outcome

The Advisor team advocated with counselling services in the survivor's country of residence regarding a specialised trauma support assessment, the survivor was referred to a specialist service for intensive trauma counselling.

The survivor expressed needs for funding supports with life skills such as driving lessons and computer skills for online education and training.

The survivor received €15,317 in funding supports predominately in the area of health supports including counselling, dental, chiropractor and acupuncture treatment.