

# Limerick School Attendance Conference



**Thomond Park**

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2025**

# SPEAKERS

## **Dr Katriona O'Sullivan**

Dr Katriona O'Sullivan is an associate professor in the faculty of science in Maynooth University, a psychologist and memoirist. Her first book, *Poor*, debuted at #1 on the Irish Non-Fiction bestseller list.

As one of 5 children in a home shaped by her parents' heroin addiction, Katriona's story chronicles her journey from poverty, teenage pregnancy, homelessness to graduating with a PhD from Trinity College Dublin and becoming an award-winning lecturer whose work challenges barriers to education.

## **Dr Jennifer McMahon**

Dr McMahon is a Senior Developmental Psychologist and Head of Educational Psychology, Inclusion and Special Education at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland. She is a selected member of the prestigious Young Ireland Academy of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) for excellence in research and impact in school, child and youth mental wellbeing. Dr McMahon has over 15 years exploring the social determinants of youth mental wellbeing, designing/delivering contextually sensitive wellbeing interventions and is an Expert Advisor to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and International Science Council (ISC) on a related project. She leads several high-profile projects relating to youth mental wellbeing including developing the Irish national social emotional wellbeing curriculum for students (aged 14-16 years) and leading CoSPACE Ireland, a collaborative study with Oxford University (and multiple countries) tracking the mental wellbeing of children/youth (aged 4-18 years) and their families throughout COVID-19. Dr McMahon has recently been appointed as an executive committee member of the International Association of Youth Mental Health (IAYMH) and is a recognised expert in youth stakeholder involvement in design and delivery of ecologically informed programmes and has co-designed and delivered projects with youth advisory panels.

## **Aisling O'Neill**

Aisling O'Neill is the Midwest Area Manager for Tusla, The Child and Family Agency and the chair of the Limerick Children and Young People's Service Committee. Aisling Graduated from Trinity College Dublin as a Social Worker in 1998 and has worked in children and family services for over 25 years. Aisling has extensive practice and management experience working in Child Protection, Family Support, Alternative Care, and the management of adult risk to children.

## **Tara Ćirić**

Tara Ćirić [pronounced: CHEER-EECH], is an Irish Research Council scholar and one of two researchers involved in developing the school avoidance report and resources to be launched today. She is a PhD researcher in Maynooth University's Department of Education focused on the lived experiences of children in care in Ireland's education system. A former education psychologist, her work is dedicated to showcasing the voices of children and young people in research.

### **Dr Mike Finneran**

Mike is Associate Professor and Head of Drama & Theatre Studies at Mary Immaculate College. His research interests are in applied theatre, creative justice and arts education and he works widely as a theatre artist.

### **Aoife Hennessey**

Aoife is a singer, performer and voice teacher. She now teaches in Spotlight Stage School, and also in Dwan Academy, Thurles. She graduated with a BA in Contemporary and Applied Theatre Studies in Mary Immaculate College and she completed her LLCM in Musical Theatre Singing with the University of West London. Her most notable roles include Jasmine in *Aladdin and his Magic Lamp*, and The Fairy-Godmother in *Jack and the Beanstalk* both at the Lime Tree Theatre, 'Maggie' with MIDAS *A Chorus Line* and 'Fan' in *Scrooge* with College Players.

### **James Corr**

James is a graduate of the BA in Contemporary and Applied Theatre Studies (BACATS) programme at MIC. He has been involved in theatre and film throughout Limerick and beyond from a very early age. Some of his most recent credits include an appearance on RTE's Hidden Assets and Honest Arts' acclaimed production of *Waiting for Poirot*, Iggy in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and Christy in *Aladdin and his Magic Lamp*, both at the Lime Tree Theatre.

### **Michael Casey**

Michael is a graduate of the BA in Contemporary and Applied Theatre Studies (BACATS) programme at MIC and has numerous stage and screen performances to his name. Prominent screen credits include *Lulu and the Electric Dreamboat* (2023), *Mersey Boys: A Letter from Al Moran* (2019) and *For We Are Many* (2019).

### **Alice Riddler**

Alice has worked in the public sector for the last 24 years with a particular focus on prevention and early intervention. As an experienced practitioner Alice has worked in the areas of youth work, community development, and family support. Alice holds a BSocSc in UCC and MA in Family Support in NUIG.

Alice's role as a Senior CSFN Coordinator with Tusla includes responsibility for; commissioning of Services, coordination & delivery of parenting supports, the promotion and delivery of the Meitheal early intervention model. Alice is the chair of several Child and Family Support Networks, including the Limerick resilience working group, an interagency group that works collaboratively to raise awareness of the impact of trauma on children's lives. Alice is committed to working in partnership with families and services to support children & families in need.

### **Dr Catriona O'Toole**

Catriona O'Toole is Associate Professor in Maynooth University Department of Education and chartered psychologist with PSI. Her research focuses on wellbeing and inclusion in education. She is particularly interested in barriers to school attendance and participation and the potential of trauma-informed practices to address these challenges.

Her research has led to collaborations with international organisations, including the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) and national charities like, Kyrie Therapeutic Farm and Alcohol Action Ireland, with whom she developed a bespoke website ([www.traumainformededucation.ie](http://www.traumainformededucation.ie)).

Catriona is Chair of the Education and Policy Committee and Member of Executive Board with the International Network for School Attendance (INSA). She is a representative on Kildare Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC). Her research has received funding from multiple sources including the Irish Research Council, Tusla, The Drug and Alcohol Task Force, Limerick CYPSC, and Schools for Health in Europe Network Foundation.

### **Dr Lindsey Liston**

A Lecturer at TUS (Midwest), Lindsey's area of interest lies in social and educational exclusion and the role education plays in shaping life outcomes. She received her PhD from NUI Maynooth, where her research explored the relationship between school exclusionary practices and involvement with the Justice system. In addition to teaching and research, Lindsey has extensive experience working in the Community and Voluntary Sector in the areas of Youth Justice, Community Development, Access to Education, Family Support and Access to Justice in underserved communities. She remains active in the Community and Voluntary Sector via membership in several Boards of Management and Advisory Groups in the Justice, Education and Community sectors. Currently, she is the Chair of Southill HUB, the Chair of Corpus Christi Family Centre and recently finished a 3-Year term as Chair of Paul Partnership Research and Evaluation Subgroup.

### **David Cashman**

David Cashman is a school principal of South Lee ETNS, an Employment Based PhD Scholar at University College Cork and CEO of The WellSchools Network. His thesis, "Reconceptualising Wellbeing," reflects a commitment to practical, inclusive education by incorporating wellbeing and trauma-informed practices into school environments. With a career that has spanned over 16 years—11 of which were deeply rooted in DEIS Band 1 schools—David has embraced roles from teaching to leadership with a focus on creating supportive educational spaces. His tenure as Chairperson of the Young Knocknaheeny/Let's Grow Together Area Based Childhood Programme further demonstrates his collaborative spirit and drive to impact community-level change. Throughout his career, David has had the opportunity to present his research at international conferences, contributing effectively to the broader dialogue on enriching student wellbeing.

## **Vivienne Hogan**

Vivienne Hogan is the Principal of Thomond Community College, a DEIS post-primary school in Limerick City under LCETB's patronage. Graduating from the University of Limerick in 2003 with a Bachelor's in Science Education, she has 15 years of experience in senior management within DEIS schools. Since 2014, Vivienne has also been an associate with the OIDE Tánaiste Programme, training newly appointed Deputy Principals. In her leisure time, she enjoys the tranquility of County Clare, where she resides with her family and farm animals. Vivienne's deep love for nature, especially horses, is an important aspect of her life

## **Limerick Traveller Network**

We are 12 Peer Researchers members of the Limerick Traveller Network, representing 8 sites and housing areas in Limerick city where Travellers live. We got together in 2019 to make changes in our community and train ourselves. In 2022 we got support and funding from the Toy Show Appeal to look into what is stopping Traveller children from going forward in their education, We set up our research team in March 2023.

We are employed by Exchange House Ireland and our research is approved and supervised by Maynooth University.

## **Tara Madden**

Tara Madden is Education Project Manager of EPIC – Empowering People in Care. EPIC's mission is to champion the rights of care-experienced children and young people, ensure their voices inform the policy and practice that affects their lives, and cultivate a care aware society. The aim of the Education Project is to raise awareness of the situation of children with experience of the care system in schools; to highlight the potential for education to make a positive difference in the experiences of children in care; to build the capacity and knowledge of teachers to support children in care and to increase collaboration between professionals in the care and education sectors.

## **Donncha Ó Treasaigh**

Donncha Ó Treasaigh is the Director of Schools for Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. With an Honours Degree in Gaeilge & Geography, Higher Diploma in Education, a postgraduate degree in ICT, First Class Honours Masters in Education and a Diploma in Law, he is extremely passionate about inclusive education. He was the founding principal of Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh and lobbied extensively for the successful application for Limerick's new Community Special School which will open in September 2024.

Donncha is also Chairperson of the Hunt Museum Board, a previous chairperson of the Limerick Principals & Deputy Principals Association, NAPD Region 6, NAPD ICT, ETBI ICT as well as the Limerick Education Centre. Donncha is a guest speaker at events for Apple, Google, and Zoom, serves on Department of Education Implementation Advisory Groups and is Board Member of the Plassey Campus Centre at University of Limerick in addition to multiple Boards of Management for Community Schools.

### **David Studer**

David Studer is Limerick Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) Coordinator with Tusla Child and Family Agency, a post he has held since 2018. He was previously coordinator of South Dublin CYPSC. David holds a First Class Honours Degree in History, Politics, Sociology and Social Studies and a First Class Honours Masters Degree in Peace and Development Studies from University of Limerick. In 2014 David was Development Worker for Limerick Creative Communities project *Are You Dancing? Remembering Limerick's Dancehalls* as part of Limerick City of Culture 2014. He has worked with Milford Care Centre, Radio New Zealand and has managed a fuel poverty and rent advocacy project in Brent, London.

### **Maria Tobin**

Maria began her career as a Post Primary Teacher and Guidance Counsellor in schools with high concentrations of educationally disadvantaged students in Limerick and Kerry.

Her experience in this area, combined with her belief that children could be further supported through working with parents, family, schools and community, underpinned her decision to engage in post graduate study in the area of Educational Disadvantage and to take on the mantle of HSCL Co-ordinator within the Primary and Post Primary sector. Maria worked in this capacity for six years and was privileged to have access to the homes of many marginalised families, to have the opportunity to learn about the educational barriers they faced and to develop strategies to assist parents in improving their own and their children's educational outcomes.

Maria was subsequently seconded to the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as an Integrated Services Manager, and upon the dissolution of the NEWB, she moved to Tusla, The Child and Family Agency in the same capacity. She took on a permanent role as a National Manager with Tusla Educational Welfare Service in 2017 and is now focused on supporting the implementation of a seamless delivery of support to educationally disadvantaged children and their families.

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# WORKSHOPS

## Thomond Suite (main conference room)

### *Workshop 1: Contemporary Issues Affecting School Attendance: Practical Strategies for Practitioner-Parent Collaboration – Jane Sharpe and Dr. Maryanne Lowney*

The workshop will outline contemporary issues affecting school attendance and provide practical support for Educational Practitioners working with parents of children experiencing school avoiding behaviour at both primary and post primary level. The presenters will provide an overview on how to recognise School Avoiding Behaviour as a specific type of School Attendance Problem and will provide practical guidance to practitioners on how to support parents to support their children.

#### **Presenters:**

Jane Sharpe is The Practice Development Manager for The School Completion Programme (TESS). She has over 20 years experiencing of working with children and families experiencing school avoidance. Jane is also completing a PhD on School Avoiding Behaviour and recently had a paper published; *A Latent Class Analysis of Mental Health Symptoms in Primary School Children: Exploring Associations with School Attendance Problems*. She is currently undertaking research on the comparative experience of parents and educational practitioners living with and working with primary school children with emotionally based school avoidance.

Dr Maryanne Lowney is a native of Limerick city and a graduate of Mary Immaculate College. She is currently working with Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) as an Integrated Services Manager supporting the Home School Community Liaison Scheme. Throughout her 20-year career in education, she has held numerous teaching, governance and management roles within the post-primary sector. Maryanne completed her doctoral studies in 2021 following the award of a prestigious Government of Ireland PhD scholarship. Her research explored a multi-case case study in association with Kerry Education and Training Board entitled *'Experiences of Post-primary School Communities Transitioning to a Settings-base for Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion: The Impact of Policy on Context, Competition and Care.'*

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### *Workshop 2: Domestic Abuse and School Attendance*

This workshop will highlight functional roles of children in Domestic Abuse families, the impact of domestic abuse on school attendance and how school provides a sanctuary for children. It will also touch on the kids power and control wheel, post domestic abuse, recovery programmes, dating abuse in teenagers and where we need to go when it is in schools and the schools healthy relationship programme.

#### **Presenter:**

Simone Fox is Child & Youth Support Coordinator with ADAPT Domestic Abuse Support Service. She has been working in ADAPT for 25 years. She leads out Child & Youth support team. Simone designs programmes and interventions to support women and children have experience of domestic abuse and coercive control. She has previously worked in Limerick Youth service and Residential Care. Simone holds an MA in Social Care Management and a BA Social Science.

# Ormond Suite

## *Workshop 1: Understanding and Supporting Anxiety in School*

This workshop will explore how anxiety presents and is maintained in young people, and specifically how anxiety might manifest in the classroom and school setting. It will also examine what accommodations and strategies work to support young people experiencing anxiety in school.

### **Presenters:**

Dr Brid Heffernan, Senior Clinical Psychologist in Primary Care Psychology Service in Limerick. Dr Garrett O'Connor, Clinical Psychologist in Primary Care Psychology Service in Limerick. Between them they have over 25 years' experience working with children and adolescents with emotional and behavioural difficulties and their families.

They will also be supported by Claire Bennett, Psychology Assistant in the Primary Care Psychology Service.

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## *Workshop 2: Connect: Creating an Educational Environment to Promote Engagement*

Presentation outlining approaches used to enhance attendance, engagement & connection in an alternative education setting, followed by discussion/exercises in identifying potential changes and new approaches that might enhance school attendance and engagement.

### **Presenter:**

Elaine Slattery (M.A., Ed. Leadership & Management), is manager of Céim ar Chéim (Probation Service Education & Training Centre, Moyross Youth Academy) for the past 25 years, previously having worked in Corpus Christi Primary School and Limerick Project School. Elaine line manages the Limerick Restorative Practices Project attached to Céim ar Chéim. Elaine is a trainer of Restorative Practices, supporting the delivery of training to schools, community and youth organisations and residential centres. She is on the Board of Directors of Moyross Youth Diversion Project, the Le Chéile Restorative Justice Steering Committee and ACJRD (Association for Criminal Justice & Research Development) Working Group for Restorative Justice.

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# Munster Suite

## *Workshop 1: Inclusion in the Classroom*

Sharing the model and lessons learnt from a research and intervention project in five DEIS Band 1 primary schools in Limerick City. We will share findings and practices identified by the EDNIP Project.

### **Presenters:**

Dr. Ruth Bourke, Áine Lyne, and Lisa Martin of ENDIP are presenting. EDNIP is a partnership initiative which aims to promote and support migrant integration into school and community life working across five DEIS band 1 primary schools in Limerick city and is currently (Sept 2021-Aug 2024) funded by the National Integration Fund, DCEDIY, Rethink Ireland Education Innovation Fund and a philanthropic donor. EDNIP delivers a full programme of activities in partnership with the five EDNIP schools and a range of other stakeholders. EDNIP is a project housed in the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in Mary Immaculate College.

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## *Workshop 2: GOSHH Gender & Orientation*

Information on GOSHH and what we do. We will explore information around gender and orientation and how it affects school attendance.

### **Presenters:**

Edel Mitchell and Caterine Corbett are both youth workers. They provide one to one support for young LGBTI people and facilitate youth groups. They create and deliver workshops in relation to gender and orientation as well as sexual health.

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## 1978 Suite

### *Workshop 1: The experience of the working with children and young people with complex needs, presenting with school attendance issues on a children's disability network team*

This workshop will focus specifically on school attendance issues with autistic children and young people. We will cover why school attendance issues occur and why they persist, with this population. We will also attempt to provide insight into how we currently support the needs of these children and young people, and also highlight the need for future improvements in this area.

#### **Presenters**

Fiona Gould is a Senior Educational Psychologist who has worked at West Limerick Children's Service since 2016. She began her career as an Educational Psychologist in the UK working with children presenting with complex needs in pre-schools, primary and secondary schools. She moved to Ireland in 2008, at which point she specialised in working within Early Intervention teams.

Elma Corcoran is a Senior Chartered Psychologist working with the West Limerick Children's services. Prior to her commencement of her position with the WLCS in December 2023, she had been working in Autism and Disability services in Kerry for 17 years. Elma also spent some time working in private practice in Canada. Elma has spent the last number of years primarily working with teenagers with complex needs, a large number of whom have difficulty engaging with school.

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### *Workshop 2: Music Generation Limerick County in the classroom.*

Participants will experience a hands on workshop in music technology and introduction to an instrument.

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#### **Presenters:**

Linda Walsh is a Musician and Educator from Limerick. She is a singer songwriter and a graduate of University of Limericks Masters in Community Music. She works with voice, song writing and instruments to deliver workshops in County Limerick.

Daithi MacCruitin is a Musician Educator and Irish Musician / producer. He also is a visual artist who uses mixed media to deliver electronic based music workshop in County Limerick.

Patrick O'Brien is the Music Development officer for Music Generation Limerick County. He is a community musician and singer songwriter.

## **LIMERICK CYPSC SUB-GROUPS AND WORKING GROUPS INVOLVED IN SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROJECT**

### **Executive Leadership Programme School Attendance Working Group**

David Studer (Limerick CYPSC/Tusla)  
Eileen O'Keefe (Ballyhoura Development)  
Jackie Dwane (UL / REPPP)  
John Flanagan (An Garda Síochána)  
Majella Hanrahan (NAPD/Castletroy College)  
Priscilla Sheehan (Limerick Youth Service)  
Richie Bowens (Foróige)  
Suzi Cronin (Southill Hub)

### **Limerick CYPSC Education Sub-Group**

Anne Delaney (Limerick Childcare Committee)  
David Studer (Limerick CYPSC / Tusla)  
Deirdre Folan (NEPS)  
Helen Ryan (Limerick and Clare ETB/Mungret Community College)  
Majella Hanrahan ((NAPD/Castletroy College)  
Sinead Toomey (IPPN/Thomond National School)

### **Conference Planning Group**

Aoife Browne (Barnardos)  
David Studer (Limerick CYPSC / Tusla)  
Laura Keane (Barnardos)  
Norma O'Brien (Limerick Education Centre)  
Richie Bowens (Foróige)

### **Limerick School Avoidance Working Group**

Aoife Browne (Barnardos)  
Claire Casey (NEPS)  
David Studer (Limerick CYPSC/Tusla)  
Deirdre Folan (NEPS)  
Eileen O'Keefe (Ballyhoura Development)  
Elaine Killowry (HSE CAMHS)  
Garrett O'Connor (HSE Primary Care Psychology)  
Geraldine Rooney (HSE CAMHS)  
Jackie Dwane (UL / REPPP)  
Jillian Mulqueen (HSE Disability – West Limerick Children's Service)  
John Flanagan (An Garda Síochána)  
Kirsten Simring (Tusla)  
Laura Keane (Barnardos)  
Laura Murphy (HSE CAMHS)  
Majella Hanrahan (NAPD/Castletroy College)  
Martin Cournane (LCETB Youthreach)  
Maryanne Lowney (Tusla Education Support Service)  
Melinda Hughes (Barnardos)  
Priscilla Sheehan (Limerick Youth Service)  
Rasha Elbagir (HSE CAMHS)  
Richie Bowens (Foróige)  
Sarah O'Shea (HSE CAMHS)  
Sean O'Carroll (LCETB Youthreach)  
Suzi Cronin (Southill Hub)