



AWARDS FOR
EXCELLENCE IN
**PUBLIC
RELATIONS
2023**



Sponsored by

ruepoint



Best Issues-Led Campaign



Pictured at the launch of the Netwatch Family Carer of the Year Awards are Miriam O'Callaghan, 2021 Young Carer of the Year recipient Evan Corbally and his sister, three-year-old Aoibhin Martin. The awards seek to honour the extraordinary work of each and every one of the more than 500,000 family carers in Ireland.

Campaign

Family Carers Ireland – No one should care alone

Description of Campaign

Caring for a loved one can be rewarding, but it can also be difficult, frightening and isolating. It shouldn't be. Family Carers Ireland want carers to know they have the support they need to care safely, to make it less of a battle and to know they are not alone.



Public Relations Consultant

MKC Communications



Client

Family Carers Ireland

Background to the Campaign

Family Carers Ireland is the national charity supporting family carers across the country who care for loved ones such as children or adults with additional needs, physical or intellectual disabilities, frail older people, those with palliative care needs or those living with chronic illnesses, mental health challenges or addiction.

The State has reached a critical juncture in its treatment of carers. Caring is a societal issue that impacts on every person at some point in their lives and it is going to become an ever more important issue as we seek to provide appropriate care for people in the future.

There are 500,000+ family carers in Ireland today, that is 1 in 8 adults, of which 250,000 (1 in 9) are juggling their career alongside their carer role. Approximately, 67,000 young people aged 10-17 years provide regular unpaid care. That is more than 13%. By 2023, 1 in 5 people will be a family carer.

It is estimated that family carers save the Irish state some €20 billion per annum, yet their contribution to society is

underappreciated and undervalued, and many struggle to make ends meet. The Covid-19 pandemic and escalating cost-of-living crisis further highlighted the difficulties faced by family carers, with many experiencing increased isolation and financial pressures due to the closure of respite and day services. Crucially, it also highlighted the importance of the care that family carers provide, as they have continued to provide an essential service to the state in the face of unprecedented challenges.

The State of Caring 2022 report produced by Family Carers Ireland highlighted that carers were lonelier, more isolated, and in poorer health than the average person in Ireland. It served to reinforce the need for the role of carers, including their rights and needs needed to become part of the national conversation.

This issues-led campaign was aligned to Family Carers Ireland mission: to highlight the contribution of family carers to Irish society and to improve the lives of family carers throughout the country.

Statement of Objectives

The subject matter is vast, the impact on individuals and families immense. Critical to achieving campaign success was to have clearly defined objectives.

MKC and Family Carers Ireland workshopped the key objectives for the campaign that aligned to the organisation's mission, keeping in mind at all times the principle 'No one should have to care alone'.

The following objectives were identified:

- 1. Be a storyteller** – ensuring the carer's voice, views, and experiences are heard. Increase number of interviews by 10%.
- 2. Enhance society's understanding of a family carer and empower carers to self-identify.** Increase membership, calls to support centres, careline and website visits by 10% by December 2022.
- 3. Be a leading advocacy organisation on behalf of carers, influencing policy and policy makers.** Increase number of Oireachtas appearances.

If Family Carers Ireland was to have an impact, it was recognised that its own brand and reputation would also need to be enhanced. As a charity, it depends on fundraising and corporate donations to do its work. Two additional objectives identified were to:

- 4. Increase awareness of the organisation's brand** from 1% to 2%.
- 5. Support Family Carers Irelands' income generation** from fundraising and corporate donations. Our fundraising target was €650,000.

Programme Planning and Strategy

The goal was to give a voice to family carers, and the strategy to do so was by facilitating them to talk about their own experiences and the reality of being a carer. Their voices were to be further strengthened and supported by the advocacy of Family Carers Ireland in raising awareness of the issues facing carers.

This was achieved through an integrated media relations and public affairs campaign.

Developing a messaging framework

A stakeholder and messaging workshop was held where key stakeholders were identified and ranked in order of their level of engagement with Family Carers Ireland and their ability to influence the organisation's desired outcome of greater awareness of the role of carers and the challenges they faced.

We developed clear and compelling messaging that resonated with our target audience, and identified a range of media formats and channels, as well as direct lobbying with politicians.

These over-arching messages highlighted the challenges faced by family carers and the support provided by Family Carers Ireland. The messaging was flexible and adapted to the campaigns undertaken throughout the year.

We continuously monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of our strategy and messaging. Listening events were held with carers to understand their issues which informed our advocacy and media outreach. This allowed us to be agile and adjust as needed to continue to improve our outreach efforts.

Media Engagement and outreach

The range of issues impacting family carers – from financial poverty; inability to access respite care; the fight for services for loved ones – are all equally important. The challenge was not to be reactive to every new issue, and not to be seen to be constantly ‘complaining’ but to create a cohesive campaign which celebrated the role of the family carer while at the same time highlighting the difficulties they faced. There are so many good causes fighting for media attention that we needed to stand out during a particularly difficult year for brands and charities alike.

The agreed media relations strategy was comprehensive and multi-pronged with a comprehensive and robust event programme devised to deliver a constant drumbeat of compelling stories, impactful research, activations, and key events to ensure that family carers were always part of the national conversation.

Storytelling

Family carers have long been lauded as the backbone of care provision in Ireland, an essential yet hidden pillar in our healthcare system. The forgotten front line. It was important that this campaign kept family carers at the centre of every activity. Storytelling, therefore, was a key tool. It provided a sense of connection, information, and advocacy for family carers.

We are extremely grateful to the many family carers who spoke to the media during the course of the campaign. It provided many family carers with a sense of validation and recognition for their experience. Caring can be a challenging and isolating experience, and hearing or reading stories from other carers who have gone through similar situations helped many feel less alone.

Storytelling also helped to break down stigma and raise awareness about the realities of caring. Many people may not understand the demands or the toll it can take. Sharing stories of real family carers in the media helped increase the understanding and empathy for this important role.

These interviews were featured extensively across print, broadcast, radio, and social media.

A fresh media approach

The biggest challenge was delivering a consistent message while keeping the approach fresh for media. We used a number of key events to achieve this including Young Carers Action Day, Census 2022 – Q23 – Is This Me? the Caring Employers Programme and the annual Netwatch Family Carer of the Year awards.

Young Carers Action Day allowed us to focus on young carers aged 10-17 years. The negative impact of caring without support can be significant and enduring on the young person’s physical and emotional health, social life, employment, and life opportunities. It was essential that we gave them a voice.

A virtual Young Carers Forum gave young carers the opportunity to speak directly with TDs and Senators to discuss topics including young carer awareness, education, mental health, peer support, respite, and the actions needed to be taken by Government.

A young carer spoke to RTÉ’s News2day about their experience of caring alone for a parent with cancer, while a special episode of RTÉ Jnr’s ‘Someone Like Me’ featured a heart-warming chat between young carer Zoe Gilmartin (14 years) and former Young Carer of the Year Shauna Tighe (19 years) on their shared experiences, the positive impacts of caring alongside the challenges.

Leveraging the interest in Census 2022, Family Carers Ireland launched a public awareness campaign titled ‘Question 23 – Is This Me?’ featuring a TV advertisement to encourage carers to tick Yes to Question 23. The campaign extended the reach of Family Carers Ireland as a national charity; encouraged family carers to self-identify, to visit the website, and to freephone the careline.

In June, Iarnród Éireann joined Family Carers Ireland’s Caring Employer Programme providing supports and resources to employees balancing their jobs with caring responsibilities. As a major national employer, this announcement helped to highlight gaps in employment supports.

The Netwatch Carer of the Year Awards is a celebration of family carers across Ireland. This is a joy-filled event where carers are recognised and celebrated. MKC secured a new ambassador for the Awards in Miriam O’Callaghan and significant media coverage was achieved for this event.

Fundraising

Family Carers Ireland provides a range of services including information and advice, training, and support services. Fundraising helps to provide the financial support needed to continue offering these valuable services. Without it, Family Carers Ireland would have limited resources to support carers in their role.

Fundraising events also helped to promote community engagement, bringing together carers, supporters, and volunteers to raise funds and awareness. Key events such as Paws for a Cause, the historic swim from Lambay to Bull Island, and Gold Heart Day helped to build a sense of community around the important work of Family Carers Ireland and created opportunities for individuals to get involved in supporting family carers.

Research and advocacy

Family Carers Ireland is a leading advocate, engaging with key decision makers and stakeholders, including government officials and policymakers, to advocate for the rights and needs of family carers. Through their research and advocacy efforts, Family Carers Ireland has helped to bring key issues to the forefront of public consciousness.

The media relations campaign supported the FCI Public Affairs team in creating awareness of FCI Oireachtas Committee Presentations, FCI Policy Papers, Oireachtas Briefing Events and Pre-Budget Campaigns.

A key policy paper was research undertaken by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) on behalf of Family Carers Ireland, it found that when compared to a household without a disability, the household caring for a child with a profound intellectual disability faces a greater depth of income inadequacy. This report not only provided evidence-based research to support the campaign for increased funding for carers, it also provided an insight into the reality faced by caring families and reveals that much of the additional costs borne by such households arise due to a denial of what should be publicly provided supports and services such as respite, assessments, and care equipment.

The State of Caring 2022 survey went one step further painting a stark picture of carers’ lives. The report revealed that a significant number of family carers are experiencing fuel and food poverty, with many reporting a reliance on food banks and charities, rely on borrowing from family, bank loans and overdrafts.

Every action undertaken as part of these issues-led campaigns had at its centre the voice of the family carer. This resonated and the issue of caring and family carers became part of the national conversation in Dáil Éireann and in wider media and public circles.

Measurement

Objective 1 - Be a storyteller

Outcome:

- Significant uplift in share of voice. Number of interviews with family carers increased 25%.
- Key messaging repeated by media.
- Press – 482 articles
- Online – 908 articles
- Radio – 352 references/ interviews
- TV – 26 references / interviews

Impact: A GoFundMe fundraising campaign to help support the winner of the Netwatch Family Carer of the Year raised over €130,000 following media coverage.

Objective 2 - Enhance understanding

Outcome:

- 100,000 unique carer engagements with centres (+17%)
- 13,523 calls received to centres (+38%)
- 4,973 freephone careline calls (+19)

Impact: Caring Employers Programme extended to include the South East Technological University (SETU), the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, Lidl and An Post.

Objective 3 - Be a leading advocacy organisation on behalf of carers

Outcome:

- 3 Oireachtas Committee appearances.
- Establishment of a new Oireachtas Cross Party Interest Group on Family Carers including TDs and Senators which will champion the voice family carers in Ireland.

Impact: The Government announced changes to the State Pension system, which will see an enhanced State Pension provision for long-term carers from January 2024.

- Budget 2023 included specific measures aimed at family carers including:
- €12 increase in the weekly rate of Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit
- A €20 rise in Domiciliary Care Allowance
- A €500 once-off payment in November to those in receipt of the Carer's Support Grant
- A double "cost of living" social welfare payment in October
- A €100 increase in the Home Carer Tax Credit
- Changes to the rules around Fuel Allowance which will address the anomaly affecting those in receipt of half rate Carer's Allowance.

Objective 4 - Increase awareness

Outcome: Independent research by B&A Research & Insight on behalf of FCI, showed brand awareness increased from 1% to 6% by April 2022.

Impact:

- Membership numbers - 10,000 (+16%)
- 159,209 website users (+17%)
- 40,640 followers on social media (+22%).

Objective 5 - Fundraising

Outcome:

Raised approximately €450,000 through fundraising activities, membership and Caring Employers Programme and secured a further €380,000 through foundation funding thereby exceeding the target.

Impact: Number of new families/ carers supported 5,339 (+7%)

ruепoint



Onclusive

PARAGON