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Monday Sport



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FG seek to enlist FF help to 'save Nóirín'

■ Patten-style review to be given a year to complete its work
■ O'Loan: Need outside experts

Daniel McConnell
Political Editor

Fine Gael is to seek the help of Fianna Fáil in the coming days to stop Sinn Féin's campaign to force the resignation of Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan.

The *Irish Examiner* has this weekend spoken to six members of Cabinet and confirmed that a 'save Nóirín' campaign is being mounted in the face of increased pressure from opposition parties.

Housing Minister Simon Coveney has said his party will seek the help of Fianna Fáil to bolster the position of the embattled Commissioner while demanding reform continues.

"Clearly, there will be a conversation between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil to ensure efforts by Sinn Féin to force a resignation don't happen. Everyone needs a reassurance of reform. We will get a further update on Tuesday," he told the *Irish Examiner*.

Fianna Fáil sources were last night cautious about coming to the aid of Ms O'Sullivan, saying such talk from Government is simply, "Fine Gael trying to drag us back into the fold."

Formally, the party is not in a position to express confidence in her and its justice spokesman Jim O'Callaghan has written to the chair of the Policing Authority, Josephine Feehily, over the weekend requesting they further investigate the breath test and fixed charge payment scandals.

But Fine Gael is hoping that it can convince Micheál Martin's party to support the commissioner from the daily calls from Sinn Féin for her to resign.

The news comes as the Cabinet reads itself to discuss its planned independent review of An Garda Síochána at its weekly meeting on Tuesday.

While not expected to sign off on the matter conclusively, Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald is expected to bring a memo seeking permission to begin dialogue with opposition parties.

But detailed talks between Independent Alliance chief of staff Tony Williams and Department of Justice official John O'Callaghan are

said to be well advanced. It is understood: ■ The independent review, which is likely to follow the example of the Chris Patten Commission in Northern Ireland — which ushered in the PSNI — will be given up to a year to complete its work.

■ It is expected that the commission, like Patten, will have multiple members on it rather than one person and would produce an interim report within three to six months of establishment.

The Alliance are claiming the setting up of the review as a major victory and a vindication for calling for such oversight in the wake of the Sgt Maurice McCabe scandal in February.

Public Expenditure Minister Paschal Donohoe said the Government is open to extending the powers of the Policing Authority should the review deem it necessary.

In his letter to the Police Authority, Jim O'Callaghan called on Ms Feehily to further examine two key issues which the Garda Commissioner failed to answer properly when before the O'Sullivan Justice Committee on Thursday.

"Why did the Garda wait until March 2017 to disclose that there were significant discrepancies between the number of breath tests published and the number that actually occurred and why has there been a delay of eight months in notifying persons who have been wrongly convicted before the District Court," he asks of the chairman.

Meanwhile, former Northern Ireland police ombudsman Nuala O'Loan has said that a commission of inquiry, staffed by international experts and with powers to access garda documents would be required to restore trust in policing.

"I think a national commission of inquiry is required now and possibly an international commission of inquiry, that would send a very clear message about the intentions of Government," she said on RTE's *This Week* programme.

"I think if such commission were appointed, it would need to have people from outside the island of Ireland serving on it," she added.

Dog day afternoon



Saoirse Brennan from Tralee, Co Kerry, and Sweetpea take a walk on a west Kerry beach.

Picture: Domnick Walsh

Foster abuse victim's family denied records by HSE

Daniel McConnell
Political Editor

The family of the young girl known as 'Sarah' who was savagely abused in the Grace foster home have been denied access to her medical records for more than two years, despite apologies from the HSE for failing her.

In an exclusive interview with the *Irish Examiner* today, Sarah's mother and sister reveal the family's torment in their battle to get justice for her and how even now the system is denying them what they are legally entitled to.

Despite requesting the



'Sarah' as a young child. She was abused in a foster home.

records back in 2015 through their solicitor, the HSE claims the matter is still under review and to date has not released the records.

This is despite Sarah, who

is non-verbal, being subjected to the most savage abuse in the foster home, which she was removed from at the age of 12.

In the interview, Sarah's mother recounts how she made the dreadful discovery her daughter, who was residing part time in the foster home, was being 'sexually' abused by her abusers to drop her pants and adopt a school pose on the utterance of a particular phrase.

"One Sunday, the kids were gone with Daddy to the water. I was here and we were playing hide and seek and she was laughing and happy. Then, I just said cer-

tain words... and Sarah had been schooled and here in front of the fireplace. It was my 'worst nightmare,'" Sarah's mother says.

"A friend of mine came in to see me. She looked at me and said 'you are very upset' and I said 'I am'."

"I asked her would she go into Sarah in the next room and asked her would she mind saying these words. She went in and said those same words and Sarah did the same thing. That was the day. She was a qualified nurse. It was an awful, awful day to be honest."

But in relation to the records, which the family has

sought since 2015, they have so far not been made available.

The family is seeking not just the records but also who had access to them as they believe there was a systematic attempt to suppress information in relation to how Sarah's case was handled.

The family also discloses how when they began to raise concerns as to her care, they found themselves under suspicion from authorities that the sexual abuse could have been happening in their home and not the foster home.

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Cork city and county to get €46m to build 3,000 homes

Daniel McConnell
Political Editor

Cork city and county will receive €46m in funding to allow the development of over 3,000 homes by 2021, the *Irish Examiner* can reveal.

The funding will support six projects in Cork city and county, as part of a national investment of over €220m.

Details of the plan, being forwarded by Housing Minister Simon Coveney, are published in today's *Irish Examiner*. It is understood that in Cork city, two sites will be prioritised to deliver the housing.

The first is a €15.5m development plan for the South Docks area which will involve significant transport infrastructure improvements and upgrade to Albert Quay. It is also likely a new bridge to cross the Lee will be included as part of improvement works for the Eastern Gateway Bridge western approach.

"This is very ambitious project which we see delivering 700 new homes by 2021. The immediate effect will be

to open up the development of residential units on two sites in the South Docks," said Mr Coveney.

The second is a €10m development of a site on the Old Whitechurch Road which will lead to the development of up to 600 houses.



Simon Coveney: 'This is a very ambitious project.'

present.

"It will also include the improvement and widening of approach roads on all sides of the site to improve accessibility and capacity, installation of an access route critical to enable site development in phases, and augmentation of drainage, water and utility infrastructure/services to link the site to main services," the documents state.

Also included in the plans are: a link road in Midleton to facilitate access and create potential for competitive delivery in 2019 and 2020; transport and amenity infrastructure to provide housing in a key area for large employment developments at South Docks; critical investment in roads infrastructure in Carrigrohane, Ballincorney and Glanmire.

"These projects will kick-start much-needed delivery in the places they are needed most," said Mr Coveney.

Critics of Mr Coveney's plan have said it goes nowhere near what is needed to address the housing crisis.

Analysis: 11

Mercedes seized in CAB operation

Cormac O'Keefe

An e-class Mercedes worth around €40,000 was seized yesterday from a criminal gang with connections with the Hutch grouping.

The operation was led by the Criminal Assets Bureau and targeted a drug trafficking and money laundering outfit based in the Clondalkin area of west Dublin.

Twelve searches were carried out on homes and businesses in counties Dublin, Meath and Kildare.

CAB was joined by the Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, the Special Crime Task Force, the Armed Support Unit and Clondalkin and Rosinstown gardai.

The gang is understood to operate a front business in the second-hand motor

trade. It is thought the targets were at a horse race meeting when CAB struck.

In addition to the Mercedes, CAB seized a large amount of financial documentation and electronic media as well as a small amount of drugs.

The gang has connections with the Hutch grouping with members involved in past Hutch armed robberies.

Missing R116 crew not in raised wreckage

Conall Ó Fátharta

The search for the missing crewmen of Rescue 116 goes on after their bodies were not found in the wreckage of the aircraft.

It had been hoped that the remains of winch operator Paul Ormsby and winchman Cláirín Smith would be found with the wreckage which was raised from the seabed yesterday.

The families of the men were briefed on the development yesterday and the focus of the search for the two men is now expected to be expanded to examine a wider area.

The bodies of captains Dara Fitzpatrick and Mark Duffy have been recovered since the crash over two weeks ago.

The aircraft was raised from the seabed last evening and placed on board the Irish lights vessel, the *Granuaile*, following a lengthy operation that was made more difficult by the weather conditions in the area off Blackrock Island off the coast of Mayo.

A 35-metre tug boat, the *Ocean Challenger*, raised the wreckage slightly before a remotely operated vehicle was used to inspect the site.

At the weekend, the Air Accident Investigation Unit (AAIU) said initial indications from the data retrieved from the aircraft's health and usage monitoring system (HUMS) and the multi-purpose flight recorder (MPFR) were that mechanical failure was not to blame for the crash.

The AAIU said its investigation is ongoing and a preliminary report will be issued in the near future.

News: 5

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NEWS
The last thing the Bus Éireann dispute needs is the intervention of Shane Ross, Patricia King has said. **Page 4**

BUSINESS
The Dublin region is taking up too much of the spend on roads, rail, and water projects, CIF has said. **Page 17**

Sarah's story

Loved at home, but abused in foster care

Placed in a HSE-approved foster home so she could attend a special needs school (her home was hours away), Sarah suffered the most horrific sexual abuse, says political editor **Daniel McConnell**

As a young girl, she smiled. She played, she hugged, she loved.

But she couldn't speak and cannot tell what happened to her. Though she is a loved member of her family, when she was born, doctors told her parents that she would be a "vegetable".

Severely brain damaged from birth, learning the most basic functions was extremely difficult for her. She was a beautiful girl, who, despite the label of being disabled, felt the full love of her family.

But the girl who has come to be known as Sarah* would suffer some of the most horrific sexual abuse, before the age of 12, in the foster home at the centre of the Government's latest Commission of Inquiry into the 'Grace' case.

"One girl, non-verbal, had been raped anally with implements over a prolonged period of time. All of this had been medically attested and confirmed. The young girl, a woman cannot be operated on today, because so much damage was done that to do so would threaten perforation of her bowel, which might kill her," is how Waterford TD, John Deasy, described what happened to Sarah.

As a survivor of that abuse, Sarah, who is now 37, strives to fully engage each day, despite living with constant pain, because of the damage done to her bowel by those who were supposed to mind her at her most vulnerable time.

Despite having been in the home for a time with Grace, and having been subject to the most disgusting neglect and abuse, the Government initially sought to exclude Sarah's case from the terms of the inquiry.

The chaos that surrounded the original terms of reference, and the subsequent U-turn by Minister Finian McGrath, meant more trauma was suffered by Sarah and her family at the hands of the State.

This is her story.

PAIN AND FRUSTRATION

The youngest of three children, Sarah's birth was not easy.

"She had a terrible birth and the brain damage she sustained was forever life-altering.

"The first few years were very difficult for Sarah, as she struggled to relearn the basic-infant development skills she had lost through her traumatic birth. She often cried in pain and frustration," her sister says.

"Sarah suffered terribly in the early years. She was terribly frustrated, but even then, as an infant, she continued to show enormous determination to learn and achieve," her mother adds.

"There was no hope given by the professionals. They said she would never walk, or anything. Sarah did, and much, much more," her mother says.

"While, today, Sarah strives to live an ordinary life, like any other 37-year-old, at birth the diagnosis given was that she would be a "vegetable". This is very much a reflection of how people with disabilities were viewed, and treated, at that time.

"The person is disabled, therefore seen as less human and, therefore, needs to be removed from society, removed from the family."

Things escalated. Paid professionals failed in their role and duty of care, leaving young children abandoned in foster homes.

The family live in rural Ireland. So when it became clear that Sarah would need special help, her mother began the search for a suitable school. But this proved incredibly difficult.

"There was no appropriate support or information for families, from the Health Board, at that time. Any professional support and intervention was sourced and paid for privately, by us, Sarah's family," her mother says.

They found a school 2.5 hours' drive away. This offered Sarah the best opportunity to learn and grow. Every morning, Sarah's mother would pack her six-year-old into the car for the long trek. Sarah's community supported her, with local mothers taking turns to drive and collect her.

"She was six when she started in that school. After months of searching, I felt I had located the best place in the South-East. But it was only a day service, a school. Eventually, Sarah got allocated a place in the school on a temporary basis. I was so relieved, as I was coming under pressure to put her into a long-term, institutionalised residential setting, which I resisted," her mother says.

"The daily commute was horrendous for her and, yet, she was beginning to flourish in learning and development," she adds.

That daily, 60km odyssey continued for two years, until Sarah, overcome with exhaustion, collapsed. "She was just exhausted from the travelling. I remember, she came home one evening on the bus, and she just went to the floor. She was gone with exhaustion. So, then, I had to decide what was I going to do that was best for her. I still wanted her to go to the school, because I could see she was beginning to thrive there. The school was the right place for her.

"And we had done allergy-testing and we found out food had an impact on her in a negative way, and prevented her from concentrating. Through a new diet and, I remember, she came home one evening on the bus, and she just went to the floor. She was gone with exhaustion. So, then, I had to decide what was I going to do that was best for her. I still wanted her to go to the school, because I could see she was beginning to thrive there. The school was the right place for her.

"So Mam started looking at respite options for during the week, so Sarah could stay close to the school and lessen her daily travel time. Mam sourced a family based close to the school, which would offer Sarah a homely environment, while away from us," says Sarah's sister.

But, then, the HSE said they had a placement, a foster placement, and that they wanted Mam to go with that, because it was a HSE-

approved placement".

This placement was the foster home at the heart of the Grace scandal.

It was a small building, with no more than three bedrooms, in the rural South-East.

If you passed it, you would never imagine the savagery that went on there for 20 years.

Sarah's family had no clue of the dangers to which she was about to be exposed.

"Sarah started staying there a few days during the week. However, when Mam encountered some huge health issues, which required surgery and hospitalisation, the placement was extended.

"Unfortunately, we had no extended family locally, who were interested in offering us support through this difficult time. So, as a family unit, we were extremely isolated. Dad was running a business, with two small kids that weren't able to help out. So, that is when Sarah went down to the foster home on a longer-term basis," her sister says.

FAMILY IN CRISIS

"As a family, we were in crisis. We were exhausted, scared, and alone. Mam had nowhere else to go. With no other choice, Mam was approaching it as 'this has to work'," Sarah's sister says.

"This was it, take it or leave it. We presumed it was safe. One of the decisions I made, at the time, was, and it was in my head, that if it was approved by the HSE, then it was safe, and, most importantly, Sarah would be safe," says her mother.

"That was my priority. I never imagined that she would be in jeopardy," she adds.

But, for the first time, Sarah's family describe what being in the house was like and also describe the foster family, who are the subject of the shocking abuse allegations.

"It was a tiny little place, with steps up and down. The woman appeared very friendly. On reflection, now, she was over-friendly," says Sarah's mother.

"She was very welcoming and sweet, seemingly," adds her sister.

"The social worker, when we went down, they were a close combination, herself and the foster mother. The social worker was reinforcing how amazing a place it was, she adds.

"I used to call down there, but never any of the others," Sarah's mother says. "I think the foster family were very strategic. Mam always had to ring before she went there. And your time was your time and that was it. It was very controlled," she adds.

"But there were no outward signs of anything wrong.

"Because, if there were, Mam wouldn't have left her there," says Sarah's sister.

But not long after, things began to change and not for the better.

"When Sarah came home, she would be upset. There were other issues, including

bruising here and there, from time to time," her sister says.

"As her parents, they continued to inquire with the school and were actively involved in raising any issues around Sarah's care. However, I feel it is important to remember it was a different time in Irish society, where families were totally governed by the professionals and they were always given a logical reason for the bruising — it was this or that — to deflect attention," says Sarah's sister.

Alarmingly for the family, although they didn't know it at the time, discussions at official level had begun to question whether the bruising to Sarah was happening at her family home or in the foster home.

"But what we subsequently heard was that meetings were happening, at which the foster mother was saying/claiming that the bruises were happening at home, here. That Sarah was

getting up on a tractor. Sarah would never go near a large vehicle, due to the noise, she would be running away," says Sarah's mother.

"So, what we discovered later, when we got the documentation, there was a clear pattern of covering up by the health board. They were writing documents about visits and interviews with Sarah's parents that never took place, to explain the issues raised by her family. "These events never happened. Sarah was never on a tractor, as she is terrified of any farming vehicles or industrial equipment. She simply would never go near them," her sister adds.

But, then, the most dramatic and horrendous event happened. It rocked the family to its core.

One Sunday, when Sarah's brother and sister had gone with their Dad to the seaside nearby, she and her mum were playing hide and seek in their living room, the same room where this

interview took place.

A CERTAIN PHRASE

During an innocent game with her mother, Sarah, on the utterance of a certain phrase, adopted a sexual pose and took down her knickers. It was clear that Sarah, a girl of prepubescent years, and non-verbal, had been schooled by her abusers.

"One Sunday, the kids were gone with Daddy to the water. I was here and we were playing hide and seek and she was laughing and happy. Then, I just said certain words, and Sarah had been schooled and here in front of the fireplace. It was my worst nightmare," Sarah's mother says.

In shock, she did not know what to do.

Sarah's mother continues: "A friend of mine came into see me. She always came to see me on a Sunday. She came in and she looked at me

and said 'you are very upset and I said 'I am'."

"I asked her would she go into Sarah in the next room and asked her would she mind saying these words. She went in and said those same words and Sarah did the same thing. That was the day. She was a qualified nurse. It was an awful, awful day, to be honest."

That night, struggling to come to terms with what had happened, Sarah's mother decided she would bring her to the doctor the next day.

"They examined her, because they thought she may have been penetrated through the vagina and, obviously, we know now it was through the bowel." Deeply concerned, Sarah's mother went to her school and raised concerns.

She asked the teachers to repeat the phrase that had caused Sarah to act out the

Stolen innocence



Through a new diet and right learning environment, Sarah was beginning to bloom

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Long fight for justice led to accusations against family

When Sarah's mother raised the alarm over possible sexual abuse, the system tried to discredit her, says **Daniel McConnell**

From her birth, Sarah's family constantly battled with the State to ensure that she received the same rights, opportunities, care, and treatment as non-disabled Irish citizens. But they found themselves in the line of fire once they began to raise concerns about her foster home. "Every milestone that Sarah reached was achieved despite the lack of appropriate support from the HSE. It was done through people coming, in a private capacity, to support her to develop and grow. It was a very bleak landscape at the time," her sister says.

Once Sarah's mother discovered that her child was being schooled to adopt sexual poses, and she raised the alarm, the family found itself at the centre of suspicion that the abuse might have been happening at home. "But what we subsequently heard was that meetings were happening to review and discuss serious concerns the health board had around the placement," Sarah's mum says.

"I was never informed of any of these conversations. They never engaged with us, as Sarah's family. It was the voice of the foster mother the health board engaged with." Something more sinister was at play. "So, what we discovered later, when we got the documentation, was that there was a clear pattern of covering up by the health board. They documented alleged meetings with Sarah's family, and reports which deeply criticise Sarah's family, particularly her mother," her sister says.

"Sarah didn't have any regular or meaningful interaction with a social worker, so there was no advocate on her behalf, or communication from the HSE to the family. "The only voice Mum had with the health board was through the school, which was a health board-funded placement. So they, in a sense, became Sarah's champion, because it went direct from Mum to the school. They would raise some of the concerns to the HSE, but the HSE only ever responded to the school. They never came back to us, except when they came back to suggest things were happening to her within her family home," Sarah's sister says.

"The only engagement with Sarah's family was when her mother raised concerns around Sarah being a victim of sexual abuse and the HSE response was to position the fault and blame back to the family," she says. When Sarah's mum was confronted with the awful truth and raised the alarm, the system refused to listen and warned her to shut up and go away.

"There was no process or structure in place which included the voice of the victim or her family. I was aware of the school completing an investigation. However, outside of that, we were left totally in the dark," she says.

In Sarah's situation, when concerns were raised by her mother around the possibility of sexual abuse, Sarah's family became the focus of senior management within the HSE. "There was only one meeting, which was attended by a senior official, who requested that her mother answer a list of questions. This placed the focus on Sarah's family and away from the foster placement. "At that meeting, we were advised by our family lawyer not to engage, for our own safety. So, we placed our focus on supporting Sarah instead," she says.

The family had to get an alternative place for Sarah, but nowhere in the Republic of Ireland would take her. Incredibly, having been failed by the State, Sarah and her family had to seek refuge in Northern Ireland. After four years in the North, she was given a residential placement in a centre closer to her home, but it was not suitable for her.

"The structure of the residential setting didn't suit Sarah. It failed to support her around her bowel and health issues, and offered her little choice and control. This meant that, while the HSE continued to fund her placement, she had to come to be supported by her family up to nine months of every year. Sarah wanted a normal life and so began the long journey with the HSE, in terms of advocating for her to get her voice heard and to secure a different way of supporting her to live her life," her sister says.

But Sarah's bowel function was worsening and she was no reason for it. She had a healthy diet, because of the allergy-testing.

Her mother's worst fears were then confirmed by a doctor that the abuse Sarah had suffered years previously was the cause.

"Sarah was hospitalised, due to serious illness, in an attempt to understand what was happening to her bowel.

"While Sarah's mother received verbal confirmation, we are still

awaiting written accountability," says Sarah's sister.

No one cared about their plight, so Sarah's family put their energies into ensuring Sarah got the support and care she needed.

Only years later, when a social worker made contact in relation to the abuse suffered by Grace at the same foster home, did things begin to move.

"I was contacted by a senior social worker. While I was weary from past experiences, for the first time I felt someone within the system was listening and believing what happened to Sarah.

"Nobody before that had paid any attention. He did his job, he was professional and respectful, he cared about the truth, and wanted to ensure that the voice of Sarah was heard," Sarah's mum says.

This finally was a positive working relationship with someone in the HSE. The whistleblower went forward with the details of Sarah's experience within the foster placement, requesting an external investigation to ensure accountability. This is yet to take place.

But then, incredibly, the foster mother accuses Sarah's mum of attempting to "ruin her business".

When the whistle was finally blown in 2009 and the HSE commissioned two internal reports, Sarah's exhausted and beleaguered family were reluctant to take part. Both investigations focused on answering the family's request about the purpose of the process, and what information the staff were seeking.

"We had honoured Sarah, we had engaged with the HSE, we had cooperated and worked in partnership with the Garda criminal investigation, but we didn't trust an internal investigation, particularly as they refused to answer our questions," she says.

Incredibly, that malicious and false accusation of possible sexual abuse within the family resurfaced in 2014, when the Garda Síochána and the Resilience Ireland report, called to the door.

"The local Garda sergeant arrived at my door, regarding a request he had received for information around

“The system refused to listen and warned her to shut up and go away

any historical local sexual abuse files linked to our family. This was while we were engaging with the official Garda criminal investigation into the foster house. I was deeply shocked and saddened by the obvious attempt at trying to cover up, by placing the focus once again, away from the foster placement. I did raise the request with the criminal investigation team at the time.

"I know nothing of the matter. They were supportive and professional, and we continued to work with them around Sarah's experience," her mother says.

Sarah and her family have received formal, official apologies from HSE director general, Tony O'Brien, for what happened to her in the home. "Through this process, we have also experienced the support of carers, and other members of staff beside Sarah and her family. The original male whistleblower, who finally listened to us, as a family, who brought it repeatedly to the attention of the HSE and requested an external investigation, the Garda Síochána, and the Resilience Ireland team, who have all been part of the criminal investigation into her foster placement; members of government, who continue to raise the need for truth and accountability for what happened to Sarah and who will not allow her individualised funding, which offers her media, who share her story and her fight for the truth and justice for all those who suffered while under the care and protection of the HSE," her sister says.

Sarah is now beginning a new chapter in her life, through her individualised funding, which offers her choice, control, and the opportunity to live within her own community and close to her family.

Her mother, despite all, continue to engage and work in partnership with the HSE, building their relationship to ensure that Sarah receives the supports and opportunities she deserves.

So clearly failed by the State in the first instance, Sarah and her family suffered a double injustice in their quest for answers. That is truly a scandal.

'Sarah' in the family home in the South-East, playing with one of her sisters. Doctors warned that severe brain damage at birth meant she would be a 'vegetable', but her family refused to give up on her.



night before. They did and, once again, Sarah adopted the same pose and took down her pants.

With no other options, Sarah, for her safety, left the foster placement and hence could not continue in the school.

Sarah's mother remained focused on finding her the best supports.

Sarah was then offered a place up North, by the Health Board. Unfortunately, due to a lack of suitable, safe-learning environments in the South, Sarah was forced to live there for four years, away from her home and family.

Her bowel function was worsening and there was no reason for it. She had a healthy diet, because of allergy-testing. "That is why we couldn't understand why she was deteriorating. We then brought her to the hos-

“Today, 20 or so years on, Sarah lives in her own home, next door to her parents and siblings

pital to be investigated. That is when I got confirmation that the bowel had been damaged by the abuse," her mum says.

Today, 20 or so years on, Sarah lives in her own home, next door to her parents and siblings.

Through a lengthy process of engagement and negotiation, Sarah and her family have recently secured individualised funding for her from the HSE.

This has enabled Sarah to move into her own home, to feel safe and secure within her own community, surrounded by those who know and love her. She has both paid and family support and lives a self-directed life.

Through her family, Sarah works with the HSE to ensure her voice is heard in a meaningful way.

Despite her bravery and willingness to keep going, her bowel problems are so severe that she needs constant medication.

"We are not sure the full

deterioration of her bowel. So, every day, we work with Sarah, looking at the signs she gives us, her communication through her facial expressions and her general health.

"But it is a combination of a really strict diet, as much exercise as possible, and huge amounts of medication, both prescribed and non-prescribed, to support her to live as healthy and pain-free as possible."

Her mum adds: "At present, there is no long-term surgical solution or intervention that will fix Sarah's bowel. We now believe it is so badly damaged, the wrong intervention could potentially worsen her condition.

"We will continue to engage in the process of looking for ways to support Sarah to live with this condition, and we will continue to search for options and opportunities to repair her bowel, to enable her to live a pain-free life. While Sarah suffers daily, she continues to work

with us and inspires us through her amazing resilience.

"There are times she is in bed, because she is so unwell, and she can't engage with her day. The damage to her bowel is more of a barrier to her living her life in a full and meaningful way than her disability will ever be. Sarah wakes up every day and she keeps going. She continues to show her drive and hunger to make the most of her life, despite what she suffers," she adds.

I ask her mum what she thinks of Sarah today, given all she has gone through and suffered. "She is my daughter and I am so very proud of her and all she has achieved. I love her so much.

"Sarah is the most incredible human being I know. It is not fair, what she has been through. But her resilience to fight all that is amazing," she says.

Despite everything, she continues to strive to live her life on her terms.