



## Mother and Baby homes

Junior Cycle Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE)  
Unit 2

SLIDE 1



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## Unit 2: Outline

Slide	Activity No	Activity Name	Description
3	1	"...close to home..."	Introduction/refreshers on human rights   Case study of one woman's experience in a Mother and Baby home (teacher input, video clip, whole class discussion)
4	2	Leaving home	Exit pathways for children leaving Mother and Baby homes (teacher input)
5	3	"You see at the time..."	Case study on the impact on a mother of the birth and adoption of her child (video clip, pair work, whole class discussion)
6	4	UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (pair work)
7	5	Unmet, disrespected, denied	Case study of human rights impact on a person adopted from a Mother and Baby home (video clip, pair work, whole class discussion)
8	6	Name, nationality, identity	Consideration of specific UNCRC rights vis-à-vis people adopted from Mother and Baby homes (individual and pair work, whole class discussion)
10	7	"...so that..."?	Consideration of the importance of learning about Ireland's historic institutions (think-pair-share, whole class discussion)
11	8	Revisiting our Brave Space	Focus on the connection between the Brave Space Agreement and UNCRC Article 12 (individual work, whole class discussion)
12	9	Baggage from the homes	Reflection (individual work)

## Teacher notes

Unit 2 activities engage students in learning linked to the CSPE outcomes listed below:

### Students should be able to:

- **Learning Outcome 1.1:** discuss what it means to be human and to live in a community with rights and responsibilities
- **Learning Outcome 1.2:** create a visual representation to communicate a situation where human dignity is not respected
- **Learning Outcome 1.7:** communicate an understanding of the importance of the UDHR, UNCRC and the ECHR in promoting human rights
- **Learning Outcome 1.9:** outline different perspectives in situations where there is an apparent conflict of rights or an abuse of rights
- **Learning Outcome 2.5:** examine case studies or personal testimonies of people experiencing poverty or inequality from different contexts and countries and how they are working to overcome this
- **Learning Outcome 3.1:** create a visual representation of the day-to-day contexts and institutions to which they belong, highlighting where they have power and influence
- **Learning Outcome 1.11, 2.12 & 3.14:** reflect on their ongoing learning and what it means for them

**NB: This unit includes adoption related case studies and activities and may personally affect some students. Please familiarise yourself with the material in advance and use your professional judgement to determine which activities are suitable given student needs, school and local context.**

## Activity 1: "...close to home..."

*Where after all, do universal Human Rights begin? In small places, close to **home** – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world.*

Eleanor Roosevelt, member of the committee responsible for drafting the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR)

Video clip extracted from a film made for the Clann Project by Avondale Media Ltd.



### Teacher notes

Ask for a volunteer to read the Eleanor Roosevelt quote on the slide.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962) was an American political figure, diplomat, and activist. She was the first lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945, when her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was in office. She served as a United States delegate to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly from 1945–1952 and was a key figure in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Human rights are rights, or freedoms, we have simply because we exist as human beings - they are not granted to us by any person, group or government. These rights belong to us all (they are universal), regardless of nationality, sex, ethnicity, race, religion, language, or any other status. Universal human rights range from the right to life to those rights that make life worth living, such as the rights to food, education, work, health, and liberty.

The UDHR has had a huge impact since it was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, including informing the development of other human rights instruments that have a legal basis, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Philomena Lee gave birth to a son in 1952 in Sean Ross Abbey (Mother and Baby home) in Roscrea, Co Tipperary. She was put to work in the laundry in Sean Ross Abbey for 3 years until her son, Anthony Lee, was adopted to the United States in 1955. Philomena never saw her son again. She, like many women who had children outside of marriage, moved away from Ireland. Philomena went to the United Kingdom, became a nurse, married and had two children. When he was adopted, Anthony's name was changed to Micheal Hess. He had a good life in America, but died young in 1995. Anthony/Michael asked that his ashes be interred on the grounds of Sean Ross Abbey in the hopes that Philomena would find his grave.

We are going to watch a short video of Philomena Lee talking about her time in Sean Ross Abbey Mother and Baby home.

As you watch and listen, think about the quote from Eleanor Roosevelt.

Play the video on the slide (1.37 mins).

If needed, play some or all the video a second time.

Facilitate a whole class discussion, using the following prompt:

*Is it important that human rights happen in “small places, close to home...[places] that cannot be seen on any maps of the world”? Why/why not?*

*Sometimes the term ‘coercive confinement’ (forced to stay somewhere) is used to describe the experience of people in historic institutions (Mother and Baby homes, Magdalene Laundries, industrial schools). Think about the lives of women in Mother and Baby homes. Do you think the term ‘coercive confinement’ fits with their experience? Why/why not? What does this say about human rights in Mother and Baby homes?*

## Sources

[Chapter 36: Human Rights](#). Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes.

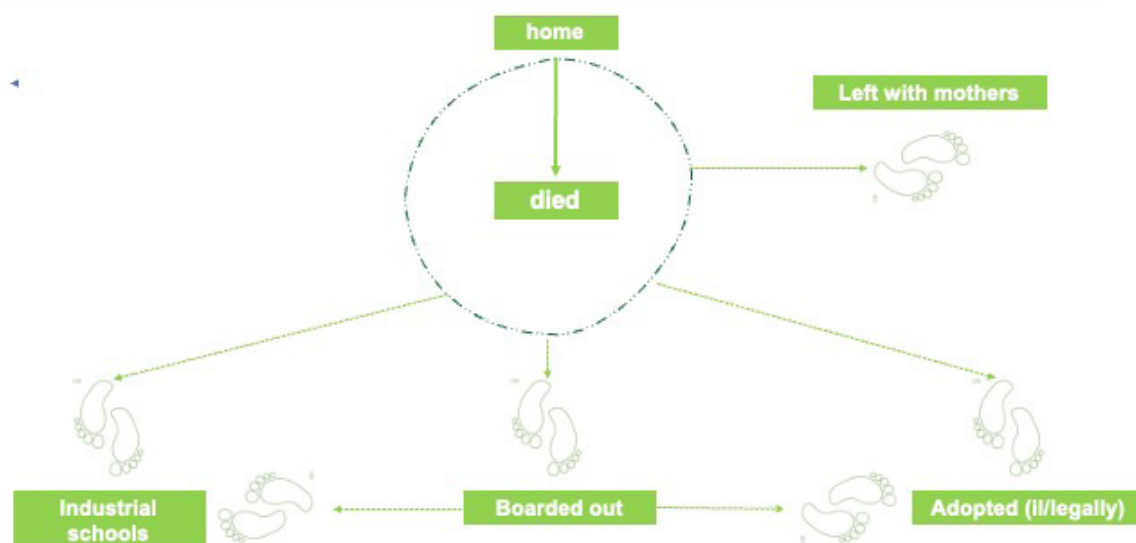
[Clann Short Film: Philomena Lee and Jane Libberton](#)

[CLANN witness statement of Philomena Lee to the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes](#)

O’Sullivan, E. and O’Donnell, I., 2007. ‘Coercive confinement in the Republic of Ireland: The waning of a culture of control’. *Punishment & Society*, 9(1), pp.27–48.

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR). [What are human rights?](#)

## Activity 2: Leaving home



### Teacher notes

Many babies and children died in Mother and Baby homes. Because of conditions in the homes and attitudes to children born outside of marriage, they died in greater numbers than other children in Ireland at the time. We do not know exactly how many children died in Mother and Baby homes because some records are missing or were falsified.

While some children did leave the homes with their mothers, many mothers were pressurised into giving up their children for adoption, and children were sometimes adopted without their permission. Children who were not adopted could be either sent to industrial schools or fostered (boarded out). Although some fostered children were later adopted by their foster families, in other cases the fostering did not work out, and these children could then be sent to industrial schools.

## Activity 3: “You see at the time...”

- What emotions did Philomena associate with the birth of her son?
- Why do you think that she felt this way?
- What was the impact of these emotions on Philomena's life?



Video clip extracted from a film made for the Clann Project by Avondale Media Ltd.

## Teacher notes

Divide the class into pairs.

Play the video on the slide (2.14 mins).

If needed, play some or all the video a second time.

*Take a few minutes to discuss the questions on the slide with your partner.*

Take feedback from a selection of pairs.

- What emotions did Philomena associate with the birth of her son? [Possible answers: guilt and shame]
- Why do you think that she felt this way? [Possible answers: At that time, it was not acceptable for women who were not married to have babies. Religious and moral views, together with societal attitudes and norms meant that women who were known to have babies before they married were stigmatised and labelled.]
- What was the impact of these emotions on Philomena's life? [Possible answers: It took Philomena many years to tell her family in the UK about the child she had in Sean Ross Abbey. She kept it a secret, partly because she still felt guilty, but she never stopped thinking about her first son, Anthony.]

Facilitate a whole class discussion, using the following prompts:

*When you hear Philomena talking about the deep impact of her experiences in the Mother and Baby home, it is natural to feel upset because it is distressing.*

*Philomena said she “plucked up the courage” to tell her family about giving birth to Anthony in Sean Ross Abbey. There is no doubt that Philomena Lee is a courageous person. What other adjectives (describing words) would you use to describe Philomena?*

*What adjectives describe how you feel when you think about Philomena's experiences?*

## Sources

Frears, S. dir. 2013. *Philomena*. Te Weinstein Company, Yucaipa Films.

Clann Short Film. [Philomena Lee and Jane Libberton](#)

[CLANN witness statement of Philomena Lee to the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes](#)

Sixsmith. M. 2013. *Philomena*. London: Pan.



## Teacher notes (internet access is required for this activity)

Depending on your class, and their knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, you might like to play a short video from the Ombudsman for Children's Office 'The UNCRC' (2.22 mins) (Available: <https://www.oco.ie/childrens-rights/un-convention/>).

*In human rights instruments, rights are called Articles. Let's look at the 54 rights or Articles in the UNCRC.*

Simplified versions of the UNCRC are available from the Ombudsman for Children or UNICEF Ireland (see links below).

Ask for volunteers to read the simplified UNCRC Articles.

Divide the class into pairs.

*With your partner, pick three or more rights that are easy to meet, recognise or respect.*

*Discuss the reasons why certain rights are easier to achieve than others.*

*Working together, come up with examples from your own life of one or more rights being met, recognised and respected.*

Take feedback from a selection of pairs.

## Sources

Ombudsman for Children. [Summary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

UNICEF Ireland. [UNCRC children's version](#)

Biggins, T. Howard, J., McDonagh, H., O'Reilly, E. & Shen, S. 2021. Guidebook for Teachers: Ireland's Dark History. The Irish Centre for Human Rights University of Galway.



NCCA

## Activity 5: unmet, disrespected, denied

### UNCRC articles

**unmet, disrespected, denied**

7

NAME AND NATIONALITY

8

IDENTITY

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Video clip extracted from a film made for the Clann Project by Avondale Media Ltd.

**Teacher notes** (the UNCRC should be displayed during this activity; slide includes animation – please ensure you are in presenter mode)

Mari Steed was born Mary Terese Fitzpatrick in Bessborough Mother and Baby home in Cork in 1960. She was one of an unknown number of children from Mother and Baby homes that were adopted by families in other countries. Mari was adopted by a family from Philadelphia, USA.

We are going to watch Mari Steed talking about what it was like to be adopted from a Mother and Baby home.

As you watch, jot down the UNCRC Articles or rights that you think were unmet, disrespected or denied in Mari's life.

Play the video on the slide (5.10 mins).

If needed, play some or all of the video a second time.

Join with another person and share your work.

Take note of any additional Articles that your partner has jotted down.

Facilitate feedback and a whole class discussion, as follows:

**Click to show the icons for Articles 7 & 8**

Who had Article 7 written down?

Article 7 says that children must be registered when they are born and given a name which is officially recognised by the government. Children must have a nationality (belong to a country). Whenever possible, children should know their parents and be looked after by them.

How was Article 7 unmet, disrespected or denied in Mari's life?

Who had Article 8?

Article 8 says that children have the right to their own identity – an official record of who they are which includes their name, nationality and family relations. No one should take this away from them, but if this happens, governments must help children to quickly get their identity back.

*How was Article 8 unmet, disrespected or denied in Mari's life?*

*Did anyone else have other Articles written down?*

[Possible answers: Articles 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 17, 23]

*How are these Articles relevant to Mari's story?*

[For example, Article 17 is about access to information. In the video, Mari describes the challenges she encountered in getting information and how, as digital technology gradually improved, it became a bit easier to contact people living far away.]

*How could Mari's rights have been recognised, met and respected?*

*Who had the power to recognise, meet and respect her rights, then and now?*

### **Possible homework task**

*Philomena Lee was just 18 years old when she gave birth to her son, Anthony, in Sean Ross Abbey. Other mothers were under 18 years of age. The UNCRC defines anyone under the age of 18 as a child. Identify the UNCRC Articles that are relevant to the Mother and Baby home experiences of mothers under the age of 18 years.*

## **Sources**

### **Clann Short Film: Mari Steed**

Milotte, M. 2012. *Banished Babies: The Secret History of Ireland's Baby Export Business*. New Island Books.

Redmond, P.J. 2018. *The Adoption Machine: The Dark History of Ireland's Mother and Baby Homes and the Inside Story of How Tuam 800 Became a Global Scandal*. Merrion Press.

## Activity 6: Name, nationality, identity



*...as difficult as it was, it was a great experience because it did put me in connection with my tribe.*

Mari Steed, CLANN video

*We cannot truthfully tell our story without knowing our story.*

Mari Steed - Testimony in O'Donnell, K., O'Rourke, M. & Smith, J. 2022. *Redress: Ireland's Institutions and Transitional Justice*. UCD Press: Dublin. p.5-8; CLANN witness statement.

### Teacher notes (slide includes animation – please ensure you are in presenter mode)

Take a minute to think about words that a good friend would use if they were describing your most likeable personality traits, your interests etc.

These are some of the things that make you the person that you are – they make up your identity.

What other things make up a person's identity?

[Possible answers: name, age, family, nationality, dis/likes, skills/talents etc]

In your copy/on a piece of paper, draw an outline of your hand.

On each finger, write or draw an important aspect of your identity.

#### Click to show the first quote from Mari Steed

Facilitate a whole class discussion, using the following prompts:

In the video, Mari Steed mentioned her 'tribe'. Who was she referring to when she talked about her 'tribe'?

[Possible answers: her natural/birth mother or the community of people adopted from Mother and Baby homes.]

On you own, think about the people that make up your 'tribe'. How important is it to have your own 'tribe'?

Divide the class into pairs.

With your partner, discuss what it must be like to be denied your right to a name, nationality (Article 7) and identity (Article 8), not to know your natural/birth family, where you were originally from, your medical history etc.

#### Click to show the second quote from Mari Steed

Who has the power to make sure that Mari and others like her get access to the information they need to be able to tell their story?

[Possible answers: government, religious orders, courts]



**If you are affected by any of the issues in this unit, and need support, come to me after class, talk to a trusted friend or adult and/or contact:**

Adoption Rights Alliance: [www.facebook.com/AdoptionRightsAllianceIreland/](https://www.facebook.com/AdoptionRightsAllianceIreland/)

Barnardos Origins, Post Adoption and Bereavement Services: [www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)

Samaritans: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)  
Phone: 116 123

Childline: [www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie)  
Phone: 1800 66 66 66

Jigsaw: [www.jigsaw.ie](http://www.jigsaw.ie)

## Teacher notes

*Some of you might find the content that we cover in these units upsetting. This is a natural and understandable reaction to what survivors call 'a dark chapter' in our national history.*

*If you are personally affected or distressed by any of the issues in these units, come to me after class, talk to a trusted friend or adult and/or contact one of the external support services listed on the slide.*

## Activity 7: “...so that...?”

*[W]e must teach children the history of this dark chapter in Ireland and keep that memory alive so that... **it never happens again.***

Mary Harney – Testimony in O'Donnell, K., O'Rourke, M. & Smith, J. 2022. *Redress: Ireland's Institutions and Transitional Justice*. UCD Press: Dublin. p.6.

- Complete the quote...
- Compare and discuss your quote with one other person
- Join with another pair, compare and discuss again
- Decide whether to merge/edit a quote to share with the class
- Present your group's quote



### Teacher notes (slide includes animation – please ensure you are in presenter mode)

Mary Harney is a survivor of Bessborough Mother and Baby home, Cork, the system of boarding out (fostering) and the Good Shepherd industrial school, Cork.

She believes that it is very important that young people in schools (like you) learn about Ireland's historic institutions, including Mother and Baby homes.

The quote on the slide from Mary is unfinished.

Drawing on what you have learned in these units, work on your own to complete the quote.

Join with one other person and discuss both quotes.

Join with another pair, compare and discuss the four versions of the quote.

- What, if anything, do your quotes have in common?
- What is different about your quotes?
- Is there a quote that stands out from the others?
- Do you want to merge or edit any of the quotes?

In your group, agree one quote to share.

Present your group's quote to the class.

#### Click to show the full quote from Mary Harney

Facilitate a whole class discussion, using the following prompts:

- Do you agree with Mary that learning about historic institutions is a way of keeping the memory of what happened in the past alive?
- Is this enough to ensure that similar things don't happen again? Why/why not?
- What else, if anything, needs to happen to ensure 'it never happens again'?
- Whose has the power to make your suggestions a reality?

**Click to show the icon for UNCRC Article 29**

*UNCRC Article 29 says that your education should help you to fully develop your personality, talents and abilities. It should teach you to understand your own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help you to live peacefully and protect the environment.*

*Does the teaching and learning in these units go some way towards meeting Article 29? Explain your answer.*

## Activity 8: Revisiting our Brave Space

SPACE	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
1. I have been listened to					
2. I felt comfortable giving my opinions					
3. I felt safe giving my opinion					
4. A lot of different voices were included					

VOICE	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
1. I got the chance to give my opinions					
2. I got enough information to help me give my opinions					
3. I got support to have my voice heard					
4. I understood what was being discussed					
5. I could give my opinions whatever way I wanted					
6. I had enough time to talk					

### Teacher notes (slide includes animation – please ensure you are in presenter mode)

**NB: Your Brave Space Agreement (Unit 1, Activity 2) should be displayed in a prominent place.**

Stand beside and read your Brave Space Agreement. Focus on the items in the Agreement that are about participation (linked to the idea of being present in a brave space, using your voice and giving others the chance to use their voice).

#### Click to show the icon for UNCRC Article 12

UNCRC Article 12 says that you have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously. The first part of this Article (the right to give your opinion) includes the idea that young people, like you, have an inclusive SPACE in which you are supported to form your views and exercise your VOICE.

#### Click to show the SPACE and VOICE statements

Ask for a volunteer(s) to read the statements on the slide.

*If you strongly agree that during these units you have been listened to by everyone in the class (SPACE), then you should give 5 stars for the first statement. If you disagree completely with the statement, you can give the statement 1 star. And, so on for each of the statements on the slide.*

*In your copy/on a piece of paper, write:*

#### SPACE

Statement 1 = [insert the number of stars]

Statement 2 = [insert the number of stars] Etc

#### VOICE

Statement 1 = [insert the number of stars] Etc

Give students a few minutes to complete the task.

Facilitate a whole class discussion, using the following prompts:

*In future, what can you or others in our Brave Space do to improve the star rating for these statements.*

*Is there anything that you think we should change in our Brave Space Agreement to reflect this?*

**Possible homework task:**

*Create a visual response to show how you ranked the SPACE and VOICE statements from the most to the least stars, e.g., a bar chart with statement numbers on y-axis and number of stars on x-axis, an infographic, mind map, picture, collage etc.*

## Sources

Activity adapted from Hub na nÓg [Participation Framework, Everyday Spaces Checklist](#)



## Activity 9: Baggage from the homes

Imagine a bag especially for your experiences and all that you have learned about the Mother and Baby homes and other historic institutions during these units.

Imagine packing your bag with words, images, symbols representing the knowledge, skills, values and experiences you want to keep.

Imagine putting the things that you want to leave behind (old ideas, misconceptions, attitudes, beliefs or difficult moments) on the ground beside the bag and walking away without them.

Imagine yourself leaving class with this bag on your back.



### Teacher notes

Read the text on the slide aloud, allowing sufficient time for students to reflect.