



Mother and Baby homes

Junior Cycle History

Unit 4

SLIDE 1



Mother and Baby homes

Junior Cycle History
Unit 4

NB: This unit includes content related to the deaths of babies/children and may personally affect some students and be emotionally challenging for others. 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.

Unit 4: Outline

Slide	Activity No	Activity Name	Description
3	1	Primary sources	Characteristics of primary sources (teacher input, whole class discussion)
4	2	The job of the historian	How historian Catherine Corless used primary sources (individual work, teacher input) NB: Internet access required here
5	3	Marian Bridget Mulryan	Document study of a child who died in the Tuam home (pair work, small group work, teacher input) NB: Internet access required here
7	4	Secondary sources	Characteristics of secondary sources, using the work of Catherine Corless as an example (pair work)
8	5	Options	Options for the burial site in Tuam (teacher input, small group work)
9	6	Statement	Bon Secours and government apologies (small group work, teacher input)
10	7	A wider Brave Space	A Brave Space Agreement to deal with the legacy of the architecture of containment (whole class discussion)
11	8	Coping and resilience	Document study to show how one survivor copes (pair work, small group work)
13	9	Timeline of learning	Reflection (teacher input, individual work)

Teacher notes

Unit 4 activities engage students in learning linked to the outcomes listed below:

Students should be able to:

Learning Outcome 1.1: develop a sense of historical empathy by viewing people, issues and events encountered in their study of the past in their historical context

Learning Outcome 1.2: consider contentious or controversial issues in history from more than one perspective and discuss the historical roots of a contentious or controversial issue or theme in the contemporary world

Learning Outcome 1.3: appreciate their cultural inheritance through recognising historically significant places and buildings and discussing why historical personalities, events and issues are commemorated

Learning Outcome 1.5: investigate the job of the historian, including how s/he finds and uses evidence to form historical judgements which may be revised and reinterpreted in the light of new evidence

Learning Outcome 1.6: debate the usefulness and limitations of different types of primary and secondary sources of historical evidence, such as written, visual, aural, oral and tactile evidence; and appreciate the contribution of archaeology and new technology to historical enquiry

Learning Outcome 1.7: develop historical judgements based on evidence about personalities, issues and events in the past, showing awareness of historical significance

Learning Outcome 1.8: investigate a repository of historical evidence such as a museum, library, heritage centre, digital or other archive or exhibition

Learning Outcome 2.9: explain how the experience of women in Irish society changed during the twentieth century

Activity 1: Primary sources

- are created by the witness who experiences the event or process, and often reflect the individual opinion of the participant or witness involved
- provide the most fundamental information on the event/process under study and so are the raw materials that historians work with when they are interpreting people, events and/or processes and drawing conclusions about the past
- are the original material on which secondary sources are based
- can be in original format (e.g. handwritten letters), microfilm, digital/electronic or in published [printed] form
- can be found in 3 different types of sources: official records; published sources; private sources

Teacher notes

Ask for volunteers to read the bullets on the slides.

Facilitate a whole class discussion, using the following prompt:

The most useful primary sources are usually thought to be those that were created closest to the specific historical event/process.

Why do you think this is the case?

Source

PDST. 2013. [Approaches to teaching History in Transition Year](#)

Activity 2: The job of the historian



Play from start to 12.00mins

As the video plays, listen out for the answers to these questions:

- Which people and organisations did Catherine Corless approach when she was looking for evidence about the deaths and burials of the children in Tuam Mother and Baby home?
- What primary sources did she find?
- What information was available in these primary sources?
- What conclusions did she come to?
- What did Catherine Corless do to make sure that her conclusions were as sound as possible?

Pair up and compare answers.

Take note of any additional information that your partner has.

Teacher notes (internet access is required for this activity)

Read through the questions on the slide, making sure students understand what is required.

Play the video of the interview with Catherine Corless from the start to 12.00mins: [Tuam and Ireland's shame: unedited interview with Catherine Corless](#)

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

Allow sufficient time for students to write their answers to the questions on the slide.

Invite students to pair up and compare their answers.

Take feedback from the class:

- *Which people and organisations did Catherine Corless approach when she was looking for evidence about the deaths and burials of the children in Tuam Mother and Baby home?*
[Possible answers: Local people in Tuam, Bon Secours order, HSE West (formerly Western Health Board), Births, Deaths and Marriages section of the Galway Registry Office]
- *What primary sources did she find?*
[Possible answers: firsthand accounts of those who had seen the remains of children in a location on the grounds of the former Mother and Baby home; local maps, death certificates for 796 children from the Tuam home]
- *What information was available in these primary sources?*
[Possible answers: firsthand accounts – possible location of remains of missing children; maps – location of a disused septic tank; death certificates for the 796 children – names, age, date of death, and in some cases the cause of death]
- *What conclusions did she come to?*
[Possible answers: some or all the 796 children were buried in a disused septic tank on the grounds of the former Mother and Baby home in Tuam]
- *What did Catherine Corless do to make sure that her conclusions were as sound as possible?*
[Possible answers: Catherine Corless cross-checked with burial records in counties Galway and Mayo to make sure that the children were not buried elsewhere by their families]

Share the following information with your students:

For several years, Corless searched and analysed records associated with the Mother and Baby home in Tuam. Her research revealed that 796 children, mostly infants, died there between 1925 and 1961. The children's names, ages, places of birth, date of death and sometimes the cause of death were recorded. The most common cause of death (152 babies/children) was 'weakness/debility/marasmus'. Marasmus means 'undernourishment causing a child's weight to be significantly low for their age', meaning they died from hunger. Children also died of tuberculosis, convulsions, measles, whooping cough, influenza, bronchitis and meningitis, among other illnesses.

The average number of deaths over the 36-year period was just over 22 babies/children a year. These numbers are a stark reflection of a period in Ireland when infant mortality in general was very much higher than today, particularly in institutions, where infection spread rapidly. However, it is important to note that even taking this into account, death rates were particularly high in the Tuam home, and in general, death rates were higher for children whose parents were not married than for those who were or had been married.

Catherine Corless did not find burial records for the 796 missing babies/children from the Tuam home. They had not been interred in any of the local public cemeteries and are not buried in family plots – as would be expected given that these children had been baptised. Corless concluded that some/all of the missing 796 children were buried in a disused septic tank (an underground container – part of a system for treating sewage) at the rear of the former home.

Depending on your class, at this point you might want to allow time for students to talk quietly in pairs or small groups.

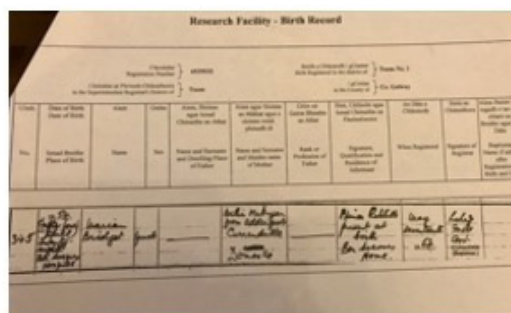
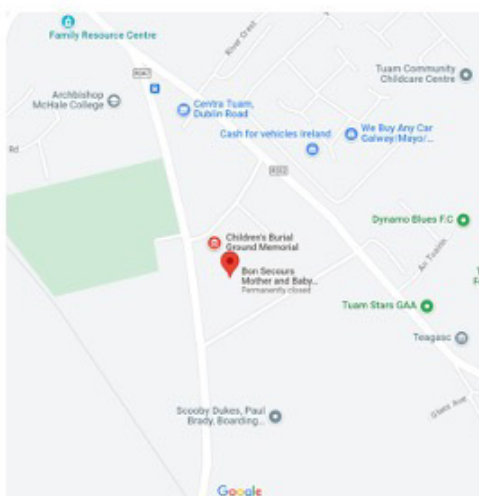
Sources

Barry, D. '[The Lost Children of Tuam](#)' *New York Times*, 28 October 2017.

Corless, C. 2021. *Belonging*, Hatchette Ireland.

Smith, James M. [Knowing and Unknowing Tuam: State Practice, the Archive, and Transitional Justice](#). *Éire-Ireland* 55, no. 1 (2020): 142–180.

Activity 3: Marian Bridget Mulryan



Document 2 - Birth Certificate for Marian Bridget Mulryan., University of Galway, Asset Id 13674, Archival Record Id TOHP, <https://digital.library.universityofgalway.ie/p/ms/asset/13674>

Teacher notes (internet access is required for this activity)

Depending on the availability of devices, divide the class into pairs or small groups.

Invite students to search for the Tuam Oral History Project – Survivors' Stories – [Peter Mulryan: Digital Archive](#)

In your pair/group, locate the birth certificate of Marian Bridget Mulryan. [Document 2: Birth certificate for Marian Bridget Mulryan]

Take note of the following information:

- Date of birth [Answer: 28 April 1954]
- Place of birth [Answer: Bon Secours hospital]
- Name and dwelling place of father [Answer: the space for this information is blank]
- Mother's name [Answer: Delia Mulryan]

Marian Mulryan died on 12 February 1955.

In your pair/group, locate the death certificate for Marian Bridget Mulryan. [Document 3 – Death Certificate for Marian Bridget Mulryan]

Take note of the following information:

- Condition [Answer: spinster – a word used to describe a single or unmarried female]
- Age [Answer: 10 months]
- Rank, profession, occupation [Answer: Daughter of a domestic]
- Certified cause of death [Answer: Convulsions]
- Duration of illness [Answer: 1.5 hours]

Share the following information with your students:

According to the available evidence, Marian Bridget Mulryan was one of 43 of the babies/children who died of 'febrile convulsions/fits/epilepsy' in the Tuam home.

The burial place of Marian Bridget Mulryan is unknown.

Tuam is not the only Mother and Baby home where there is missing information about deaths and burials of babies/children. In the Bessborough Mother and Baby home in Co Cork, 923 babies/children died between 1922–1998. The burial place of only 64 of these children is known. The Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary who owned and managed this and two other homes (Castlepollard and Sean Ross) did not record children's burials. A map of the 3.7-acre Bessborough site dating from the 1940s includes a reference to "children's burial ground". Recently, planning permission to build apartments on the Bessborough site was refused by An Bord Pleanála, because there were "reasonable concerns in relation to the potential for a children's burial ground within the site, associated with the former use of the lands as a mother and baby home".

For many families, missing death certificates and burial records, combined with missing or 'unavailable' information about adoptions within Ireland and from Ireland to other countries, and the emergence of evidence of falsification of identities and official records to facilitate illegal adoptions, means that they do not know whether their child/sibling/cousin etc is alive or dead.

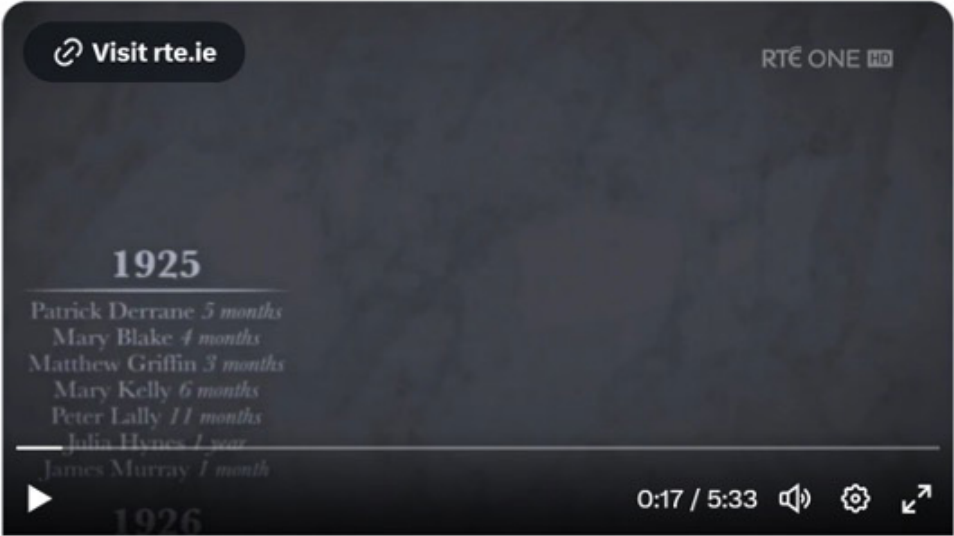
Depending on your class, at this point you might want to allow time for students to talk quietly in pairs or small groups.

Sources

[Document 2 – Birth Certificate for Marian Bridget Mulryan](#). University of Galway, Asset Id 13674, Archival Record Id TOHP.

[Document 3 – Death Certificate for Marian Bridget Mulryan](#). University of Galway Digital Collections, Asset Id 13675, Archival Record Id TOHP.

[Document 4 – Recorded causes of death of 796 children in the Tuam Mother and Baby Home](#). University of Galway, Asset Id 13676, Archival Record Id TOHP.



Visit [rte.ie](https://www.rte.ie) RTE ONE

1925

- Patrick Derrane 5 months
- Mary Blake 4 months
- Matthew Griffin 3 months
- Mary Kelly 6 months
- Peter Lally 11 months
- Julia Hynes 1 year
- James Murray 1 month

1926

0:17 / 5:33

Play from start to 5.08 mins

Teacher notes (internet access is required for this activity)

Depending on your students, play [RTÉ clip](#) (from start to 5.08 mins) with the names of the 796 children identified by Catherine Corless as dead/missing from the Mother and Baby home in Tuam.

Depending on your students, you might like to acknowledge the difficult nature of this topic as follows:

Learning about Mother and Baby homes is hard. If you feel upset, this means that you have empathy for the mothers and children in these institutions. Empathy is about 'our ability to adopt and understand the emotions, feelings and perspectives of others'. Empathy helps us 'to see and respond to the experiences' of other people, especially those who have gone through or are going through hardship.

Facilitate a whole class discussion, using the following prompt:

Do you think it is important to view people, issues and events in the past with empathy? Explain your answer.

Source

Murphy, C., Dolan, P., Browne, G. & Brennan, M. eds. 2022. *IONBHÁ: The Empathy Book For Ireland*. Cork: Mercier Press.

Activity 4: Secondary sources

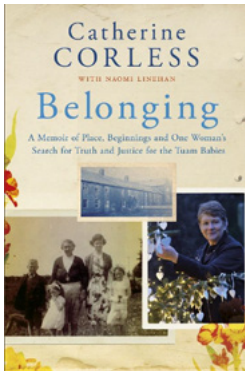


Image courtesy of
Hatchette Ireland

- present historical evidence
- provide an interpretation of that evidence
- draws conclusions about the people/event/process reported in the primary source(s).

A secondary source is always one step removed from the event/process under study.

The purpose of the secondary source is to persuade the reader to adopt a point of view.

When reading a secondary source, watch for the way that the writer presents their analysis and interpretation.

Catherine Corless' memoir, *Belonging*, is about the Tuam home and her work as a historian.

Is *Belonging* an example of a primary or a secondary source? Explain your answer.

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

Ask for volunteers to read the text on the slides.

Divide the class into pairs.

In pairs, write down two or more reasons why the most valuable secondary sources are those that have been published/made available recently.

Let's look at an example related to the Mother and Baby home in Tuam.

As you listen to the following information, jot down any additional reasons why the most recent secondary sources are the most valued.

- *In 2012, Catherine Corless published an essay, a secondary source, about the Tuam home in the Journal of the Old Tuam Society, a local history periodical. This article was the first time anything appeared in print about the burial ground on the site of the old Tuam home.*
- *In 2012, when Corless published her essay, she did not yet have the names or numbers of the children.*
- *Between October 2016–January 2017, test excavations were carried out at the burial ground in Tuam. These excavations proved Catherine Corless, survivors and locals correct. Human bones dating from the time of the home's operations were found in a decommissioned septic tank on the site.*
- *Additionally, since 2012, evidence has emerged of falsification of birth certification at other Mother and Baby homes which may mean that some of the deaths in Tuam were incorrectly registered to cover the fact that children were adopted illegally.*

Take feedback from a selection of pairs.

Click to show the image of Catherine Corless' book and associated question

Is Belonging, a book by Catherine Corless published in 2021, an example of a primary or a secondary source?

[Answer = primary source because it is a memoir]

Sources

BBC News. [Irish mother and baby homes: Timeline of controversy](#). 13 January 2021.

O Fatharta, C. 'Special Investigation: Fears over "Trafficking" of Children to the US', *The Irish Examiner*, 3 June 2015.

PDST. 2013. [Approaches to teaching History in Transition Year](#)

Activity 5: Options

1. Memorialisation
2. Exhumation of known human remains
3. Forensic excavation and recovery of known human remains
4. Forensic excavation and recovery of known human remains with further evaluation and excavation of other areas of interest
5. Forensic excavation of the total available area, removal and identification of human remains.



Clip from "They'll even come after your soul"
Episode 2, Tuam Oral History podcast, 1.22 mins
Courtesy of University of Galway

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

In 2015, largely because of the scandal around the Tuam burial site, the Irish Government set up a Commission (team of experts) of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. The purpose of the Commission was to find out what happened to women and children in 14 Mother and Baby homes (including in Tuam) and 4 County homes (institutions for a wide variety of people, mostly poor and including women who were not married and their children) during the period 1922–1998.

As part of the work of this Commission, in January–March 2018, the government ran a consultation with 5 different options (on the slide) for action relating to the burial site in Tuam.

Read aloud the five options on the slide.

Depending on your students, you might want to use the following definitions to ensure understanding.

- Memorialisation – a way of preserving the memory of people or events (e.g., a plaque with names of those proven by research to be buried at the site)
- Exhumation – the action of digging up something buried (usually, but not always, human bodies)
- Human remains – dead bodies
- Forensic excavation – removing something specific from the ground using scientific methods

Divide the class into small groups.

The consultation about what was to happen to the burial site in Tuam was open to survivors, relatives of people who were confined there, local people living in houses on the former site and members of the public. Some survivors/relatives (e.g., Tuam Babies Family Group) strongly objected to the way the consultation was organised, arguing that they were the only people who should have a say in what happens.

In your group, discuss whether you agree with the opinion of the Tuam Babies Family Group and why?

Many survivors (and Catherine Corless) agreed with option 5 on the slide – forensic excavation of the total available area, removal and identification of human remains.

Click to play the audio clip (2.25 mins) on the top right of the slide.

This clip is an extract from the University of Galway's Tuam Oral History podcast series. The voices in the clip are (in chronological order):

- Peter Mulryan, brother of Marian Bridget Mulryan (see Unit 4, Activity 3)
- Cillian Murphy, actor and narrator of the Tuam Oral History podcast series
- Catherine Corless, historian, author and social activist

In July 2022, the Institutions Burial Act was signed into law. This Act allows for:

- *Excavation of the site*
- *Recovery of human remains*
- *Post recovery analysis of remains*
- *Identification of remains through DNA familial matching (if possible)*
- *Return of remains to family members or respectful re-interment of remains in line with family wishes*

However, the people appointed to lead the work at the site say that it is a very complex task that will push the limits of forensic science and that it is highly unlikely that all the babies and children will be identifiable. Those that are not identified will be reinterred (reburied) at a memorial site in Tuam.

Sources

Government of Ireland, Press Release: [Institutional Burials Bill 2022 passed by Oireachtas](#)

Holland, K. [Very likely many of the 796 babies' remains at Tuam grave will never be identified](#). *Irish Times*, 20 July 2023.

O'Donnell, K., O'Rourke, M. & Smith, J. eds. 2022. *Redress: Ireland's Institutions and Transitional Justice*. UCD Press: Dublin

O'Reilly, A. 2018. *My name is Bridget: The untold story of Bridget Dolan and the Tuam Mother and Baby Home*. Gill: Dublin.

University of Galway. [They'll even come after your soul](#). Episode 2, Tuam Oral History podcast.

Activity 6: Statement

Statement of the Sisters of Bon Secours upon publication of the Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes

The Commission's report presents a history of our country in which many women and children were rejected, silenced and excluded; in which they were subjected to hardship; and in which their inherent human dignity was disrespected, in life and in death.

Our Sisters of Bon Secours were part of this sorrowful history.

Our Sisters ran [the] Mother and Baby Home in Tuam from 1925 to 1961. We did not live up to our Christianity when running the Home. We failed to respect the inherent dignity of the women and children who came to the Home. We failed to offer them the compassion that they so badly needed. We were part of the system in which they suffered hardship, loneliness and terrible hurt. We acknowledge in particular that infants and children who died at the Home were buried in a disrespectful and unacceptable way. For all that, we are deeply sorry.

We offer our profound apologies to all the women and children of [the Tuam] Mother and Baby Home, to their families and to the people of this country.

Healing is not possible until what happened is acknowledged. We hope and we pray that healing will come to all those affected; those who are living and those who have died. We hope that we, our church and our country can learn from this history.

Teacher notes

Read aloud the statement issued by the Bon Secours order the day after the publication of the Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes (January 2021).

There was a mixed response from survivors and family members to the Bon Secours statement. Some welcomed the statement as being a clear acknowledgement of responsibility, while others believe that the apology came too late and/or needed to be backed up by financial contributions, for example, for the care of survivors.

Divide the class into small groups.

In your groups, decide:

- if this statement is an example of a primary or secondary source of evidence; and, the uses and limitations of this source.
- on the two sentences in the Bon Secours statement that you think are the most important and the two sentences about which you have questions.

In both cases, be prepared to give reasons for your answers.

Take feedback from a selection of groups.

The Bon Secours say that they 'were part of the system'. What system do you think they are referring to?

[Possible answer: the architecture of containment or Ireland's network of historic institutions]

The 1960 report of the Irish Province of the Sisters of Bon Secours described their work in the Tuam home as 'especially dear to the Heart of our Divine Lord'.

The Bon Secours seem to have different opinions about their work in the Mother and Baby home in Tuam between 1960 and their 2022 statement of apology. To help us understand this change, here's a quote from Sr Goretti Butler, head of the Daughters of Charity, a religious order that operated St. Patrick's Mother and Baby home in Dublin. Sr Goretti said:

'It was a crisis, and this was the response to unmarried mothers at the time. My own belief is that...[the nuns in St Patrick's] did the best they could with the amount they had to work with at the time. ...you judge on today, but that was a different time.'

Consider displaying the notes from Unit 3, Activity 8: Alternative.

In your groups, discuss:

- *what Sr Goretti Butler meant when she said, 'You judge on today, but that was a different time.'*
- *whether the religious orders who ran the Mother and Baby homes and other institutions should be judged on the standards of the time or the standards of today.*

Be prepared to give reasons for your answers.

Take feedback from a selection of groups.

Facilitate a whole class discussion, using the following as a prompt:

On 13 January 2021, the Taoiseach Micháel Martin apologised on behalf of the Irish Government to those who were confined in Mother and Baby or County homes. As part of his statement, the Taoiseach said 'while context is essential to our proper understanding of this chapter of our history, it does not lessen what happened or diminish the responsibility of churches and state...'

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

Sources

Bon Secours [Apology Statement](#)

Government of Ireland [Apology and Action Plan](#)

O'Reilly, A. [Nuns: We did our best in Mother and Baby Home](#), *Irish Daily Mail*, 7 August 2017.

Activity 7: A wider Brave Space

Read our Brave Space Agreement

- Do we need a Brave Space Agreement in Ireland to help us come to terms with the legacy of our historic institutions, including Mother and Baby homes?
- What would need to be deleted / added / changed to widen our Brave Space Agreement for this purpose?

Teacher notes

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

Facilitate a whole class discussion about the operation of your Brave Space Agreement, using the questions on the slide as prompts.

Activity 8: Coping and resilience



Peter Mulryan with Handball Players, University of Galway, Asset Id 13665, Archival Record Id TOHP, <https://digital.library.universityofgalway.ie/ojs/asset/13665>



“...go out and hit a ball against a wall and release the stress that is there in your head.”

Peter Mulryan

Teacher notes (internet access is required for this activity)

Some people never recovered from their experiences in Mother and Baby homes and/or other historic institutions. They may never have told their story because they were, or still are, too traumatised to speak about this time in their lives. We cannot even begin to imagine their profound hurt. Other people refused to let their time in institutions define them and put their past behind them. The stories of these people may also be untold. Other survivors, like the people we've encountered in these units, have spoken about their experiences as a way of speaking out about what they see as a shameful chapter in our history and/or of demanding information, change and justice.

Peter Mulryan, older brother of Marian Bridget Mulryan (Activity 3, Unit 4) was born in Galway Regional Hospital and transferred the Tuam home in the 1944. He had a very hard time when he was boarded out (fostered) at the age of four and a half. But Peter has tried to find ways to cope and build resilience. For example, Peter is a world champion handball player, and he credits handball with helping him to deal with the hardship he has experienced in life. He sings in the local church choir and says this also helps him cope.

Invite students to access the Tuam Oral History Project – Survivors' Stories – [Peter Mulryan: Digital Archive](#)

Find at least one document or photograph relating to Peter's life (other than the photo on the slide) that shows how he has coped and developed resilience in the face of the extraordinary challenges and difficulties he has encountered.

Think about the different ways that you 'release the stress that is there in your head'. This might be something that you enjoy doing on your own or with others, it could be taking part in a sport, playing or listening to music, talking to a friend etc.

Take a minute to jot down a reminder to yourself to do these things when times are tough.

Sources

[Peter Mulryan: Digital Archive](#). Tuam Oral History project, University of Galway.



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/

Barnardos Origins, Post Adoption and Bereavement Services: www.barnardos.ie

Samaritans: www.samaritans.org
Phone: 116 123

Childline: www.childline.ie
Phone: 1800 66 66 66

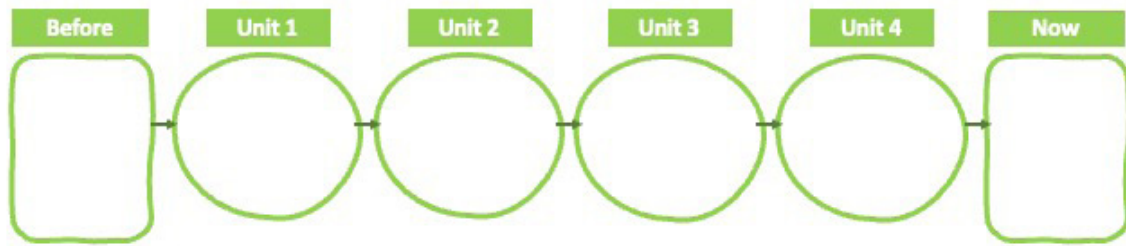
Jigsaw: www.jigsaw.ie

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, and need support, 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 9: Timeline of learning



- **BEFORE:** Use the rectangular space to write down what you knew about Ireland's historic institutions, and especially the Mother and Baby home in Tuam, before doing these units.
- **UNITS 1-4:** Use the circular spaces to record your significant learning in Unit 1, 2, 3 and 4 (things you found out that you didn't know before, skills you gained or practiced, the main challenges you encountered and why these were challenging for you).
- **NOW:** Use the rectangular space to note any questions you are left with, anything that you want to know more about and what you will now do to get answers or information.

Teacher notes

Recreate the timeline of learning diagram on the slide in your copy/journal. Make your diagram as large as possible.

Review activities in Units 1–4 by showing the unit outlines (Slide 2 in each unit).

Complete your timeline of learning by following the steps outlined in the bullets on the slide.