CLANN: IRELAND'S UNMARRIED MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: GATHERING THE DATA

Statement of Witness 52

Reference Code:	CLANN/WIT52
Status:	Adopted Person
Institution(s)/Agencies:	Bessborough Mother and Baby Home, Cork; Catholic Women's Aid Society
Date:	Not available at this time
Transcript:	3 pages
Records/Papers included:	Yes
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WITNESS STATEMENT OF [redacted]

I, [redacted] of [redacted] will say:

1. I make this statement for the purpose of providing evidence to the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation established by the Irish Government pursuant to Section 3 of the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004.

2. Save as otherwise stated, the facts and matters set out in this witness statement are within my own knowledge. To the extent that such facts and matters are not within my own knowledge, they are true to the best of my belief and are from the sources identified.

3. Attached to this statement is an exhibit marked [redacted] which contains various copy documents.

4. I make this statement as an adopted person.

Circumstances of my birth and early life

5. I was born on [redacted] 1962 at the Bessborough Mother and Baby Home ("**Bessborough**") in Cork. I remained at Bessborough for 2 months. I was adopted on [redacted] 1963. I am now 54 years old.

6. From speaking to my birth mother, I know she was 17 when she became pregnant. My birth mother was not married when she became pregnant. Due to the circumstances and the identity of the father (who was married [redacted] she could not tell her family about the pregnancy. Whilst pregnant my birth mother contacted Bessborough after seeing an advert in the newspaper. Bessborough arranged for my mother to be collected in a car and took her to the home. I was baptised in Bessborough [redacted] after I was born. My birth mother remained in Bessborough after my birth. [redacted] after I was born my birth mother fell ill and was admitted to St Finbarr's Hospital in Cork. My birth mother spent a month in St Finbarr's Hospital before returning to Bessborough on [redacted] 1963.

7. Whilst in hospital my birth mother told her mother about me. My birth mother thinks that my birth grandmother contacted her local parish church who helped arrange my adoption through the Catholic Women's Aid Society (the "**CWAS**"). My birth mother told me that she signed the adoption papers consenting to my adoption and that her mother paid £100 to Bessborough so that she could leave the home. On [redacted] 1963 I was taken from Bessborough by [redacted] who worked with the CWAS. My mother left Bessborough on the same day.

8. I am not aware of the process by which my adoptive parents applied to adopt me. My adoptive family was, however, friendly with [redacted] and another woman who worked for the CWAS, [redacted] I understand from my adoptive mother that a 'social worker' visited my adoptive parents at least once after I was adopted but before the adoption order went through in [redacted] 1963.

9. I always knew that I had been adopted, although I do not remember being specifically told I was adopted.

10. At the time I was adopted, the general view in society was that "illegitimate and unwanted" babies were better off given to married parents who were unable to have children of their own, as was the case with my adoptive parents. However, the lived reality was very different. I know from speaking to my birth mother that I was wanted and that she suffered greatly from giving me up and not knowing where I was. I also suffered mentally and emotionally, as both a child and an adult, in believing that I was unwanted and in

having no information whatsoever about my mother, my family background and my medical history. I always had to put 'unknown' on medical forms, which was embarrassing and upsetting. As a child I had a sense that I did not know who I was or where I was from. I felt as if I didn't fit in. I remember feeling this huge sadness inside me when I was 4 or 5 years old. At the time I did not know where this feeling came from but now I think it was because I missed my mother. This was exacerbated by not being able to know my mother's name and not being allowed to talk about her.

11. I have [redacted] older adoptive sisters. [redacted] were born in Bessborough and adopted through the CWAS. My adoptive sisters were very different from me in looks, temperament, abilities and interests. I believe this heightened the sense of dislocation I felt as a child. I believe that my adoptive sisters also had the same sense of loss and not belonging that I felt. I struggled with the feeling that I did not fit in with my adoptive family. I believe this feeling, coupled with the sense of loss I felt for my birth mother, damaged my mental health and was a key reason for me seeking counselling as a an adult.

12. I had a good relationship with my adoptive father, who understood how I felt. I disliked my adoptive mother and did not connect with her at all. When I was about 8 or 9 I remember my adoptive mother speaking about unmarried mothers with her friends. She described how unmarried mothers brought disgrace on themselves and their family. I knew that my birth mother had been unmarried and it was hard to hear that my birth mother was something shameful. My adoptive father was different; he used to joke that without unmarried mothers we would not have had a family. When I began searching for my birth mother in 1984 I told my adoptive father but I did not tell my adoptive mother, as I knew she would see it as a rejection of her.

Information and tracing my mother

13. I always wanted to know who my mother was. In the summer of 1984 I contacted Bessborough and met with Sister [redacted] who worked at the home. She gave me a tour of the home and introduced me as "*one of her babies*", as she had worked at the home when I was born. Sister [redacted] told me small details like the time I was born, how much I weighed and my mother's age when I was born. I treasured these small bits of information; they seem such minor details but they were important to me because they assured me that I had come from somewhere. Sister [redacted] could not, however, tell me my mother's name but assured me that it was "*a good name*". I was angry about this at the time. I am still angry now. It is outrageous and inhumane that as an adult I did not have a right to know my mother's name.

14. Sister [redacted] told me that she would start a trace. A couple of weeks later she informed me that she had drawn a blank and that she had been unable to find my birth mother. She said that my birth mother must have given the wrong name or the wrong address as nobody of my birth mother's name ever lived at the address given. I remember feeling devastated that I was never going to know who my mother was. It was awful thinking that you meant so little to your mother that she never wanted you to be able to find her. It felt like she had died and I would never know my true identity.

15. In 1992 my adoptive sister, [redacted] contacted Bessborough to trace her birth mother. [redacted] told me that Sister [redacted] mentioned how I had never returned to try to find my birth mother again. I thought this was strange because Sister [redacted] had told me there was no hope of finding my birth mother. However, Sister [redacted] told [redacted] that I could try to find my mother again. I was delighted and contacted Bessborough in early 1992. I met with Sister [redacted] who was very business-like and helpful. 2 or 3 weeks later I received a phone call from Sister [redacted] who said she had spoken to my mother the day before. I was overjoyed.

Sister [redacted] explained that initially she had not been able to find evidence of my birth mother at the address given because my birth mother had moved in 1963 (less than a year after I was born). Sister [redacted] found out where my mother lived now by speaking to a man working at the [redacted] who remembered my mother's family. I do not know whether Sister [redacted] lied about not being able to find my birth mother or whether she simply had not gone the "extra-mile" as Sister [redacted] had in looking for her. Either way, Sister [redacted] should not have said that my mother gave the wrong name or address, as this upset me and left me with no hope of finding my mother.

16. Sister [redacted] arranged for my mother to contact me by letter in early 1992. We exchanged numerous letters via Sister [redacted] who forwarded the letters on. My mother said she wanted to meet me and Sister [redacted] arranged for us to meet in September 1992. We met in the convent sitting room at Bessborough. The meeting was wonderful. We spent a couple of hours together in Bessborough before going into town, where we spent another 3 hours together. It meant so much to meet her and see how alike we were. It was amazing to know that my mother had cared about me and thought about me over the years.

17. I am still in contact with my birth mother and we meet up once a year.

18. My birth mother has [redacted] other children. Her family do not know I exist. She does not feel that she can tell her family about me after such a long time.

19. My birth mother told me about my natural father. [redacted] He took advantage of my mother when she was staying with him as a 17 year old. My natural father died in [redacted] He had [redacted] children. I have not met any of his children but I am thinking about contacting one of them. I would like to see a photograph of my natural father. I think this would help me better understand who I am.

Access to information

20. As I have described, I initially had some difficulty finding my birth mother through Bessborough.

21. I made a freedom of information request about 5 years ago and received the 9 pages set out in [redacted] I am curious to know whether there is any more information about me that can be made available. I feel that adopted children should have access to information held by organisations about their birth and background. Adoptive children should not have to undertake difficult investigations to find out their parents' identities. It should not be so difficult to find out your own mother's name.

I believe that the contents of this statement are true.

Signed ……..

[redacted]

Date ……..

[redacted]

All redactions have been carried out by the Clann Project

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

10th of May 2012

Private & Confidential

[redacted]

Re: Freedom of Information Request
Our Ref : [redacted]

Dear [redacted]

I refer to your request under the Freedom of Information Act 1997 for access to information held by the HSE south.

I can confirm that I have conducted a full search of records taken over by the HSE on the 30th of August 2011. I now enclose all information that we have been able to identify that is relevant to your request. It should be noted that where records do exist they were often poorly maintained prior to the coming into force of the Freedom of Information Act and this fact has to be seen in the context of that time when there were very few requests for records.

I wish to advise you that following consideration of the provisions of the Act, I have decided to grant partial access to the information requested that we have been able to identify that is relevant to your request.

There are 9 pages on file and the attached schedule lists all of these records and also details the level of access granted. I am refusing access to some records under Section 28(1) of the Act and Sec 26(1)(a), which states that:

"a head shall refuse to grant a request …if the record concerned would involve the disclosure of personal information"(Sec 28(1))

"a head shall refuse to grant a request …if the record concerned contains information given to the public body in confidence and on the understanding that it would be treated by it as confidential……and in the opinion of the head its disclosure would be likely to prejudice the giving to the body of further similar information"(26(1)(a)).

CHILD CARE MANAGER'S OFFICE - HSE SOUTH
134 Bank Place, Mallow, Co. Cork.
Tel. [redacted] Fax [redacted]

xemptions made are detailed in the Schedule.
Exemptions under these sections are subject to a Public Interest Test as follows:

For Release

- Right of an individual to view all personal information
- Rights under natural justice
- Accountability of the public body
- Transparency of the public body in all its actions

Refusing Release

- The public interest in protecting privacy
- The public interest in maintaining personal privacy of third parties
- The entitlement of members of the public to a degree of personal privacy when they have dealings with government
- The need to protect vulnerable individuals
- The need for the HSE to discuss child welfare cases with relevant third parties in a spirit of mutual confidentiality

If you wish to contact the Adoption Department please feel free to do so.

Under the Freedom of Information Act you have a right to a review of this decision. If you wish to do so please submit a request for a review in writing within 4 weeks of receipt of this decision and address it to the Internal Reviewer, Department of Consumer Relations. HSE, Wilton Road, Cork.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

DECISION MAKER.

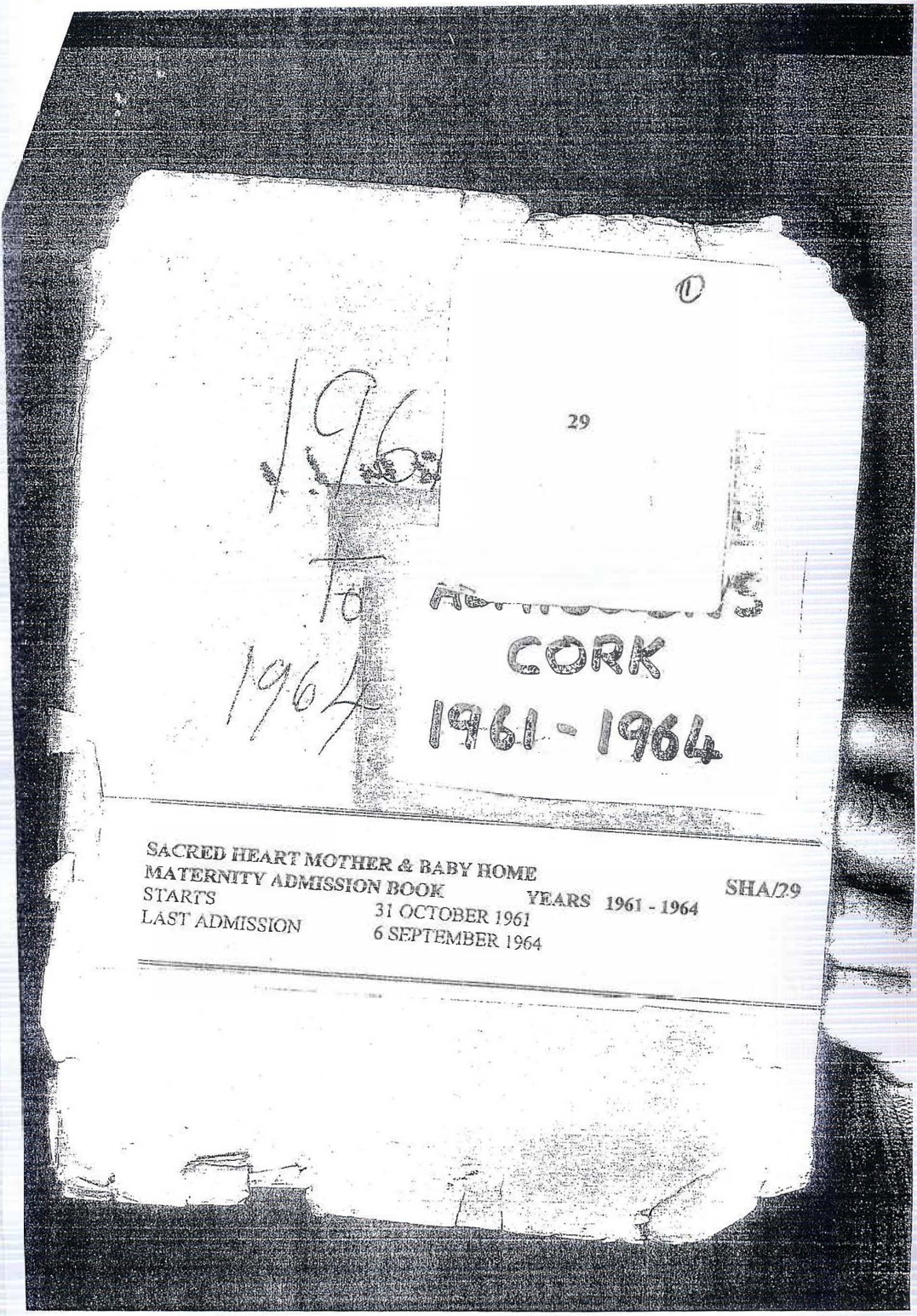
c.c. [redacted] **Customer Care Co-ordinator**

CHILD CARE MANAGER'S OFFICE - HSE SOUTH
134 Bank Place, Mallow, Co. Cork.
Tel. [redacted] Fax [redacted]

HEDULE OF RECORDS

File Ref. No. FOI [redacted]

Page No.	Description	Release Yes/No	Exempt Section of Act
1	File Record	Yes	
2	File Record	Yes	
3	File Record	Partial	Sec 26(1)(a)Sec 28(1)
4	Records and Particulars Book of Maternity Home	Partial	Sec 26(1)(a)Sec 28(1)
5	Particulars of Adoption Order	Yes	
6-7	File Record	Partial	Sec 26(1)(a)Sec 28(1)
8	File Record	Partial	Sec 26(1)(a)Sec 28(1)
9	File Record	Yes	


1
29
CORK
1961 - 1964
SACRED HEART MOTHER & BABY HOME
MATERNITY ADMISSION BOOK
YEARS 1961 - 1964
SHA/29
STARTS
31 OCTOBER 1961
LAST ADMISSION
6 SEPTEMBER 1964

RECORDS.

APRIL 1962

TO

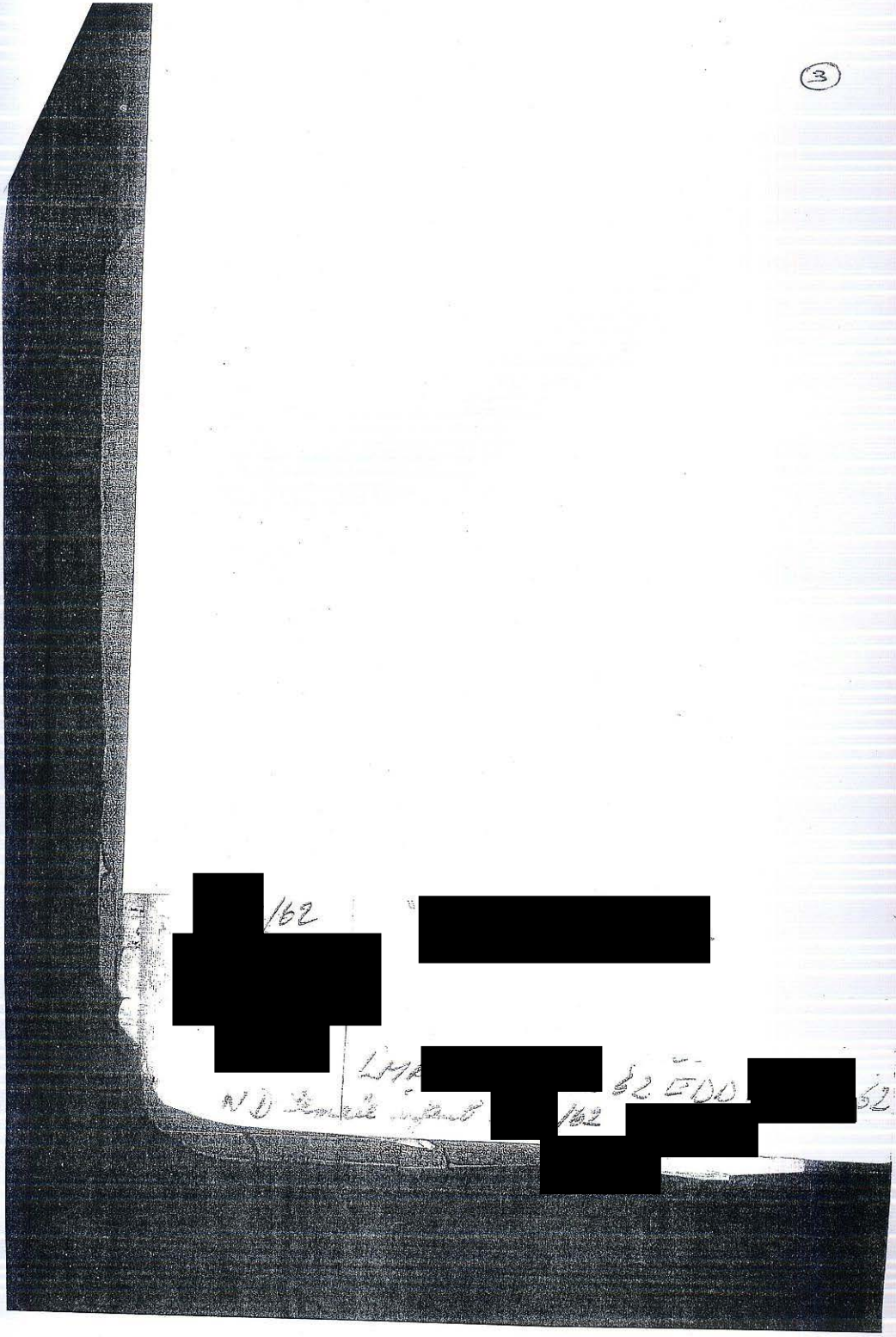
APRIL 1963.

March 62 to Jan 63

RECORDS AND PARTICULARS BOOK OF THE MATERNITY HOSPITAL
SACRED HEART HOSPITAL, BESSBORO, BLACKROCK, CORK.

BOOK 7

BIRTHS FROM	22 APRIL 1962
LAST BIRTH	19 APRIL 1963



Form No. 4.

REGISTRATION OF MATERNITY HOMES ACT, 1934

RECORDS AND PARTICULARS BOOK OF MATERNITY HOME

KNOWN AS ..... (Insert Name (if any) and Address of Home)

Particulars of PATIENT to be entered on reception into the Home

No. ..... Name [redacted]

Address [redacted]

Date of reception [redacted] 1962

Condition on reception Good

Number of previous pregnancies (full time or otherwise) .....

Name of Patient's Husband .....

Occupation of Patient's Husband .....

MEDICAL ATTENDANT (if any) of Patient while in Home

Name .....

Address [redacted]

CONFINEMENT AND BIRTH IN HOME

CONFINEMENT

Date and hour [redacted] 1962 6.10 PM

Delivery, normal or abnormal Normal

If abnormal, give particulars .....

Whether Sepsis or other complication developed Nil to Note

If so, give particulars .....

BIRTH

Sex of Infant Female Weight of Infant at birth 7 lb. 14 oz.

Full time or premature Full Time

If premature, state degree of prematurity .....

Whether born alive or stillborn Alive

Miscarriage in Home

Date and hour of miscarriage .....

Period of pregnancy .....

Contributing cause (if any) of miscarriage .....

Death in Home

Whether Mother or Infant .....

Date and hour of death .....

Cause of death .....

Discharge of Mother from Home

Date of discharge [redacted] 1962

State of health on discharge Good

REMOVAL OF CHILD FROM HOME

Particulars of Person removing Child

Date and hour of removal [redacted] 1962 3 pm

Name [redacted]

Address Cork

Relationship (if any) .....

Particulars of Person to whose care Child is removed

Name .....

Address .....

Relationship (if any) .....

(5)

GUTHÁN [redacted]
(Telephone).

TAGAIRT:
(Ref. No.) [redacted]

CONFIDENTIAL.

AN BORD UCHTÁLA,
45 FAICHE STIABHNA, O.,
(45, St. Stephen's Green, E.),
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).
31 Deireadh Fómhair, 1963.

PARTICULARS OF ADOPTION ORDER

Names and address of adopters: [redacted] and [redacted]

Name of child prior to adoption: [redacted]

Name/Names of parent/parents: [redacted]

Date of birth of child: [redacted] 1962

Date and place of Baptism of child: [redacted] in the [redacted]

Name of child on adoption: [redacted]

Date of Adoption Order: [redacted] 1963

A Athair, a chara,

I am desired by An Bord Uchtála to forward the foregoing particulars for your information, and to request that you will be good enough to amend accordingly the entry in the Baptismal Register relating to the child concerned.

Mise, le meas,

[redacted]

CLÁRAITHEOIR.

[redacted]

Record from Bessboro Computer

Bessboro Admission Register 1961-1964 Page [redacted] Ledger No [redacted]

Mother ID: [redacted]

Name:

Surname:

Date of Birth: [redacted] 1962

Sex: Female

Weight: 7lbs 4ozs

Adopted

Baptised: [redacted] 1962

Adoptive Name:

Adoptive Parents: [redacted]

Country of Adoption: Ireland

Date of Discharge: _____

Misc: *NOTE C.W.A.S. Adoptive Parents Address: as* [redacted]

Date of Adoption Order: [redacted]

Date of Marriage:

Married to:

Married Where:

Reference Books

Cork Indoor Register 1930-71 Page 55 & 56 Ref. No.: [redacted]

Baptismal Register 1949-1978

Mother's ID:	[redacted]
Mother's Area:	
Mother's County:	[redacted]
Date admitted:	[redacted] 1962
Date of Discharge:	[redacted] 1963
Discharge to:	Home without baby
First Name:	[redacted]
Surname:	
House Name:	
Mother's Date of Birth:	[redacted] 1946 5
Mother's Address:	
	[redacted]
Mother's Religion:	Catholic
Child:	[redacted]
Date of Birth:	[redacted] 1962

Reference Books

Cork Indoor Register	1930-71	Page 55 & 56	Ref. No.: [redacted]
Birth Register		Page 22	
Baptismal Register	1949-1978		

Indoor Register 1930-1971 [redacted]

Page 55 & 56

Admitted:	[redacted] 1962
Age:	17
House Name:	[redacted]
Name:	
Address:	
Sex:	Female
Date of Birth:	[redacted] 1962
Name of Child:	

[redacted] *1963 CWAS – Mother home*

Mother Hospital [redacted] *1963 re-admitted* [redacted] *and discharged* [redacted] *CWAS*

(9)

C.W.A.S. Book1937-1971

Page 134

No: [redacted]

[redacted]

Born Bessboro [redacted] *1962*

Placed for Legal Adoption [redacted] *1963*

With [redacted]

Adoption order made 23 = 63