

How the KIND project is supporting separated migrant children, with receipt of the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal grant (<https://www.activelink.ie/node/116326>)

“My hope grew when I thought I would meet my family again one day”: How the KIND project is supporting separated migrant children, with receipt of the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal grant

18.06.2025 – The Immigrant Council of Ireland is pleased to announce that we have been awarded a grant to support migrant children who are separated from their families. This grant is provided by the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal grants administered by Community Foundation Ireland and will fund our work on the KIND project providing legal aid to separated migrant children.

Every year, approximately 175 unaccompanied children arrive in Ireland, often having left their families in countries impacted by conflict, including Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria and Ethiopia. After receiving international protection status, these children often face an uphill battle to be reunited with their families.

With the number of cases increasing each year, each child's story is different. In the cases of Mirwais and Aminata, the assistance they were given by the lawyers trained by the KIND project meant that they were not alone in the process.

Mirwais' Story

Mirwais Nawabzai arrived in Ireland in 2017 alone aged just 17 years old, after fleeing Afghanistan three years earlier at 14. As a minor, Mirwais was placed with a foster family, as he navigated his new life in Ireland and the immigration system here. In 2020, he received international protection status, allowing him to stay. Yet, although he was safe now, he felt hopeless at the thought that he might never be reunited with his family.

“I didn't have any hope, thinking that I wouldn't meet my family and that the process was too long,” Mirwais says. “I was stressed and had mental [health] issues because of the process which I didn't understand.”

When his care worker put him in touch with the Immigrant Council of Ireland's KIND team who placed him with the A & L Goodbody lawyers, Mirwais began to feel excited and hopeful again.

“Through the team's hard work and dedication, helping me and always keeping me updated about the process, I felt happy that one day [family reunification] will happen. And finally, I got an email from Rebecca that my family's visa had been issued,” explains Mirwais.

“In 2022, when I first met them in the airport, I couldn't believe it. When I saw them, it was completely emotional,” he says. “I can't explain with words just how happy and excited I was and how thankful to the people who helped me. It's not easy for children when they arrive in Ireland but being helped changes that.”

After eight years apart, Mirwais was reunited with his parents and younger brother in 2022. Navigating the reunification process would have been extremely difficult without the help of the lawyers trained through the KIND project, including Rebecca Martin from A & L Goodbody.

“We've watched Mirwais grow up since the age of 20 and have been with him for some very significant events,” says Rebecca. “We were delighted for Mirwais when he was reunited with his family. It was really special.”

Rebecca explains that she was easily drawn to working on cases through the KIND project. “Many of the people we work with are coming from the most unimaginable circumstances, and to be able to have a positive impact on their lives is very fulfilling in both a personal and professional sense,” she says. “I feel very privileged to have been trusted with some of the most important aspects of my clients' lives.”

Mirwais and his family are now happily continuing their lives in Ireland. “Ireland is my country now, this is home,” he says.

Aminata's Story

At 16 years old, Aminata* fled an arranged marriage in Sierra Leone and arrived in Ireland as an unaccompanied minor in 2019. After being granted refugee status, she learned English and supported herself while undertaking full-time education, ultimately going on to complete the Leaving Certificate. However, for Aminata, reunifying with her family and bringing them

to Ireland was a priority.

With assistance through the KIND project's trained lawyers at Arthur Cox, Aminata was successfully reunited with her family members in Ireland. The legal team subsequently assisted her with her citizenship application and Aminata has become an Irish citizen.

She is now in education, with aspirations to become a social worker. Expressing her support to the lawyers, who assisted her, Aminata said, "I am very grateful for all the assistance the firm has given me over the past few years."

Philip Hayden from Arthur Cox who worked on Aminata's case described it as "incredibly meaningful".

"This was easily the most human case I had ever worked on," he says. "Aminata's story is so incredible and assisting her was life changing. Working on this was really rewarding."

Reunifying with family is critically important to children's well-being, mental health, and development. In Aminata's* case, reuniting with her family meant she could get back on track with her life and focus once again on her studies.

Training pro bono lawyers

Through the KIND project, pro bono lawyers are trained to assist children through the family reunification process to address the gap in legal services that fall outside the scope of state legal aid.

A&L Goodbody, Arthur Cox, Microsoft, LinkedIn, and Simmons and Simmons have joined the project as pro bono partners. With ICI and IRC's training and guidance, their lawyers provide free, child-friendly legal advice to young people who have arrived in Ireland alone and are seeking to reunite with the families they left behind.

To date, we have directly assisted 390 young people with applications. There were approximately 30 referrals from Tusla in 2019 and this has steadily increased overtime to 120 referrals in 2025. Based on the number of children that applied for protection in 2024, we anticipate that there may be 175 referrals this year and will continue to increase in 2026.

Commenting on the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal grant, **Teresa Buczkowska, CEO of the Immigrant Council of Ireland, said** "We are delighted to have been awarded the CFI grant this year. With a rising number of young people in need of legal assistance, this grant will help us continue our work through the KIND project to assist vulnerable children who are currently unable to access civil legal aid to realise their full rights in Ireland. With very limited sources of funding available, this grant will enable us to expand to meet the high level of demand and sustain the project in the short term."

*name has been changed

Region

Nationwide

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