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'Our families deserve better'

Respite crisis:

By SINEAD KELLEHER

KERRY parents of adults with additional needs are demanding more respite services for their loved ones.

They are calling on the HSE to use St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort for overnight respite care for families in mid-Kerry. Shockingly, families are currently only receiving one weekend a year of overnight respite when their children with special needs turn 18 - as they are now adults they can only avail of such

limited supports. Given the lack of respite spaces in the county, even this is proving difficult for families to attain and they are pleading for services to be improved. Jacqueline Riordan from Glenbeigh, whose son is 19, said the aim of the campaign is to highlight the need for overnight respite in mid-Kerry as

parents say they are 'burnt out'. "They can't run on a dying battery, they are not getting overnight respite," she said. "Their children are leaving St Francis Special School and entering adult services. To get this respite now they have to be approved and assessed. Then they are put on a waiting list and

when they finally are successful it is only one weekend in the year." Jacqueline says St Mary of the Angel's is the ideal location as the children are familiar with the environment. "It is not time for words but for action," she added.

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'We need proper respite for our children when they turn 18'

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The parents' association of St Francis' Special School in Beaufort are leading the calls.

They have identified St Mary of the Angels, on the same campus as the school, as the perfect location for overnight respite and are urging the HSE to fund this.

They claim St Mary of the Angels has the space to provide such care and, given its location close to the school, it means that it is a familiar setting.

"Families we meet the length and breadth of this county are not getting the respite care they need. When they come to 18, these children fall off a cliff and nobody cares," said chair of the parents association, Jean O'Sullivan.

"Families and children deserve better. It is a no-brainer that a respite facility should be developed here."

Last week the parents and school staff met with members of Kerry County Council to discuss their campaign for respite services and also for adult day services. They have also previously met with TDs, including Deputy Michael Cahill who raised the issue in the Dáil.

Principal Keith Ó Brolacháin, says when children turn 18 and stop attending the school in Beaufort, they have to avail of limited adult services.

"Parents are crying out for support for their children who are now over 18. We have heard from parents who are only receiving one weekend a year of overnight respite when their children go into adult services," he said.

Mr Ó Brolacháin said developing St Mary of the Angels to provide respite and adult day services is the ideal solution, securing the future of the campus but also lessening the stress and worry for families whose children are turning 18 and leaving St Francis Special School for adults services.



St Mary of the Angels