

Childhood Matters

Annual Report 2025





Childhood Matters

Company Overview



Childhood Matters

Childhood Matters is a not-for-profit organisation (Registered Charity Number: 20004644) that provides child and family services aimed at supporting and promoting positive childhood outcomes, developing and understanding parenting capacity, building overall family resilience, and contributing to healthier and more sustainable communities. Our services are based on a fundamental appreciation of individual differences in life experience, and we are committed to using a relational model of working that aims to understand and respect the wide diversity of people we work for, and with, in order for positive change and development to be achieved where possible. It is our strongly held belief that strong communities lead to strong families and to this effect we contribute to community development initiative locally in Cork City to improve social cohesion, inclusion, sustainability and provide platforms through which family support benefits can be actualised

Our Service

Our services are tailored to the needs of each individual. We are dedicated to using a relationship working model that aims to understand and respect the needs of each individual we work with. The aim of Childhood Matters is to promote positive change and development where it is needed.

Our clinical and family support teams practice strengths-based learning, child psychological development, trauma informed care, new-born mental health, and parental development. These strengths allow our team to provide high quality services with the aim to encourage clients to be and do the best they can.

Year in Review

539

**Children and adults used
our services in 2025**





Message from CEO

It is with great pride that I present the 2025 Annual Report for Childhood Matters. This year, once again, our organisation deepened its commitment and dedication to delivering high-quality, clinically informed, and relationship-based services to children and families across Cork city and county.

2025 was a year of growth and continued impact across all of our services. We supported over 450 children, parents, and carers through therapeutic interventions, early years and Leaving Certificate education, and parenting or foster carer support. Our work was grounded in the belief that meaningful change is possible when individuals and families are met with compassion, empathy, and understanding. The scope of our engagement reflects not only the scale of need in society today, but also the trust placed in us by those we serve and the partners who refer and support them.

Children in foster care represent one of the most systemically vulnerable cohorts within Irish society. With over 5,200 children currently in State care, many continue to experience the cumulative impact of early trauma, placement instability, and limited access to therapeutic services. Similarly, families engaged with social work systems are frequently navigating complex intergenerational adversity, socioeconomic disadvantage, and fragmented service pathways. These structural challenges underscore the urgent need for integrated, high-quality, and evidence-informed responses, reinforcing our commitment to expanding the reach, quality, and effectiveness of our services.

This year saw a number of key developments across the organisation. Our Research Committee was formally established, marking an important step in our commitment to reflective practice and innovation. We were also successful in securing a national research tender from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth—a subject very close to our hearts, which we hope will contribute to improved foster care outcomes on a national scale.

CHIPPS continued to thrive in 2025, and we were proud to publish its first two-year evaluation. What began as a pilot in response to the lack of therapeutic intervention for children in care has now become a widely respected, much-needed service with clear and demonstrable impact. We are grateful to our partners in Tusla and the wider professional community for their support of this initiative.

We also saw further growth and success in our core services—from the highly valued work of the Parent & Infant Unit to the continued development of the Lime Tree Family Support Project and Lime Tree hub in Clonakilty. Our Teen Parents Support Programme and Community Employment initiatives maintained high levels of engagement, while our Leaving Certificate programme once again saw students' progress into third-level education and meaningful employment—achievements that speak volumes about the quality of support and education provided.



Message from CEO

It was also a year of progress in infrastructure and sustainability. Our new premises in Blackpool opened successfully, and we made key investments in governance, finance, digital systems, and operational coordination. A particular highlight was the complete replacement of the roof at our Bessborough childcare service—a long-overdue and highly impressive achievement by our maintenance team.

This progress would not have been possible without the dedication of our exceptional staff, especially those in our administrative departments—the backbone of our organisation. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you all for your commitment, your resilience, and your belief in the work we do. Our organisation is defined not just by the services we provide, but by the people who deliver them. I am incredibly proud to work alongside such a talented and dedicated team.

I would also like to thank our excellent Board of Directors for their belief in Childhood Matters and for their strategic leadership and oversight. I extend our thanks to our funders—particularly Tusla—whose continued partnership enables us to broaden the reach and impact of our services. Most importantly, I acknowledge the children, families, and carers who entrust us with their care and confidence—they remain at the very Centre of our mission and purpose.

As we look ahead to 2026, the launch of our 2026-2030 strategic plan, our focus will remain on service development and sustainability. Plans include the further development of the Placement Support Project, the opening of our new childcare service in Banduff, the expansion of our research activities, and the continued building of partnerships and systems that enable us to respond to the needs of children and families across Cork.



Dr. Calem De Búrca

CEO of Childhood Matters.

Chairperson Statement

As Chairperson of Childhood Matters, I am proud to reflect on a year marked by strong progress, meaningful impact, and continued commitment to the children and families we serve.

Throughout 2025, the organisation has demonstrated its capacity for innovation, partnership, and excellence in service delivery. From the successful establishment of CHIPPS and the Placement Support Project to the continued growth of our Early Years and Family and Parenting Support Services, the breadth and depth of our work is a testament to the skill, dedication, and professionalism of our staff. The organisation's involvement in national research and its investment in internal systems further reflect a clear and strategic trajectory—grounded in evidence-based practice and focused on long-term sustainability.

Looking ahead, the Board remains fully supportive of the organisation's ambition to scale its impact and expand services where needed to ensure that the most vulnerable children and families continue to receive timely, high-quality support. As demand increases, so too does our responsibility to respond with innovation, integrity, and care. With a strong executive team, a committed workforce, and trusted partnerships with funders and community stakeholders, Childhood Matters is well positioned to grow in both scope and influence in the years ahead.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our staff, executive team, funders, and partners. Your commitment continues to shape a stronger, more responsive system of support for vulnerable children and families across Cork.



John Minihan

Chairperson Childhood Matters

Meet our Management Team

Executive Team



Operations Manager

Lee Dempsey

Finance/HR Manager



Rachel Falk

Clinical Director

Service Managers



Marie O' Riordan

Parent & Infant Unit Manager



Louise Kelleher

Family Support Services
Manager



Roisin Kennedy

Clinical Lead CHIPPS



Rachel Geary

PSP Manager



Inga O' Shea

Early Years-Admin Manager



Elizabeth Cronin

Early Years- Practice Manager



Pat Callanan

Office Manager



Colman Stack

CE Supervisor/Grounds



Paudie Cremin

Facilities Supervisor



Paul Heaphy

Campus Support Supervisor

Financial Highlight



Total Revenue

€5,763,513 was received in funding in 2025 (€1,385,413 deferred from 2024 for PSP)

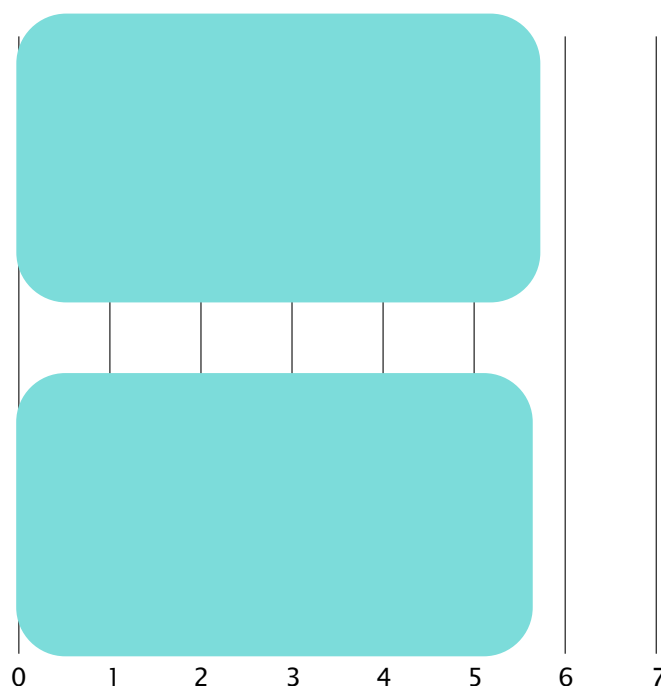
● € million

Income

Total Expenses

€5,644,515 was spent in 2025

Expenditure





Parent & Infant Unit

The Parent & Infant Unit is a residential support and assessment service for parents with infant children. While living on the unit, parents take part in a parenting assessment while also engaging in a programme of therapeutic support and key working tailored to meet their individual needs.

The Parent & Infant Unit's framework is underpinned by Infant Mental Health, Parenting Development, and Trauma Informed Care principles. A recommendation on parents' parental capacity is arrived at through understanding and weighing up risk and protective factors alongside a parent's ability to receive intervention in relation to parenting and personal development.

This means is that at the end of the assessment, the team will make recommendations about parents' ability to look after their infant, what support they may need to be able to do this safely in the community. Whilst the overall aim of support and development opportunities provided to parents whilst resident on the unit is to allow families stay together safely, sometimes if there is too high a level of risk posed to an infant child in its parents' care, with no reliable support options available to them in the community, foster care for the infant is a recommendation of the assessment.

Interventions offered

- Psychological assessment
- Psychological intervention
- Parenting Support
- Key Working Sessions
- Peep Group
- Emotional Regulation Group
- Parent & Infant Sessions
- Baby Massage
- Aftercare

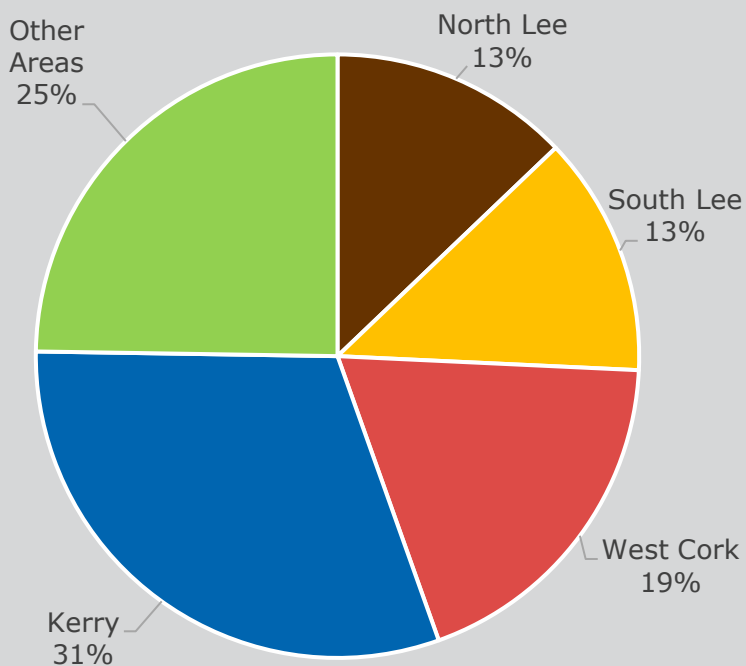




Parent & Infant Unit

REFERRAL PATHWAY

- South Lee
- Kerry
- North Lee
- Other Areas
- West Cork



REFERRALS

34 Referrals were received in 2025.
11 Admissions to the Parent & Infant Unit in 2025
10 Non-admissions in 2025

CLIENTS

16 parents and 14 infants were supported

DISCHARGED

5 infants left the Parent & Infant Unit into foster care

5 infants left the Parent & Infant Unit back into the community

WAITING LIST

The Average wait time for a placement is 2-4 months

AFTERCARE

10 families were supported with aftercare





The Limetree Project

The Lime Tree family support service works with vulnerable families living in the community who need a diverse range of interventions to help maintain family unity. This service is a therapeutic family support service, which is child-focused in nature and operates at a protective level.

Lime Tree engages with families referred by South Lee Social Work Department and operates an outreach service over five days per week both within and outside normal working hours. This may include assessments, improved parenting strategies, therapeutic intervention, preparation of court reports, and support at social work meetings and child protection case conferences.

Engagement with the Lime Tree team can support families in a diverse range of areas such as parenting skills, relationship building and communication within families. In addition, we utilize a variety of frameworks, such as; Parenting under Pressure (PuP), Signs of Safety, Non-Violent resistance (NVR), life story work, shared parenting with separated or divorced parents, support to foster carers and supervised access.

A multi-disciplinary team including youth and community workers, social care staff, psychologists and social workers work together to create the best possible outcomes for families referred to our service. The majority of interaction with families' takes place in the families' own homes and a range of facilities at Childhood Matters are also available.

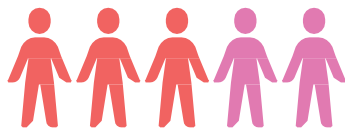
Support is offered for various lengths of time and can be tailored to meet the needs of individual families who have come to the attention of the social work department and require additional support and guidance to enhance and develop their family and home environment.

- **Programme Aims**

- Ensure the safety and welfare of children during contact.
- Enable children to maintain relationships with their family through safe and professionally monitored contact visits.
- To provide assessment reports on the quality and progression of contact visits when Court directed.
- Support the Social Services in their statutory duty towards children while they are in the care of TUSLA and under Court direction
- Act therapeutically to promote and strengthen family relationships.
- To progress the contact from supervised in the Centre to unsupervised in the community. To achieve this goal contact is reviewed regularly and progress reported to the referring social worker.
- Children and parents are welcomed into safe, welcoming and neutral surroundings at Childhood Matters family contact centre. The visits are very discreet and private while professionally directed supervision and observations are conducted and confidential reports provided.



The Limetree Project

01 Referrals	02 Number of children /Young people	03 Current Caseload	04 Waiting List
	96		
57 referrals were received in 2025. 40- Family Support 8- CCA 9-West Cork	96 young people engaging with the service in 2025 42- Family Support 13- Access 41 – West Cork	53 families continued to work with Limetree into 2025. 35 families were discharged from Limetree in 2025	There are 4 families on a wait list to access services into 2025 1 Family Support 1 – West Cork 1 - Access



Teen Parents

The Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP for short) is the only targeted community-based support service for young parents in Ireland.

We work with young people who become parents when they are aged 19 years or under and can support them until their children are 2 years of age. This service is available to all young parents in Cork who become parents while still in their teens.

TPSP staff actively seeks to engage with young fathers and encourage and support them to be involved in the lives of their children. They also provide support to grandparents and other family members who play a role in the life of the young parent. The young parent support services are funded by both Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and the HSE. They are free and confidential.

How does our Support Programme Work?

After you contact the service, a TPSP project worker will meet you to talk about your needs and how the TPSP could support you during your pregnancy and after the birth of your baby. You can meet the project worker on your own, as a couple, with a member of your family or with someone else of your choice. You can meet in your own home, at the TPSP office or somewhere else where you feel comfortable.

Ongoing support is provided on a one-to-one basis, through group activities or through referral to other sources of support. The Teen Parents Support Programme can also provide support and financial assistance to help parents stay in and complete educational pursuits.

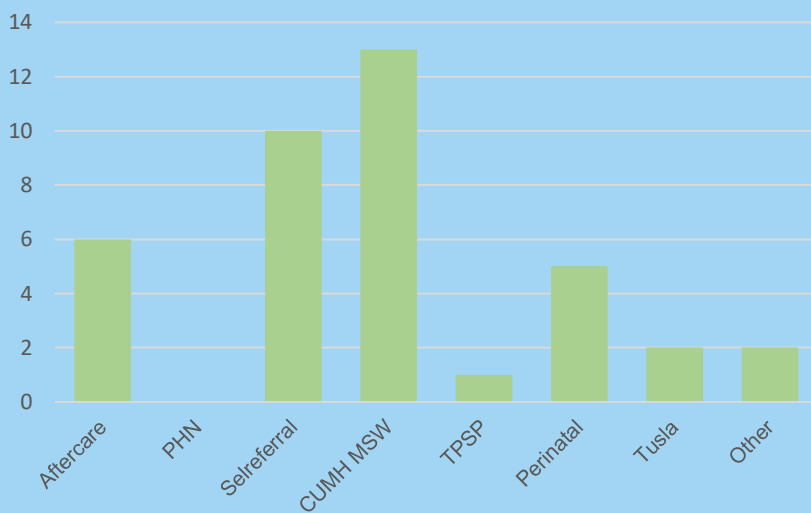
What Support Does the Teen Parent Programme Provide?

Our teen parent support services are tailored to your needs. The workers in the TPSP will give you one-one support to deal with your own individual situation.



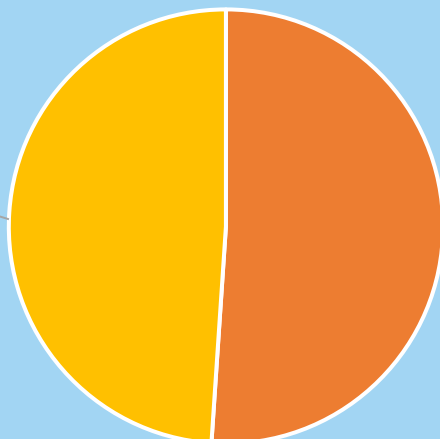
Teen Parents

Referral Pathway



47 Total Families
42 Parents
50 Infants

Services users
23



Closed to
Service
24

0 on waiting list –
Average waiting time
8 weeks



CHIPPS

CHIPPS was set up to support children and young people in care who have had traumatic childhood experiences. We know that distressing early years experiences, especially those involving maltreatment by primary caregivers, can impact negatively on children and young people. These experiences can impact their emotional well-being and affect their physical, psychological and social development.

We are aware that when children and young people leave the care of their birth families, their neurobiological systems may have evolved to deal with abusive or neglectful circumstances.

These children's coping methods and attachment techniques occasionally don't function as well for them in their new surroundings, which can make it difficult for them to fit in, build relationships, and feel comfortable.

Research shows that children in care are more likely to experience mental health problems than their peers who live with birth parents. These difficulties can persist long into adulthood if the appropriate help and support is not offered in a timely fashion. CHIPPS is a specialist attachment-focussed, trauma-informed mental health service for children and young people in care.

What can we do to help?

At CHIPPS we believe that every child in care deserves the opportunity to maximise their emotional wellbeing and to develop and maintain healthy, nurturing relationships with their carers, peers, family members, and the professionals working with them.

We are a team of mental health professionals who offer children and young people support with exploring their journey into care with a view to integrating early adverse experiences into their story and sense of self. We hope to assist children and young people in considering issues that often cause distress such as their identity and sense of belonging. We also offer multiple interventions to treat mental health difficulties they may have due to their care status and the developmental trauma they have experienced.

We believe that relational trauma is most effectively repaired in relationships so our work often involves offering therapeutic input to carers and children together. We also offer interventions for carers alone and, where appropriate, provide direct individual work for young people and children who need their own space to work through their difficulties.

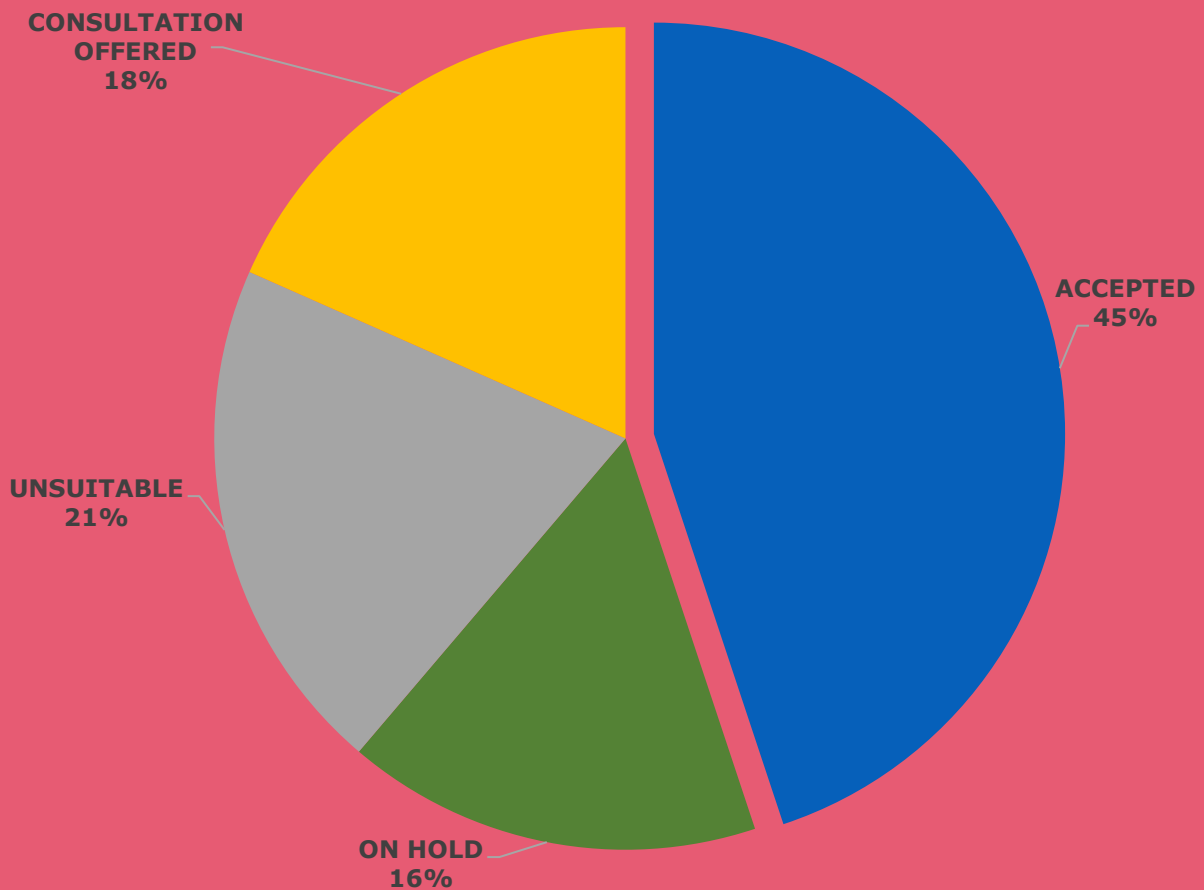
We have developed a number of groups for young people and groups for foster carers – allocation to these will be based on presenting difficulties and meeting each child/carer's needs in the most helpful way. Through offering such interventions, we hope to improve placement stability and help children (and their carers) to develop skills and tools to navigate their journey together and hopefully feel equipped to deal with the challenges that may arise along the way.



CHIPPS

49
Referrals

- Accepted
- On Hold
- Consultation Offered
- Unsuitable





Placement Support Project

The Placement Support Project launched in June 2023 as a collaborative effort between Tusla and Childhood Matters to cater for the increasing numbers of Special Emergency Arrangements, and develop a preventative intervention pathway to stabilize foster placements in jeopardy of breaking down. Both Special Emergency Arrangements and Foster Placement breakdowns pose considerable challenges to social work departments. It is widely recognized that interventions which support foster placement stability for children in care, and prevent placement breakdown, can help to improve a wide range of outcomes including educational, relational, and physical, mental, and emotional health and wellbeing.

This is a pilot project aimed at stabilizing at-risk foster placements, and supporting family reunification from 'Special Emergency Arrangements', through intensive multidisciplinary support over a 10-week period, and the provision of a stability roadmap specifically tailored to the family.

Service Model

- When a Special Emergency Arrangement is being considered for a child, a referral should be made when appropriate to the Placement Support Project.
- Where appropriate, children already residing in Special Emergency Arrangements should be referred to the project with a view to family reunification.
- The presenting situation must be assessed as being at high risk of foster placement breakdown, or unlikely to safely return to foster placement without intensive intervention
- A placement disruption meeting has taken place and social work level and it is agreed that a next useful step would be referral to this service
- Previous interventions around these issues have already been tried and proven ineffective

The service is based on an intensive intervention model, with 2-3 visits to the home, or foster family, per week initially, over a 10 week period. The carers and child will be assigned separate workers from within the Placement Support Project team, with individual sessions eventually progressing to joint sessions, a process in which team members actively monitor and scaffold over time. Where necessary, staffed accommodation can be provided to allow the placement a physical break while a stability plan is being worked on with child and carers.

The AMBIT model influences practice in many ways, across the domains of client work, team work, network functioning and learning at work. The application of the theory of mentalizing across these domains is central to the framework and practice tools.

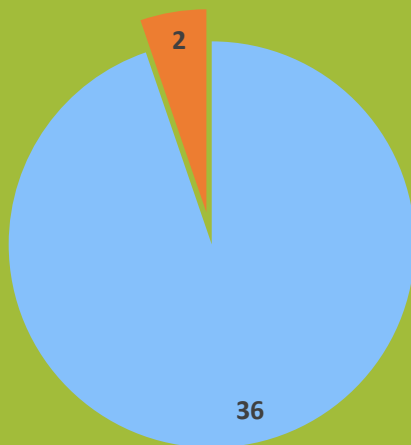
The child's work is delivered on an outreach basis and includes:

- Relationship building
- Behaviour management
- Safety planning with child and all relevant parties
- Emotion regulation development
- Routine support to include transport and assistance with educational/extracurricular activities



Placement Support Project

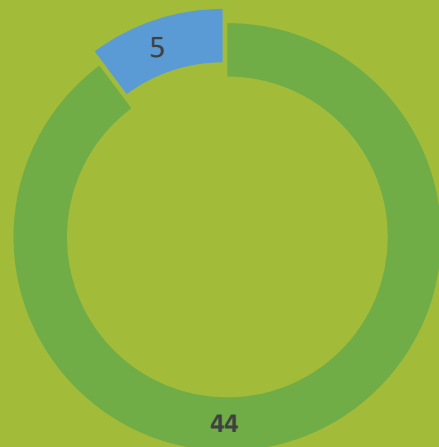
EPOS



Place of safety

Discharged in Jan 25

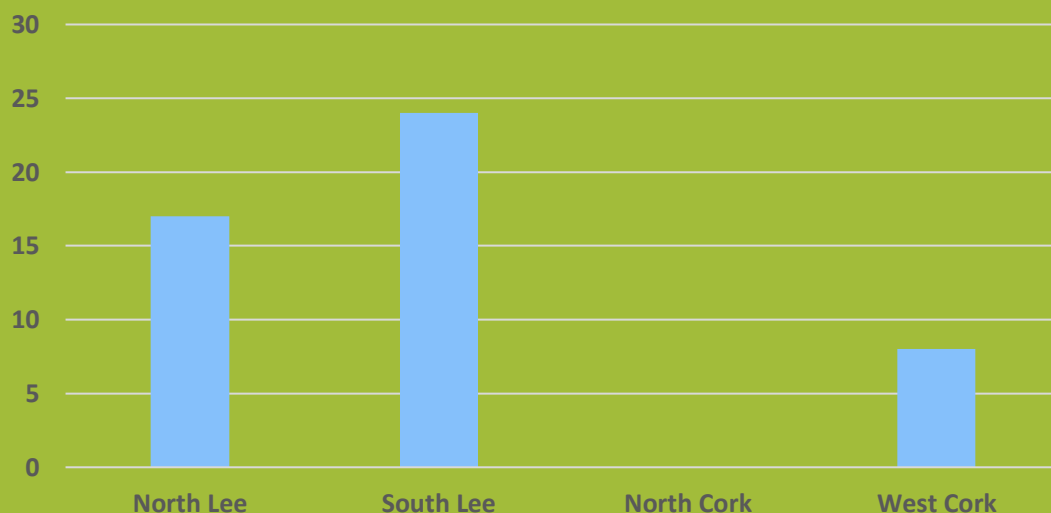
Community



Accepted

Unsuitable

Referral Pathways - Community





Childcare Service

We consider every 'little person' to be a beautiful, independent, fascinating, creative individual with a huge amount to offer the world, and we thoroughly understand the importance of the early years in a child's general development.

We have created a wonderful environment where each child is nurtured as an individual. With this in mind, we focus on implementing an evolving play-based curriculum that follows guidelines laid out by Aistear (Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) and Siolta (National Quality Framework).

We are a well-established childcare provider that is run by a dedicated and highly motivated team since 2004. Childhood Matters Early Years currently operate 2 services in purpose build facilities in Cork City. One is located in Blackrock and the other in Farranree.

Service Delivery Ethos

Our existing childcare service delivery model prioritizes supporting and encouraging each child that attends the service to progress and develop into confident and competent children, achieving this at their own unique pace. We appreciate and embrace the fact that each child has their own individual needs and identity, and to this effect, we implement and evaluate individually-led, and education-based, programmes. We also develop strong working relationships with parents and recognize their role as primary educators in their child's life.

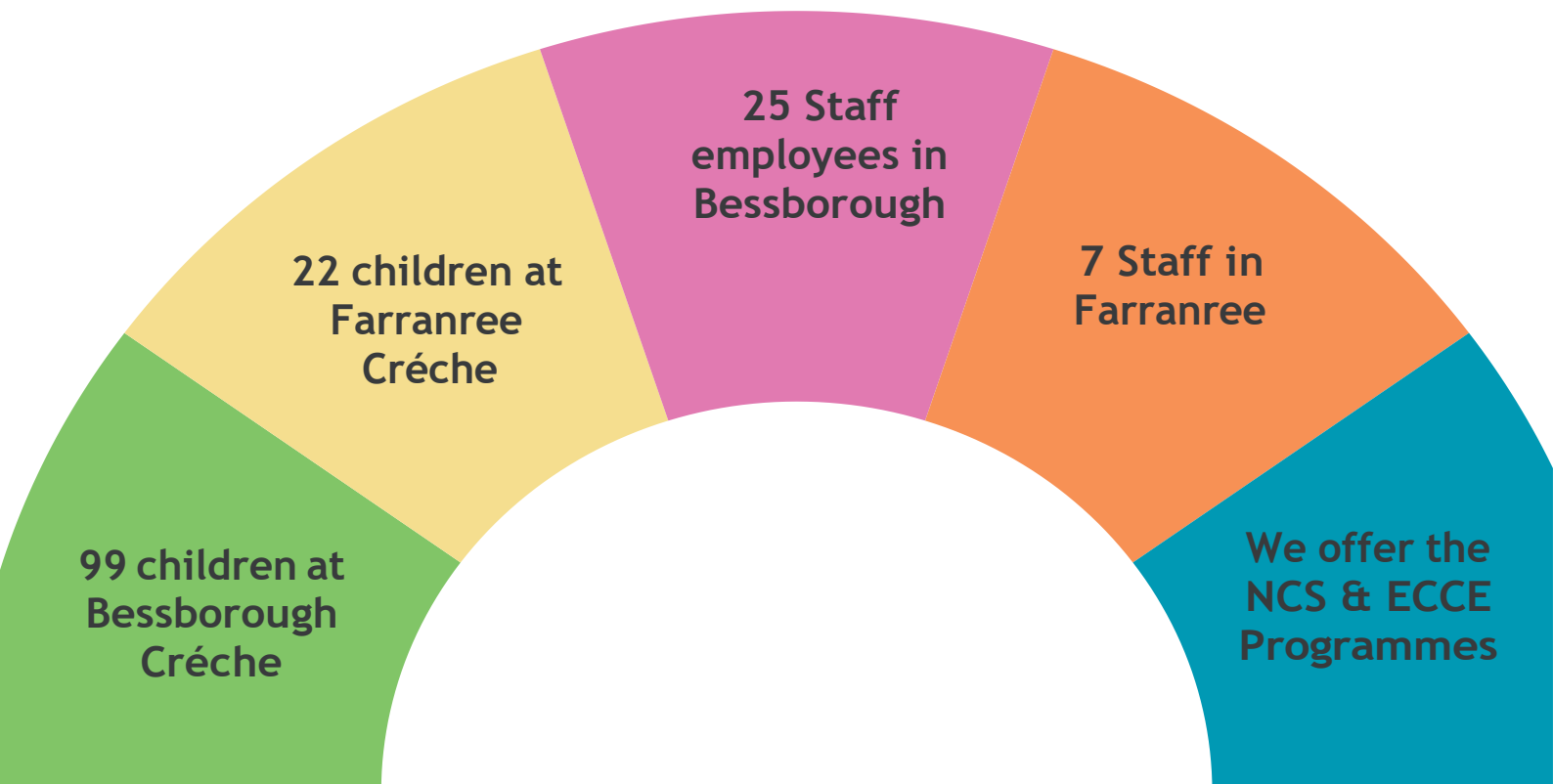
Integral to our delivery model, is the creation of an inviting, safe, fun, healthy, and warm environment that prompts a positive relationship between staff and children and also between the children themselves.

We provide children with a safe space to develop their full potential supported by a childcare team that will observe them and then put in supports that help them to become competent and confident learners. This environment enables children to learn the necessary social skills that are paramount through the early years and beyond.

We endeavour to provide a curriculum that reflects the abilities and also ensure we challenge the children in an appropriate manner to build confident, competent, and happy children. Our learning emphasis is play-based and established children as being active agents in their learning, and they learn by doing.



Childcare Service 2025



Additional Services



School

10 participants registered to sit the Leaving Certificate in 2025. 8 participants completed the examinations, collectively passing seven subjects.

Of these:

- 1 participant progressed to MTU
- 6 participants enrolled in Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses
- 1 participant entered employment
- 6 students have registered to sit the Leaving Certificate in 2026. Within this group, 2 are first-time parents and 1 recently gave birth; all three are linked with the Teen Parents Support Programme.

1 student received a Cork City Garda Youth Award in recognition of excellence in parental care.



Community Employment

17 staff were active in the scheme, working across Security, Gardens and Reception roles.

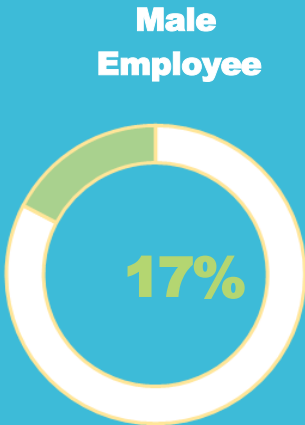
5 participants left the scheme during 2025

Vacancies for Gardens, Parenting Assistant, Carer and Caretaker roles.

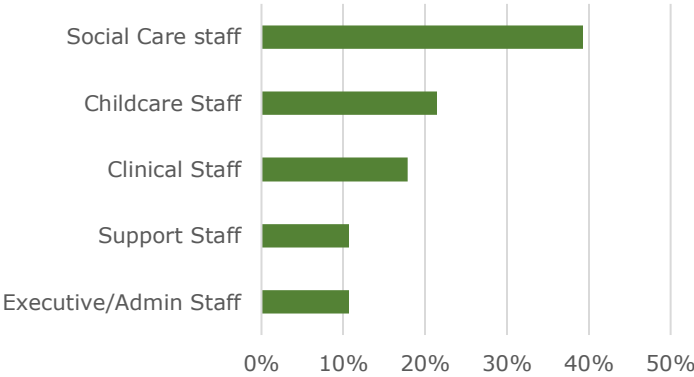


HR/Admin Report

- Early Years PayScale implemented
- Increased employee pension contributions from 3.5% to 5% for all staff
- Implemented PLEO Platform
- Preparation and completion of WRC pay award for section 56 – Tusla
- Aligned all employees to the HSE Pay Scale (October 2024)
- Completed and published the 2024 Gender Pay Gap Report



New Hires in 2025



Launch Strategic Plan 2026–2030

- Restructure the Senior Management Team
- Extend the Placement Support Project Pilot Programme
- Engage in research and development both internally and externally



Our Funding Partners



An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

Phone

021-4353370

Email

info@childhood-matters.ie

Website

www.childhood-matters.ie

Sláinte Gnéis agus
Clár um Thoirchis Ghéarchéime
**Sexual Health and
Crisis Pregnancy Programme**



government supporting communities



cetb

Bord Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Chorcaí
*Cork Education and
Training Board*

Location

Bessborough Centre
Blackrock / Cork
T12CRA0

RCN: 20004644/ CHY 3669



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach

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European Union