



Limerick
Social Service
Council CLG

Comhairle Sheirbhís Sóisialta Luimnigh CLG

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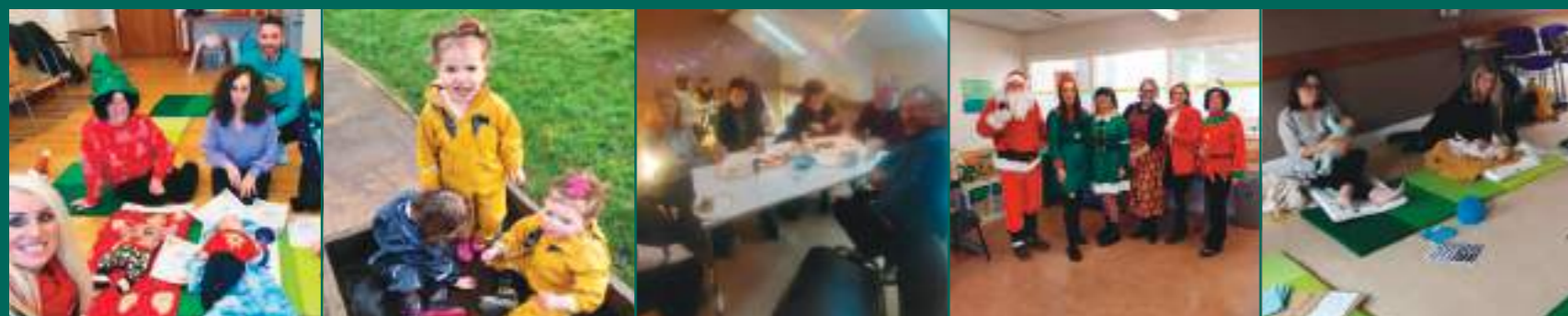
Offering Care & Support in Limerick Communities for Over 50 Years



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Social Service
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Annual
Report
2023



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Our Identity - Who We Are

LIMERICK SOCIAL SERVICE COUNCIL CLG (LSSC) is a leading voluntary service, working in Limerick for over five decades. We pride ourselves on being at the forefront of supporting individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised.

We employ over 60 staff across our management, programmes, administration and maintenance. We are also supported in our work by over 20 volunteers.

Our team is led by our General Manager, Brian Ryan, and overseen by our Board of Directors which is composed of members from diverse professional backgrounds. The Board provides strategic leadership, direction and overall accountability and ensures that our organisation complies with our governing documents and relevant legislation.

We work on a partnership basis with our service users and with other agencies and professionals from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

Our Mission - What We Do

Through a caring response, Limerick Social Service Council CLG aims to promote the dignity and growth of individuals, families and groups.

Our services are designed to provide personal and practical support for children, young people and adults who need extra help at different times of their lives and in all stages of the family cycle.

We offer a comprehensive range of Programmes, covering prevention and early intervention, as well as intensive services and personalised packages of support for service users with more complex issues or whose lives have been disrupted by crisis situations.

These services are delivered through the CHILD & FAMILY SERVICE, the EARLY YEARS SERVICES, the SOUTHSIDE CHILD & FAMILY CENTRE, the COUNSELLING & PSYCHOTHERAPY SERVICE, and SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE.

We deliver our services at the LSSC Centre in Henry Street, Limerick, at the Southside Education Campus in Galvone and through outreach in a range of locations throughout Limerick City and County.

In addition, we provide a professional and welcoming space at the LSSC Centre for self-help groups and charitable organisations to convene and engage in social care and community work.

Our Core Values

Limerick Social Service Council CLG (LSSC) aims to promote the self-worth and growth of individuals, families and groups by ensuring that:

- The dignity of every person is respected;
- Services are evidence based, preventative and cost effective;
- Services are affordable and accessible to those in need, or free of charge where appropriate;
- Services are monitored and evaluated.

Our Child Safeguarding Statement in Summary

In accordance with the requirements of the Children First Act 2015, the LSSC Child Safeguarding Statement specifies that the services being provided and the principles and procedures to be observed will ensure, as far as practicable, that a child availing of our services is safe from harm.

At the centre of service delivery within LSSC is the promotion of the general welfare, health, development and safety of children. Our organisation is committed to upholding the rights of every child and young person who attends our services, including the rights to be kept safe, listened to and heard.

These guiding principles apply to everyone in the organisation and all staff must conduct themselves in a way that reflects the child-centred principles of LSSC.



Limerick - A Changing Population

209,536

The population of Limerick City and County was 209,536 and shows an increase of over 10,000 since 2016.

5.2

The population change showed an average natural increase of 5.2 persons per 1,000 of population per year between 2016 and 2022.

This increase is in line with the growth in the national population for the same period.

2,341

There were 2,341 births registered in 2022. The average age of mothers giving birth was 31 years and 37 babies were born to mothers under 20 years of age.

44.7%

were births to mothers outside of marriage.

9

Infant mortality was 9 deaths.

39.3

The average age of the population was 39.3 years, up from 37.7 years in 2016.

47,560

Children and young people under 18 years comprised 47,560 or 23.7% of the overall population.

33,588

persons aged 65 years and older or 16% of the overall population lived in Limerick. This was a 23% increase on data from the 2016 Census.

1,597

There were 1,597 deaths registered, with cancer being the cause in 469 deaths.

27

suicides were reported for Limerick. The suicide rate was 20.1 for Limerick City and 10.5 for Limerick County – the rate was 8.1 nationally.

90,623

people were employed which relates to 13,438 additional people (+17%) at work since 2016; 27% of the workforce worked from home at least one day a week.

104,452
105,084

The population was divided between 104,452 males and 105,084 females.

1%

White Irish Traveller comprised 1% of the overall population.

68%

Dual Irish citizenship increased by 68% from 3,258 to 5,487; non-Irish citizens accounted for 11% of the population.



Statement by the Chair of the Board of Directors

As the Chair of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Limerick Social Services Council (LSSC) for 2023.

This report covers one of the most challenging periods for individuals and households in Ireland. Over the past 12 months and on the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise in the cost of living has pushed more families into poverty and hardship, increased the strain on parents, and lowered the standard of living for many people nationwide.

This report illustrates how the LSSC was on the front line in 2023, dealing with the fallout of the cost-of-living crisis, supporting individuals and parents struggling with housing, health and care-giving issues, as well as dealing with increased pressure on household finances. At the same time, conflicts in other parts of the world drove record numbers of people to seek sanctuary in Ireland. The LSSC teams, like many other agencies around the country, were there to help and stepped in to provide valuable assistance.

Targeting support measures at those most vulnerable in our communities has always been at the heart of the LSSC and once again this year, I acknowledge the professionalism and care provided by our staff. Their work has changed the lives of so many children, young people and adults whether it was through intensive support, counselling services, parenting groups or through general advice offered over the phone. I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the LSSC General Manager, Brian Ryan, who successfully supported and guided staff in this valuable work.

Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to my fellow board members for their time and expertise. Together with the General Manager, they have been crucial in maintaining the accountability, relevance, and governance of the LSSC. As a Board, we continue to have a clear focus on maximising long-term commitment to the needs of the most vulnerable in Limerick. I also want to pay tribute to our dedicated funders and to our partner agencies that have helped to promote LSSC services across Limerick.

Under the direction of the Board and the General Manager, I have no doubt that the LSSC will continue in the year ahead to be a strong values-led organisation that enables our staff to innovate and act with compassion in a fast-paced changing world. While our organisation is not immune to external factors beyond our control, I am confident that the LSSC together with our continued partnerships with local and national agencies, positions us well to respond effectively to the people of Limerick who need us most.

Kevin O'Farrell
Chair Board of
Directors

Brian Ryan
LSSC General
Manager

Message from the General Manager

I take great pride in presenting this year's annual report which highlights the impact of LSSC programmes in Limerick. This report provides an update to our funders, our service users and the public in respect of how we achieved our aims and how we dealt with the challenges in responding to the needs of services users during the year.

2023 marked the official end of the COVID-19 pandemic, and while it should have been a year of optimism, it was a considerably challenging period for many people across the country. We saw how increases in the cost-of-living together with the housing crisis, pushed many households and individuals into deeper difficulty. Nevertheless, I am satisfied to report that the LSSC worked tirelessly to support the most vulnerable families and individuals dealing with the fall-out of housing insecurity, financial pressures and the general stress of modern living.

Simultaneously, conflicts in other parts of the world led to an unprecedented number of people seeking refuge in Ireland, including many children and mothers who were forced to flee their homes under the most traumatic circumstances. Despite this background, I am proud to report that our teams responded with both urgency and innovation to provide services and to collaborate with other agencies in Limerick to provide assistance as required.

How LSSC Responded in 2023

Some of the key achievements for the LSSC during 2023 include the following.

Early Years Services: The Henry Street Early Years Service (EYS) operated at full capacity offering services to almost 50 children from different backgrounds and to children with particular needs. Likewise, the EYS at the Southside Child and Family Centre offered services to 58 children. Families who are not native English speakers often face a disadvantage in getting their children school-ready. The EYS at both locations have been exceptionally effective in supporting families so that their children were better prepared for school.

The Child and Family Service: The Child and Family Service (CFS) continued its work to empower families through advice, information and partnership work with parents. In 2023, it again utilised both one-to-one targeted support and groupwork programmes. The CFS dealt with over 200 referrals from Tusla, the

HSE, other voluntary agencies, schools as well as self-referrals and in response offered one-to-one client sessions/meetings in addition to parenting programmes, workshops and a range of other group sessions.

The Southside Child and Family Centre: In addition to the Early Years Service, a range of other services were delivered from the Southside Child and Family Centre that included the LSSC Child and Family Service, the LSSC Counselling & Psychotherapy Service, the Phoenix Creative Psychotherapy Service, the Community Midwifery Service, the HSE Psychology Service, and other community services in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations in Limerick.

The Counselling and Psychotherapy Service: The Counselling and Psychotherapy Service arranged over 2,729 sessions in response to referrals for adults and young people. Support was provided to equip individuals with tools and techniques to manage stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues effectively.

Services for Older Persons: Services for Older Persons were offered to support our senior citizens to live independently in their own homes, to stay active and to be socially connected in their communities. Through tailored information, advice and support, our staff enabled many older people to build self-confidence and access the relevant services to meet their needs.

Service Planning: In the LSSC, we believe that by continually identifying and understanding the needs of our communities, we can better plan and direct our services to where they are needed most. In 2023, as part of the wider planning cycle, we commissioned a community Needs Assessment project. We envisage that the data from this project will help us to prioritise areas for service development and to ensure that our planning is guided by quality data and service user insights, leading to more effective and informed decisions.

Conclusion

Our work this year demonstrates again the extent of services provided by the LSSC. From the feedback we have received, I know that considerable positive change has been achieved and that the impact of our services highlights the value of our working model for the benefit of countless individuals and families in Limerick.

I am proud to work alongside incredible staff and volunteers who share a vision to help build thriving communities right across Limerick that will lead to a higher quality of life for so many. My thanks to them for their achievements over the last 12 months. In a year of remarkable challenges, they stayed committed to supporting local priorities, constantly adapting their approach to make real, lasting differences for the communities we support.

I am also enormously grateful for the generosity of our supporters, partner agencies and funders – our work would simply not be possible without this solidarity. My thanks go out as always to the LSSC Board. Under the leadership of our Chair, Kevin O'Farrell, our Board has continued to guide the LSSC, and provided oversight and direction to the delivery of our vision. As I reflect on another dynamic year in 2023, I remain privileged to be a part of the LSSC and all that it has achieved.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to Fr Willie Walsh (RIP) who passed away earlier this year and for the enormous contribution he made as Director in previous years at the LSSC. He will be remembered for his kindness, support and compassion and for his great commitment to social justice here in Limerick. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.



Highlights from Services in 2023

The Child and Family Service (CFS)

The Child and Family Service (CFS) works in partnership with families to support them to improve relationships and to address concerns with the goal of meeting agreed outcomes for their children and themselves. Building positive relationships, both within families and between CFS staff and families, is at the core of our work. The CFS team works with great care to ensure that the people who avail of our service feel secure and valued in their work with us.

The Service supports parents and children from the ante-natal period up to the age of 18 years. Families availing of services come from all areas across Limerick City and County. Some of whom may only need short term support whereas others may be engaging with services over a number of years.

Services are devised where possible according to individual's preferences e.g. some families appreciate the social opportunities of groupwork whereas others may prefer to meet CFS staff on a one-to-one basis. Support is therefore tailored according to the needs of each individual and can be delivered through home visits, centre-based work, phone contacts, and targeted group interventions and workshops.

The range of programmes within the CFS are as follows:

The Community Social Work and Family Support Service

The Community Social Work and Family Support Service consists of professionally qualified social workers and family support workers who work with families to address a range of challenges that they may be facing. These issues may include poverty, inadequate housing, acrimonious separations, education issues, domestic violence, addiction and other trauma related issues or simply a breakdown in family communication. The Community Social Workers and Family Support Workers maintain an active caseload and work closely with other services, externally as well as those within LSSC, to provide support to parents, carers and children.

The Community Social Workers also act as LSSC's Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person, and, in this role, they provide support across the organisation in ensuring that every staff member understands their

role under Children First and that all services in the LSSC work together as an organisation to ensure the safety of children.

The Teen Parent Support Programme (TPSP)

TPSP Limerick is part of the National Teen Parents Support Programme and provides confidential support to young people who are pregnant or who are parents. Support is also available to the young person's partner and members of their extended families.

Support is provided through one-to-one home visits and centre-based work, financial and non-financial assistance to enable the young parent to remain in education, group work programmes to support individuals in their parenting roles and in their own personal development. Group work includes the City Slickers Programme and a series of workshops and events to provide information and support parent/child relationships.

The Community Mothers Programme

The Community Mothers Programme is a home visiting service for families with new babies and young children and aims to support positive parent/child relationships. Community Mothers visits are arranged during the early years of a child's life (generally up to the age of three) and parents are offered non-directive information on parenting, child development and local services and supports.

Community Mothers also facilitate Parent and Baby/Toddler Groups, weaning workshops, baby massage and baby reflexology programmes, Incredible Years Programmes and the Peep Ante-Natal and Post Natal Programmes. Supporting parents to access group work and develop natural support networks is a key part of the service.

The Relationships and Sexual Health Programme

The Relationships and Sexual Health Programme aims to increase parental capacity to communicate with their children regarding relationships and sexual health through one to one and group supports. The Programme also provides a range of programmes to young people, based on "The Real U Programme", to provide them with the skills and knowledge to make positive choices and engage in healthy relationships.

In line with the National Sexual Health Strategy, the programme works intensively with people from migrant backgrounds, young people with intellectual disabilities and young parents.



Family Advocacy Service

The Family Advocacy Service is a confidential and independent service for parents who have children either in care or in the process of being taken into the care of the State. The Service offers support to parents to continue positive involvement with their children while they are in care and assists them to participate in Child in Care reviews and child protection case conferences. The Family Advocacy Service provides one-to-one and group support through a weekly support group for parents.

Family Welfare Conferencing Service

The Family Welfare Conferencing (FWC) Service is a specialised service that supports family members to participate in the FWC process and to formulate plans for their children. It brings together family members, along with the child where appropriate, in a structured, family led, decision making meeting. The FWC Coordinator meets each family member in advance of the FWC to ensure that everyone has opportunities to express their views. The aim of these meetings is to assist families to formulate a safe family plan in the best interests of their children and is a method of family intervention that enables families to provide their own solutions to the difficulties they face.

Meitheal and the LSSC



Tusla developed the Meitheal approach to help children where they may need the support of more than one service. Meitheal is a case co-ordination process for families with additional needs who require multi-agency intervention but who do not meet the threshold for referral to the Social Work Department under Children First.

Practitioners in different agencies such as the LSSC, can use and lead on Meitheal so that they can communicate and work together more effectively to bring together a range of expertise, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the child and family within their community.

Across the LSSC Child and Family Service, the Team has been using Meitheal to support families. The Team finds that it helps to better understand what the family is experiencing, and that it can improve the communication with other services who are working with the family.

For example, one of the LSSC Community Social Workers held the lead on a Meitheal where a sixth-class student was at risk of expulsion from school. By taking the time to listen to the perspective of each person: the child, the parent,

and the representatives from the school and by identifying additional supports that were required, it was possible to develop a shared plan. This collective effort enabled the child to graduate from primary school and transition smoothly into secondary school due to the intensive supports that were put in place.

In another case, the Meitheal process was used to help a family and other support services understand the needs of the family's child who was recently diagnosed with autism. The LSSC lead practitioner used the Meitheal process to facilitate a discussion on multiple aspects of the family's needs, such as housing, health, education, and counselling. The lead practitioner ensured that the necessary supports were identified and coordinated in a structured way. Through these meetings, the family and the agencies working with the family were able to pool their resources and expertise, ensuring a holistic approach to providing support for the child and the family. This collaborative effort highlighted how effective the Meitheal process can have on making significant and lasting change in the lives of children and families.

CFS Activities and Developments in 2023

Intensive one-to-one work continued across all areas in 2023 as the CFS continued to receive high volumes of referrals from Tusla and the HSE, as well as referrals from other agencies, schools and self-referrals. The Team continued to deliver a busy schedule of parenting groups, programmes and workshops. A summary of CFS activities and developments in 2023 are outlined below:

200+

referrals and over 900 drop-ins were made to the CFS service during the year with over 2,700 client contacts made in response by Programme staff. The number of referrals (216) was similar to the number of referrals for the previous year. The highest percentages of referrals were made to the Community Mothers Programme (32%) and the Community Social Work and Family Support Service (32%) followed by the Teen Parent Support Programme (14%), with 22% to the remaining programmes.

350

families received a one-to-one service in response to referrals received, of which 31% of families were supported through the Community Mothers Programme, 27% through the Community Social Work and Family Support Service, 18% were supported through the TPSP and 10% through the CFC Family Support Service.

930+

individuals contacted the service through direct drop-ins and availed of advice, information or were signposted to other more relevant services. The majority of contacts (39%) came through the TPSP.

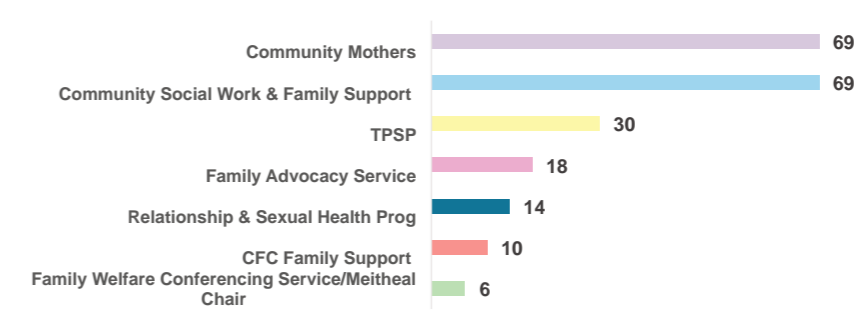
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parenting programmes, parenting groups and workshops were conducted across all the programmes.

26

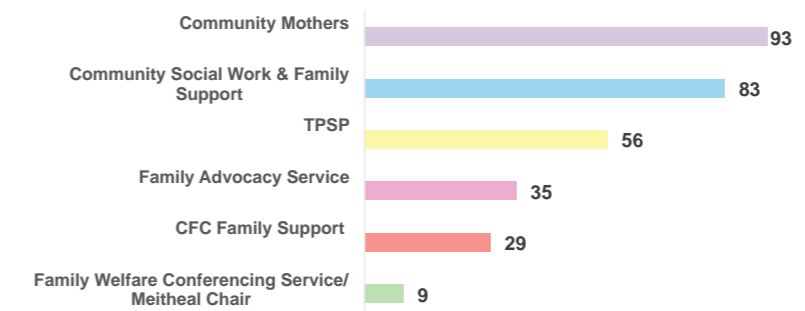
Across the CFS, staff have been working to increase the number of Meitheals initiated and a significant number were processed with 26 completed during 2023 compared to 10 in 2022.

Fig. 1 Numbers of Referrals to the CFS Services in 2023*



*Note: Data between services are not comparable as some programmes are 0.5 WTE posts and others have 3-4 WTEs.

Fig. 2 Numbers of Families/Individuals Receiving a One-to-One Service from the CFS Services in 2023*



*Note: Data between services are not comparable as some programmes are 0.5 WTE posts and others have 3-4 WTEs.

Fig. 3 One-to-One Sessions by CFS Services in 2023

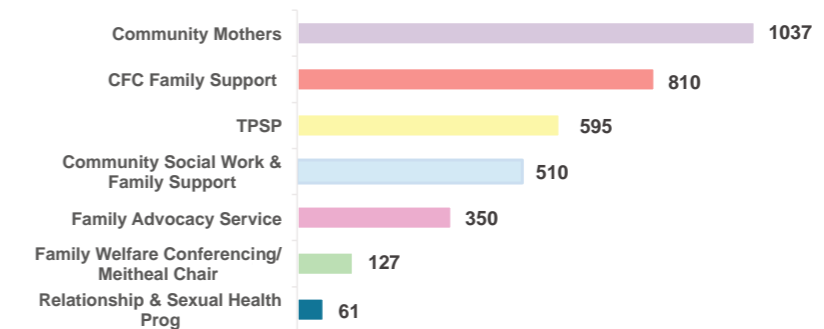


Fig. 4 Number of Professional Contacts in 2023

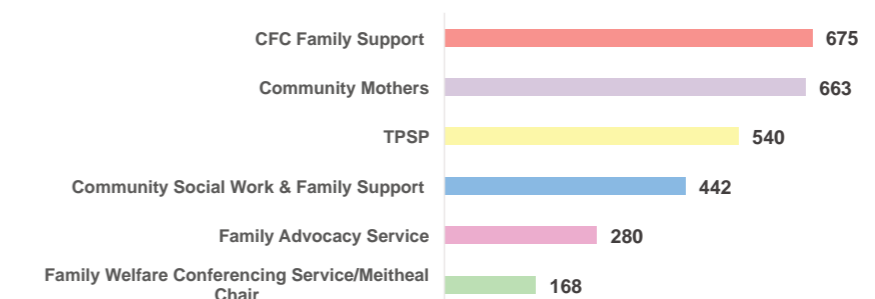


Fig. 5 Parenting Programmes, Groupwork & Workshops in 2023

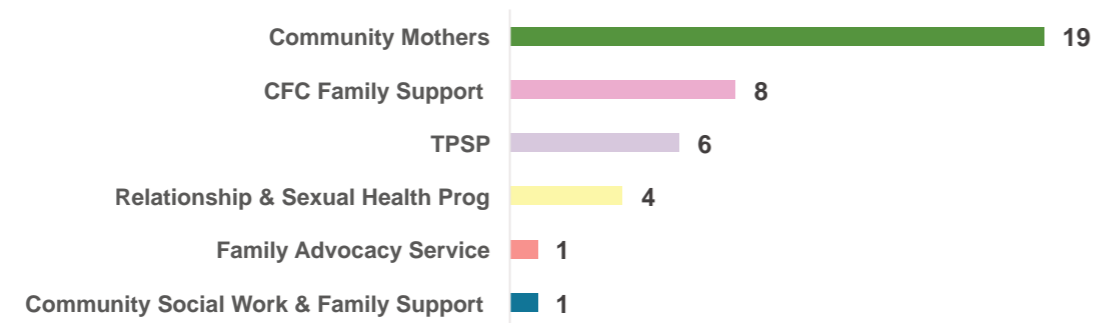


Fig. 6 Parents Attending Programmes, Groupwork & Workshops in 2023

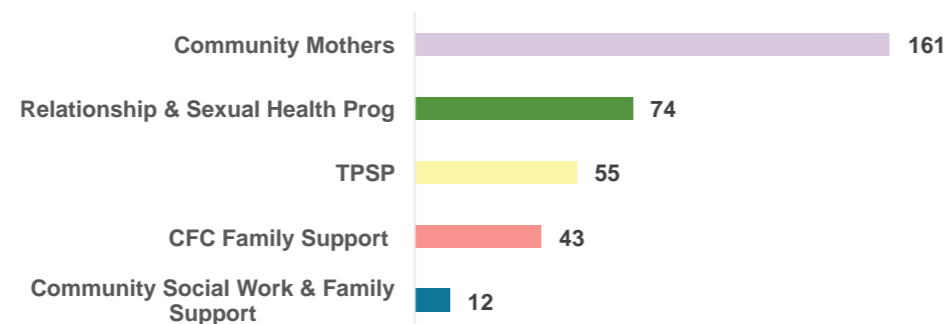
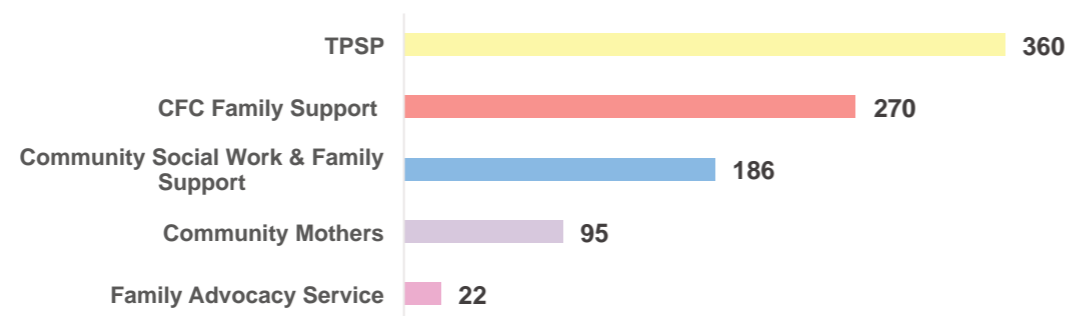


Fig. 7 Number of Drop-Ins/ Signposting in 2023



In addition to the above activities, a number of services developments are also noteworthy:

Extending Services at The Child and Family Centre (CFC)

The CFS Team increased its presence within the CFC with up to two CFS staff working regularly from the CFC offering both one-to-one and group work support to families. A parent and toddler group and a CFC parent support group were held weekly with the aim to provide a support space for parents to engage with CFS staff, to provide peer support to one another and to identify and meet areas for additional support.

Significant levels of need among some of the families in the CFC have been identified and the provision of wrap-around EYS supports, practical supports such as meals and laundry for families in crisis or experiencing homelessness, and one-to-one / group supports were most effective.

Promoting Service Quality

The Team commenced the development of a revised Family Support Model with the support of Dr. Brid Featherstone and Dr. Kate Morris, who are international specialists in family support and child protection. While this work is ongoing, it is envisaged that it will provide a clear, evidence-based model of work for the Child and Family Support Service. As part of the LSSC ongoing commitment to delivering and enhancing quality services, a draft Standard Operating Procedures document has been completed and will form part of this model.

Community Social Work & Family Support

In addition to offering over 500 one-to-one sessions to families and leading on 15 Meitheals, the Community Social Work & Family Support Team delivered a PuP programme over 10 sessions to 12 parents. The Teams completed 17 Child Protection and Welfare Report Forms (CPWRFs) and Retrospective Abuse Report Forms (RARFs). The Team also delivered Safeguarding Training to all LSSC staff members and developed a safeguarding Traveller Health Programme specific training.

The Community Mothers Programme

The Community Mothers Team continued to engage with the national Community Families Programme, which has developed a standardised model across seven sites and is working to develop an evidence base. It is expected that the LSSC Community Mothers Programme will transition to Community Families over the next year.

In addition to a schedule of home-visiting appointments, the Team delivered a full schedule of parenting groups and programmes including: eight weaning workshops; three Baby Massage Programmes; two ante-natal workshops; one messy play workshop; two child directed play programmes

(based on the Incredible Years programme); one PuP play programme; three buggy walking groups; one Summer Family Day; and one Santa Visit for the parent and toddler groups.

The Team also facilitated two parent and toddler groups in Henry Street and in the Southside CFC. Building on lessons learned from COVID and the success of the outdoor parent and toddler group, both groups continued to run on a hybrid model (indoors and outdoors). A very popular summer series was held in the People's Park, consisting of six outdoor parent and toddler group sessions

The TPSP continued to support the developmental, educational, and parenting needs of young parents through a range of interventions including one-to-one parenting and advocacy support, and support with childcare and education costs. The Programme facilitated two City Slicker Programmes - the first culminated with a trip to Dublin Zoo and the second with a trip to Elf Town. The TPSP also facilitated two Pediatric First Aid Programmes with over 30 parents attending. In addition, Easter and Halloween workshops were held.

Nationally, the TPSP completed a comprehensive Programme review and secured funding from European Social Funds with a possible expansion of the Limerick Programme.

The RSHP continued its programme to promote healthy relationships, cultural integration, and sexual health awareness and focused on facilitating training events, interagency visits, group work, and one-to-one support. Training included Foróige Real U Training, Yes! Consent Training, Parents Plus 0-6 Years and Parents' Adolescents programme. Groupwork included an International Women's Group with 50 participants from various countries, a Friday Wellness Group involving 12 parents, a Foróige Young Teenager Group involving girls aged 10-14 from the Travelling Community and a West Limerick Parent Support Group. The Programme responded to 14 new referrals for one-to-one support, offering 61 sessions of support.

The Family Advocacy Service continued to provide a valuable service to parents of children in care and works intensively with parents to support them in their engagements with Tusla and other services. In 2023, it responded to 18 referrals and offered services to 35 families involving 350 sessions.

The Family Welfare Conference Coordinator continued to Chair and support internal Meitheal meetings. In addition to Chairing the meetings, the Meitheal Chair supported the lead

practitioner with managing administrative tasks, contacting families and partner agencies to arrange meetings and supporting reviews. This has proved positive assistance in supporting more complex Meitheal cases. The Family Welfare Conference Coordinator has also managed eight Advocacy clients in support of the Family Advocacy Service.

Staff Training & Professional Development

Two staff members were accredited in the PuP (Parents Under Pressure) programme and one staff member was accredited as a PuP Supervisor. This programme has supported the Team's capacity to provide quality one-to-one supports for parents who are facing multiple or complex challenges. A PuP Group was delivered in partnership with Coolmine TC. A five-week PuP hour, which focused on play based skills for parents recovering from addiction to enhance their capacity to build positive relationships with their children was also delivered.

Other staff training included: Meitheal Chair Training (3 staff); Meitheal Community of Practice (3 staff); Understanding Self Harm training with the HSE (1 staff); Understanding Traumatized Children's Behaviours (1 staff); Community of Practice: Key working, Case management and Motivational Interviewing with Coomine (3 staff); MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy Programme in UCD (1 staff); Baby Massage training (2 staff); PEEP training (1 staff); ADAPT Domestic Abuse Training (2 staff).

Interagency Work

The CFS Team continued to support a number of inter-agency groups and networks and regularly attended the following: Southside CFSN; King's Island CFS; East Limerick CFSN; West Limerick CFSN; IPAS network; PAUL Partnership Child & Family Pillar Group; ABC Start Right Wider Team Meetings; PAUL Partnership Research and Evaluation Group; Parenting Limerick; Infant Mental Health Network; SEC Campus Partner Meetings; HSE Breastfeeding Support Group; the Youth Housing Allocation Group

The Team worked regularly with other agencies in the delivery of programmes and workshops including Tusla, the HSE, the Child and Family Centre, Limerick Childcare Committee and ABC Start Right and with a broad range of agencies to support individual families e.g. HSE Disability & Mental Health Services, CAMHS, Family Resource Centres, ISPC, West Limerick Resources, Ballyhoura Development, Barnardos, Limerick City & County Council, Focus Ireland, NOVAS, Bedford Row Project, LCETB; Perinatal Mental Health Team; and HSE Medical Social Workers.



Teen Parent Support Programme (TPSP)



Relationship and Sexual Health Programmes (RSHP)



The Family Advocacy Service

The Family Welfare Conference Service



Feedback from Service Users

"...We found ourselves reflecting on the warmth and kindness you've [Community Mother Programme Team] brought into our lives. Your support has been a true blessing to our family. Your willingness to lend a helping hand, your comforting presence during challenging times and your genuine care has made a significant difference in our lives. I'll never forget the day you made me sit on the sofa and feed the baby more relaxed. This kindness gesture will always be in my heart."

"I'm delighted to be able to say that working with my Community Mother and the service provided by the community outreach staff has really made a huge positive impact on my life over the past year. Coming out of Covid with two small children has been really challenging and knowing that I have the warm and knowledgeable support of my Community Mother has provided me with a sense of security and confidence navigating a difficult time. I am very grateful for all the practical advice and emotional support the service has offered. It has made a real difference to me and my family."

"My Community Mother is great company when she calls to see myself and my son. She has great experience and gives great advice if I ever need anything. It's just nice to have someone call especially being a first-time mother helps put me at ease."

"The girls at the TPSP always go above and beyond during day trips, activities and classes to ensure everyone enjoys their time and feels comfortable. The team all engage with the kids so well and are so caring towards them and are so quick to give a hand with them when needed. They really are so friendly, understanding and helpful with everything and are always there when you need a chat. We went to Elf Town in December 2023 and despite me being anxious about going on a bus for the first time with the kids, the staff reassured me and made sure everything went so smoothly and checked in on us throughout the duration of the trip. I would definitely recommend the TPSP."

"The Teen Parent Support Programme has been extraordinary. The team has supported me through any issues and difficulties I have faced. My feedback overall is I couldn't have asked for more, they have gone above and beyond for me. In my opinion the team should be recognised for all their hard work and rewarded for all they do. I can't thank them all enough."

"When I arrived for the first time, they [LSSC International Women's Community group] welcomed me like a sister, they listened to my story and made it their own, they shared their stories and I made them mine, we travelled together discovering places, even supporting events for our children, that gave it a plus since other groups do not allow children. We parade together, we cook together, (it is) more than a group for me, it is a family. Although for work reasons I cannot always be present, the group gave me refuge and identity in this beautiful country. I think we are lucky to remain in this group, I hope we can continue supporting each other and growing until we become a large group, contributing the good of our cultures, and integrating it into Limerick society - How sisters from different nations can be light in this piece of the world that welcomed us!"

"The Women's International Community Group is ready to lend a helping hand to everyone. Each meeting is on an exciting journey, here you can find something to your liking: meditation, Zumba, support circle, trips out of town, participation in festivals and many other activities. I'm glad to be part of this big female family."

"I'm really grateful the International Women's Group for support, joy and love. Thank you for your amazing meditation with beautiful Pauline, thank you for your unforgettable trips to Bunratty with kids, thank you for your inspiration and understanding, thank you for Zumba, I came from Ukraine, from the war and I was so depressed, and you supported me and gave me so much joy and love, thank you so much."



Case Study: The Community Mothers' Programme

Anna* arrived in Ireland in 2022 alone. She wanted to improve her English and shortly after arrival she met a man from her native country and began a relationship with him. She became pregnant very soon and unexpectedly as she had been told it would be unlikely that she would conceive. She had been diagnosed with benign uterine tumors in her home country, which had caused her discomfort and pain. Anna had an elective caesarean section as her anxiety around the birth of her baby was very high. During her pregnancy she was referred to the Perinatal Mental Health team who in turn referred Anna to the LSSC Community Mothers programme when her baby was three months old.

Anna has experienced domestic violence in the past although she feels her current husband is very supportive. She feels, however, that her husband's family are not supportive of their relationship. They had been living with them after her baby was born in January 2023. They moved out in August 2023 due to relationship difficulties with them. This entailed a move from a busy city location to a more isolated suburban area with poor access to public transport. This has led to social isolation as Anna does not have any friends or family in Ireland. Both Anna and her husband express that they find it difficult to make friends. Anna enrolled in an online course to improve her job prospects. They pay a high rent and are reliant on her husband's income which they find challenging to make ends meet. Anna feels she does not have a peer network or extended family systems to depend on. She continues to link in with perinatal mental health as she has on going anxiety and psychosexual issues.

Anna was invited to the weekly Parent and Toddler group and the International Women's Group in LSSC after the referral was received. She attended these events on occasion as she was dependent on her husband for transport. She found it difficult to socialise but made links with LSSC staff. A Community Mother was subsequently assigned and a home visit was arranged. In partnership with Anna, a plan was devised to support her in her role as a new mother. Anna identified areas where she would like support and how often she would like a home visit. She wanted information around current child development, in particular weaning, and an opportunity to meet other mums. Her husband worked shift work so she requested that some visits could be arranged around his work schedule so that he could be included. She continued to study on-line as she is keen to work from home in the future. Monthly visits were scheduled and the Community Mother began to help Anna identify her needs so that appropriate supports could be arranged.

The Community Mother sign-posted Anna to the various workshops run by ABC Start Right, and she attended these with her husband. They both attended the Baby Massage Classes. Anna had difficulty weaning her baby onto solid foods, the process which she felt was fraught with tension and anxiety. She voiced how she missed her own mother for advice at this time. She also indicated that she had issues with food in her childhood, and this was impacting on the weaning process. The Community Mother contacted her more frequently to offer support around these issues and sign-posted Anna to a Weaning Workshop, which she found very useful. She was also sign-posted to the Public Health Nurse in her local area and attended the Connect Café run by Paul Partnership as a means to increase her connections in her community and to lessen the social isolation she feels living so far from her family of origin.

Anna continued to access support through Perinatal Mental Health as her baby approaches her first birthday. The Community Mother also reviewed the frequency of visits with Anna and agreed to increase the contact by phone or Home Visits depending on Anna's needs. Anna feels that her husband is also experiencing anxiety and is concerned for his mental health. She has requested access to Counselling services for him and a referral has been made to the LSSC Counselling and Psychotherapy Service.

"Your willingness to lend a helping hand, your comforting presence during challenging times and your genuine care has made a difference to our lives. I'll never forget the day you made me sit on the sofa and prepared a hot tea so I could feed my baby and feel more relaxed. This kindness gesture will always be in my heart." Anna.

*All names have been changed.

The Southside Child & Family Centre

The Child and Family Centre (CFC) is located at the Southside Education Campus in Galvone, Limerick City and is a state-of-the-art campus providing integrated and accessible service provision for children. The Centre is supported by a consortium of agencies with the LSSC as lead agency in the management of the CFC and in the development of the Early Years Centre element of the campus. Agencies and partners represented in the consortium include the Diocese of Limerick, Tusla, the HSE, the Limerick City and County Council, the Department of Education, the Limerick Childcare Committee, the Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership, the Limerick and Clare ETB, Le Chéile N.S. and Gaelscoil Sheoirse Clancy.

The Early Years Service (EYS) at the Centre is designed to provide a safe, secure yet stimulating environment for children ranging from new-born to pre-school age. The aim of the EYS at the Centre is to help children and their parents and guardians to engage with the educational system from an early stage in the child's development and thereby work to remove the barriers that have heretofore obstructed children from continuing in education.

The EYS has grown in numbers since it was first opened in 2020. Children can begin their journey in the Baby Room from 6 months old and then progress through the Wobbler Room, Toddler Room and then upstairs, to the First- and Second-year Preschools. In addition to the EYS, the CFS Team has increased its presence within the Centre with both one to one and group work provided to families availing of services in the CFC and the wider area.

The EYS and other services on offer at the Centre are committed to using the Meitheal process to assess strengths and needs, and to develop integrated plans around the children and families attending the CFC.

Activities and Developments in 2023

The following outlines some of the activities delivered by the EYS and through other services at the CFC in 2023:

Early Years' Service / Preschool

In 2023, the EYS catered for 59 children, of whom 35 children were in sponsored places through either Tusla or the HSE. Ten children were referred to Better Start for AIM support. The service arranged programmes to promote early language development with the support of ABC Start Right and delivered both the Incredible Years Dina in the Pre-school Programme and



Early Talkboost. In addition, the service had a Team Around the Toddler (TAC) with the toddler group. TAC is for children and families who might need a little extra support from professionals in order to achieve expected standards of health, education, development or welfare.

As part of the Lifelong Learning Festival, a campus wide Family Day was held in the CFC. A mobile farm with animals came to the Centre and was enjoyed by the children and their families; staff of the Child and Family Service worked with the CFC Team to provide various including puppet shows, games and face painting. The CFC extended an invitation to both schools on the campus, Le Cheile National School and Gaelscoil Sheirse Clancy.

In addition to routine activities, a family fun day and communal picnic was arranged for both children and parents at Sean Choill sports complex; at Christmas, children and parents visited Santa and the children and staff enjoyed a Christmas dinner together. At the end of the preschool year, a graduation event was held where parents were invited to see their children receive certificates.

Referrals Referrals to the CFC were received from Tusla, Limerick City and County Council Homeless Action Team, Public Health Nurses, local community groups and through self-referral.

Wrap-Around Services Staff from the LSSC Child and Family Service were available to children and families attending the Centre, with some families engaging in the Meitheal Process. As a number of the children presented with additional needs, the location of the Family Support Service on site meant that families could more easily avail of additional support as required.

A CFC parent support group was held each Friday with the aim to provide a support space for parents to engage with CFS staff, to provide peer support to one another, and to identify and meet others for additional support.

Counselling and Psychotherapy services continued to be an integral part of service delivery with LSSC counsellors covering adolescent and adult counselling, and Family Therapy.

The Traveller Health Worker was based in the Centre for part of the week and worked with local children and families from the Travelling Community.

Access visits were facilitated in the CFC and acknowledged as a positive experience and safe environment for the families involved. The HSE continued to utilise the CFC for services such as the Community Mid Wifery Service and the HSE Psychology Services. In addition, there were regular requests for the use of the CFC for the delivery of programmes such as weaning and baby massage from the Peri-natal Mental Health Team.

Additional Support Programmes, Groups & Workshops Additional support programmes were offered from the Centre including: Baby Incredible Years, an after-school service (Barnardos); Phoenix Creative Therapies provided music, art and play therapy in the CFC three days per week; Blue Box Creative Therapy Services used the space one day per week to facilitate clients from Le Chéile School; other parenting courses and classes were delivered on First Aid, nutrition and health, arts in addition to therapy workshops for children and young people.

Staff Training & Development Staff participated in several information and training events including First Aid Response training, Manual Handling training, and HACCP training. Staff also attended various sessions offered by Limerick Childcare, Talk Boost, Lámh, GDPR Briefing, and Mentoring in Early Years.

Feedback from TPSP/CFC Service User

When I first joined Community Mums/TPSP, I was just after having my first child and felt lost. Through chats, walks in the park and advice, they helped me find my way. Through workshops, programmes, I felt like part of the community. They helped me greatly with career guidance and helped me place my child in crèche in the CFC. Due to this, I was able to go back to education. They also financially helped, which made it easier to stay in education as there were times where I was just scraping by. They have been very supportive with my children's assessments and have been a kind, listening ear. I am so grateful for their service and highly recommend them to every mother I know.

The Early Years' Service Henry Street

A Vision for Early Childhood

All babies' and young children's early years will be valued as a critical and distinct period which should be enjoyed. Families will be assisted and enabled to nurture babies and young children and support their development, with additional support for those who need it. Community contexts will help babies and young children make the most of their early years and fulfil their potential.

First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children & Their Families 2019-2028



The LSSC Early Years' Service (EYS) is acknowledged as one of the leading community Crèche and Pre-school services in Limerick City that provides quality care for babies and young children. In its purpose-built facility in Henry Street, the EYS forms part of the LSSC building and is therefore ideally located to enable parents who are living, working or in education/ training in the City Centre to avail of the service. The EYS offers a full day Crèche Service and a Pre-School Service five days a week.

The Centre gained Validation in Siolta Standards, which is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and is designed to support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in early childhood care and education settings where children aged birth to six years are present.

The EYS team comprised 17 staff from a range of cultures.

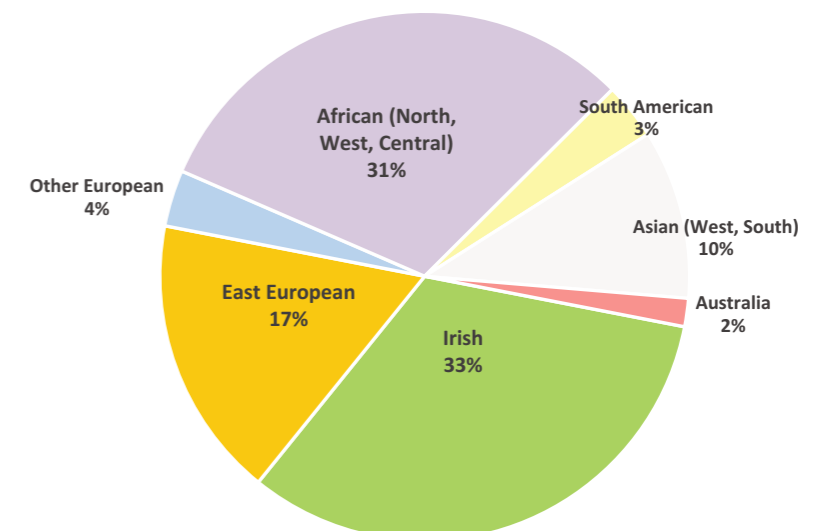
Activities and Developments in 2023

Attendance

The EYS generally operated at full capacity during 2023 with a waiting list of people who wish to use the service. Daily routines were maintained with full day care, 8.30am to 5.00pm, five days a week. The Centre extended the Preschool service from 9.00am to 12.00pm, to 9.00am to 5.00pm with a second Pre-school room and facilitated additional ECCE children. In the post-Covid period, the Service re-opened the Baby room.

In 2023, 58 children regularly attended services. Children with additional needs attended services with the assistance of two Aims support workers. Children also came from a range of nationalities including Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, South America and Australia.

Fig. 8 Nationality of Children Attending EYS in 2023





Programme of Care

The outdoor area was upgraded to enhance the range of outside activities for the children. Outdoor clothing, provided ABC Start Right, enabled the children to play outdoors for longer periods regardless of the weather.

Indoor activities included "Team around the Toddlers" with ABC Start Right, which covered healthy eating, dental hygiene and bedtime routines; and programmes comprised Social and Problem-Solving Skills to strengthen children's social, emotional, and academic competencies such as understanding and communicating feelings, using effective problem-solving strategies, managing anger, practicing friendship and conversational skills.

As part of the EYS' commitment to supporting the needs of individual children and children who may have additional needs, Play Therapy was arranged to assist children to improve emotional literacy and alleviate behaviour and mental health problems. The EYS recognises that all children, and most especially those with identified extra needs, benefit from a systematic approach that ensures that they are provided with extensive opportunities, and assistance, to develop play skills and to engage in playful activities. A Play Therapist was available to provide small group and one-to-one sessions on requests from parents.

Of particular benefit for children is the space offered to relax in the newly established sensory room. Staff reported benefits for the children that included a decrease in levels of anxiety, distress, agitation, and physiological stress. They also reported increased levels of self-esteem and confidence in the children, and increased engagement when children returned to the wider group.

Cultural & Community Activities

In addition to daily routines, extra activities were arranged for the children both at the Centre and at local venues. Children expressed considerable enjoyment with the visit from Limerick

Gardaí and Fire Brigade officers who came with a fire engine, which the children were allowed to experience close-up. Children also enjoyed a visit to the Post Office and to a local cafe for refreshments. A number of staff members were from different nationalities shared dishes from different countries with the children e.g. paella was cooked by a Spanish member of staff and an Indian dish was cooked by another employee. Children took part in the Christmas shoebox appeal along with a range of other festive events.

Staff Training & Professional Development

The EYS team continued to ensure their training and professional development was maintained and updated. Staff training and development included Children First: Guidance for the Protection & Welfare of Children training, First Aid training, and two staff members were supported through 3rd level degrees.



Traveller Demographics

In the Census of Population 2022, there were 32,949 White Irish Travellers usually resident in Ireland, an increase of 6% from 30,987 in the 2016 census. Six out of 1,000 people in the State were Irish Travellers which equates to approximately 0.65% of the total population. Looking at the overall population in Ireland, 15% were aged 65 years and over compared with just 5% of Irish Travellers.

Within Limerick City and suburbs, data showed that the percentage of White Irish Traveller amounted to 1%.

The Limerick City Traveller Health Advocacy Programme (THAP) has been operating in collaboration with the HSE Mid-West Traveller Health Unit since 2013. The Programme was developed in response to findings from the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010), which highlighted the significant health inequalities experienced by the Irish Travelling Community. The overarching aim of THAP is to improve the health status of Travellers in Limerick City. In 2023, THAP staff consisted of one Co-ordinator, eight Traveller Health staff and in November, two new employees joined the Team. The Team provided peer-led evidence-based health information to 150 families living on eight halting sites in Limerick City. The overall aim of this community development approach is to improve the health outcomes of Limerick City Travellers.

Activities and Developments in 2023

National Traveller Health Action Plan (2022-2027) A key priority for the Programme in 2023 was the local implementation of the National Traveller Health Action Plan, which was initiated to improve the health experiences and outcomes of Travellers. In this regard, initiatives encompassed a range of health topics including heart health, mental health, diabetes care, cancer screening programme awareness, smoking cessation, menopause information, sun safety, oral health, asthma awareness, etc.

Community Activities Early in 2023, the Team actively participated in community events such as the Great Limerick Run and Darkness into Light for Pieta House in support of physical activity initiatives and mental health awareness.

During the Summer of 2023, Limerick City Hall hosted "Moments of Truth", an exhibition featuring Traveller artwork and two specially commissioned textile pieces delivered in collaboration with The West Limerick Primary Healthcare Project for Travellers. This Traveller Pride event proved to be very effective not only for the participants but also in garnering significant local media coverage.

As part of the Autumn initiative, the Team delivered Seasons for Growth, an eight-week programme facilitated by two psychotherapists to support individuals coping with grief, loss, or change.



In September, the Team organised a health day with support from the Marie Keating Cancer Nurse and Mobile Unit, Irish Heart Foundation nurses and Mobile Unit, and Diabetes Clinical Nurse Specialist. This event drew a high attendance from a number of the target communities.

Staff Training & Professional Development

The Traveller Health Team proved high levels of remaining commitment to the Programme and to continuing to work collaboratively with Limerick Social Service Council, enhancing their skills through continuous professional development, and ensuring the delivery of services at the highest standards possible.



Counselling and Psychotherapy Service

World Health Organisation 2024

“In all countries, mental health conditions are highly prevalent. In 2019, around one in eight people in the world lived with a mental disorder. These conditions are the leading cause of years lived with disability. The economic consequences of mental health conditions are enormous, with productivity losses and other indirect costs to society often far outstripping health care costs.”

Counselling and Psychotherapy Service

The aim of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Service is to provide a professional, accessible service to adults and adolescents (14 years and over) who may be struggling with personal, emotional or mental health difficulties. The Service works with clients so that they can understand the root causes of challenging circumstances, manage difficult situations and distress, develop positive, healthy coping mechanisms and live happier lives. The LSSC Counsellors and Psychotherapists support clients in a confidential, safe, compassionate and non-judgmental environment.

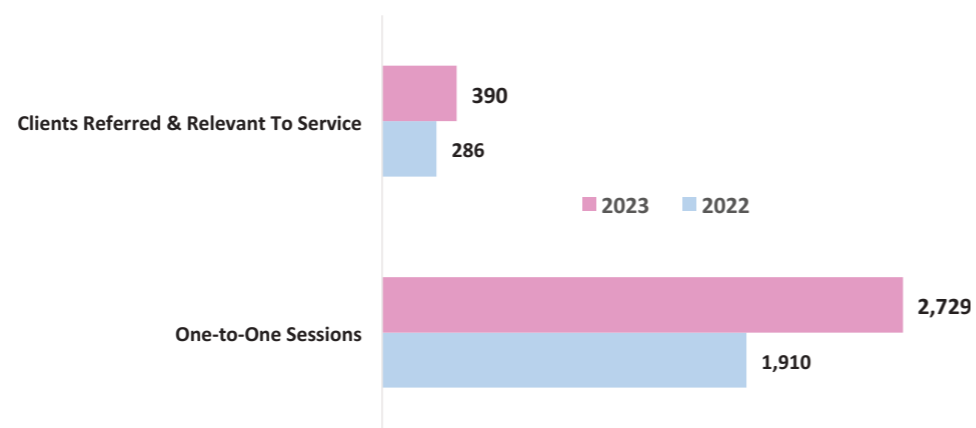
The Service is available to individuals in Limerick City and County. Referral pathways to access the Service are through Tusla the Child and Family Agency and through the HSE.

LSSC's Counselling and Psychotherapy Service is a member of the Association for Agency-based Counselling and Psychotherapy in Ireland (AACPI). All staff undergo stringent pre-employment assessments to ensure that each staff member is professionally qualified and eligible for accreditation with the Irish Council for Psychotherapy (ICP). Staff are also required to undertake regular professional supervision of their practice, which ensures that staff continue to work to the highest professional standards.

Activities and Developments in 2023

A summary of the Service's activities and developments in 2023 are as follows:

Fig. 9 LSSC Counselling and Psychotherapy Clients Referred & One-to-One Sessions in 2022 & 2023



Services for Adults & Adolescents

The number of referrals suitable for service was 390 clients and 2,729 one-to-one sessions were delivered. Both were increases on 2022 data as outlined in the above figure. In addition, the Service responded to individuals (Drop-in contacts) who called to the Service for information or for signposting to other relevant services.

The range of issues presenting to the Service in 2023 included: cross-cultural issues and socio-economic challenges for individuals who were non-Irish nationals; domestic violence, sexual violence, and childhood sexual abuse; relationship and marital issues; issues relating to complex developmental trauma, intergenerational trauma, post-traumatic stress; chronic conditions regarding illness and disability; issues with food and underlying eating disorders and disordered eating. There was an increase in neurodiversity presentations.

The provision of services for both adults and young people continued to be delivered at the Southside CFC and Henry Street sites, and in Kilmallock and Newcastle West.

Clinical Supervision

The internal Clinical Supervisor provided regular supervision to staff to ensure the clinical governance of their therapeutic work. In this regard, ongoing supportive supervision was provided to build staff confidence and competence, promote safe and ethical practice, and to provide support for staff dealing with challenging cases. Supervision is acknowledged important to ensure all counsellors in practice are keeping their skills up to date and that they work in a safe and ethical way. Supervision in counselling also forms part of the counsellor's continuous professional and personal development. Supervision thereby ensured that LSSC provided the highest quality counselling service to clients; that therapists were supported and guided in their work; and that the Service adhered to best practice guidelines and was compliant with the objectives of LSSC and funders.

A Peer Supervision Model was further developed.



Counselling & Psychotherapy Database The Database was regularly updated to provide an essential management resource in maintaining records, generating data and on day-to-day case management.

Training & Professional Development All counselling staff completed a CPD day workshop facilitated by Fierna Kennedy under the title "Working Therapeutically with Eating Disorders". This is in response to a noted increase in adolescents and young people presenting with issues with food, and underlying eating disorders and disordered eating.

Interagency Work The Service Manager participated in a young person's mental health liaison group involving JIGSAW, PIETA House, LYS Be Well, CAMHS Kilmallock /Churchtown, CAMHS East & Central, CSMT, UL and TUS Student Counselling, NOSP, and TUSLA Duty and Intake Team.

The Service continued membership with Community Therapy Ireland (formerly AACPI).

Services for Older People

Older Persons in Limerick

From Census data in 2022, 33,588 persons aged 65 years and older lived in Limerick City and County. This was a 23% increase on data from the 2016 Census and was approximately 16% of the overall population in Limerick.





Services for Older People is one of the smallest service areas in LSSC and has only two part-time staff. Nevertheless, feedback from service users and agencies recognise that its impact is considerable. While many older Irish people now generally live healthier lives than in previous decades, many older people receiving LSSC services are affected by ill-health, frailty or social isolation. Many are struggling with financial hardships and how to meet day-to-day living costs such as food and heating, or capital costs such as home repairs and general maintenance.

People of all ages occasionally experience loneliness, but for many, especially those in later life, it can significantly affect their wellbeing. A key element of the Services for Older Persons is home visiting, which is an important social link for many older people who are living alone with limited or no family support locally. This aspect of the Service enables staff to take the time to listen and have a better understanding of the person's wishes and needs. From these visits, staff can ensure that a response to meeting needs is more relevant and will frequently provide practical assistance, information or advice on how to access other services and groups that are operating in their local area.

A further means to address social isolation is how the Service opens a doorway to a variety of social events, friendship clubs and local fun activities including weekly groups for the over 55s, dinner clubs, information events, dances and celebrations and day outings.

The Services for Older Persons works primarily in the Southill, St. Mary's Park and Corbally areas. Referrals to the Service are from HSE services, other community and voluntary agencies and by self-referral.

Activities and Developments in 2023

General Activities

Day-to-day support was arranged for elder persons in the target communities in relation to shopping, medication from pharmacies, laundry, personal alarms, services from electricians/plumbers, arranging appointments, grass cutting, keys cut, shoe repairs and attending socially distanced funerals.

Individual visits were arranged to assist older people with online services including applications for bin-waivers, renewal of medical cards, processing property tax, applying for Social Welfare benefits, completing Housing Aid forms, making referrals to Slainte Care, etc. Some older people required assistance completing the Fair Deal Scheme form which can seem overwhelming for many.

Visits and social contacts were made to help to address the social isolation and anxiety arising from the absence of contacts with family members and friends, and due to the closure of community groups during the pandemic.

Southill

1,584 dinners were supplied amounting to 33 dinners weekly and 288 morning Teas were provided weekly over a 48-week period. There were also 244 weekly home visits and drop-in contacts at the office in addition to 156 shopping arrangements. Assistance was particularly important for form-filling in relation to Medical Card renewals (23), Social Welfare forms (40) and Housing Aid forms (15). Referrals to other agencies were for example, Community Law (12) and Primary Care/social care services (10).

A number of joint initiatives were also undertaken with other groups in the area including a Valentines Tea Dance, an International Women's Day event, a Thomond Park Tea Dance, participation at the Intergenerational Café, dinner at the College for Further Education & Training Centre, Kilmallock Road Campus, an Easter Bonnet Tea Dance with over 70 attendees, a day trip to Carraig-on-Suir with 52 attendees, and a day trip to Kilkenny for 50 attendees. A range of Christmas events were also organised e.g. at Our Lady Queen of Peace School NS Janesboro, at The Hospitality Suite Roxboro, at Thomond Park and at the LSSC Henry Street.

St. Mary's/Corbally

Initiatives continued in the St Mary's/Corbally area as 22 referrals were received, and 28 referrals were made to other relevant agencies such as the HSE Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and to the Public Health Nurse and Community Nurse in Kings Island Health Centre.

432 one-to-one contacts and 165 professional contacts were made in relation to a range of support issues. Many of the contacts were possibly the only contacts outside their homes that older people had due to their illness, vulnerability or the absence of visits by family members and friends from their social network.



Feedback from Service Users

"Older people continue to worry about heating their homes and keeping warm in the winter months. I have found that knowing a member of the Limerick Social Service Council is there to help reassure them that we will support them through the winter months is a great source of comfort to them."

"Older adults are especially susceptible to social isolation and loneliness due to the loss of friends and family, as well as decreased mobility, income or poorer health. The effects of loneliness and social isolation on an individual's health and wellbeing have financial repercussions for health and social care services. Investment is required to enable voluntary organisations like the LSSC, to continue mitigating loneliness and enhancing the quality of life for older adults, thereby reducing reliance on more expensive services."



Supporting Refugees & Asylum Seekers

2023 has been a significant year globally for displaced families and children as millions of families have been forced to flee their homes in the months since Russia invaded Ukraine. Ireland saw a significant increase in immigration in 2023. Available figures showed that 141,600 people arrived into the State by April 2023 which represented a 31 per cent increase from the year to April 2022.

By October 2023 in Limerick (Newcastle West, Adare-Rathkeale, Cappamore-Kilmallock, Limerick City West, Limerick City North, Limerick City East), approximately 22,000 people arrived from Ukraine based on PPSN allocations and CSO data. In addition, there were several hundred individuals in international protection accommodation.

As a key agency in Limerick that works with the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups, the LSSC reaches out to all individuals and families in need, irrespective of their city or country of origin. In response to the migrant and asylum seeker crisis, LSSC has welcomed parents and children to its Parent and Toddler groups and offered places in the Early Years Services to children from Asia, Europe, Africa and South America. The LSSC continued to support a weekly International Women's Group (see feedback from service users).

A number of qualified people seeking asylum have also contributed to the work of the LSSC as part of its staff group. The LSSC has also collaborated with a range of agencies to support the migrant and asylum seeker population including Paul Partnership, UMHL, Limerick City & County Council, local schools, welfare and health services.



Challenges for LSSC Services

This report is presented at a time of great change and uncertainty for Irish society. Over the past 12 months and on the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise in the cost of living has pushed more individuals and families into poverty and hardship, increased the strain on parents and carers, and lowered the standard of living for many people nationwide. Housing affordability,

accommodation availability and homelessness presented a more serious issue than previously seen with increasing numbers of people accessing emergency homeless accommodation. There have also been numerous domestic and global crises, notably the war in Ukraine which resulted in an unprecedented number of people seeking refuge in Ireland, including many children and mothers who were forced to flee their country under the most traumatic circumstances.

In 2023 as in previous years, LSSC teams worked steadily to deliver services in order to support the most vulnerable at a time of such uncertainty and volatility. In their work, staff faced specific challenges in their daily work. Some of these key challenges are outlined below:

Some Key Challenges in 2023

- ▶ The homelessness crisis is not a new trend, but it continued to be a source of stress for many families and individuals, young and old. A lack of suitable housing and overcrowding presented significant challenges. For example, it was difficult for staff to engage with families around parenting/child development at a time when the family did not have adequate housing. This issue was particularly relevant for families living long-term in hotel accommodation.
- ▶ The general cost-of-living crisis had a considerable impact on families in terms of their ability to meet basic needs as well as deal with the heightened stress levels of parenting.

- ▶ LSSC Teams worked with many migrant families and individuals where social isolation and the lack of family/peer support exacerbated the challenges in their lives.
- ▶ All Teams noted that fuel poverty was problematic for households across all income levels and particularly for older people who could not afford adequate heating for themselves, and parents who could not heat their homes to an acceptable standard for their young infants.
- ▶ An ongoing significant gap exists in services for early intervention for families whose children have additional needs or developmental delays. This has placed additional stress on the children, on the family and on the community services who are trying to provide support while families are waiting for statutory intervention.
- ▶ Challenges were reported in terms of the absence of clear referral pathways for clients. For example, clients have found it difficult to navigate procedures when they were referred to multiple services for similar interventions and found themselves on multiple waiting lists or receiving services from different agencies. In some cases, these clients may not have fully understood the referral process, became despondent and reluctant to engage with any services and therefore missed out on much needed supports.
- ▶ While the NCS (and access to sponsored places) has proved to be a positive development in terms of ensuring that childcare is more affordable, there remains a lack of childcare places for many families generally in Limerick.
- ▶ LSSC Teams had concerns regarding referrals they received in which domestic violence and poor parental relationships are having negative impacts on children and other family members, particularly when parents continued to live in the same house due to the lack of affordable housing. Referrals were also concerning regarding cases where parental mental health was an issue, which in turn impacted on the mental health of children.
- ▶ 'School refusal' and 'anxiety' were increasingly reported issues among children and young people with limited responses available to alleviate the problem.



**Partnership
and
Collaborative
Working**

Partnership and Collaborative Working

Partnership working has always been at the heart of the LSSC agenda for improving outcomes and making local services cost effective. A critical part of the work of the LSSC in 2023 was to continue to work in partnership with other agencies to deliver services. These agencies included government organisations and departments, schools, colleges of further education, universities, community and voluntary organisations, community centres, hospitals, GPs and philanthropic organisations. Through partnership working, these organisations have provided a range of supports through funding, expertise, and collaborative delivery of services that has enhanced the quality of LSSC work for service users.

As in previous years, LSSC staff supported a number of inter-agency initiatives in 2023 including ABC Start Right, the Limerick Homeless Alliance, CYPSC's Parenting Limerick, CYPSC's Youth Mental Health Sub-group, Limerick Childcare Committee, Tusla's Parenting Support Champion Initiative, the Incredible Years Limerick Management Group and the Youth Housing Allocation Group. Staff also collaborated regularly with other agencies in the delivery of programmes and workshops. Partners included Tusla, HSE officers such as PHNs, Psychologists and Medical Social Workers, Barnardos, PAUL Partnership and the ISPCC.

Staff in the Community Social Work and Family Support Service and the Teen Parent Support Programme led on a number of Meitheals and actively engaged with other agencies to support families to achieve the outcomes identified through the Meitheal Process. Staff also participated actively in Family Welfare, Child Protection and Children in Care conferences, meetings and reviews as required.

A Note of Appreciation to our Partners and Funders

As we reflect on 2023, we would like to take this opportunity to thank our funders and our partner organisations for their significant levels of cooperation over the past year. It has been a particularly challenging time, and we are grateful for the support and assistance we received from our whole community, without whom we would not have been able to make such a positive impact for individuals and families across Limerick.

LSSC's Funders/Partner Agencies



- Tusla, Child & Family Agency
- Health Service Executive
- Pobal
- Limerick City & County Council
- Dept of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth
- Dept of Education & Skills
- Dept of Social Protection
- TUS
- Mary Immaculate College
- LCETB
- Limerick College of Further Education
- Mid-West Simon Community
- University of Limerick
- University Hospital Limerick
- University Maternity Hospital Limerick
- Accord
- Adapt Services
- Age & Opportunity (Dublin)
- Barnardos
- Community Law & Mediation
- Diocese of Limerick
- Doras Luimní
- Family Resource Centres
- Focus Ireland
- Good Shepherd Ireland
- Irish Foster Carers' Assoc
- LEDP
- Limerick Childcare Committee
- Limerick Youth Service
- Novas
- PAUL Partnership: ABC Start Right /Incredible Years
- Treoir



Obituary Fr. Willie Walsh

Father Willie Walsh (RIP), former Chaplain to the Forces, Sarsfield Barracks, Limerick, and former Director of Limerick Social Services Council. Also former Parish Priest of Our Lady of the Rosary Church, Ennis Road, Limerick and of Rockhill, Bruree, County Limerick.

It was with profound sadness that we learnt of the passing of Fr Willie Walsh on the 28 April 2024. Fr Walsh was Director of Limerick Social Service Council from 1992 until 2005. He was an advocate for social justice and a beacon of hope for the marginalised in society. Fr Willie transformed the Limerick Social Service Centre during his time in charge, establishing the Early Years Service, the Counselling and Psychotherapy service and other numerous outreach programmes including the accommodation service for young mothers. His gentle spirit and humble demeanour earned him the respect of all who knew him. Known for his compassionate heart and wise counsel, he touched the lives of many through his many acts of charity.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilis.