

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021

# Annual Report 2021



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A Year of  
Challenges  
& Resilience



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## Our Mission Statement

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

## Our 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

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

## 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.

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# LIMERICK SOCIAL SERVICE COUNCIL CLG



## 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. The current Board members are as follows:

Ger Crowley (Chair), Frank O'Brien, Betty Walsh, Pat Lynch, Christine Cross, Fr Derek Leonard, Brian O'Gorman, Keith Morrow

## Our Objective

Our object is to benefit society through the promotion of a caring, client-centred, responsive Christian ethos and community within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Limerick and environs.

## What We Do

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 premises in Thomondgate is allocated to supported accommodation for homeless women in Limerick.



# CHAIR WELCOME

As the chair of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the work of the Limerick Social Services Council (LSSC) for 2021 in this Annual Report. This report covers an extraordinary year for the LSSC and I am extremely proud of the organisation's achievements which are a testament to the strength and resilience of the LSSC teams.

Throughout its history of over five decades, the LSSC has always supported individuals and families when they are most in need and in 2020, LSSC teams faced one of their most challenging years yet with the impact of COVID -19. In the second year of the pandemic, LSSC teams were even more challenged knowing that marginalised groups would be further affected and that service users who faced inequality prior to the crisis would be hit disproportionately hard. While the pandemic changed the way that staff have had to work to deliver services, it has reinforced the fundamental values of the LSSC.

Fortunately, the LSSC was positioned well to respond promptly and effectively to those facing hardship and to the people who needed our help the most. In the face of an ongoing public health crisis, the LSSC teams stepped forward to work in collaboration with other agencies to support individuals and families throughout the crisis. Thanks to our dedicated funders and partners, our collective response demonstrated the capacity of the LSSC as an organisation and what we can accomplish together.

As we plan for the months ahead, the LSSC faces a unique opportunity, one that requires us to think beyond simply returning to the way things were before the pandemic. This moment in time calls for us to review what previously worked well and to chart a more dynamic path to move forward. Within this context, the Board made progress in reviewing our governance standards so that they reflect best practice and are appropriate as we take different approaches to challenges facing the LSSC. Together with our partners, the Board has also worked steadily to support the progress of the Southside Child and Family Centre in its transition from building to operational activities.

The success of the past year stems from the efforts, flexibility and innovation of our teams. It also required greater partnership with other agencies and community groups. I would like to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of our General Manager, our staff, volunteers and my fellow Board members. On behalf of the LSSC organisation, I would particularly like to express our appreciation to Martin Golden as outgoing Chair. His leadership has supported the LSSC through some testing times as well as through periods of growth in the development of several ambitious initiatives that will have a lasting impact on the communities we serve.

## **Ger Crowley**

Chair  
Board of Directors



# MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

This last year has been another challenging time for the LSSC with a further year of the global pandemic. As we look back over 2021, we must firstly reflect on the many people who have suffered and died in Limerick as a result of COVID-19, their grieving families, and friends. To our staff, volunteers and service users who have been bereaved in the past two years, I offer our thoughts and condolences.

Undoubtedly COVID-19 has changed our way of working and increased demand for our services. But, faced with such demands, we stayed resilient and focused because our work to support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in Limerick was at the heart of every choice we made. We were determined not only to deliver services, but we also worked to transform the organisation so that we are better equipped to support our service users in ways that suit their needs within an ever-changing society.

## **Achievements during 2021 have included:**

- Operating the Early Years' Service at full capacity with the programme of activities adapted to COVID-19 safety measures. This included additional outdoor activities and events for the children together with various indoor health and hygiene routines in response to COVID-19.
- Recommencing the Child and Family Service (CFS) through face-to-face contact with clients in outdoor meetings and where possible, through home visits.
- Delivering a full suite of services from the Southside Child and Family Centre that included the LSSC CFS, the Early Years and Pre-school service, the Counselling & Psychotherapy service, the Schools' PHN service, the Speech and Language service, the Community Law service, Creative Therapies, and the Community Midwifery Services.
- Responding to the support needs of older people with particular care and sensitivity. The team reconfigured the delivery of services and how to connect with older people, many of whom were self-isolating and had found it difficult to re-engage in the social activities they enjoyed before the pandemic.
- Enhancing the quality of LSSC services through (a) the information management systems e.g. the Counselling & Psychotherapy database and the CFS database were fully operational proving a key resource in day-to-day case management, data governance and performance measurement; (b) the updating of the LSSC Child Safeguarding Statement and Policy; (c) the completion of a draft CFS Standard Operating Procedures document.
- Implementing recommendations from a review of our governance structures. This has led to an expansion of the number of Board sub-committees, a revision of their terms of reference and the appointment of additional members with professional experience in relevant areas.



- Reviewing our Governance Code for the Community and Voluntary Sector to ensure compliance ahead of the requirement by the Charity Regulator and that standards associated with the key principles of governance as laid out in the voluntary code have been met.

This report provides an update not just on how we had achieved our core business goals in 2021, but also how our teams met the challenges which we faced as an organisation and as a society over the past difficult year. The progress and impact we have made has only been made possible by the talents and hard work of our fantastic teams and underpinned by the positive backing of our Board. I thank all those who supported and worked with us. Not only our staff, volunteers and Board members, but also our funders, partners and the communities with whom we work.

While the future remains uncertain, the leadership of our Board and the professionalism of our teams enables the LSSC to face all kinds of challenges ahead and to withstand any disruptive events that may emerge in the coming year. Inevitably, innovation comes with change. We will continue to innovate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of our communities while implementing action plans in 2022 based on the learning from the past year.

Finally, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the outgoing Chair's contribution to the work of the LSSC during his leadership - Martin Golden provided valuable support in our work during times of change, challenge and renewal. I welcome Ger Crowley as the new Chair and will also be privileged to work alongside him in the year ahead.

As we look forward to the LSSC's next chapter, I am confident that we have the foundations and resilience required to continue achieving long-term, positive change for individuals, families and communities across Limerick.

**Brian Ryan**  
LSSC General Manager

# Highlights from Services in

# 2021



## THE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE



The Child and Family Service (CFS) works in partnership with families to support them to improve relationships and address any 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 CFS work. The CFS provides one to one and group supports to parents and carers, children, young people and extended family members. The CFS consists of the following individual programmes:

### 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 to support families to build stronger relationships, develop their parenting and communication skills and address a range of challenges that the family may be facing. These issues 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. This work is done through home visits, centre-based work and phone contact. Targeted group interventions and workshops are also facilitated.

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 work together as an organisation to ensure the safety of children.

### The Teen Parent Support Programme

The Teen Parent Support Programme (TPSP) 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.

TPSP Limerick is part of the National Teen Parents Support Programme. Support to parents is provided through the provision of one-to-one home visits and centre-based work; a range of financial and non-financial supports for the young parent to remain in education; and provision of group work programmes to support

# THE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE



parents both in their parenting role and in their own personal development. These include a weekly parent and toddler group, the City Slickers Programme, the Mellow Bumps Ante-Natal Programme and other ante-natal supports.

## The Community Mothers Programme

The Community Mothers Programme is a home visiting service for families with new babies and young children. The programme aims to encourage parents to enjoy participating more fully in their child's life. Community Mothers visit parents in their home during the early years (generally up to the age of three) to offer non-directive information on parenting, child development and local services and supports. Community Mothers support positive parent/child relationships.

Community Mothers also facilitate Baby/Toddler/ Parent Groups, weaning workshops, baby massage and baby reflexology programmes, Incredible Years Programmes and the Mellow Bumps Ante-Natal Programme. 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 teenage children in the area of relationships and sexual health. The Programme also supports young people with additional life skills to support the existing Social Health and Personal Development Programme within their school or training centres and to incorporate communication skills, self-esteem and confidence-building skills to the area of relationships and sexual health.

The Programme provides a forum for parents who had previously completed a Relationships and Sexual Health Parenting Programme to meet and develop peer support networks and share their experiences regarding the parenting of their teenage children. It also links parents with other services for additional supports in the area of sexual health, if required.

## Family Advocacy Service

The Family Advocacy Service is a confidential and independent service for parents in Limerick who have children who are 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 fully 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 of children in care.

## 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 as many family members as possible, along with the child where appropriate, in a structured, family led, decision making meeting. The FWC Coordinator meets each member of the family in advance of the FWC to ensure that everyone has opportunities to express their views. This type of meeting assists the family to formulate a safe family plan in the best interests of the child. Essentially it is a method of family intervention that enables families to provide their own solutions to the difficulties they face.



# THE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE

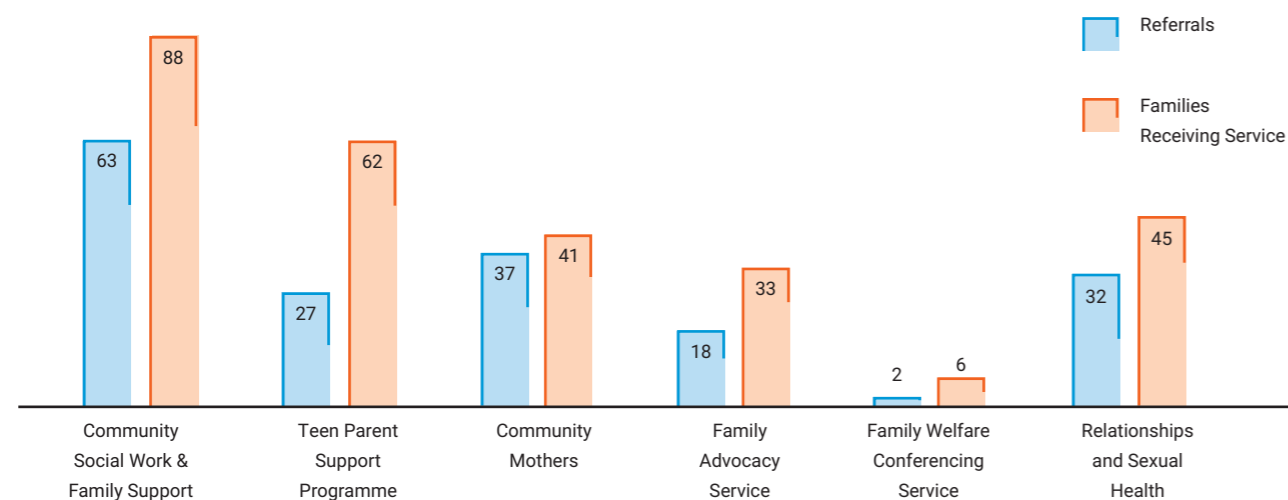


## ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN 2021

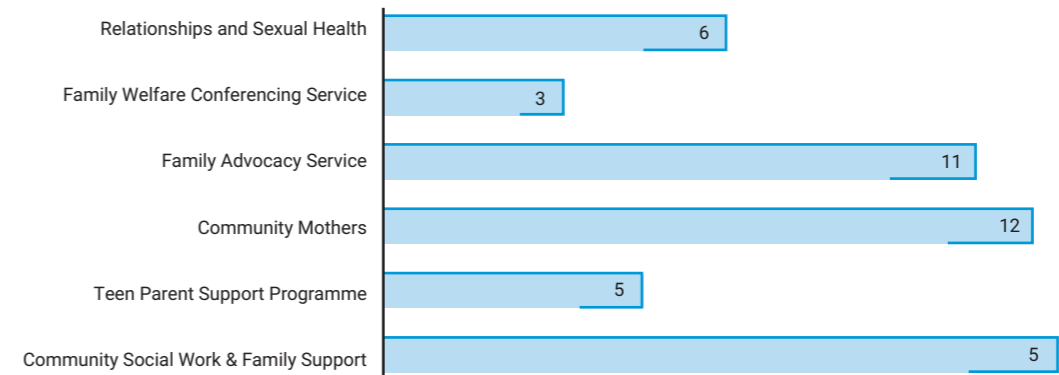
A summary of CFS activities and developments in 2021 are outlined below and illustrate that there were almost 180 referrals to the overall service. The highest percentage of referrals (35%) were made to the Community Social Work and Family Support Service, with 21% to the Community Mothers Programme and the remaining 44% to the other programmes. 275 families received a CFS service, of which 32% of families were supported through the Community Social Work and Family Support Service and 23% were supported through the TPSP. The number of overall client contacts was over 2,600 of which 44% related to contacts with the Community Social Work and Family Support Service and 19% through the Community Mothers Programme. There were over 250 individuals who dropped into the service and received advice or information or were signposted to other more relevant services. The majority or 35% contacted the Community Social Work and Family Support Service, 18% were dealt with through the TPSP and 16% through the Community Mothers Programme. The Family Advocacy Service dealt with 13% of these contacts.

The CFS offered 29 parenting programmes and parenting groups in addition to 11 workshops. Some of these were delivered virtually or outdoors due to COVID-19 restrictions. Approximately, 250 parents were in attendance.

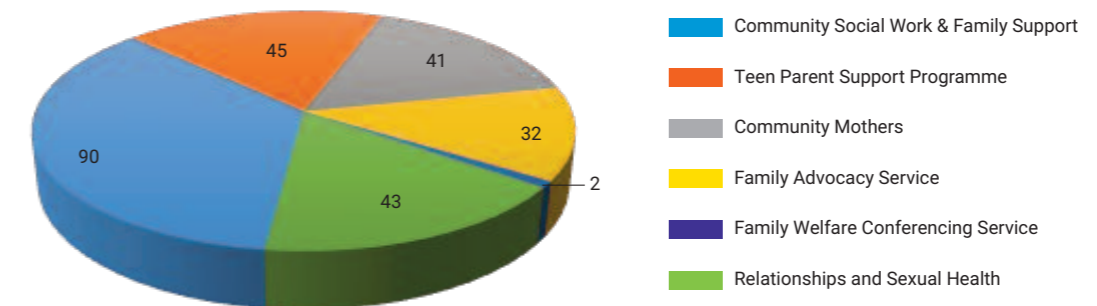
**Fig. 1 Numbers of Referrals & Families Receiving CFS Services in 2021**



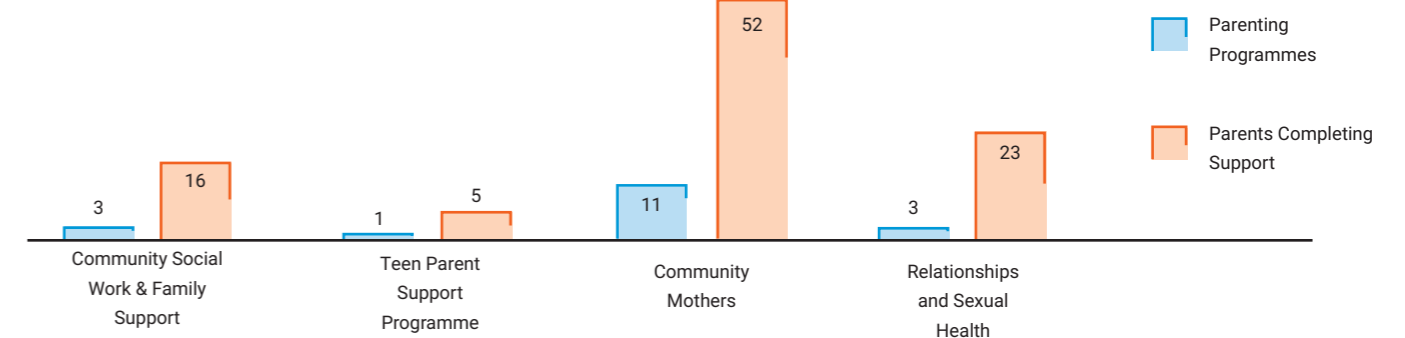
**Fig. 2 Average Number of Client Contacts per Family Receiving CFS Services in 2021**



**Fig. 3 Number of Drop-ins/Signposting Contacts by CFS Services in 2021**

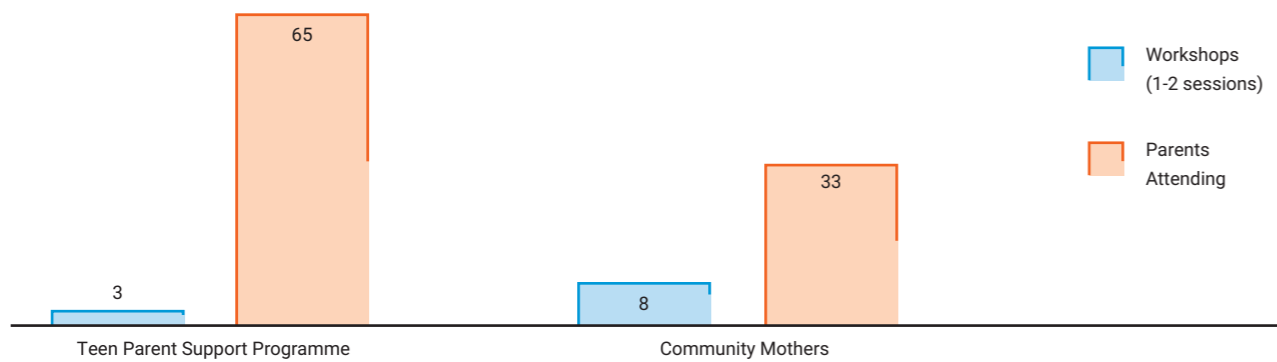


**Fig. 4 Number of Parenting Programmes & Parents Completing CFS Programmes in 2021**

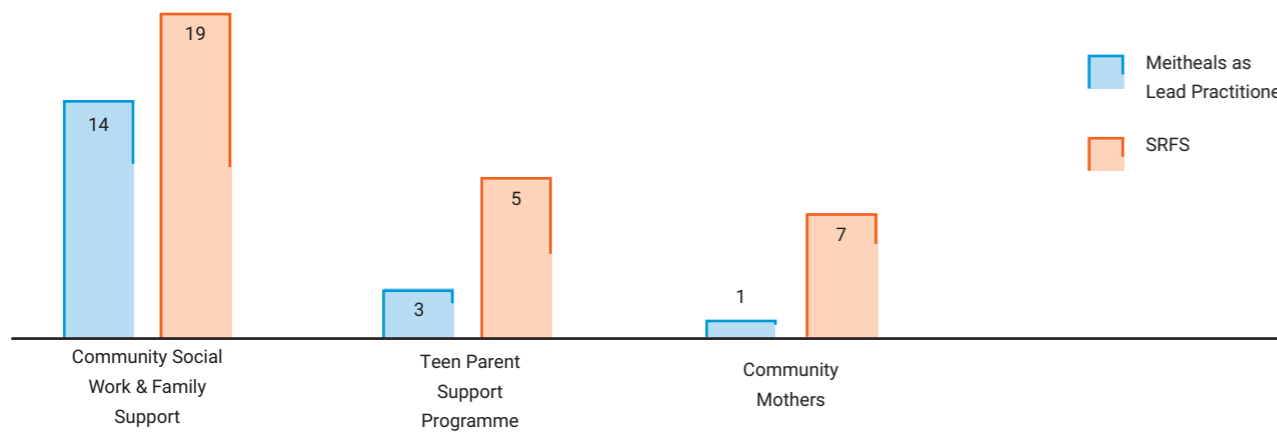




**Fig. 5 Number of CFS Workshops & Parents Attending Workshops in 2021**



**Fig. 6 Number of Meitheals & SRFS within CFS in 2021**



In addition to the above activities, a number of developments were noteworthy in 2021. A summary of activities and developments is as follows:

- CFS Database** The CFS Database became fully operational and provides a valuable resource in managing and generating data and day-to-day case management.
- Safeguarding Statement and Policy** The LSSC Child Safeguarding Statement and Policy has been updated, and the statement has been deemed compliant by Tusla.
- Promoting Service Quality** A Standard Operating Procedures document has been drafted that provides a clear framework for how the CFS operates. It is expected that this document will be rolled out in 2022.
- Standardised Model of Service Delivery** The LSSC Community Mothers Programme is participating in a national initiative to develop a standardised model of community-based home visiting funded through the Sláintecare Integration Fund and a philanthropic donor, with the support of Tusla and the HSE. The developmental stage of the project was concluded in December and the model was presented to stakeholders at a national event.
- The Community Mothers Programme** The Community Mothers Programme delivered seven weaning workshops; seven baby massage programmes; two Gentle Touch Reflexology Programmes; one Healthy Food Made Easy Programme; three parent and toddler groups, and one Circle of Security Programme.
- Parent & Toddler Groups** A virtual parent and toddler group was held in the first half of 2021 and another group met outdoors weekly throughout the pandemic e.g. in the People's Park, etc. The Holiday parent and toddler group was held in December for a Christmas event with approximately 20 parents and 25 children in attendance. A new parent and toddler group was launched in the Child and Family Centre with a holiday party.
- Parenting Programmes & Groups** The Relationships and Sexual Health Project Worker and Community Mother/Family Support Worker delivered a Parents Plus Parenting Adolescents Programme; a Parenting When Separated Programme and a Parenting Support Group. An additional Parenting When Separated Programme was delivered in partnership with Barnardos.

# THE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE

## Teen Parent Support Programme

The TPSP facilitated three paediatric first aid programmes, online and in person, and has 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; support with childcare and education costs.

## The Family Advocacy Service

The Family Advocacy Service has continued to provide support to parents of children in care and has actively supported Tusla's Parental Participation Seed Funding project.

## Staff Training & Professional Development

Staff participated in several training events and courses including the Diploma in Management with IBEC; Supervision Training with Barnardos; an Infant Mental Health Master Class facilitated by Young Ballymun; Parenting Under Pressure with Coolmine; an MSc Systemic Psychotherapy Programme in UCD; Touchpoints training with the Brazelton Centre; Newborn Behavioural Observations training (NBO); Parents Plus Early Years Programme training; and Baby Massage training.

## Interagency Work

Staff supported several inter-agency initiatives including the Child and Family Centre Consortium, ABC Start Right, the Incredible Years Limerick Management Group, the Limerick Homeless Alliance, Parenting Limerick, Tusla's Parenting Support Champion Initiative, Limerick Childcare Committee, the Youth Housing Allocation Group, the Infant Mental Health Network, the IPAS Child and Family Network, and the East Limerick Family Support Network. Staff members participated on Interagency Fora in East Limerick and a staff member was nominated to the Child and Family Network in West Limerick.

The CFS also collaborates regularly with other external agencies including Tusla, the HSE, the Child and Family Centre, Barnardos, Limerick Youth Service, UL, LIT, MIC, ISPCC, CAMHS, Family Resource Centres, PAUL Partnership, West Limerick Resources, Ballyhoura Development, Limerick City and County Council, Peter McVerry Trust, Ana Liffey, Focus Ireland, NOVAS, Bedford Row Project.

Staff are leading on a number of Meitheals and also participate actively in Family Welfare, Child Protection and Children in Care conferences, meetings and reviews as required.

“The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood.

What happens during these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being – from obesity, heart disease and mental health to educational achievement and economic status.”

Michael Marmot



# SOUTHSIDE CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE



The Southside Child and Family Centre (CFC) was designed to provide a safe, secure yet stimulating environment for children ranging from new-born to pre-school age. The aim of the Centre's services 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 Centre has committed to using the Meitheal process to assess strengths and needs, and to develop integrated plans around the children and families attending the CFC.

The CFC is located at the new Southside Education Campus in Galvone, Limerick City and is a state-of-the-art campus providing integrated and accessible service provision for children. It is anticipated that the Centre will play a valuable role in the social and physical regeneration of the area.

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 Gael Scoil Sheoirse Clancy.

## Activities and Developments in 2021

In 2021, the CFC made the transition from building to operational activities. The year is therefore recognised as the first full year in operation and while COVID-19 restrictions impacted on services generally, the Early Years' Service remained opened and catered for children in need of support as well as children of frontline workers. The year saw children from the first Preschool class move to primary school and an incremental increase in the numbers in the Early Years Services. Several other services were also delivered from the Centre by LSSC staff and by partner agencies.

A summary of CFC activities and developments in 2021 are as follows:

**Early Years' Service / Preschool** In January 2021, a small percentage of children were attending the service due to Covid restrictions and the prevalence of the disease in the community. However, staff maintained contact with families and found new ways of communicating and reaching out to children and families at this time.

By year end, 43 families were participating in the service. 13 children were in the targeted 0-3 years' service (an increase of 5 from 2020) and 37 children were in the Preschool (an increase of 18 on 2020). In November, the service opened a Baby room.

33 children availed of the NCS sponsored places. The DCYA / POBAL also funded the service through fees and sponsored places on the recommendation of Tusla, HSE and LCCC.

8 children have been referred to Better Start for AIMS support.

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

In addition to routine activities, numerous fun events were also arranged for children including an end of school year event with a mobile farm, an outdoor Halloween trick or treating experience, a Santa grotto at Christmas.

### LSSC Community Social Work & Family Support Service

Staff from the LSSC Community Social Work and Family Support Service have been available to children and families attending the Centre, with some families engaging in the Meitheal Process. To date, 3 referrals have been made to the Community Mothers Programme and 5 children were referred to the Community Social Work and Family Support service.

### Counselling & Psychotherapy Services

Counselling and Psychotherapy continued to be an integral part of service delivery covering adolescent and adult counselling, and Family Therapy. Approximately 477 sessions were held for adults and adolescents, 68 sessions were offered through Family Therapy.

### PHN Services

The PHN service operated through regular clinic sessions, undertaking child developmental assessments, sight and hearing assessments, and providing health promotion and safety awareness information. During September, 47 clinics were held with an average of 14 children per clinic attending.

### Community Law

The Community Law service offered a monthly community-based service directly at the CFC and through online consultations. It provided expert legal, mediation, and education services to individuals who, because of economic, social or other disadvantage, were unable to access legal or mediation services.

# SOUTHSIDE CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE

- Creative Therapies** Funded through ABC Start Right, Phoenix Creative Therapies provided music, art and play therapy in the CFC. The Early Years Service referred 8 children for creative therapies and children were also referred from the Southill FRC for play therapy.
- Community Midwifery Services** The Community Midwifery Services was available on a weekly basis and catered for approximately 12 appointments per week. The service was available to women from various parts of Limerick.
- Access Visits** A number of access visits were facilitated in the CFC and acknowledged as a positive experience and safe environment for the families involved.
- Traveller Health Programme** The Traveller Health Worker was based in the Centre. In line with government guidance during the lockdowns, the Team had to rearrange how they worked and ceased door-to-door contacts during this period. The service is currently under development.
- Additional Support Programmes, Groups & Workshops** Additional support programmes were offered from the Centre either through on-line consultations and groupwork, or in person depending on COVID-19 restrictions. These included: Baby Incredible Years, Baby Massage, Barnardos TLC Kidz Programme, Parenting when Separated Programme, NVR Programme, School Completion Programme and DEPS Drumming Workshop, Adolescent Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Group, Helium Arts, HSE Health Promotion Programmes, and a Parent & Toddler group. Other supports were offered to families in relation to driver theory preparation, accommodation, school access supports and food parcel distributions.
- Staff Training & Development** Staff participated in several information and training events including a briefing from Tusla staff on the Meitheal Process, First Aid Response training, Manual Handling training, training on the use of Epee Pens, HACCP training, infection control, COVID-19 Safe Working, sessions offered by Limerick Childcare, Healthy Ireland Smart Start Birth to 3 years, Talk Boost, Lámh, baby massage, Incredible Years, GDPR, Mentoring in Early Years, and staff supervision.



# EARLY YEARS' SERVICE, HENRY STREET



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 Síolta 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 are supported by the valuable input of 12 staff from the CE scheme through Paul Partnership.

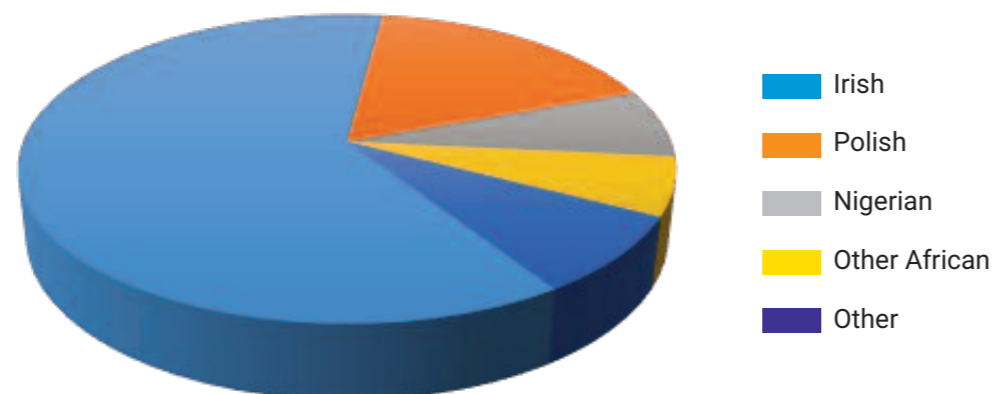
## Activities and Developments in 2021

The EYS generally operated at full capacity during 2021 with a waiting list of people that wish to use the service. Daily routines were maintained and the EYS offered full day care, 8.30am to 5.00pm, five days a week. The Centre also offered the Preschool service from 9.00am to 12.00am.

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, a number of parents worked from home, resulting in a decrease in demand for the Baby-room. In response, the LSSC decided to close the Baby-room and open a second Preschool room. While this was a realistic development at the time, the service may decide to re-open the Baby-room at a later stage.

In 2021, 49 children regularly attended services with 44 children in the two Pre-school Rooms and five children in the Toddler Room. Seven children with additional needs attended services between with two Aims support workers. Children came from a range of nationalities as outlined below.

**Fig. 7 Nationality of Children Attending EYS in 2021**



## Programme of Care

While EYS routines continued in 2021, the daily schedule was adapted to meet COVID-19 related health and safety requirements for children and staff. Constant change and innovation became the norm, with continued flexibility delivered by staff. In this regard, most activities, weather permitting, were organised in the outdoor play area. Additional funding provided for new outdoor equipment such as bikes, seesaws, swings and a new climbing frame assisted the range of outside activities. ABC Start Right also provided for outdoor clothing which allowed the children to play outside for longer periods regardless of the weather.

Indoor activities were also complemented by personal hygiene activities and were guided by resources developed through national initiatives. Of particular enjoyment to the children was learning about personal hygiene through the Safefood 'Rufus' way. The Rufus handwashing programme has been developed with childcare professionals to teach children about good handwashing habits. Guidelines and packs were provided by Safefood and were particularly apt in relation to compliance with COVID-19 safety measures.

Staff also provided a range of activities from the Dina training. Dina (the Dinosaur Social Skills and Problem-Solving Curriculum) is a child training programme that strengthens 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. Dina is provided from the Incredible Years Programme and is also run through Paul Partnership.

At the EYS, staff are committed to supporting the needs of each individual child and recognise that some children who come to the service may have additional needs, emotional issues or require opportunities for individual attention. The EYS arranged Play Therapy to assist children to improve emotional literacy and alleviate behaviour and mental health problems; a Play Therapist was available to provide small group sessions or one-to-one on requests from parents.

Of particular benefit for children within the EYS is the space offered to children 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 return to the wider group.

# EARLY YEARS' SERVICE, HENRY STREET

## **Community Activities**

In addition to daily routines, a number of community activities were arranged for the children either at the Centre or at a local venue. Children expressed considerable enjoyment with the visit from Limerick Gardaí who arrived in a Garda car and motorbike, which the children were allowed to experience close-up.

Children also enjoyed the road safety activities organized by staff on national 'Beep Beep' Day - they learned about road safety and the safe cross code in a fun way, and also received a high vis vest each from the RSA.

## **Staff Training & Professional Development**

The COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding restrictions affected the internal and external training calendars significantly. Nevertheless, the EYS and staff worked together to ensure their training and professional development was maintained, and all staff updated their training and skills at every opportunity. Some of the training is outlined in the following:

Two staff members commenced 3rd Level Degrees and one member reached the final stage of Level 6 training.

- 8 fulltime staff members completed First Aid training.
- 4 staff members completed Lámh training, which is the manual or key word sign system used by children and adults with intellectual disability and communication needs in Ireland. Lámh is grant-aided by the HSE and is endorsed by the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists and Down Syndrome Ireland.
- All staff participated in Child Safeguarding training.



# TRAVELLER HEALTH ADVOCACY PROGRAMME



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 2021, THAP staff consisted of one Co-ordinator, four trained Traveller Health Advocates and two Traveller Health Assistants. 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 2021

Due to the health and safety implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on working face-to-face, much of the work of the Programme was carried out remotely via phone/social media/Zoom. Nevertheless, THAP health messages were delivered in three priority areas:

- Cardiovascular Health
- Diabetes
- Mental Health.



Additional health information was also disseminated on topics including:

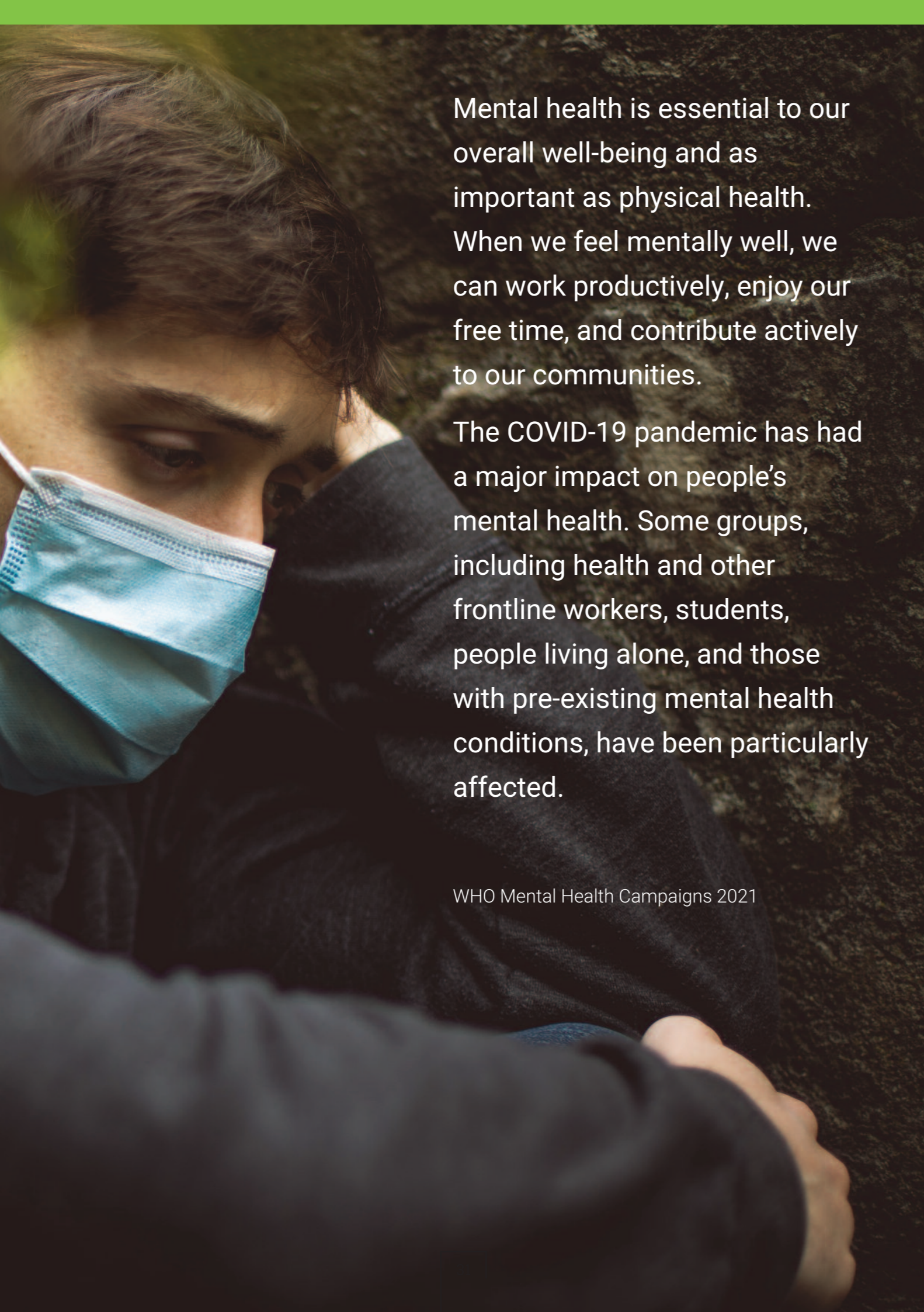
- Up-to-date COVID 19 information
- Vaccine Awareness
- National Cancer Screening Programmes
- Self-care / Stress management
- Crisis Support Information
- Smoking Cessation
- Water Safety
- Alcohol Awareness
- Asthma Awareness

The Team returned to the office in the autumn of 2021 to carry out their duties in line with the current guidelines, as well as focusing on updating their training and certification, and organising future initiatives.

A wide range of initiatives are planned for 2022, as well as the continuation of the interagency work that supports Traveller uptake of services in Limerick.

### Service User Feedback:

**“The Traveller Health worker gave me the information that I needed to get a cervical check, I didn’t know how important it was, or how to book it.”**



Mental health is essential to our overall well-being and as important as physical health. When we feel mentally well, we can work productively, enjoy our free time, and contribute actively to our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on people's mental health. Some groups, including health and other frontline workers, students, people living alone, and those with pre-existing mental health conditions, have been particularly affected.

WHO Mental Health Campaigns 2021

# 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 Child and Family Agency and through the HSE (Network 8 Area).

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.

The range of issues presenting to the Counselling & Psychotherapy Service include: physical problems, anxiety/stress, abuse, self-esteem, anger, depression, relationships, trauma, domestic violence, conflict, unemployment, sexuality, work issues, suicide, self-harm, bereavement, living/welfare, food related issues.

## Activities and Developments in 2021

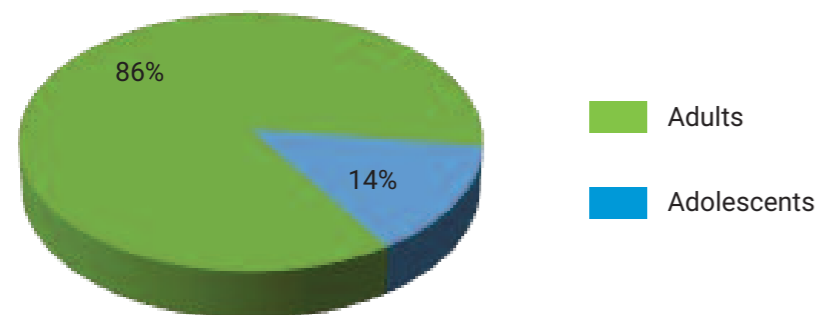
Concerns about the impact of COVID-19 and associated restrictions on mental health continued during 2021 with evidence showing that the combined effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions has significantly increased psychological distress (e.g. anxiety, depression, etc.). Contracting the COVID-19 infection was also reported to have affected mental health both immediately (e.g. depression, anxiety, etc.) and, most likely, in the longer term. People with pre-existing mental illness were also reported to be at significantly increased risk of COVID-19 infection and required particular support to maintain wellness during the pandemic. As demand for support services increased, many services were generally curtailed in terms of offering face-to-face contacts. Nevertheless, staff at the LSSC the Counselling & Psychotherapy Service continued to accept referrals and worked in line with public health advice to respond to individuals in need of services.

A summary of the Service's activities and developments in 2021 are as follows:

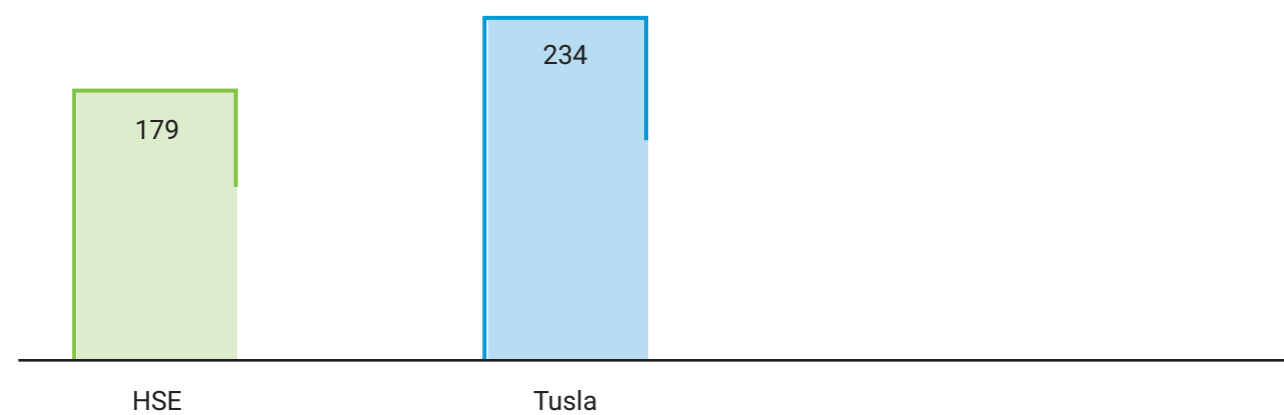
# COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY SERVICE



**Fig. 8 Adults & Adolescents Referrals to LSSC Counselling and Psychotherapy in 2021**



**Fig. 9 Referrals Received by LSSC Counselling and Psychotherapy in 2021**



## Services for Adults & Adolescents

**The Service continued to deliver Counselling and Psychotherapy sessions to adult and adolescent clients referred through Tusla and HSE pathways.** 413 referrals were received of which 179 were received from the HSE and 234 referrals were received from Tusla. Tusla referrals were divided between 177 for adult services and 57 for adolescent services. The Service supported 289 clients, provided 2,734 client contacts and offered 2,912 sessions. In addition, the Service responded to 730 individuals who contacted the Service for information through 'Drop-Ins' or who were signposted to other more relevant services.

## Clinical Supervision

The internal Clinical Supervisor continued to provide regular supervision to staff and support on case management to ensure the clinical governance of the therapeutic work. In this regard, internal supervision 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 also developed.

## Counselling & Psychotherapy

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

## Family Therapy Service

The Family Therapy Service continued for the first 6 months of 2021 and offered support families to improve relationships and communication through exploration of the dynamics of the family group. The work is tailored to meet the needs of the individual and is often complemented by adult and/or adult counselling. In addition, other areas of the service, such as the Child and Family Service and the CFC, often work in partnership with the Service to support the multi-faceted needs of families

## Training & Professional Development

One or more members of the Team participated in the following training and workshops:

- Trauma Informed Practice
- Legal Studies for Psychotherapy
- Suicide Bereavement Conference
- On-line Therapy
- Pandemic therapy with the Mindfulness Clinic
- Children's First, Child Safeguarding and Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Training (updated)
- Introduction to Internal Family Systems Model (webinar with PCPSI)
- Therapy with Tusla/AACPI (on-line)
- Trauma Training in September 2021 with PCPSI(provided by LSSC).

# COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY SERVICE

In addition, two therapists completed their Masters in Adolescent Psychotherapy in 2021; one Therapist/Supervision completed a Master Class in Supervision/ Gestalt Centre; one therapist received a QQI Level 6 train the trainers qualification; Five staff members trained (Certificate) in Suicide Bereavement, provided by the HSE.

## Interagency Work

The Service continued to engage with group service integration, which included CAMHS, AHMS, Youth Service, HSE, Tusla, Pieta House and CYPSC.

The Team also participated in a number of projects including:

- Limerick Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) Child and Youth Mental Health Sub-group
- A multi-agency young person's mental health liaison group, involving LSSSC, Limerick Youth Service, Jigsaw, Pieta House, CAMHS.
- A bereavement group involving LSSC, Milford Hospice, HSE, Children's Grief Project, Pieta House

One therapist facilitated two on-line self-management courses for Migraine Ireland and one therapist gave a full module (12 weeks) of three-hour lectures on Researching Social Change in the Department of Sociology, UL, covering mental health.

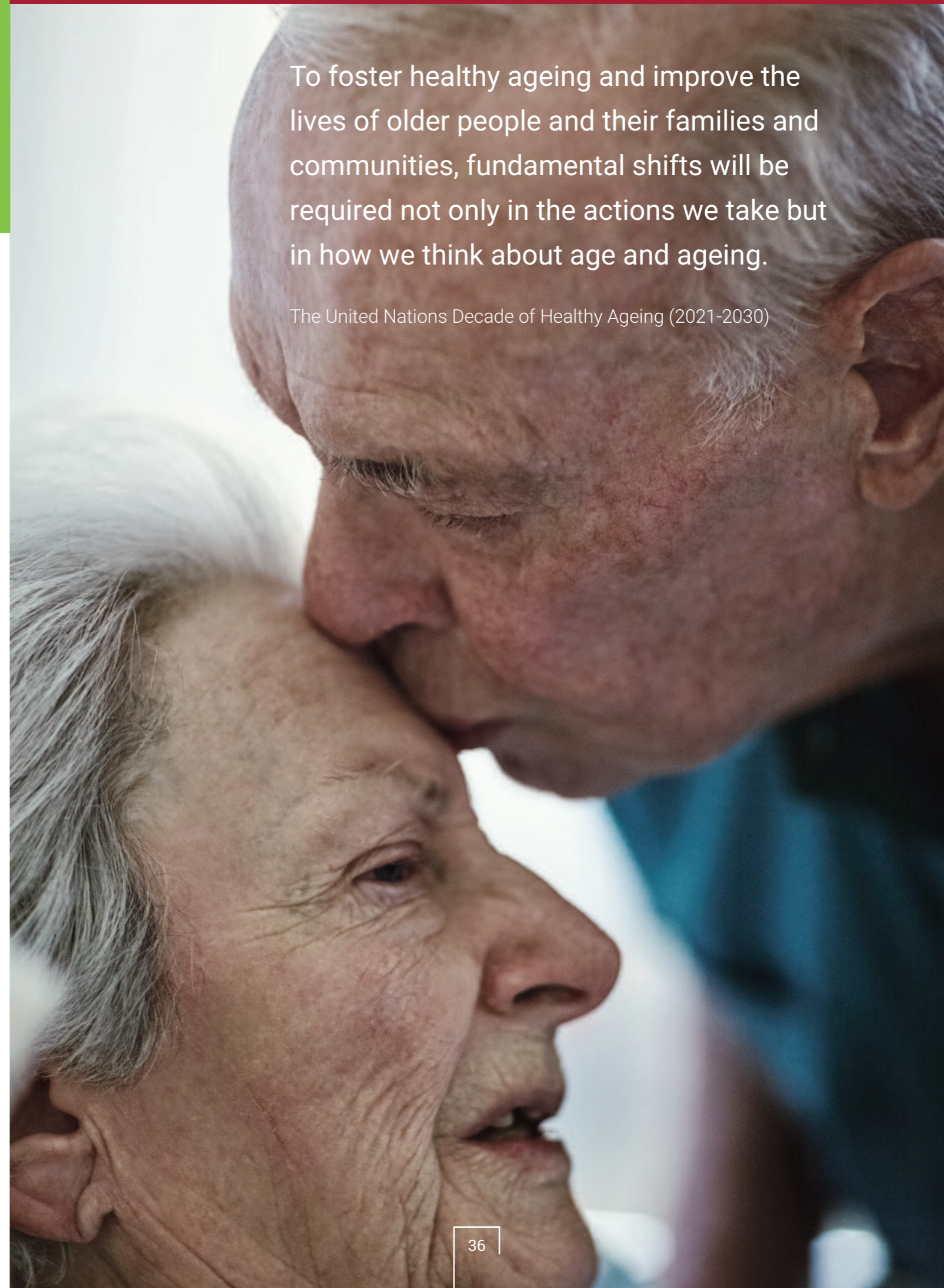
## Service User Feedback:

**"I really got a lot from my counselling sessions, excellent venue and the counsellor was brilliant"  
(Female aged 21 years)."**

**"Excellent counselling service, my family have attended over the years and have experienced valued support"  
(Female aged 59 years).**

To foster healthy ageing and improve the lives of older people and their families and communities, fundamental shifts will be required not only in the actions we take but in how we think about age and ageing.

The United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)



# SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE



While the Services for Older People may be the smallest service area in LSSC, its impact is deemed to be considerable for its size. The Service has two part-time staff, who work primarily in Southill and St. Mary's Park.

One core element of the Service is home visiting, which also includes visits to care homes and hospitals. These visits are valued as important social links for many older people who may be living alone with limited or no family support. Through these visits, staff also help to connect service users to relevant services, agencies and groups that are operating in the area and provide practical information and advice on how to access services and to fill in forms.

The Service also supports a range of social activities including weekly groups for the over 55s, dinner clubs, information events, dances and celebrations and day trips away. In Southill, for example 33 meals are prepared and served to a group of older people each week.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly difficult for older people and the LSSC Team were faced with considerable challenges as older people carried a significant portion of the impact of COVID-19. The various restrictions introduced to manage the impact of the pandemic affected everyone but had a disproportionate effect on the social and economic health and wellbeing of older people. While many people benefited from digital technology to stay connected to family and friends, many older people were excluded and experienced severe social isolation. Moreover, older persons, lacked the skills and confidence to deal with their finances online or access services.

## Activities and Developments in 2021

As in the previous year, while one-to-one visits and group activities were severely curtailed, staff responded with energy and creativity to the evolving support needs of older people in the target communities. The following outlines a summary of key activities and developments in 2021:

**Fig. 10 Number of Visits and Contacts by Older Persons Services in Southill in 2021**



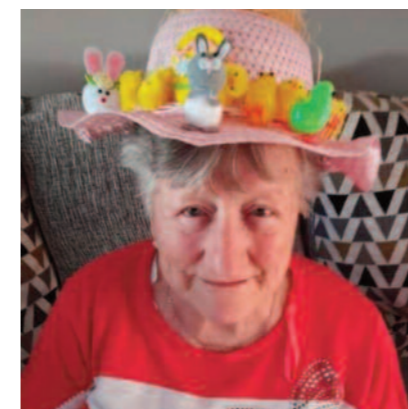
## General Activities

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.

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 lockdowns, staff covered a number of emergency calls to support distressed elderly people and worked with other agencies to ensure elderly members of the communities were not alone and had what they needed.



# SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

## Southill

1,584 dinners were supplied and the Thursday Teas resumed.

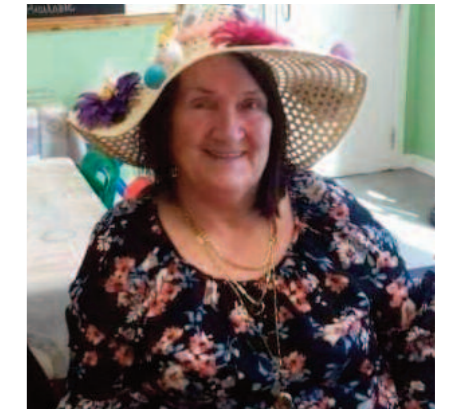
A number of exceptional initiatives were also undertaken in the Southill area including

- Older people in the community were sent a Valentine Card through An Post Community initiative;
- Groups were registered with the 'One Million Star' Project and star packages were dispatched to all households. At Christmas, each older person's star was displayed at the Hunt Museum and showed the community's solidarity towards those who experience domestic violence.
- Shopping vouchers for food were sent to each group member at Easter, during the summer and at Christmas.
- An Easter Bonnet Competition was organised and judged at people's doorsteps.
- A group event for 35 older people with disabilities was arranged at the Greenhills Hotel - dinner with travel, spot prizes and entertainment included.
- A Halloween Fancy Dress Tea Dance was hosted by Southill Dining Club and held at the Area Centre, food, music, spot prizes and prizes for best costumes.

Christmas cards and the purchase of vouchers for those facing financial poverty were organised.

## St. Mary's/ Corbally

Initiatives continued in the St Mary's/Corbally area with 2,688 one-to-one contacts (including groups), and 189 professional contacts made in relation to a range of issues. Many of the contacts may have been the only contacts outside their homes that older people had due to their adherence to public health guidelines, illness or the absence of family members and friends from their normal social network. In 2021, 10 referrals were received, and 56 referrals were made to other relevant agencies.



# 2021

# ANOTHER YEAR OF CHALLENGE...

2021 was undoubtedly a year like no other for LSSC services and the pandemic had a severe impact on every aspect of life across society. Like agencies across the country, management and staff watched the pandemic continue, its impact affecting vulnerable and marginalised groups in Limerick.

In 2021 as in the previous year, LSSC teams had to rethink how they delivered services in order to support the most vulnerable at a time of great upheaval. While it was possible for staff to provide some programmes through face-to-face support in line with Government guidance, many of the LSSC services had to operate, as in 2020, via phone, messaging apps, and video calls.

## Key Challenges in 2021

COVID-19 created or exacerbated challenges for families in the following areas:

- Housing issues (both temporary accommodation and inadequate accommodation; not a new need but certainly exacerbated by closure of schools and some early years facilities);
- Access to childcare generally, but particularly for TPSP clients who were trying to continue their education;
- Digital inequality—both in terms of access to devices (including printers, etc.) and the capacity of some parents to fully utilise these devices to support their children in school and to engage with professional and other supports;
- Increased isolation, loneliness and parental stress/ lack of access to usual support systems and worry for vulnerable family members;
- Increased domestic tensions due to lack of external activities such as school, work outside the home, activities, therapeutic and group supports, etc. In a small number of cases, increased risk of domestic violence;
- Stress for parents as they tried to support their children to complete their schoolwork and balance the needs of a range of children at the same time;
- Working with families who were vulnerable financially and struggling to adequately provide for the basic needs of their children—food, warmth, clothing, etc.

COVID-19 presented significant challenges for staff for a number of reasons:

- Limited methods of engaging with clients and building and nurturing positive, trusting relationships, which is the basis of LSSC work. (Staff showed significant creativity and innovation in responding to these challenges and managed to maintain and foster relationships via phone, video and text contact and occasional home visits);
- Staff had concerns for a number of children as they were unable to visit homes and therefore found it difficult to accurately assess how families were coping and how best to support them;
- The suspension of in-person groups for parents and children as they lost out on social interactions and opportunities to develop positive social connections. (This was partially ameliorated by Zoom groups, but staff felt it did not fully address the need.)

The profile of referrals received were challenging due to the specific issues or complexity of cases that extend beyond the capacity of the service to respond:

- Cases received related to domestic violence, poor parental relationships (sometimes with parents continuing to live in the same house due to lack of affordable housing), mental health of parents that had negative impacts on children;
- Referrals regarding school refusal and anxiety in children and young people;
- Within TPSP, 3 referrals were received of young parents aged 14;

Challenges arose in relation to staff retention, recruitment and retention, and by extended staff sick leave. This meant that there were increasing waiting lists and a loss of agility in responding quickly to urgent referrals.



# ANOTHER YEAR OF CHALLENGE...

For Advocacy clients, there were significant challenges in terms of the arrangement of access visits for children and the emotional distress that this caused to both parents and children.

COVID-19 presented significant challenges for the Counselling and Psychotherapy in terms of

- Engaging with clients, particularly clients with complex and high-level needs - while staff made the transition to Zoom/phone support in many cases, this was not possible for all clients. In addition, initial assessments of new clients proved challenging during the shutdown period;
- Managing clients who struggle to attend sessions regularly due to their own personal circumstances.

**Engaging with older clients due to COVID-19 restrictions:** The COVID-19 pandemic has been incredibly difficult for everyone and one of the hardest elements has been its impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing, particularly for older persons. Social distancing introduced in response to COVID-19 increased feelings of loneliness and isolation among many older people. A number of issues compounded their situation including fear of illness, reduced mobility, and underlying health issues. The 'digital divide' was also a significant factor, preventing many older people from making social contacts, gaining quality information or from using practical services, such as online shopping. After the lockdown, while the Team continued to offer support as before, the method of delivery was re-configured i.e. house calls resumed but were managed from the doorsteps. A major challenge for the Team related to ensuring the safety of service users through socially distanced contacts while also adequately addressing issues of social isolation and the impact of COVID-19 on their lives.



# PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Interagency work became increasingly important throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and peer support, collaborative working, and the sharing of information become an essential part of supporting clients by the Community and Voluntary sector.

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 2021 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 2021 including the Child and Family Centre Consortium, 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 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 2021, and look forward to leaving COVID-19 behind, 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 and Family Agency	LSSC's Funders/Partner Agencies	Limerick Youth Service
Health Service Executive	Adapt Services	Mary Immaculate College
Pobal	Age and Opportunity (Dublin)	Mid-West Simon Community
Limerick City and County Council	Barnardos	Novas
Limerick and Clare Education & Training Board	Diocese of Limerick	Family Resource Centres
PAUL Partnership:	Focus Ireland	University of Limerick
• ABC Start Right	Irish Foster Carers' Association	University Hospital Limerick
• Incredible Years	Limerick Institute of Technology	University Maternity Hospital, Limerick
Limerick Childcare Committee	Community Law and Mediation	Treoir
Dept of Children and Youth Affairs	Doras Luimní	
Dept of Education & Skills	Limerick College of Further Education	
Dept of Social Protection	Limerick Enterprise Development Park (LEDP)	



