



Limerick
Social Service
Council CLG

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Annual Report 2020



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Message from the Chair

We take it for granted in our sector that services need to be flexible and adaptable in the face of change. Never was there a year where this was more tested than in 2020. We started the year full of the same plans and hopes as every other year; we spoke about needing to address the same challenges and vented about the same frustrations. Then, slowly, news of a virus on the other side of the world began to percolate in to our collective conscience. Most of us dismissed this initially as concerning news but very distant from ourselves. Until, suddenly, it wasn't. We were told to retreat to our homes and stay there. Our children were sent home from early year's services and schools. We were told not to visit each other, and those living alone found themselves almost completely isolated. There was no template on where to go from there; none of us had dealt with this before; there was no precedent to follow. We all had to learn and to listen; we had to find a way to continue even when we didn't know what lay ahead. We had to put our adaptability to the test.

While COVID provided us with many challenges, it also provided us with important lessons. We learned that, in an era of increased compliance and accountability, the connections with our service users and with each other are what matters most. As an organisation, both staff and Board, we have worked very hard this year to ensure the strong future of LSSC by trying to get this balance right: to ensure that all of our reporting requirements and compliance measures are exceeded while keeping the focus on the human element of our work. I would like to thank all of the staff and my fellow Board members for working so diligently and with such dedication and compassion. It has been a challenging year for all of us, both on professional and personal levels, and I truly appreciate the commitment that all in LSSC have shown.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge our service users. The services that they were so used to changed abruptly; home visits and warm chats at groups were replaced by invitations to Zoom, phone calls and sometimes socially distanced meetings. It changed fundamentally the service that we could offer, and I would like to thank all of our service users for continuing to engage with us during such a difficult period. We are eagerly awaiting the day that we can welcome you all back to our centres.



Mise le meas,
Martin Golden,
Chairman of the Board

Message from the General Manager


In LSSC, as in many other organisations, we worked hard to respond to the challenges presented to us in 2020 as quickly as possible. We didn't always get it right immediately, but we were committed from the start to trying to support our service users as best as we could within the new constraints. I would like to thank the administrative team, who supported all staff members to start Zooming in the first week of home working and to navigate effectively across this and other new platforms. The administrative team also made sure that payroll and other essential systems continued to be delivered efficiently. This was no small task, but it made an essential difference and allowed our front-line services to continue.

I would like to thank the staff of our Counselling and Psychotherapy Services, our Child and Family Service, Services for Older People and Traveller Health Programme, who, through a combination of phone calls, Zoom sessions and socially distanced door step drop-offs, maintained contact with service users. Meals were still cooked for and delivered to older people; parents and children were provided with both family support and practical support such as food parcels and activity packs. Many of our groups went on-line quickly, and this was an important way to connect with parents during such isolating times. When the restrictions allowed, we moved some of the groups to local parks. The counselling service continued to provide an essential service that became even more needed during a time of such uncertainty and anxiety.

I would also like to thank the staff in the Child and Family Centre, who managed to maintain the momentum in the development of a new service despite the additional challenges that COVID presented. The CFC Team showed great creativity in supporting families both within the CFC and through outreach visits to homes. I look forward to seeing how this service grows and develops under more ordinary circumstances.

I would like to thank the staff in both of our Early Years Services, in Henry Street and in the Child and Family Centre for their commitment and care to the children throughout this difficult year. The Early Years Team were on the frontline, with no option to work from home, and there were one of the first sectors to return to work when most of the country was still in lockdown. I was truly impressed with how quickly and effectively they responded and adapted to very new working environments.

We look forward to returning to some sense of normality as soon as possible.



Mise le meas,
Brian Ryan,
LSSC General Manager

About Us

Our Mission Statement

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

Our Values

Limerick Social Service Council 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.

Who We Are

The LSSC employs over 65 staff. The team is divided between management, programme staff, administration and maintenance staff. The team is led by the LSSC General Manager, Brian Ryan, and overseen by the LSSC Board of Directors. The LSSC's Board of Directors provide strategic leadership for LSSC affairs in accordance with the organisation's mission, vision and values and ensures accountability to the public. The Board is comprised of up to 10 members who serve voluntarily.

What We Do

The LIMERICK SOCIAL SERVICE COUNCIL (LSSC) is a leading voluntary service, working in communities in Limerick for five decades. The LSSC delivers its services at the LSSC Centre in Henry Street, Limerick, our new premises, the Child and Family Centre in Galvone and through outreach in a range of locations throughout Limerick City and County. The six main services areas are the Child and Family Service; the Early Years' Service; Henry Street; the Counselling and Psychotherapy Service; The Service for Older People; the Southside Child and Family Centre and the Traveller Health Programme.

COVID 19 presented significant challenges in engaging with clients and in building and nurturing positive, trusting relationships, which is the basis of all of the work that we do. Staff showed significant creativity and innovation in responding to these challenges and managed to maintain and nurture relationships via phone, video and text contact and occasional one to one outside home visits, but this was far more challenging. Staff expressed concern that they were no longer able to be a significant protective factor in the lives of the children and older people they work with as they were not in a position to visit the home environment; they found it challenging to ascertain how families were coping and how best to support them.

Similarly, the suspension of in person groups was challenging as parents, children and older people benefit greatly not only from the programme content but from the social interaction and the opportunity to develop social connections. This was partially ameliorated by the Zoom groups, but it did not fully address the need.

Our Early Years Services were the first to return to full-service delivery. This was challenging for both staff, children and their families, but great efforts were made to ensure that the pod system was managed safely and effectively and that the needs of the children remained at the centre of all service delivery.

COVID 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 are trying to continue their education
- Digital inequality-both in terms of access to devices 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. Access to printers
- Increased isolation, loneliness and parental stress. Lack of access to usual support systems and worry for vulnerable family members
- The Services for Older people found that older people were particularly isolated and vulnerable and that some were not able to access key services during this time. Older people often suffered from digital inequality and were not able to use technology to connect to the outside world as easily as other groups
- 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 try to support their children to complete their school work and balance the needs of a range of children. Also, the stress of trying to explain some concepts that may be unfamiliar to or difficult for the parents
- General increase in anxiety for many people across service areas
- Some very financially vulnerable families struggled to adequately provide for the basic needs of their children - food, warmth, clothing, etc.

A year like no other...

First the quantity... the year in numbers

Child and Family Service

Programme	Total Number of Referrals	Total Number of Families Receiving a Service	Total Number of Client Contacts
Community Social Work and Family Support	74	89	1238
Teen Parent Support Programme	38	37	223
Community Mothers	61	67	418
Relationships and Sexual Health Programme	72	75	330
Family Advocacy Service	27	55	281
Family Welfare Conferencing Service	6	6	110



Total Number of **Parenting Programmes Delivered** (these are multi-session parenting programmes that are usually based on an evidence-based manualized programme):

22

Total Number of **Parents Completing the Programmes:**

98

Total Number of **Parenting Groups Delivered** (these are less formal groups such as parent and toddler groups and parent support groups):

groups with multiple sessions each

11

Total Number of **Workshops Delivered** (1-2 session workshops such as baby first aid, weaning, etc.):

11

Counselling and Psychotherapy Service:

Total Number of Referrals:	220
Total Number of Referrals of Young People:	29
Total Number of Sessions Delivered:	3518

Older Person's Service:

Client Visits (in homes, nursing homes or hospitals) and Phone Contacts:	1,009
Social Events Planned, Coordinated and Supported:	4
Numbers is Attendance at Events:	216
Number of Meals Prepared and Served (in house until March 2013 and takeaway thereafter):	1,006
Number of Teas Prepared and Serviced:	60
Number of Over 55 groups Supported:	2

Southside Child and Family Centre:

Early Years Service

Number of Children in the Toddler Room:	8
Number of Children in the Pre-school:	20

Wrap Around Services

Number of Services Operating from the CFC:	9
Number of Parenting Programmes Delivered from the CFC:	6
Number of Mental Health Programmes:	2
Number of Programme for Young People:	1
Number of Training Programmes Delivered for Staff:	7

Early Years' Service, Henry Street:

Number of Children in the Toddler Room: **22**

Number of Children in the Pre-school: **22**

Traveller Health Programme

Individuals contacted: **350**

Number of individual contacts: **1196**

Number of Families Provided with Health Information: **150**

Number of Health Advocates: **4**

Number of Health Advocate Assistants: **2**

Number of Coordinators: **1**

Now the quality...

the story behind the numbers



Child and Family Service

About the Service:

The Child and Family Service works in partnership with families to support them to improve relationships and communication with the goal of meeting agreed outcomes for children and their families. The service supports parents with practical skills and strategies so that they can enjoy healthy and happy relationships with their children. Building positive relationships, both within families and between ourselves and families, is at the core of our work.

The CFS provides one to one and group supports to parents and carers, children, young people and extended family members. The Service consists of individual programmes, which are outlined below, but the CFS team work together and with other LSSC service areas to provide integrated supports to families. The CFS Team frequently refer clients, both parents and young people, to the Counselling and Psychotherapy Service and collaborate with the Early Years Team to support a number of children and their parents. During the first part of 2020, CFS staff began delivering some programmes in the Child and Family Centre, Galvone.

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

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 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 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 aims to increase parental capacity to communicate with their teenage children in the area of relationships and sexual health through the provision of one to one and group supports. 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.

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 in to 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 monthly support group for parents of children in care.

The Family Welfare Conferencing Service is a specialized service that supports family members to participate in the Family Welfare Conference process and plans for their children. It brings together as many family members as possible, along with the child where appropriate, to develop a family support plan in the best interests of the child. The Family Welfare Conference Coordinator meets each member of the family separately in advance of the FWC to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to express their views. This type of meeting assists the family in making a plan to help a child/young person within a family network to ensure that they are looked after and safe.



Noteworthy Achievements:

- The Community Mothers Service was in the midst of two baby massage workshops, one Circle of Security Programme (with ABC SR) and the usual parent and toddler groups when groups had to be suspended. By April, two virtual parent and toddler groups were established and two baby massage workshops were delivered. In addition, Community Mothers were able to deliver one to one weaning workshops to their clients from their own kitchens via video
- Community Mothers delivered the following programmes over the course of 2020: seven weaning workshops; one healthy eating workshop; 9 Baby Massage Workshops; one Baby Reflexology Programme and one Parents Plus Early Years Programme
- A Parenting When Separated Programme, delivered in partnership between LSSC and Barnardos, was delivered before the shutdown of services with 7 parents completing the programme
- Two Parents Plus Parenting Adolescents Programme were held via Zoom
- One Relationship and Sexual Health Programme with Self Care Programme for Parents of Teenagers was delivered outdoors and one group was delivered via Zoom. A Parents Support Group for Limerick City Parents met through Zoom every Friday as part of this programme
- The International Women Sexuality and Spirit Group Programme continued to meet whenever possible during 2020, with the group held outdoors whenever restrictions allowed
- The LSSC Child Safeguarding Statement and Policy has been updated, and the statement has been deemed compliant by the Tusla Compliance Unit. This was led by the Community Social Workers, who service as the Designated Liaison Person(s) for LSSC
- The Community Social Work and Family Support Service continued to provide intensive parenting and family support as well as practical support to families across Limerick City and County
- A virtual City Slickers programme was run in October. The TPSP Project Worker developed an innovative programme to engage parents on-line and this was well-received. Parents particularly appreciated the opportunity to spend time engaging with other parents with similar experience



- The TPSP programme 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 TPSP Programme sent art and activity packs via post to 38 families with 64 children benefiting from this
- The Family Welfare Conference Coordinator, who is a qualified Guidance Counsellor, also provided guidance counselling sessions to a number of TPSP clients on a virtual basis with 53 sessions delivered to 15 clients over the reporting period
- The Family Advocacy Service has continued to provide a much-needed service to parents of children in care. In addition, the Family Advocacy Worker has actively supported Tusla's Parental Participation Seed Funding project
- In the run up to Christmas, vouchers were distributed to 22 families over the Christmas period, and we continue to respond to this type of need as best we can as it presents (e.g. dropping off food parcels; providing support to purchase essential household items or warm clothing etc.)
- The CFS worked partnership with Tusla and ABC Start Right to deliver additional art and activity packs and food parcels to our service users. This was an important way to support families and connect with them; dropping off packs and food parcels was a good way to visit families and have at least some face-to-face contact with them
- The CFS Database became fully operational during this year and is proving to be a great resource in terms of managing and generating data and day to day case management. We are continuing to work with the database developer to refine and develop it, but we have excellent feedback from staff who find it of great benefit in managing their work. This has been a significant piece of developmental work over the past year
- 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. The project is supported by the Katharine Howard Foundation. The project will work together with the support of Tusla and the HSE to develop a standardised model of delivery for the Community Mothers Programme.

Challenges:

- It can be very challenging to access the appropriate supports for families before they meet a certain threshold of crisis, even though it is clear that they will reach this crisis point if supports are not put in place
- It can be challenging to identify progress in terms and measurable outcomes as the change is often in small, incremental personal progressions that individuals make, but this can have a significant impact over time
- For young parents, the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) along with stricter eligibility criteria for young parents to be approved as having a Housing Need by Local Authorities has led to many young parent families not being able to get on their Local Authority Housing List and therefore not be eligible to qualify for HAP. For many young parents this is the cause of much anxiety and stress, particularly those who are involuntary sharing the family home and have two family units living in the one dwelling
- For Advocacy clients, there were significant challenges in terms of access visits with children and the emotional distress that this caused to both parents and children.

Counselling and Psychotherapy Service



Counselling and Psychotherapy Service

About the Service:

LSSC's Counselling and Psychotherapy Service provides services to adolescents and adults across Limerick City and County. Services are delivered in the LSSC premises in Henry Street, the Southside Child and Family Centre and in outreach locations in the county. The service supports adults and young people who may be struggling with personal, emotional or mental health difficulties, and 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 to explore their life situations in a confidential, safe, compassionate and non-judgmental environment.

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 they meet LSSC and professional standards. LSSC ensures 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.

Service Updates and Developments:

- One of the most significant developments for the Counselling and Psychotherapy service in 2020 was the introduction of the Family Therapy Service. The need for this service was in response to a need identified across all service areas in LSSC.
- The Service continues to deliver counselling and psychotherapy sessions to adult and adolescent clients referred by Tusla staff and Tusla funded services and to adult clients referred through HSE referral pathways
- The internal Clinical Supervisor continues to provide high quality supervision to staff members, which ensures that all counsellors have access to regular supervision
- The service has developed a Peer Supervision Model which has further supported individual counsellors and ensured quality across the service.

Training and Professional Development (one or more members of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Team participated in the following training):

- Trauma Informed Practice
- Legal Studies for Psychotherapy
- Suicide Bereavement Conference
- Workshop on On-line Therapy
- One therapist qualified with a Level 9 Master's in Adolescent Psychotherapy Dublin Counselling and Therapy Centre (affiliated with Northampton University)
- One therapist is at Dissertation Level of a Master's in Adolescent Psychotherapy with Northampton University
- On-line training in pandemic therapy with the Mindfulness Clinic

- One Therapist/Supervisor completed a Master Class in Supervision/Gestalt Centre
- Children's First and Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Training updated
- One therapist received a QQI Level 6 train the trainers qualification
- Attended webinar with PCPSI: Introduction to Internal Family Systems Model
- Therapists completed on-line therapy course with Tusla/AACPI.

Interagency Work

- Participation in Limerick Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) Child and Youth Mental Health Sub-group
- Participation in a multi service young person's mental health liaison group, involving LSSSC, Limerick Youth Service, Jigsaw, Pieta House, CAMHS
- Participation in a multi service 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
- 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.

Challenges

- COVID 19 presented significant challenges in terms of engaging with clients. Staff members made the transition to Zoom/phone support in many cases, but this was not possible for all clients. In addition, initial assessments of new clients proved challenging during the shutdown period
- Working with clients with complex and high level needs
- Managing clients who struggle to attend regularly and engage consistently with counselling/psychotherapy due to challenging personal circumstances.





Southside Child and Family Centre

About the Service:

January 2020 saw the start to the first full year of operations in the CFC, following the initial opening in September 2019. With the onset of the pandemic, the CFC had to diversify and adjust its plans for opening. Core services were delivered where possible; the centre also provided support to the HSE in responding to the public health crisis.

Children and families were warmly welcomed to the early years service in August. Staff worked in partnership with families to ensure that the centre remained a healthy, happy and safe environment for all.

The development of the Child and Family Centre has been overseen by The Board of Directors of Limerick Social Service Council. The development of the CFC has been guided and supported by a multi-agency consortium and was also guided by the involvement of an Operational Working Group and monthly meetings of the Consortium. The CFC has also benefitted from the active involvement of a number of agencies and partners to support and direct the expected delivery of services.

The following agencies and partners are represented on the Consortium

Independent Chair | Limerick Social Service Council | Diocese of Limerick
Tusla | Health Service Executive | Limerick City and County Council | Department of Education
Limerick Childcare Committee | Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership
Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board | Board of Le Chéile National School
Board of Gael Scoil Sheoirse Glancy



Community Wrap-Around

Noteworthy Achievements:

- While full implementation of the Community Wrap-around model envisaged for the centre was delayed due to COVID, significant planning was undertaken and a number of services were run from the CFC during early 2020
- A learning visit to Pen Green in the UK, a model of high quality and integrated early years provision, took place in February. Their holistic approach, with an emphasis on quality and child and family-centred care along with a commitment to documentation, research and learning was inspiring and informed the original service model for the CFC
- Early Learning and Play workshops were held in January and February to introduce the centre and the service to parents and children and to start the essential communication and consultation loop with parents and children. These were delivered through a partnership of the Child and Family Centre, Community Mothers, ABC Start Right and the HSE Nurture Programme
- The LSSC Counselling and Psychotherapy Support began delivering sessions in the CFC. This included an adult counsellor, an adolescent counsellor and a Family Therapist. This provided a great resource both for families accessing the early year's services in the CFC and the wider community
- The CFC was used to facilitate testing for COVID 19 in the initial weeks of the pandemic and then provided a facility to store the stock for testing. The HSE then used the building to vaccinate national school children who had missed out on their vaccinations due to lock down. Following this, the public health nurses ran clinics to assess children's hearing and sight, again to catch up on those who missed it due to lockdown
- The Community Law and Mediation Service began delivering clinics at the end of January. These had to be moved on-line due to COVID but were a great resource to support families across the community
- Phoenix Creative Arts Psychotherapy Centre provided music, art and play therapy on a regular basis. This provision was funded by ABC Start Right
- The Community Midwifery Service began operation from the CFC and now runs weekly clinics that provide community based ante-natal support
- The LSSC Child and Family Service started a number of programmes in the centre, including Baby Incredible Years, Baby Massage and Parenting When Separated. The Child and Family Service Team work closely with the CFC to provide one to one support across the various programmes; to lead on Meitheal where appropriate and to deliver group programmes
- Partner agencies, such as Barnardos, also used the space in the CFC to deliver the TLC Kids Programme, which provides support to mothers and children who have experienced domestic violence. The LCETB ran a self-confidence programme for adults; HSE Mid-West Aries ran resilience workshops, and the Southill School Completion Programme completed a four week summer programme for children
- The CFC was also able to facilitate some access visits so families with children in care could spend quality time together.

Early Years' Service / Preschool

Noteworthy Achievements:

- A significant amount of planning work was undertaken in developing the service: It was agreed to start incrementally and a Service Model starting with 22 children in Age 3-5 Preschool and 8 children in Age 0-3 Targeted Early Years' Service was agreed with all stakeholders
- The quality of the provision depended heavily on getting the right team on board. An Early Years Manager took up post in early July and six early years' practitioners and a cook took up post in August. With the team in place, the service model started to come together and children and families were soon warmly welcomed in to the centre
- Two introductory days for parents and children were held before the children officially began. This gave both the parents and children a chance to meet the staff and see the building in a relaxed way
- Family Guides were created and given to all parents. These were used to provide information on the service to parents and children and to map the child's journey. They also gave the early year's team an understanding of the individual child and their story. These guides were intended to set out the ethos of the CFC from the start: child and family centred, open and welcoming and committed to quality provision
- Consultations with parents became a regular feature of the service and parents and children were consulted around issues such as a proposed sensory room and daily menus
- Through generous grants from ABC Start Right and Tusla, the CFC was able to furnish the early years rooms and begin planning for the outdoor space
- While COVID limited some of the planned activity in the centre, the Early Years Team showed great commitment and creativity in engaging with parents and children:
 - Staff did a great deal of outreach work to support families including food and activity pack drop offs. They organised buggy walks to stay engaged with the children even when they were not able to attend the centre, and they checked in with families on a regular basis.
 - Halloween was celebrated in (COVID compliant) style with the children trick or treating around the external doors of the building
 - The team created a Santa Grotto at Christmas time. Packs were also sent home over the Christmas break with lots of ideas and some hands on tools on spending time together and having fun as a family. The packs included baking sets and ingredients, playdough and books to help get them started.





Early Years' Service, Henry Street

The LSSC Early Years' Service offers a full day Early Years' Service and a Pre-school Service five days a week. The Service is committed to providing the highest quality childcare for young children. The Early Years' Service has a highly qualified staff who are committed to ongoing professional development so that they can provide the highest standard of care and early education. All staff members are trained in Early Childhood Care and Education to provide a happy, positive, caring learning and care environment that is led by the interests and needs of the children and focuses on play.

The Early Years' Service is almost always operating at full capacity with a waiting list of families wishing to use the service.

Two staff members completed their Level 6 Training in Early Years Care and Education during the period.

COVID presented a number of challenges to the normal running of the service. In normal times, the service works in close partnership with parents and is committed to supporting positive transitions from the home to the service, between each of the different rooms and from the pre-school to primary school. Staff members recognise that parents are the first and most important educators of their children and work to support the home/early years' service connections. While this was difficult to maintain during COVID, staff worked to build on the partnership between parents and the service in creative ways.

During COVID, the staff also used the outdoors space in creative ways that allowed everyone to stay safe. It also opened up lots of new learning and play opportunities and, most importantly, it was lots of fun for both children and staff.



Traveller Health Programme



Limerick City Traveller Health Programme has been operating since 2013 in collaboration with the HSE Mid-West Traveller Health Unit. It 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 the programme is to improve the health status of Travellers in Limerick City

In 2020, staff consisted of one co-ordinator, four part-time trained Traveller Health Advocates and two part-time Traveller Health Assistants. The team provides health information to more than 150 Traveller families in the area and signposts services available. Normally the work is done by going door-to-door to families who primarily live on halting sites, using a peer education and community development approach.

2020 posed many challenges for Traveller families in the area due to Covid-19. Original plans for the year were stopped in their tracks, including some crucial health initiatives such as:

- Healthy Heart Awareness days for Traveller Men and Women
- Diabetes Awareness Mornings planned for the North and Southside of the city
- Health Programmes for cancer screenings

In line with government guidance in March, the team had to change how they worked for a number of months, and could no longer call door-to-door. In the final quarter of the year, each Traveller Health Advocate received a smartphone to make contact with Traveller adults across the city. The Traveller Health team worked hard to ensure they could contact as many Travellers as possible. Through this contact, different issues, such as isolation and the impact of this on mental health and well-being, were highlighted.

One key element to the team's work included providing accurate health information on the social media page, particularly information around Covid-19 and Mental Health. The programme was also able to provide a limited amount of PPE packs to some Traveller families across the city. Each pack included masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, antibacterial spray and wipes. Where possible, the team supported interagency projects that are ongoing into 2021 such as a Traveller Youth Mental Health Project, and are working with local and national support organisations to respond to the needs of Travellers arising from the Covid-19 crisis.



Services for Older People

LSSC's Services for Older People is the smallest service area in LSSC, but it certainly punches above its weight. The services has two part-time workers, who work primarily in Southill, St. Mary's Park and Corbally. One core part of their work is home visiting, which also includes visits to care homes and hospitals. These visits are important social links for people who may be living alone without a huge amount of family support. The workers also help to connect people to relevant services, agencies and groups that are operating in the area. The workers provide practical information on advice on how to access services and fill in forms.

In addition to the home visits, the workers also support 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.

The start of 2020 began as normal with a number of events operating as usual:

- In January, 152 older people attended the Joe Dolan Tribute night in the Pery Hotel with dinner, dancing and raffles. There was fantastic feedback from the night
- The group also attended an informative talk on housing and the law in the Child and Family Centre, given by the Community Law and Mediation Service. Some people were able to avail of ongoing support and advice on their housing situation
- The Older Person's Support Worker in Southill supported older people in the community to attend a number of events including the following: the City-wide Valentine's Tea Dance, again held at the Pery Hotel and hosted by Family Carers Ireland; an information morning on getting involved in the community organised by the Limerick City Community Development Project and a celebration event for International Women's Day
- Dinner service continued in Southill until March 13th; after that, a takeaway service was in place until December 16th
- Support for the two over 55 groups operating in St. Mary's
- Day to day support such as shopping, collecting medication from pharmacies, trips to the post office, organising laundry, personal alarms, electricians, plumbers, appointments, grass cutting, keys cut, shoemaker and attended socially distanced funerals.



After the lockdown, the support remained strong and steady but the delivery looked quite different. In both areas, house calls continued but these were done from the doorstep. Both workers continued to provide practical support as noted above. In addition, a number of new initiatives began:

Southill

- Project knit, which involved some of the women in the group knit little cardigans/hats to be donated to the neonatal Limerick Maternity Hospital
- Project Phone a Friend, in which phone numbers were exchanged and new friendships born
- Project Penpal, which engaged older people and the youth group in the Southill Hub. The two groups wrote letters to one another about their lives, their experiences of life in general and COVID
- Regular engagement with Community Policing and Community Call on a regular basis to support older people
- In November/December, shopping vouchers and a Christmas Card were posted to group members in Southill.

St. Mary's/Corbally

- Work was undertaken with 'Masterchefs' to deliver free dinners
- Delivery of 'Older Adult Health and Well-Being' booklet to service users
- Work was undertaken in collaboration with Limerick City Community Development Project and Limerick Island Community Partners (formally St. Mary's Aid) to organise a Christmas Hamper to be delivered to all members of the over 55 King's Island Group
- A Calendar with a group photograph of the older person's group and local pictures was developed and distributed to all members of the group. The Older Person's Support Worker organised the photographs, the layout, the ordering and delivering of the Calendar.



A Note of Appreciation to our Partners and Funders

A core part of the work of LSSC is working in partnership with other agencies to deliver our services. These include government agencies and departments, schools, colleges of further education, universities, community and voluntary organisations, community centres, hospitals, GPs and philanthropic organisations. These organisations have provided a range of supports—funding, expertise, collaborative delivery—that has enhanced the quality of the service that we provide to our clients.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our funders, in particular, and all of our partner organisations for their significant levels of support over the past year. It has been a particularly challenging year, but it was invaluable to be able to share information and support across the family of agencies.

LSSC's Funders



Comhairle Sheirbhís Sóisialta Luimnigh CLG

Partner Agencies

- Adapt Services
- Age and Opportunity (Dublin)
- Barnardos
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Department of Education and Skills
- Department of Social Protection
- Diocese of Limerick
- Focus Ireland
- Irish Foster Carer's Association
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- Community Law and Mediation
- Doras Luimni
- Limerick College of Further Education
- Limerick Enterprise Development Park (LEDP)
- Limerick Youth Service
- Mary Immaculate College
- Mid-West Simon Community
- Novas
- Family Resource Centres
- University of Limerick
- University Hospital Limerick
- University Maternity Hospital, Limerick
- Treoir

Staff across Limerick Social Service Council support a number of inter-agency initiatives 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.

LSSC collaborates regularly with other agencies in the delivery of programmes and workshops. Partners include Tusla; HSE officers such as PHNs, psychologists and Medical Social Workers,; Barnardos; PAUL Partnership and ISPCG.

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

