



# Annual Report 2023

**St Brigid's Family & Community Centre**  
**37 Lower Yellow Road Waterford**  
**CHY:2002283336**  
**051-375261**



## *Chairperson – Mary O’Halloran*

Inevitably 2023 brought change to the Board of St. Brigid’s. Michelle O’Brien Power resigned from our Board in September after many years of service to St. Brigid’s, including occupying the role of Treasurer. Michelle joined the Board in 2011 and I would like to acknowledge her long commitment and loyalty to St. Brigid’s over the years. We wish Michelle all the best for the future. Bill Deevy stepped into the role of Treasurer in September. Bill joined the Board in 2019 and brought with him many years of experience in business, finance, and volunteering. In September we also welcomed James Farnan onto our Board. James has a background in retail management, and community engagement, and an interest in strategic planning. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my fellow Board members for their ongoing support and dedication.

Following a successful application for Pobal Community Centre Investment (CCIF) funding in 2022, in 2023 work took place in the Centre to install automatic entry doors, LED lighting throughout, and the re-carpeting of all common areas in the building. The completion of this work ensures that our Centre is more accessible and welcoming while also reducing overheads.

In December St. Brigid’s officially launched the Problem Gambling Support Service. This is a valuable addition to the suite of counselling services available in St. Brigid’s. This is an initiative of the National Forum of FRC’s and the Gambling Awareness Trust to provide support to individuals experiencing problem gambling and their families. We are optimistic that funding for this initiative will continue beyond the initial three-year period into 2024 and beyond.

In line with good governance, Health & Safety was a key focus for the Board in 2023. A full Health & Safety audit was commissioned and completed, followed by a comprehensive update of our existing H&S statement.

In 2023 the Board also commissioned work on the creation of a new website. The website, which is due to go live in 2024, reflects new initiatives and expanding areas of work, and the changing demographic of our community.

In late 2023 pre-planning commenced on the development of a long-term strategic plan for St. Brigid’s to set out the vision and goals for the organisation over the next six years. Work will continue on this project in 2024 including linking with all our staff and volunteers, our local community, and all our stakeholders. We look forward to engaging with this process.

Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the staff and volunteers in St. Brigid’s whose professionalism, diligence and empathy ensures the ongoing success of the organisation.



## *Manager - Gerardine Lanigan*

I would like to acknowledge the guidance and support I received from the Board of Directors throughout 2023, and the ongoing backing and cooperation I received from the staff and volunteer team.

The ongoing work of St. Brigid's in 2023 would not have been possible without the support of all our funders and partners, and I would like to take this opportunity to recognise their contribution to the services and programmes we provide to the community in Waterford.

Brigid's does not work in a vacuum, we are an integral element of a multidisciplinary approach built on partnership, collaboration and communication which brings together experience, insight and resources to provide support that is needs-led, relevant and sustainable. St. Brigid's continued to grow and build strong connections with the community in 2023. This report tells the story of our partnership with our community in Waterford, reflecting on our responses to the needs of the families and individuals who reached out to us, and also to whom we reached out.

Our work plan for 2023 was broad and ambitious, aligned to the fundamental principle of a 'cradle to grave' approach to providing support that strengthens and empowers children, families and communities to be active and healthy, to achieve their full potential in learning and development, to be safe and protected from harm, to have economic security and opportunity, and to be connected, respected and to contribute to their world.

In 2023 we welcomed some new additions to the St. Brigid's community. In August Carmel Connolly, from our Family Resource Team, gave birth to a baby boy, Ben, and in September Karen Jacob, our Play Therapist, welcomed the arrival of a little girl, Indie. We are looking forward to welcoming both Carmel and Karen back to work in May 2024 and hopefully Ben and Indie will pop in from time to time to say hello.

We also wished some of our long-term colleagues good luck in 2023. In July Ann Cody retired after nineteen years working and providing excellent customer care in St. Brigid's Charity Shops. November saw the retirement of Mary Moyser from the Children Centre. Mary joined St. Brigid's in 2006 working initially in the Busy Bees Respite Creche in the Yellow Road and then moving to the brand-new Children Centre, in Powersfield, Hennessy's Road as part of the inaugural staff team. Mags Drohan, Community Development and Family Support Worker, who joined St. Brigid's in 2007, made the leap in December to move on to Waterford City Council supporting tenants in the newly refurbished St. Joseph's House. I would like to acknowledge the contribution Ann, Mary and Mags made to St. Brigid's over the years and wish them all the very best for the future



*Gerardine Lanigan*

## *Who We Are*

### **FAMILY IS THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR COMMUNITY**

St. Brigid's Family & Community Centre provides Family Support and Community Development to individuals living in Waterford Inner City and surrounding areas.

Family Support involves supporting families in communities to identify their family and local needs, develop holistic responses, and enhance participation in the wider community. Community Development focuses on the empowerment and participation of marginalised groups in decision-making that impacts their lives and communities.

#### **Our Mission is:**

Supporting families and individuals in the Community to identify their family and local needs; to develop together holistic responses and improve participation in wider community life.

#### **Our Values are:**

Respect – We respect individuals' diversity, culture, and voice.

Empowerment – We believe in empowering and supporting individuals to meet their own needs.

Quality service provision

Relationship-building and Trust

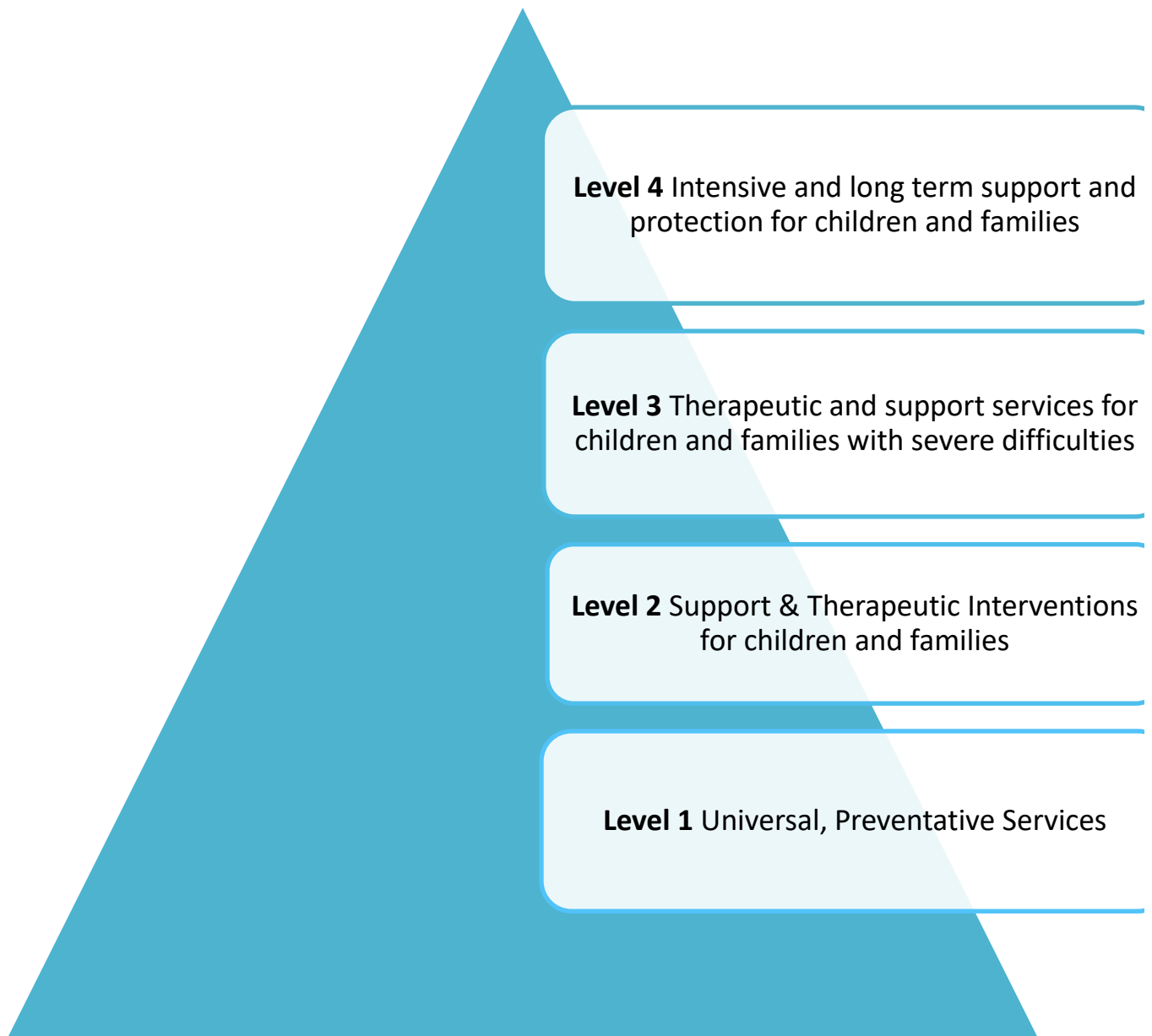
#### **Our Vision is:**

Working with the Community of the Waterford Inner City and surrounding area, we will provide quality services, responsive to need, with respect for dignity and individuality. We will work from an ethos of Community Development fostering social change to enable everyone to participate in a more just and humane society in which people have a much greater say in matters affecting them.

## *Family Support*

St Brigid's Family Support Team works to provide supports and services to families and individuals, offering one-to-one and group support programmes to meet each family's individual needs.

St. Brigid's supports are community-based with a focus on early intervention and prevention. We aim to work with families at levels 1 and 2 of the Hardiker Model, (see diagram below). We work in partnership with families to ensure that supports are provided prior to possible escalation, with a focus on supporting them to achieve their family goals. All families are different, and we try to ensure that we cater for individual families by offering a range of services to support each individual family's identified needs.



## *Family Support Programmes Delivered During 2023*

### **Parenting Programmes**

The Family Support Team delivered three Parents Plus Programmes in 2023. Parents Plus is an evidence-based, practical programme delivered to parents by trained facilitators to improve the wellbeing of children and parents by supporting parents to support their children and themselves.

### **Parents Plus Parenting When Separated Programme**

The Parenting When Separated Programme aims to support parents to explore the impact their separation has had on them as parents, to understand and support their children with the impact of change, as well as supporting parents to work towards a positive co-parenting relationship with their child's other parent. In Q1 a six-week Parenting When Separated was delivered in St. Brigid's Centre

### **Parents Plus Children's Programme**

The Family Resource Team delivered two Parents Plus Children's Programmes in 2023, one in Q2 and one in Q4. The Children's Programme is a solution-focused, practical programmes which aims to draw on parent's existing strengths. The programme was directed towards the parents of 6 to 11 year olds. The programme supported parents to manage behavioural and emotional problems, to develop skills and strategies, to problem-solve with their children, to encourage their learning, and to develop close family relationships.

Feedback from parents was positive with parents stating that they learned valuable skills, felt more confident in their role, and that they enjoyed the opportunity to meet other parents and listen to their experiences. Feedback from parents included learning about the value of self-care, 'The idea I am taking away today is I have learned how to give myself care. I didn't know that before'. Parents shared their learning in relation to their parenting, 'I feel I have a better understanding of how to be a better parent and I am now more conscious and aware of how to give my time and being present in the moment with my daughter'.

Between the two programmes a total of 63 sessions (including one-to-one meetings) were delivered to 22 parents in 2023.

### **Health and Wellbeing Programme for First Time Mums & Dads & Babies**

First delivered in Autumn 2019, this programme has continued to evolve to meet the needs of parents and babies. It is an eight-week programme which aims to support first-time parents in their parenting role and to provide space for peer support and informal networking.

The programme was delivered in Q4, 2023 and provided parents with opportunities to meet and engage with a range of experts including a Speech & Language Therapist, Paediatric Physiotherapist, PHN, Paediatric First Aider, and Nutritionist. Workshops also included Parental Self-care, Play, and Childcare. Parents valued the opportunity to relax and meet other parents, and to share experiences. The programme was delivered in collaboration with other organisations and agencies in Waterford including SETU, HSE, Waterford Childcare Committee and Waterford Parent Hub

Feedback from parents was positive, 'excellent, I learned something in every class'.

A total of eleven sessions were delivered to eleven parents and seven babies up to one year.

### **Baby Massage Classes and Parent & Toddler Yoga**

In response to needs expressed by parents attending existing programmes in St. Brigid's, Baby Massage and Parent & Toddler Yoga were delivered in Q3 and Q4 2023 to provide parents with opportunities to engage with their young children in a fun and loving way which promotes development, bonding and shared learning while enhancing their parenting skills and confidence and contributing to their own as well as their baby's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Five Baby Massage classes were delivered to ten parents and their babies under twelve months.

Five Parent & Toddler Yoga sessions were delivered to 10 parents and their toddlers from one year to four years.

### **I AM BABA**

St. Brigid's collaborated with the Children and Young People Services Committee, CYPSC, to facilitate the delivery of I AM BABA in the Carrickpherish Library in November 2023. I AM BABA is a sensory theatre event for babies under one year and their parents. Three sessions took place on the morning on 15<sup>th</sup> November, and 18 parents and their babies attended. Both babies and adults enjoyed the gentle, calming experience.

### **One-To-One Family Support**

One to one Family Support continued to be a key element of the work of the Family Support Team throughout 2023. The support offered by the Family Support Workers was needs-led by the individual families. Referrals were received from a range of sources including self-referrals, HSE, Social Work, Home School Liaison, Housing Association. As is the practice in St. Brigid's, referrals were accepted on a case-by-case basis.

The Family Support Team endeavoured to ensure that all families received the appropriate service within a reasonable time frame. In general, families availed of approximately 8-10 one-to-one sessions, however sessions were extended when more complex issues arose. Presenting issues in 2023 included behaviour management, housing, accessing services, children in care, parent/child relationship and emotional support.

The support offered responded to the individual needs of each family. Key areas of work for the Family Support Team included supporting parents to deal with challenging behaviour and to communicate in a positive way with their children. The Team also provided information, emotional support and advocacy support.

In total 84 one-to-one sessions were delivered to 28 parents, which in turn benefited a total of 43 children. This does not include those parents who reached out to the Family Support Team for once-off information, support and signposting to other services.

## *Community Supports for Children*

Throughout 2023 St Brigid's delivered a range of group supports to children. These groups had a particular emphasis on Health and Wellbeing for children aged from 2 to 12 years. Demand for these supports was high and St Brigid's operated a continuous wait list for the various programmes.

### **Mindfulness Through Creativity**

A six-week introduction to mindfulness and self-compassion through art activities, stories, discussion, and meditation. Delivered by accredited and experienced facilitator, Bernie Woods, the Mindful Muinteoir.

A total of 33 Mindfulness sessions were delivered to 54 children in St. Brigid's in 2023

### **The SuperHero Programme**

A seven-week programme to support children to build resilience self-confidence and self-esteem while learning life-long skills in a fun and age-appropriate way. The SuperHero programme was delivered in St. Brigid's in April 2023. Twelve children from 8 to 10 years attended.

### **Rainbows**

An evidence-based peer-support group programme for children from 7 to 12 years. There are two Rainbows programmes, one for children who have experienced parental separation and one for children who have experienced bereavement. In 2023, two Rainbows groups were facilitated in St. Brigid's. A total of 12 children participated.

### **Parent & Toddler Groups**

The Inner City Parent & Toddler Group meets on Wednesday mornings in Waterford Central Library.

The Portlawn Parent & Toddler Group meets in the Portlawn Community Resource Hub on Monday mornings.

18 children accompanied by 15 adults accessed forty Parent & Toddler sessions in 2023

## Community Groups

Community supports are an integral part of the work of St Brigid's. Community groups provide a space for individuals and families to come together and access services. Very often these community supports help us to reach individuals who may require additional specialised supports. Group participation can promote confidence to access other services and can help to combat social isolation, improving mental health and supporting inclusion in local communities. The community groups delivered in St Brigid's are needs-led by the local community.

**Chair Based Yoga:** The Chair Based Yoga Group continued to attract a full house at both its weekly programmes. Participants testified to the physical and mental benefits of attending the weekly classes. A total of forty nine yoga sessions took place in St. Brigid's Centre in 2023

**Womens Health Group:** The Group continued to meet and explore a shared interest in self development and social interaction. It is hoped that the core group of regular participants will continue to grow in 2024

**Intergenerational Group:** This Group promotes understanding, interaction, respect and learning between older people and younger people. During 2023 the Group held thirteen meetings and funding was secured for a Summer Singing Project through Waterford City & County Council, WWETB and Leargas. This initiative is a collaboration between St. Brigid's and Waterford & South Tipperary Youth Services.

**Friday Coffee Morning Group:** This is a well established and long standing Group in St. Brigid's. The group comprises approximately 22 older women from the local community who meet every Friday morning to chat and socialise, share their experiences and wisdom and to participate in a variety of activities and workshops

# *Counselling Service*

## **What We Provide**

Presently, St Brigid's Counselling Service consists of the Adult Counselling Service, the Adolescent Counselling Service, Couples Counselling, the Problem Gambling Support Service, and Play Therapy. In 2023, 405 intakes were carried out for 268 adults, 120 young people aged 11-17 years old, and 16 couples. Significantly, many others made contact but were deemed to be ineligible upon screening, as St Brigid's Counselling Service is only appropriate as a relatively brief intervention, for those experiencing mild to moderate symptoms, conditions, and diagnoses.

There was a 4% increase in overall demand for support in 2023, with slightly more adults and slightly less adolescents seeking a service.

## **New initiatives in 2023**

Problem Gambling Therapist Stephen Elliott received six mentoring/guidance sessions with gambling expert Tony O'Reilly for the provision of advice, substantial resources, and strategies for clients. The service officially launched in December via an interview with Tony on WLRFM Radio and the delivery of two-hour workshops to TY students at local secondary schools (Gaelcholaiste, Mt Sion, and De La Salle). Subsequently, St Brigid's FRC hosted an information session for parents and also an information session for professionals in our Centre.

Following an approach by Anam Cara to Tusla seeking therapeutic support for bereaved parents, CTI facilitated a referral system between Anam Cara, and member agencies who offer counselling.

Theoretically, this initiative created a paid role for one of the volunteers at St Brigid's Counselling Service, although therapist Perle Hennessy worked with just one client. Perle also commenced an MSc in Bereavement and Loss in September 2023.

## **Challenges**

During the AACPI Clinical Standards Member Consultation in June, an invitation was issued to suggest desirable areas of support to enhance clinical practice. Most agency representatives lamented a lack of funding, and high turnover of volunteers, in operating their services. Losses of data from a usb device for one therapist, served as an undesirable but timely reminder of the urgency and necessity of acquiring a reliable and fit-for-purpose system, to minimise exposure for the organisation. Regarding the potential digitalisation of counselling services for efficiencies in record keeping, storage, structuring of processes, and wait lists, advocacy was sought from the AACPI (now CTI) to companies leasing client management software systems (e.g., CORE-OM). Exploration processes are ongoing.

The Counselling Department acquired a new desktop PC in July 2023. St Brigid's IT contractor strongly suggested saving client records to the Cloud and 2 Factor Authentication was installed on the PC and all St Brigids laptops within the Counselling Department. Useful documents for present and future reference were kindly imparted by Sarah Jane Hennelly CEO of the AACPI, such as Cyber Security, Small Charity Guide.

## **Other Issues of Importance in 2023**

### **Child Protection**

The Court of Appeal ruled that child protection legislation does not require Health Service Executive (HSE) therapists, and other mandated people, to report to Tusla when an adult discloses historic child abuse, provided there is no reasonable suspicion that a child is at risk. We now only report historic childhood abuse of someone who is now an adult, if identifiable details about the alleged perpetrator are disclosed by the client, or if it is believed that a child is currently at risk.

### **Professional Placements**

Trainee Art Therapist Eimear Barron completed her placement with St Brigids Counselling Service in May. This was the first time that Art Therapy had been offered through St Brigids, and Eimear's involvement was highly valued. It is hoped that a future collaboration between St Brigids and Crawford College, Cork, can transpire again. Meanwhile trainee Play Therapist, Kevin Keogh, began a placement with St Brigids in November 2023. There is a dearth of therapeutic supports available for neurodivergent children in the city and county. Therefore, an application was made for Dormant Account Funding to outsource and host a group programme to help young people and their families. No response was received but it is hoped that this year's application will yield success.

## *Community Therapeutic Supports*

### **Head to Heart Mental Health Programme for Children**

Head to Heart provides a six-week, 50-minute workshop for children to promote positive mental health and wellbeing. Good mental health allows children to think clearly, develop socially and learn new skills. This programme is designed to foster and promote self-confidence and self-esteem and build social capital, which is a life skill for children and grows with them into adult life.

This is an interactive programme incorporating playful and creative techniques to introduce children to the concept of mental health. This programme was delivered in 2023 by our Play Therapist, Karen Jacob. The delivery of this programme enabled St Brigid's to deliver a valuable service to children.



### **Play Therapy**

St Brigid's accessed funding from Tusla in 2023 to continue the provision of Community Play Therapy in the Centre. St. Brigid's was the lead agency for the delivery of Play Therapy on behalf of the three Waterford based FRCs.

As in 2022, demand for the service was high with referrals received from schools, parents, GPs and other organisations and agencies. In 2023 a total of 305 sessions were delivered to 25 children ranging in age from 3 to 12 years.

The provision of Play Therapy further enhanced the suite of affordable and accessible therapeutic supports available to the community through St. Brigid's Counselling Service. It is hoped that ongoing funding will support the employment of a part-time therapist in 2024.



### **Art Therapy**

Through the ongoing placement of our Art Therapy trainee, Art Therapy continued to be delivered in St. Brigid's up to July of 2023. Art Therapy is a creative intervention which encourages self-expression within a therapeutic relationship. The aim is to improve mental health and maintain emotional well-being. In 2023 a total of 56 Art Therapy sessions were delivered in St. Brigid's to a total of 11 children and 1 adult. The service was accessed through St. Brigid's Counselling Services.



## *Community Employment*

The Community Employment (CE) programme is designed to support individuals who are long-term unemployed to return to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities. St. Brigid's has twenty-four places on the Scheme based in St. Brigid's Centre, St. Brigid's Shops, and in the Portlaw Community Resource Hub. The Scheme also has participants based with other organisations namely Children's Group Link, Tintean House, and Vision Ireland (formerly N.C.B.I.) The Scheme is funded by the Department of Social Protection (D.S.P.)

### **New Initiatives in 2023**

St. Brigid's established a new place on the Scheme in 2023 with the inclusion of an Administrator for the Portlaw Community Resource Hub. This new position gives important administrative support to the Senior Family Support & Development Worker in Portlaw. It also gives valuable work experience to the participant along with the opportunity to engage in training.

St. Brigid's has proposed to the D.S.P. to increase the number of participants on the Scheme to twenty-eight, to facilitate the appointment of a Wellbeing Facilitator, a Maintenance Worker, and Youth Workers to be based in Tintean House and Children's Group Link. This proposal has been put on hold at the present, pending filling existing vacancies. St. Brigid's will also be proposing to appoint an Administrator based in St. Brigid's Centre on the C.E. Scheme.

### **Challenges**

The main continuing problem for the Scheme is one of recruitment. In an economy with low unemployment, the availability of eligible and suitable candidates is in decline. This means that the calibre of candidates being referred by the D.S.P. is often unsuitable with a lack of English language skills being a major feature. This can lead to delays in the recruitment process and the appointment of new participants. With a number of our existing participants coming to the end of their time on the Scheme, this is likely to be an increasing problem over the next few years.

### **Highlights & Achievements.**

Certified training for participants is an integral aspect of the Scheme and an important pillar in fulfilling its objectives. In the Scheme that finished in August 2023, six participants received a combination of L5 and L6 Minor Q.Q.I. Awards. Nine non-QQI courses were completed by participants including ICDL Computer Training and First Aid Responder training. These courses give participants important vocational skills to assist with their progression to employment. In relation to progression, two participants left the Scheme in 2023, and both secured employment.

### **And finally**

The current C.E. Scheme brings to an end the present three-year cycle. A new cycle will begin in August 2024. St. Brigid's has applied for twenty-four participants and one Supervisor. Trade Union approval is also required for the new Scheme.

## *Portlaw Community Resource Hub*

The Portlaw Community Resource Hub at Clodiagh House in Portlaw continued to grow and evolve in 2023. The Hub continued the day-to-day management of the Community Allotments and the general outdoor campus. Longstanding initiatives continued, including the Tidy Towns Seeding Project which involves input from local schoolchildren. The local Scouts, Beavers, and Cubs also continued to meet in the Hub in 2023.



### **The Hub Team**

Pyper Ludlow is the Senior Family Support and Community Development Worker responsible for the overall management of the Hub including accessing appropriate funding, coordinating programmes and groups, liaising and collaborating with other agencies and organisations, and working directly with families and individuals in the community. Pyper represents the Hub as community spokesperson on the Education, Health and Wellbeing Committee, a Subcommittee of the Portlaw Community Enhancement Group. Representing St. Brigid's, Pyper co-chaired regular Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) meetings in 2023. These meetings provide an invaluable networking connection with community stakeholders.

In March 2023 Pamela Dunne commenced as our Administrator in the Hub. Pamela deals with booking spaces for courses, taking bookings for community programmes and activities and dealing with queries and requests.

Jane O'Brien joined the Hub Team in September for two mornings a week, focusing on the Parent & Toddler Group and Family Support

### **New Initiatives 2023**

In response to identified need and interest within the community, 2023 saw the rollout of some new initiatives. The Tyre Project joined the Hub early in the year. The Tyre Youth Diversion Project is a community-based initiative which provides activities to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and improve long-term employability prospects for young people involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour.

Through the ongoing support from WWETB a number of programmes were run throughout 2023. A horticulture course was run in Spring/Summer. Also during the Summer, the Women's Group participated in a cooking workshop and Pyper Ludlow, Senior Family Support and Development Worker, delivered a series of Batik workshops.





In Spring 2023 an initiative to bring adults and primary school-aged children together to create and plant a wildflower meadow in the grounds of Clodiagh House took place. The project provided the participants with an opportunity to learn about the use of tools and the growing cycle. The community growing tunnel proved to be a very suitable learning space for the group. This project was funded by WWETB

### Parent, Baby & Toddler Groups

Funded through Coiste Curam Leanai Phort Láirge (Waterford Childcare Committee), both the Parent & Toddler Group which takes place in the Hub, and the Stories and Play sessions which take place in the Portlaw Library continued to attract a core group of families throughout 2023. These programmes provided space and time for parents, babies and young children to play and read together. For parents they were an opportunity to meet with other parents in a calm and safe space to chat and share their experiences and their knowledge.

### Community Support – Group Programmes

Interest in group programmes remained strong in 2023 with demand for some such as the outdoor growing group showing an increase on 2022. The groups were a key element of the community engagement in the Hub in 2023. They promoted health and wellbeing, social interaction and participation. Generally, individuals self-referred for groups which reflected their own interests, however Social Prescribing and the Hub team also linked people with groups.

### The following groups met in the Hub in 2023:

- ✚ Women's Group
- ✚ Knitting Group
- ✚ The Tunnel Project
- ✚ Portlaw Men's Shed
- ✚ WSTCYS Youth Club
- ✚ Foroige
- ✚ Bowles Group
- ✚ Outreach and Advice
- ✚ Formal and informal training and education programmes in collaboration with WWETB
- ✚ Collaboration with Portlaw National School to deliver needs-led programmes and supports.



## Community Events in 2023



A number of interesting community events took place in the Hub in 2023. In July, in collaboration with the Comeraghs Wild Festival, local theatre company, Theatre Vamps, treated us to an evening of fun with their production of *When Harry Met Sally* in the courtyard of Clodiagh House. In August the Hub hosted a Harvest BBQ for the community allotment holders and their families.



A Summer Fun Sports Day was held for the community and took full advantage of the beautiful grounds of Clodiagh House. In September a community event was held in the town square to showcase the various community initiatives available in Portlaw. Staff from the Hub attended and had an opportunity to promote their work and to link with individuals who were not familiar with the Hub.

## *St. Brigid's Children Centre*

### **What We Do**

St. Brigid's Children Centre offers part time, full time and sessional care and education to children from one year to 12 years in a nurturing, child-centred environment, staffed by qualified, experienced, and dedicated staff.

Our purpose-built Children Centre is situated in Powersfield, Hennessy's Road in Waterford's Inner City. The Centre includes a Wobbler Room, a Toddler Room, two Preschool Rooms, three School Aged Rooms, a Sensory Room, and a spacious, multipurpose Central Atrium. There is also a large secure outdoor play space, and each room has its own individual secure outdoor area which is accessible to the children all day. The curriculum in the Children Centre reflects the four cornerstones of the Early Years curriculum – Wellbeing, Identity & Belonging, Exploring and Thinking, and Communicating.

The Children Centre operates on a feed-through system starting from the Wobbler Room, which caters for children from 1 to 2 years old, right through to the School Age Service for primary school-aged children up to 12 years.

### **New Initiatives in 2023**

In early 2023 we introduced Creative Mindfulness to the Children Centre. This was facilitated by Bernie Woods, The Meaningful Muinteoir, and was very well received by the children, their parents, and the staff. The programme was rolled out in 5-week blocks and every one of our school-age children had the opportunity to attend five sessions with Bernie. In today's world we are, more than ever, placing significant and worthwhile focus on the wellbeing of our children. Bernie created an atmosphere of trust and understanding, allowing each child to explore mindfulness at their own pace, in a safe environment. We cannot over-emphasise the positive impact on the children, empowering their young minds with tools for a lifetime of well-being. It was, without a doubt, one of the highlights of the year for them, and something we believe should continue to be embedded in the school-age programme.



In 2023 we had some interesting visitors from people who work in our community, including the Community Gardai, the Fire Brigade, and our local Postman. These experiences were great fun for the children, and they had lots of interesting questions to ask.

## Summer Camp 2023



Summer Camp 2023 was another great success for seven fun-filled weeks, with visits from the Dogs Trust, a Zumba teacher, and the Community Gardai. We created a McDonald's themed party which the children named 'McBrigid's', we hosted 'The Big Breakfast' and both children and staff enjoyed lots of fun, games, and creative projects daily.

## Trips and Celebrations

The children from The Jungle Room who were due to start Big School in September 2023 had a fantastic outing to Copper Coast Farm in June.



There was great excitement when Waterford City Library sent The Gruffalo, 'the scariest creature in the wood' to the Children Centre to meet everybody. Forging links with our local libraries promotes library use and early literacy.



Our two Preschool groups were once again gifted a wonderful trip to Activate to visit Santa, funded by the Lions Club, something we are very thankful for each year.

We celebrated numerous occasions in the Children Centre in 2023 including St. Patrick's Day, Africa Day, Pyjama Day, and the Big Toddle for Barnardos, to name just a few.



## Goodbye to Some Old Friends



2023/24 is the final year for three of our school-aged children who will make the journey into second-level education. One of these children has been with us since he was two years old, continuing after his early year's journey to attend our afterschool service, and out-of-school camps. We will be sad to see them all leave after so many years in the Children Centre, and we wish them all the best on their educational journey.

Both Viktoria Drobot and Elaine Moran changed career paths in August /September of 2023. While we miss them and their valued contribution to the Children Centre, we wish them all the very best their new endeavours.



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In November Mary Moyser reached retirement age, and after almost 20 years of caring for the younger children in St. Brigid's, Mary hung up her childcare boots and retired. Mary had seen hundreds of children pass through her care from the early days in the Creche in the Yellow Road, to the move to the Children Centre in Hennessy's Road in 2008. Mary was a valuable member of the core staff team who have made the Children Centre what it is today.

## Challenges in 2023

A key challenge we face daily is to ensure that staff ratios are maintained during break times, during periods of annual leave and during periods of absence through to illness. The length of time in obtaining Garda Vetting can also present a challenge in relation to staff ratios.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to fill vacant positions as significantly fewer practitioners are entering the Early Years Care and Education sector. This situation is further exacerbated by the lack of suitable candidates availing of the Community Employment Scheme. In previous years the Children Centre attracted up to seven CE participants, some qualified or part qualified and others for whom the CE scheme in the Children Centre provided the opportunity to achieve an accredited qualification in tandem with gaining valuable work experience. By the end of 2023, the Children Centre employed only one CE Participant. This, along with rising operational costs, has resulted in additional pressure on our budget. Core funding introduced in 2021/2022 did not increase as much as anticipated in 2023/2024, and time will tell if 2024/2025 sees a significant improvement in the rollout of it. A key factor of Core funding is that services are prohibited from raising their fees, this does not take into account the increased cost of living in recent years, and in particular the significant increase in fuel and energy costs.

As in 2022, 2023 continued with high demand for childcare and school-aged places. Unfortunately, there are simply not enough spaces available. As referenced earlier, we operate on a feed-through basis with quite a long wait list in place. It is safe to say that demand has increased across the age groups but particularly in the younger age group i.e. 1- to 2-year-olds.

In the Children Centre we intend to continue to provide a high-quality service for children, parents, and families in 2024. The staff team takes great pride in and ownership of the service. The ongoing success of the Children Centre is a tribute to the commitment and professionalism of all those who work there. We are very lucky in St. Brigid's to have such a loyal workforce, who will always go above and beyond for all our children and families. Keeping staff morale high in these challenging times for the childcare sector is crucial. This will continue to be the case until the sector gets the recognition it deserves and adequate and appropriate funding and pay levels are instigated.

### **A total of 184 children attended St. Brigid's Children Centre in 2022/23**

- 91 children aged from 1 to 5 years attended our Preschool
- 55 children aged from 4 years to 12 years attended our Afterschool Service
- 38 children aged from 4 years to 12 years attended our Summer Camp

### **2023 At A Glance**

- Chime In And Play visited us every month for music, song and movement.
  - All School-Aged children enjoyed Mindfulness through Creativity
- The Centre continued to provide full-time, part-time, sessional and out-of-school services.
- Strong links were established with our Community Play Therapist who supported children, families and staff by sharing strategies and information.
- In 2023 St. Brigid's continued to operate a minibus with the excellent John (Doc) Nolan at the helm to support Traveller families who require transport,
  - Another fantastic, fun-filled Summer Camp
- Waterford Lions Club once again treated our Preschoolers to a morning of fun in Activate, including meeting Santa Claus.

## St Brigid's Charity Shops

### Where We Are and What We Do

St Brigid's has two Charity Shops, one based in Westgate Retail Park which deals mainly with furniture and homeware, the second is located on Gladstone St. in Waterford City dealing mainly in bric-a-brac & clothing.



Our Charity Shops generate much-needed funding for St Brigid's Family Resource Centre while also promoting the ethos and values of the organisation. The net surplus generated by St Brigid's Shops is used to support the activities of St Brigid's Services.



### Opportunities For Work & Training

The Shops provide valuable volunteering opportunities for all ages in the community. We also offer placements through the Community Employment Scheme for people to gain experience in a working environment and opportunities to up-skill on various training courses.

### The Circular Economy

The Shops contribute to the circular economy by protecting our environment by facilitating the redistribution of clothing, furniture and other items which might otherwise go to landfill. We continue to



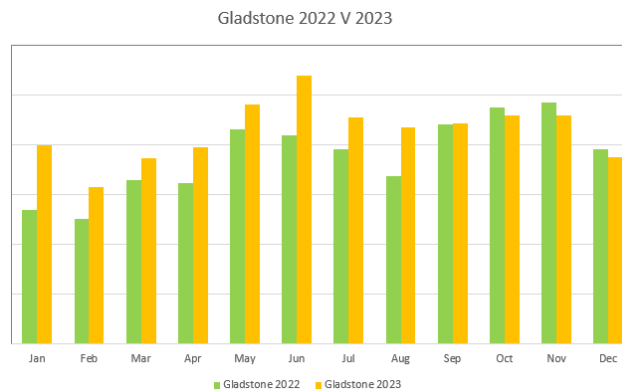
**DONATE**  
**DON'T WASTE**

promote the Shops through social media, offering employment opportunities, volunteering positions, items for sale and appeals for donations. St. Brigid's is a member of Charity Retail Ireland.

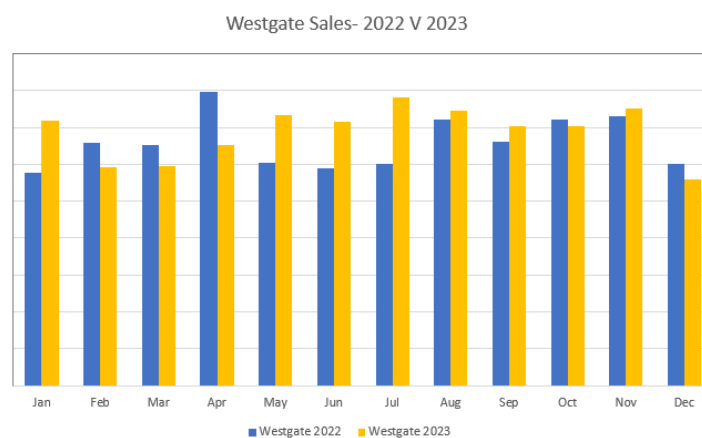
## Sales Through Service



The “sales through service” approach of our shops has distinguished us from our competitors and is evident in our continued growth.



Our Shops team offers a listening ear and has formed friendships with our customers. The “sales through service” ensures that they continue to shop with us and will recommend us to others for both sales and donations. We aim to differentiate ourselves on quality and price by giving good value and quality secondhand products.



## Volunteering

Sourcing dedicated volunteers is becoming increasingly difficult; we struggle to fill roles, particularly in our Gladstone Street shop as volunteers factor in the cost of parking in the city. We advertise in our shops and through Charity Retail Ireland for volunteers.



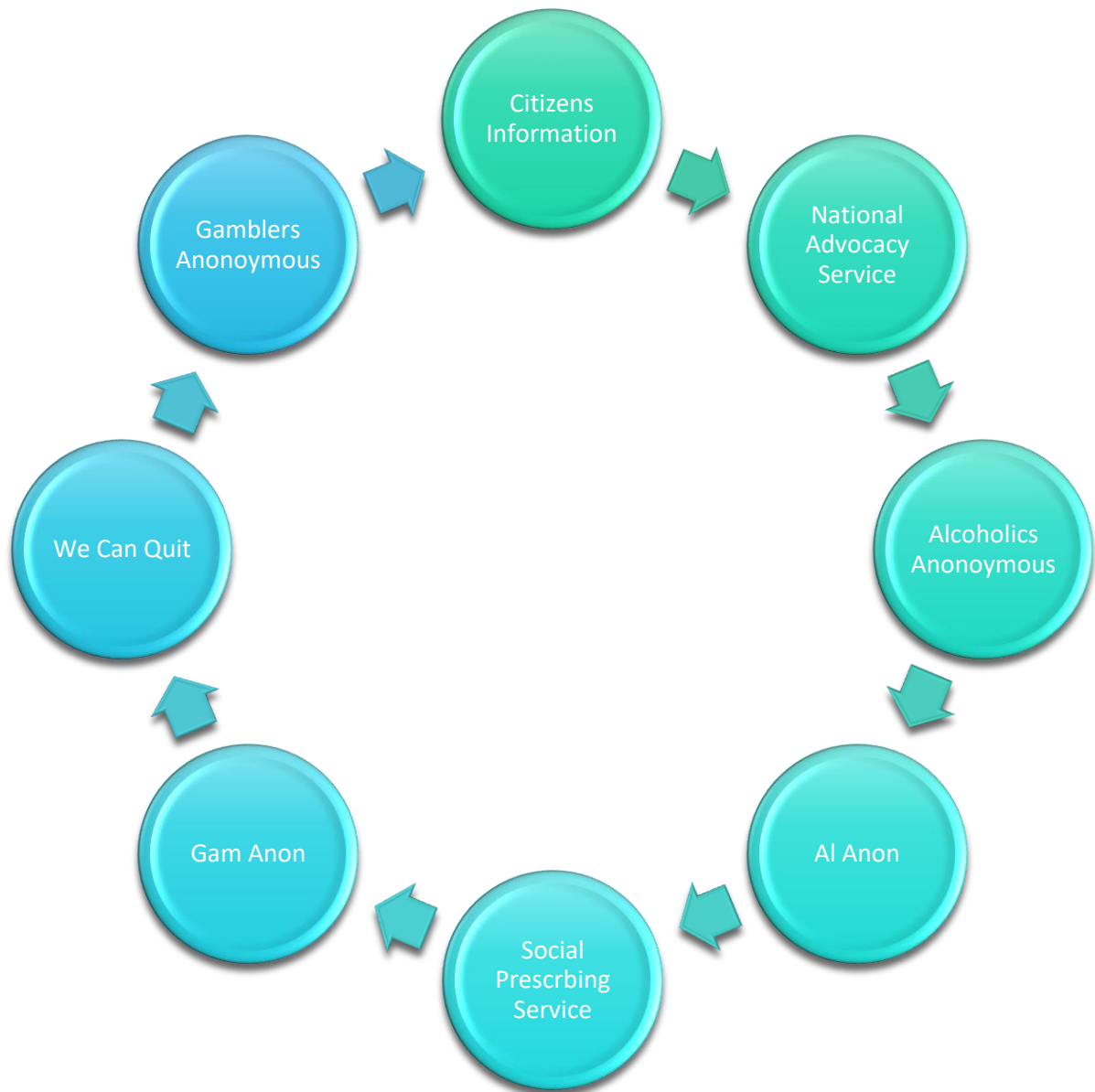
## Goodbye And Welcome!

After 19 years of service, Ann Coady retired from our shops in July. Ann was a fantastic team player and will be missed. We wish her the best on her many sun holidays.

Ann handed over the keys to our volunteer Olivia Storan who now works with us 2 days per week.



## *Other Services Available in St. Brigid's Centre*



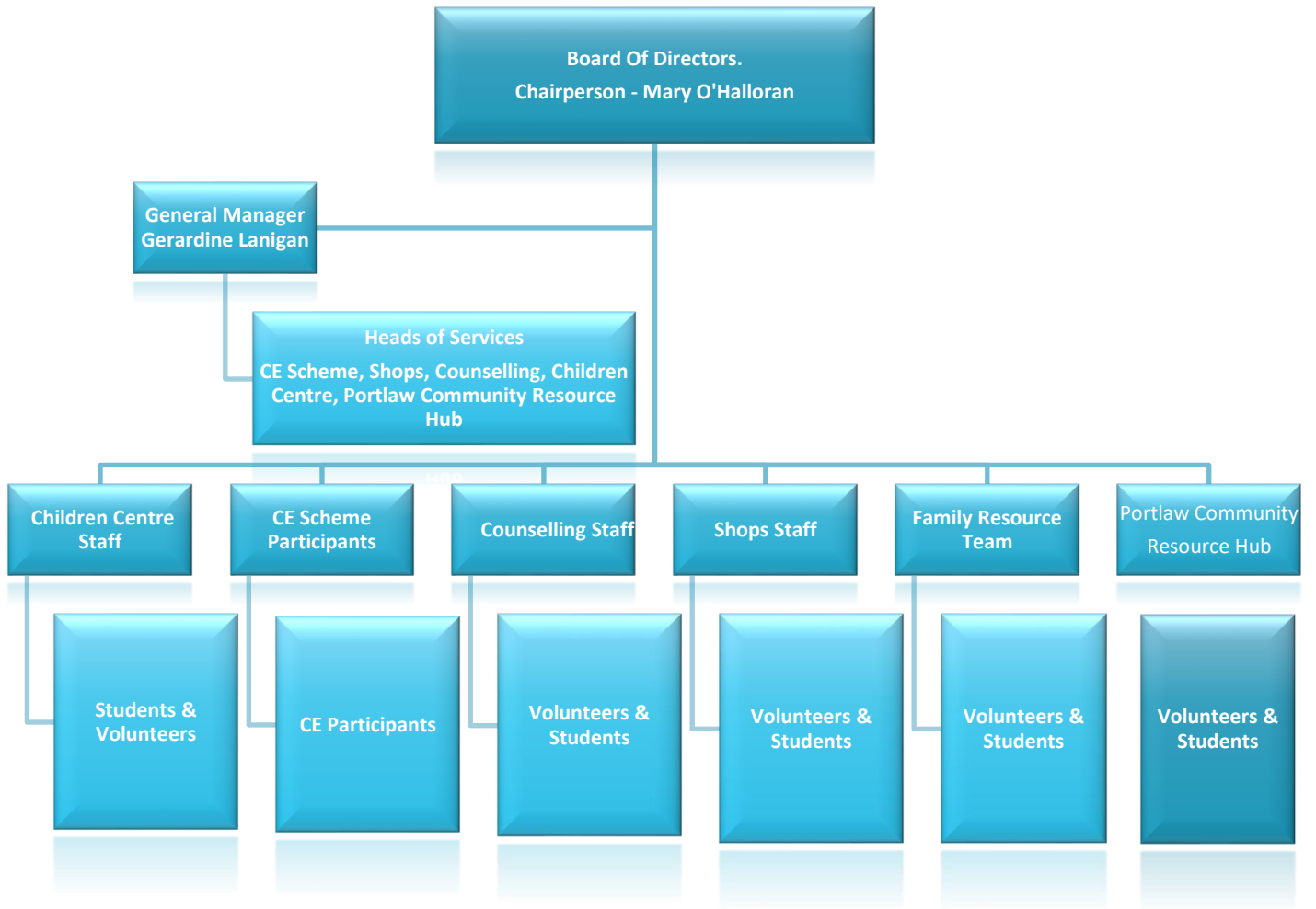
## *Board of Directors*

St Brigid's Board of Directors is made up of six local community members. St. Brigid's has a Board Recruitment Process which seeks qualified candidates with a diverse range of skills. All Board Members participate in an induction programme, which is a structured way of providing them with all the information and support they need to be confident and productive in their role. The aim is to help new Board Members to understand the Organisation, the environment in which it operates and their role in making the Organisation a success. Board Members adhere to St. Brigid's Code of Conduct for Board Members.

### **The following information gives an insight into the Board of Directors of St Brigid's:**

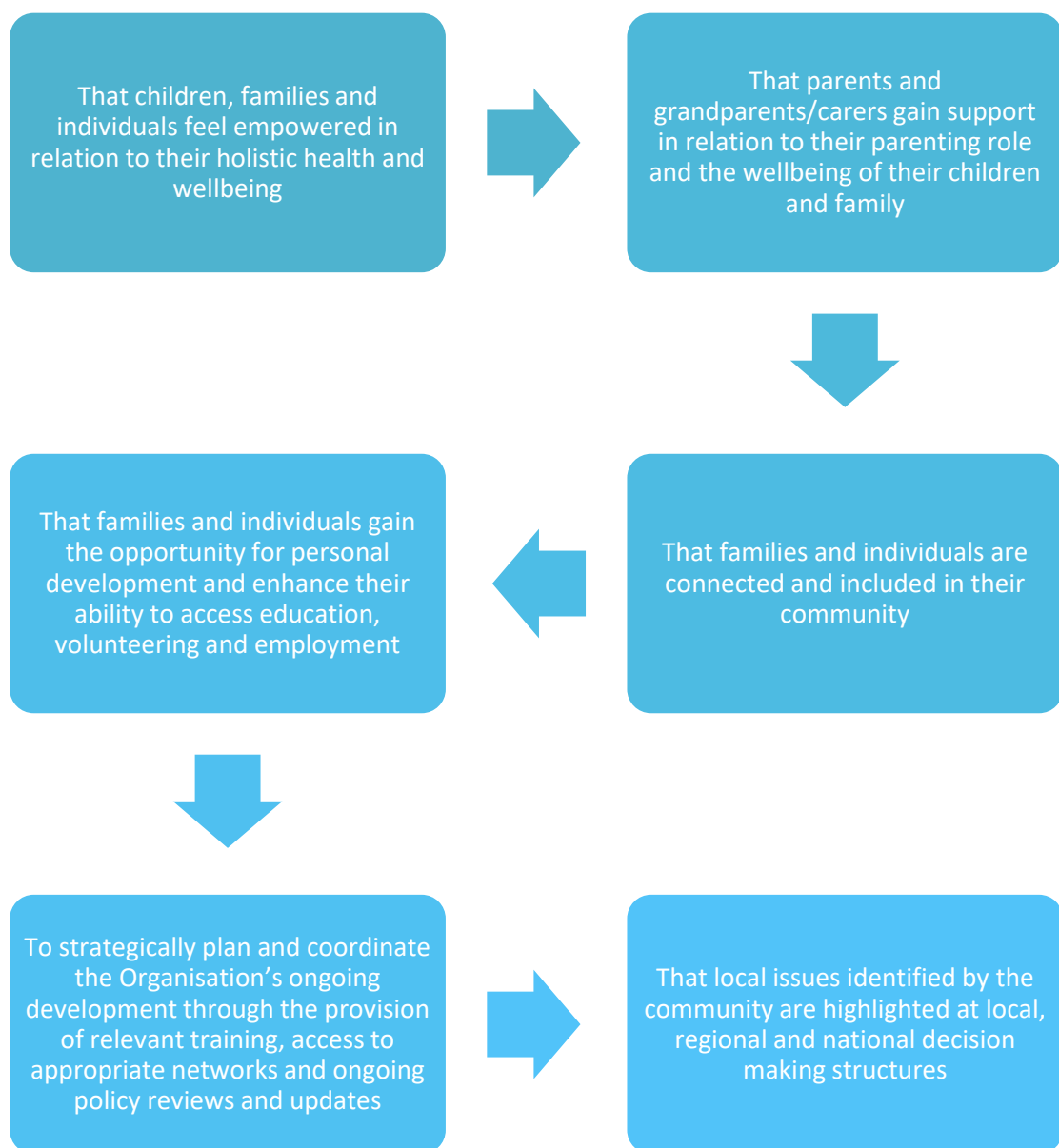
- Our Chairperson, Ms. Mary O'Halloran, served as Councillor on Waterford City Council from June 2004, and as Mayoress of Waterford City from June 2007 to June 2008. She has served on the Boards of several Charities. Mary became a member of St Brigid's Board as she felt that her experience of serving as a member of other Boards and Committees would be of benefit to the Centre.
- Treasurer, Ms. Michele O'Brien Power, brings significant business and financial experience to the Board of St Brigid's. Michele is very cognisant of the work being done within the Organisation and its support for the local community. Following twelve years on the Board of St. Brigid's, Michelle stepped down in September 2023. We are very grateful for Michelle's contribution to St. Brigid's over the years and for her support in leading St. Brigid's to its current success. Bill Deevy stepped into the role of Treasurer in September 2023.
- Company Secretary, Ms. Joan Quinlan, was appointed to St Brigid's Board of Directors in 2012. She was a Volunteer on the St Brigid's Waterford Contact Project and has also volunteered her services at Waterford University Hospital as a Play Assistant on the Paediatric Ward.
- Bill Deevy, Director, is a long-standing Company Director. Bill brings his experience of business, finance, and management to the Board. Bill joined the Board of Directors in 2019. In September 2023 Bill succeeded Michelle O'Brien Power as Treasurer of St. Brigid's.
- Frances Roche, Director, is owner, and Managing Director of a Waterford training company. Frances joined the Board in 2019 and brought with her valuable insight and experience of people-management and programme co-ordination.
- Billy O'Keefe, Director, has worked in the non-profit arena for over 30 years at national and local levels and brings that experience to St Brigid's. Billy joined the Board in 2021.
- Jim Farnan. Joined the Board of St. Brigid's in 2023. Following on from over 40 years of retail management experience, Jim also holds a Diploma in Community Services. Jim's goal is to help St Brigid's develop its strategic plan for moving forward over the next five years.

# Staffing Structure



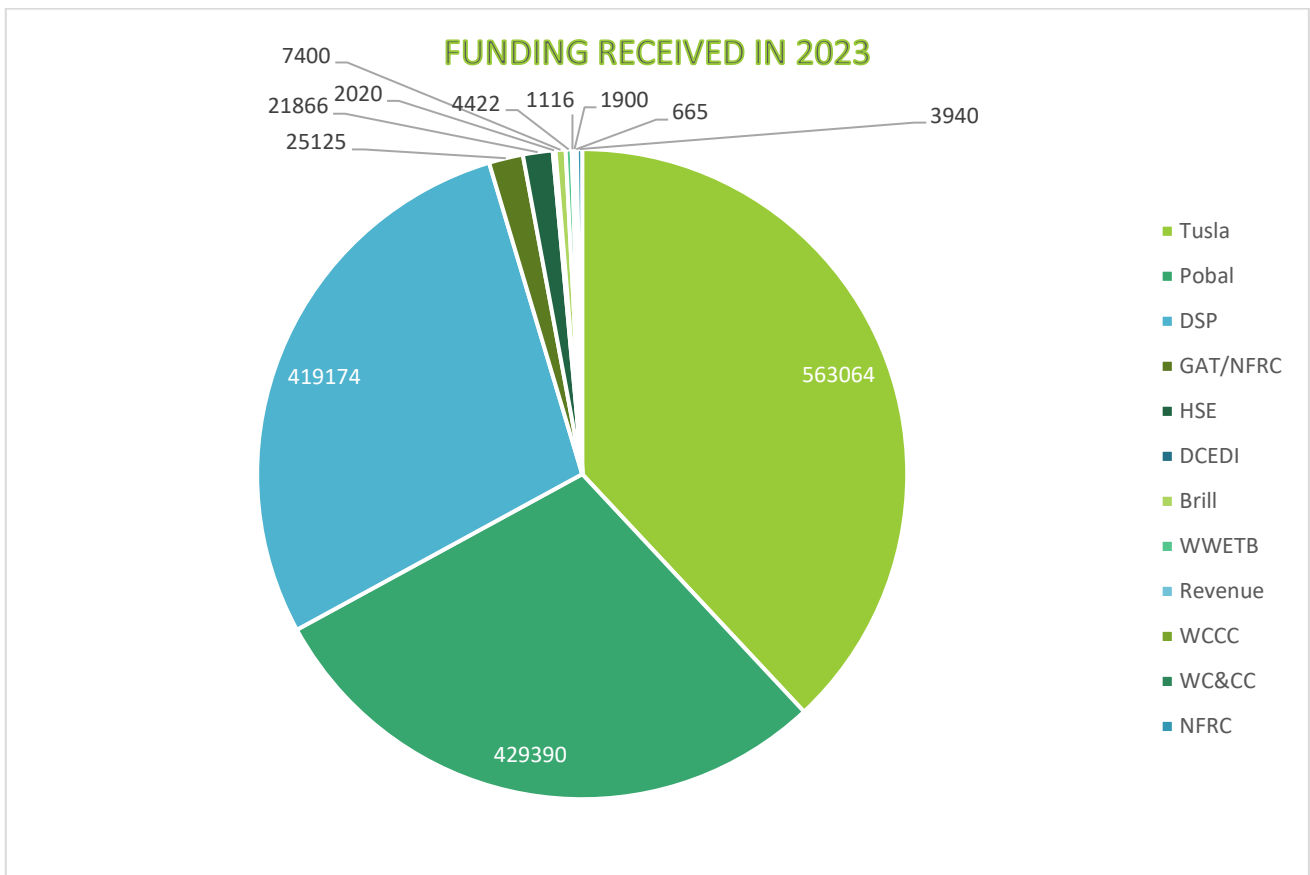
## *Annual Action Plan Outcomes for 2023*

St Brigid's Family and Community Centre sets out six key outcomes in its Annual Action Plan. Each of these outcomes is linked with a set of objectives for the delivery of services. The Action Plan guides the work of St. Brigid's throughout the year so that as an Organisation we can ensure the needs of the Community of Waterford City and County are being met. Below are the identified outcomes for St. Brigid's work:



## Financial Review

St Brigid's is a Registered Charity and receives core funding and once-off funding through several government departments for the provision of family support and community services in Waterford City and County.



St Brigid's is part of the National Family Resource Centre Programme which is core funded through TUSLA Child & Family Agency. In 2023, St Brigid's received a total of €563,064 in funding through TUSLA Child & Family Agency. This income makes up approximately 38% of the overall income for St Brigid's and is allocated to the Family Resource Team's staffing costs, part funding the Counselling Service, outreach work in Portlaw Community Resource Hub, Community Play Therapy, and hosting staff for the Tusla Therapeutic Team.

St Brigid's Community Employment Scheme received €419,173 from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) in 2023 to fund wage costs, training and materials for Scheme participants and the CE Supervisor.

In 2023, St Brigid's Children Centre received €429,390 from Pobal/Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to fund the operation of the service.

St Brigid's also received funding through a variety of other Agencies and Organisations throughout the year. Generally, this funding was secured for the delivery or development of specific programmes, supports and services including the following:

€22,500 was received through the Gambling Awareness Trust (GAT), and the Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF), to fund the continued delivery of a dedicated counselling and support service for individuals experiencing problem gambling, and for their families in 2023. St. Brigid's is the lead agency on this initiative on behalf of the Waterford FRC Network, which is a collaboration of Brill FRC, Sacred Heart FRC and St. Brigid's FCC. A further €2,625 was received to facilitate engagement with Tony Reilly in advance of the official launch of the service.

In 2023 collaborative work continued with the Waterford FRC Network and the HSE to deliver two Sláintecare We Can Quit, a smoking/vaping cessation group programme. St. Brigid's is the lead agency on this initiative and the two seven-week programmes took place in our Centre. A total of €20,676 was received in 2023 for this initiative.

Sláintecare Healthy Communities also supported the delivery of Parents Plus Parenting Programmes in 2023. €7,400 was received from Brill FRC (the Lead Agency) for this purpose.

Following a joint application by the three Waterford FRCs in 2022, a further €3,940 was received from the FRC National Forum Recovery and Resilience initiative in 2023. This facilitated the delivery of programmes to support positive mental health and wellbeing for children from birth to twelve years including Mindfulness through Creativity, Head & Heart Mental Health Group, Baby Massage, Parent & Baby Yoga, and the delivery of Play Therapy in Portlaw.

A total of €4,422 was received from WWETB Waterford/Wexford in 2023 for the delivery of community education projects including the Wildflower Meadow, Batik Art, and Cookery in The Portlaw Community Resource Hub.

St. Brigid's was successful in an application to DECDI for €2,020 funding to deliver four intercultural workshops in Waterford. These workshops took place in February 2024.

Successful applications by the FRC Team and the Portlaw Community Resource Hub in 2023 resulted in a total of €1,900 being granted by Coiste Curam Leanai Phort Láirge to support the ongoing rollout of Parent & Toddler groups in Waterford City and in Portlaw.

