

Growing Hope

Fostering the Future

Annual Report 2024

Irish
Foster Care
Association





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Chairpersons Statement



As Chairperson, in the final year of my tenure at the Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA), it is a privilege to offer our Annual Report for 2024, a year of tremendous commitment and support to foster carers, their families and the wider foster care community across Ireland.

As a Board, we are proud of the work IFCA continues to deliver to an extremely high standard. With the financial challenges surrounding the community and voluntary sector, we were still able to support foster carers through our dedicated services, represent our members locally and nationally to decision makers and the Government, and to progress with the challenges brought to us from foster carers.

2024 was a year of consultation. We received the financial support of the Community Foundation Ireland to open a call for an independent agency to ask our community what they wanted from us, and to direct our next strategy, which will be launched in 2025. We were so proud that almost 600 people engaged in the process, to let us know what they want from us going forward. These 600 people

included foster carers, IFCA staff, representatives from Tusla, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and the Ombudsman for Children, to name a few.

It was regrettable that we had to cancel our National Conference, due to circumstances beyond our control, as we know this event is a wonderful occasion to bring our foster carers and the wider foster care community together to learn, network, and share.

Our supports and services continued to help those who found themselves in difficulty. Our National Helpline Service, Advocacy, Counselling, and our Learning and Development made sure that foster carers and their families had a range of supports to help and guide them with whatever challenge they were going through, in a timely manner.

Our advocacy in 2024 was key to supporting the Government's decision to introduce a Placement Start Up Payment to foster carers. We know that children may come to a foster carer with very little, so this payment will go some way towards supporting them with additional clothing, toiletries etc.

To conclude, I would like to thank my fellow Board and Subgroup members for their time, dedication and support to both me as chair, and to the organisation. They give their time and knowledge freely and with an unwavering energy. I would like to thank the staff and volunteer team at IFCA who go the extra mile, time and time again. Your dedication to foster carers, their families, and the wider foster care community ensures that we will always strive for the best outcomes for foster carers, and for the children who find themselves needing a safe and secure home. Lastly, I would like to thank the wonderful foster carers all across the country for everything you do for the children in your care.

Raymond Nolan

Raymond Nolan



Chief Executive Review



I am delighted to present the Irish Foster Care Association's Annual Report, looking back at the milestones achieved in 2024 - an extraordinary year that laid the groundwork for continued growth and transformation in foster care across Ireland. The accomplishments shared in this report are not simply a record of success but a demonstration of the shared dedication of our staff, volunteers, funders, and supporters who worked tirelessly to support and advocate for foster carers and the children in their care.

With 540 cases in 2024, resulting in 1552 activities, our National Helpline continued to be a vital service for foster carers and the wider foster care community. A broad range of calls, of which there were 694, spanned emotional, legal, and practical needs, highlighting the growing demand for trusted support and guidance. Our expert team offered not just solutions, but solidarity, and their impact was deeply felt by those they served.

Independent advocacy continues to be core to IFCA's purpose. In 2024, we continued to empower foster carers, and to support them to elevate their voices through the challenges they faced. Our dedicated advocacy team

provided one to one support to 107 cases, reflecting both the scale and complexity of challenges foster carers encounter. This support is essential - it informs decision-making and navigating the policies that affect foster carers daily lives.

We proudly grew the number of Learning and Development events across 2024, ensuring that every session remained relevant and accessible. Participation soared as 980 foster carers, and members of the wider foster care community, engaged with 66 in-person and online sessions, gaining a deeper understanding of trauma-informed care, child development, legal frameworks, education, and best practice.

Across the country, Branch & Hub events welcomed over 2,660 attendees spending time together to connect, to share and to support each other. We had 30 family events and 12 Christmas family luncheons. These gatherings are so important to harness a powerful sense of belonging for foster carers and their families.

Our award-winning podcast series, 'Stories from Foster Care', surged in 2024 with 5 incredible podcasts. These authentic voices offered insight

and courage and discussed what it means to be part of a community. We are always eternally grateful to those who share their lived experiences with us.

Through collaboration with policymakers and public representatives, we brought critical issues into national focus, ensuring that foster carers are seen, heard, and supported in every facet of their journey.

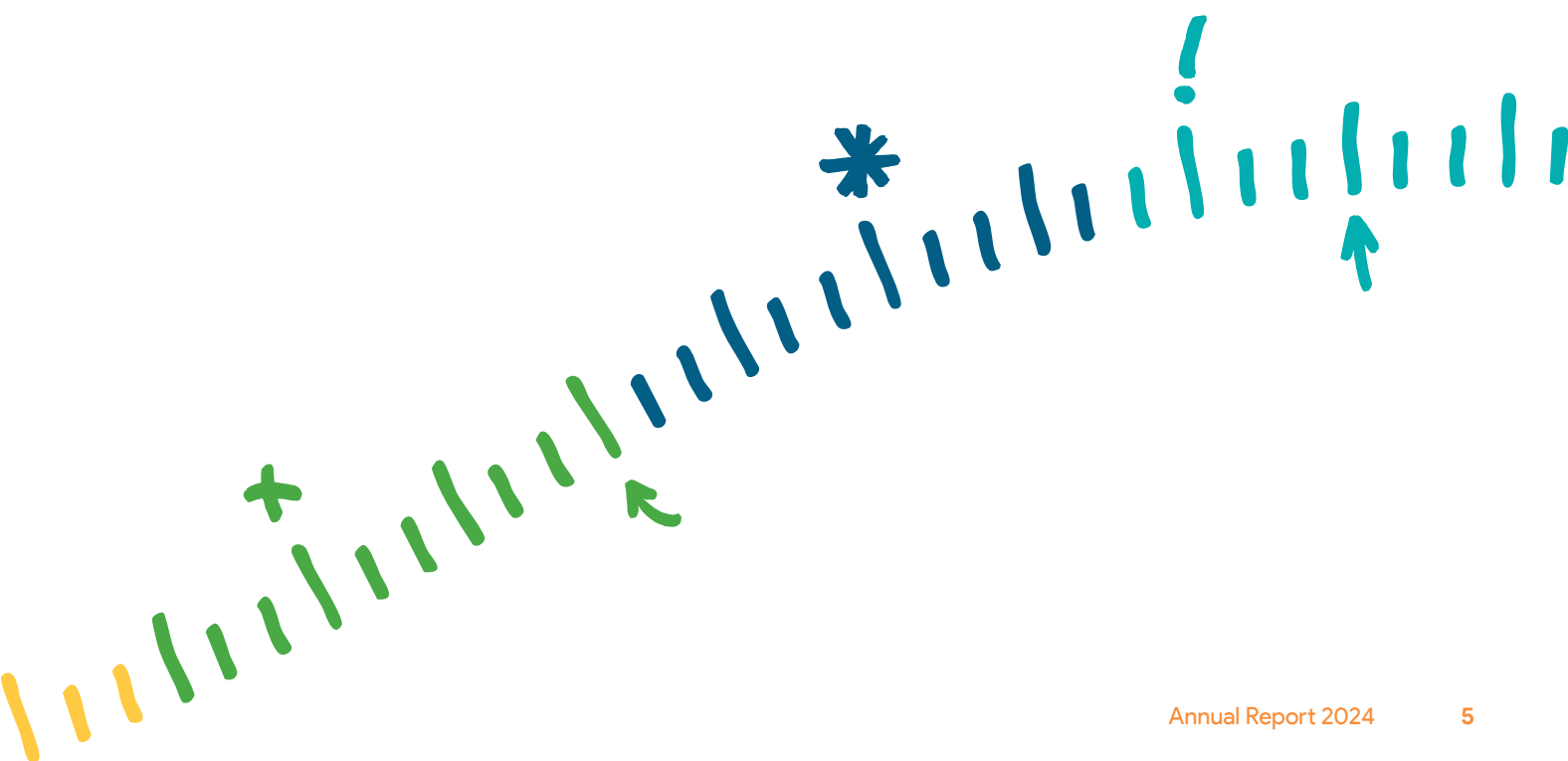
Our Budget 2025 Campaign continued to drive foster care onto the political agenda. Whilst we welcomed the confirmation of the Placement Start Up Payment, and additional mileage support for foster carers, delays in implementation remained a concern. We were pleased to see foster carers receive the double foster care allowance payment before Christmas, and two double child benefit payments. Our engagement at Leinster House during our campaign, supported by foster carers, demonstrated our commitment to push for urgent and lasting reform, and we will continue to build on this momentum.

We were very fortunate to be given financial support from the Community Foundation Ireland, to be able to undertake a full strategic consultation process. Almost 600 people took part and gave a clear mandate to IFCA. The strategy 2025 – 2027 will be published early 2025.

To our Board, staff, volunteers, funders, and every member of our vibrant fostering community - Thank You. Your commitment has made an immeasurable difference. As we move forward, IFCA remains firmly dedicated to advocating, supporting, and empowering foster carers - ensuring that every child in foster care has the chance to thrive, and that the profound contribution of the fostering community is recognised, valued and supported.



Corrinne Hasson



Our Vision

- Fostering is recognised, valued and supported

Mission

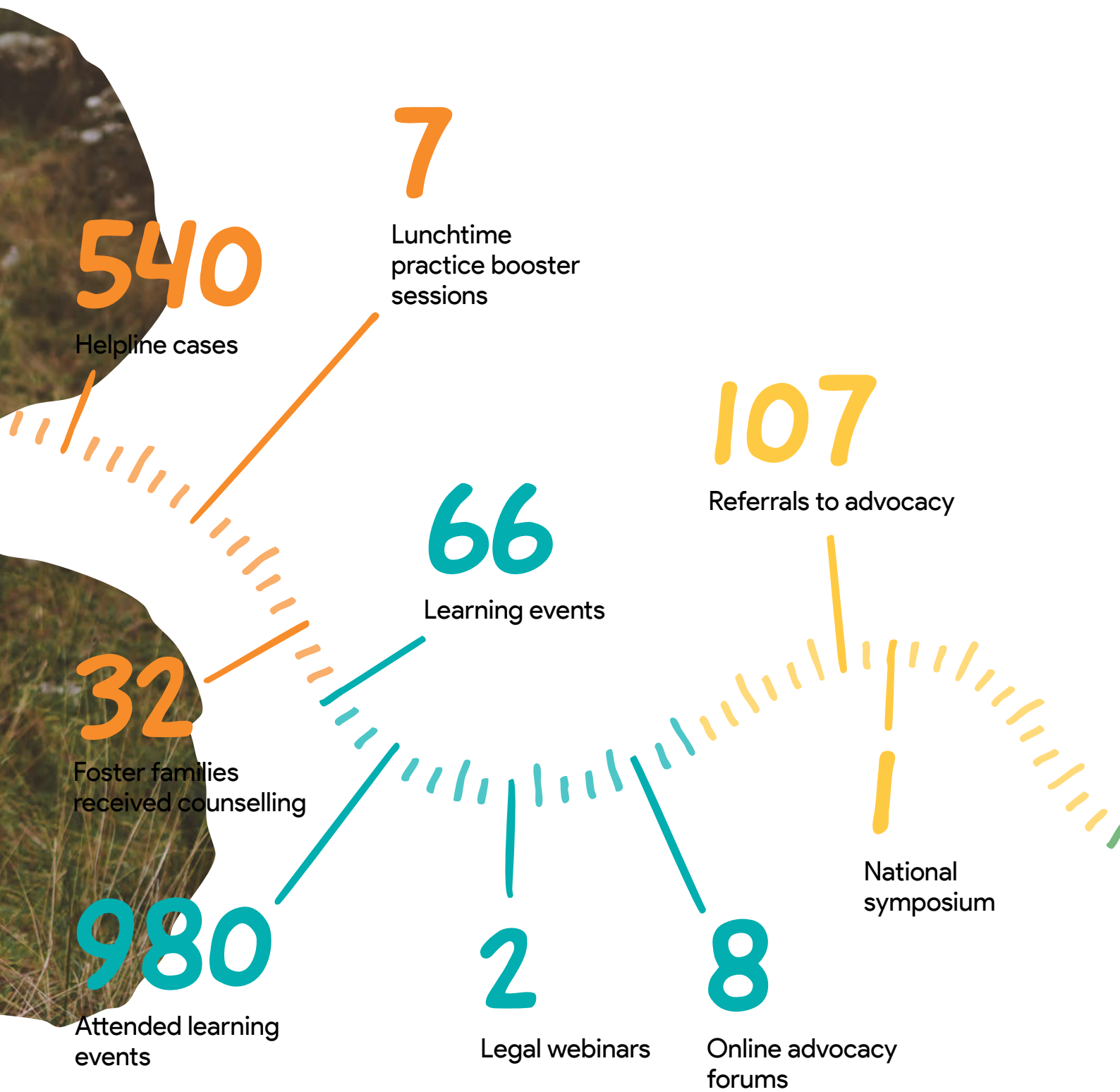
- IFCA is the voice for foster care in Ireland.
We promote and strengthen foster care through the provision of supports and by advocating for the progressive reform of policy and practice.

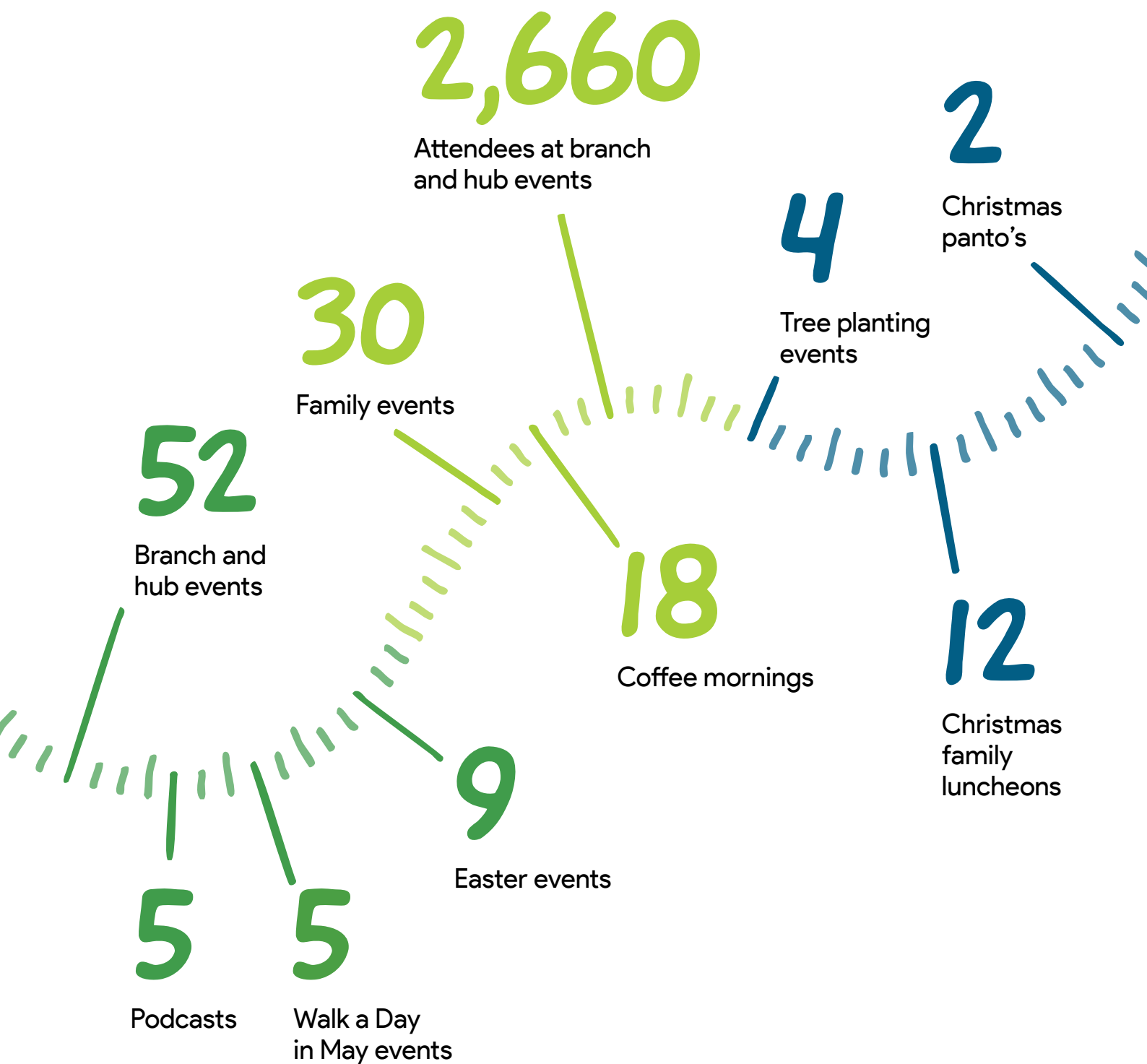
Values

- We value solidarity, acting in unity and consensus as the voice of foster care in Ireland.
- Respect for and inclusion of all members of the fostering community is core to our work.
- We work in collaboration with all our stakeholders to achieve our shared goals of recognising, valuing and supporting foster care.
- We act with integrity, communicating honestly and being accountable as the voice of foster care in Ireland.



2024 in Numbers



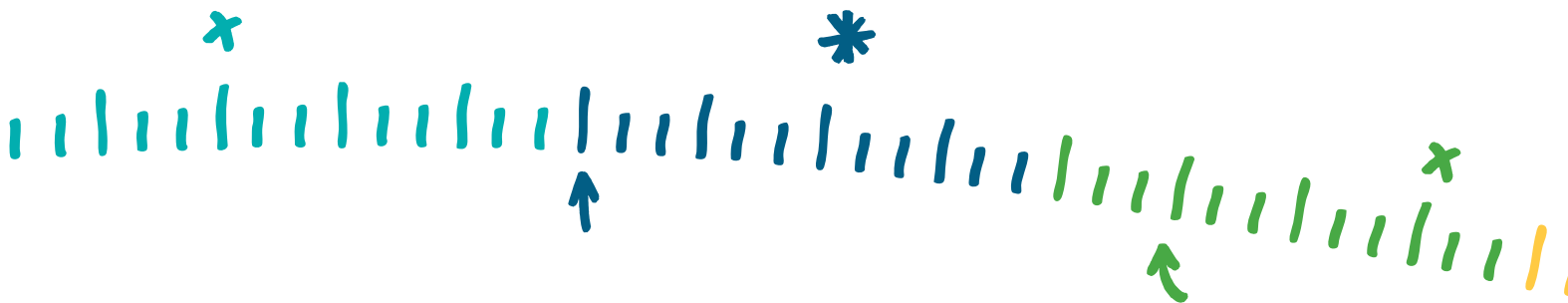


Statement of Strategy

The Irish Foster Care Association continued to champion the needs, rights, and voices of foster carers and the wider fostering community through a clear and purpose-driven strategy in 2024. This statement of strategy outlined our core priorities and desired outcomes in 2024, providing a roadmap to guide our work and deliver meaningful impact.

The strategic priorities for 2024 responded to the increasing complexity and challenges within the foster care landscape. They reflect our commitment to delivering relevant, high-quality support while strengthening the systems and relationships that sustain foster care in Ireland.

In parallel with this work, and in recognition of the changing environment in which we operate, IFCA also undertook a comprehensive strategic consultation process during 2024. This process will inform the development of a longer-term organisational strategy that ensures IFCA remains responsive, relevant, and impactful into the future.



Strategic Priorities

1. Needs-Led Services & Supports

Provide responsive, solution-focused, and flexible services tailored to the evolving needs of foster carers, children in care, and the broader fostering community.

2. Innovation, Learning & Research

Through creative thinking and evidence-based practice, develop and deliver impactful learning, capacity-building, and research initiatives aligned with national policy and fostering sector priorities.

3. Engage, Influence & Reform

Amplify the collective voice of members to influence policy and practice, advocating for accountability, improved outcomes, and sustainable reform in foster care. Working in partnership with stakeholders remains central to this goal.

4. Build Organisational Capacity, Sustainability & Governance

Continue to strengthen IFCA's internal capacity, ensuring a resilient, effective, and values-led organisation supported by a positive and empowered team culture.

National Advocacy





Advocating for Foster Carers

Budget 2025 Campaign

The Irish Foster Care Association mounted a strong and unified campaign ahead of Budget 2025 to ensure that the voices of foster carers across Ireland were heard at the highest levels of Government. Against a backdrop of increasing demand for foster carers and growing concern across the care sector, IFCA's Budget 2025 campaign was rooted in a simple yet vital message: Time to Deliver for Foster Carers.

Our comprehensive campaign included a Pre-Budget Submission and a series of coordinated actions designed to raise public and political awareness, including:

- Meet-and-greet sessions inside Leinster House that brought foster carers and IFCA staff face-to-face with TDs, Senators, and Ministers, enabling real stories to be shared directly with policymakers.
- A dedicated Uplift letter campaign, empowering foster carers nationwide to contact their local TDs and urge support for IFCA's key asks.
- Engagement with political representatives, including follow-up briefings and meetings with a wide cross-section of Government and opposition representatives.

Our submission focused on four critical areas:

- Pension Security for foster carers
- A Comprehensive Suite of Supports, including placement start-up costs, mileage reform, and automatic access to the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowance
- Improved Access to Therapeutic Supports for children in care through enhanced Tusla funding

- A Cross-Government Strategy to address the systemic issues affecting foster care, spanning healthcare, education, aftercare, disability, and justice

These asks reflected the lived realities of foster families, as well as a vision for a more equitable and sustainable foster care system.

Budget 2025 delivered several key commitments:

- Double Foster Care Allowance payment before Christmas
- Two Double Child Benefit Payments
- €88 million uplift in Tusla's funding, supporting:
 - New funding to support children and foster families at the start of placements
 - Expanded access to therapeutic supports
 - Additional mileage support for foster carers
 - €400 once-off Domiciliary Care Allowance payment and a €20 increase in monthly rate

While we welcomed these developments as progress, IFCA remains deeply disappointed that pension security for foster carers and auto-enrolment for Back-to-School Allowance were not addressed – despite their critical importance to the wellbeing and recognition of foster families.

We extend our sincere thanks to all the foster carers, members, and supporters who took part in the campaign, from attending events to writing letters, meeting TDs, and sharing stories. Your voices are powerful, and they are being heard.

As Ireland continues to face challenges in recruitment and retention of foster carers, our advocacy will persist with renewed energy and determination. Foster care is a vital part of our care system, and we will not stop until every foster family receives the recognition, support, and respect they deserve.

Pension Information Session for Foster Carers

The Irish Foster Care Association hosted a dedicated information session for foster carers, focusing on State Pension entitlements. Organised in collaboration with the Department of Social Protection, the session responded to requests for more tailored guidance on pensions and related entitlements. Key areas covered in the session included:

- An overview of payments available after age 66
- Contribution requirements for the State Pension (Contributory)
- Recognition of caring periods in eligibility assessments
- Recent updates to the State Pension (Contributory)

A dedicated Q&A segment allowed foster carers to engage directly with Department representatives, helping to clarify individual concerns. The strong attendance and active participation reflected the ongoing need for clear, accessible information, and we look forward to facilitating further sessions in the future.

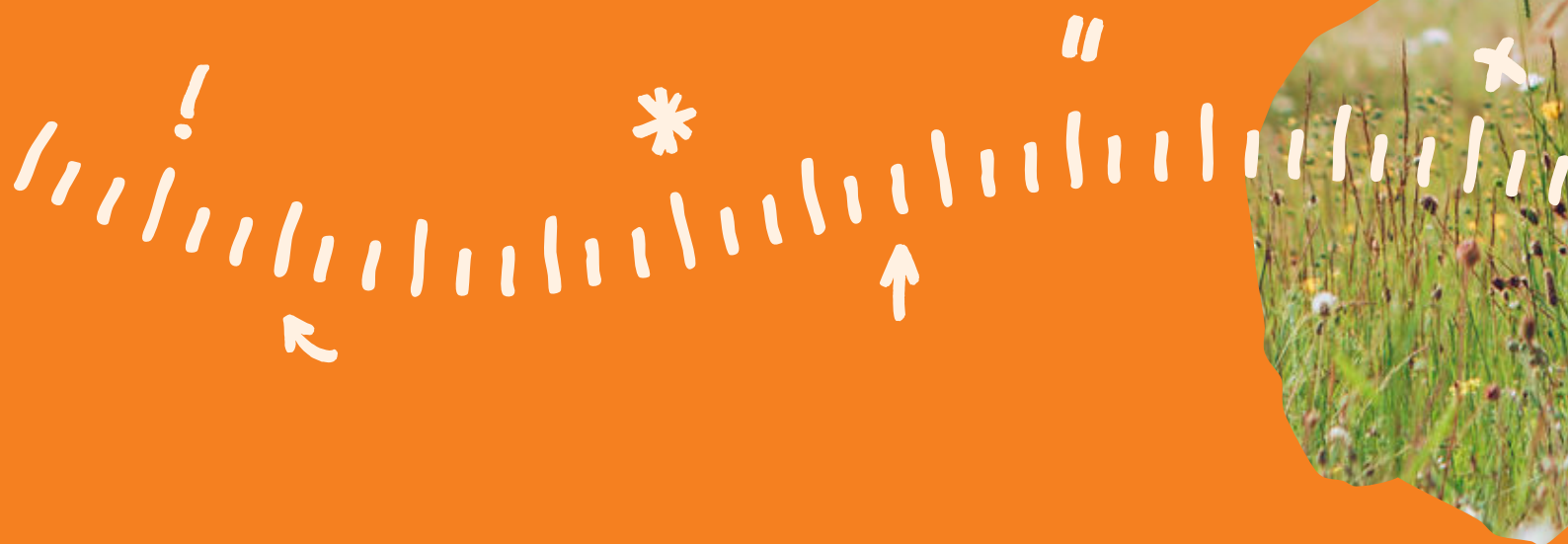
Contributing to the Future of Education: IFCA Engages with Curriculum Review

IFCA members and foster carers participated in a focus group in Dublin as part of the national review of the Primary Wellbeing Curriculum. Organised in collaboration with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the session provided a valuable platform for foster carers to share their insights on the needs and experiences of children in care in relation to the new Wellbeing curriculum, including SPHE.

In addition to direct participation, IFCA notified its members about the opportunity to submit feedback online to the NCCA. IFCA also made a formal written submission highlighting the importance of a Physical Education (PE) curriculum that supports foundational sensorimotor development. The submission proposed the BUSS (Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems) model as a useful approach for understanding and promoting school readiness and supporting children's engagement in learning and relationships.

The revised primary curriculum is expected to be implemented in the coming years.

Services Overview





National Helpline Service

The National Helpline Service continues to be a vital support for foster carers across Ireland, offering independent, confidential, and non-judgmental assistance. Operated by trained and certified staff and volunteers, many of whom are foster carers themselves, the service is available via telephone, email, and webchat, Monday to Friday from 11am to 3pm.

As the only dedicated helpline in Ireland specifically for foster carers, the service provides high-quality information, guidance, and emotional support on all aspects of foster care. It offers a safe and supportive space where callers can discuss concerns, navigate complex situations, and receive empathetic, objective assistance.

In addition to offering direct support, the helpline serves as a key access point to IFCA's Advocacy and Counselling Services, ensuring members can be connected to further individualised help when needed.

The helpline also plays a strategic role within IFCA by identifying emerging issues and trends on the ground, informing our national advocacy efforts and ensuring that the voices of foster carers are heard at policy level.

Our aim is to respond to all calls and messages received during helpline hours on the same day, ensuring timely support for those who need it the most.

"The information provided was excellent, they truly went the extra mile by following up with additional details via email."

540

cases

107

referrals
to advocacy

1,552

activities



694

Calls



708

Emails



90

Webchats



42

Texts



4

Referrals to
external organisations



5

Direct referrals
to advocacy



9

Organisational
advocacy

Top 10 Helpline Issues

1. Financial Queries

2. Allegations

3. Placement Ending/
Breakdown Support

4. Foster Child Support
Psychological/
Emotional

5. Foster Carer
Emotional Support

6. Assessment/
Approval

7. General
Care Queries

8. Membership
Queries

9. Access

10. Aftercare

*"I felt I had time to share my story
with a receptive ear. I was understood,
I was believed. Promised follow up,
was prompt and relevant."*



*"She listened to my concerns
and advised as to what we
needed to do, so lovely."*

Top 10 Referral Themes for Advocacy Support

**1. Placement Ending/
Issues/Breakdowns**

2. Allegations

**3. Assessment/
Approval**

**4. Communication
with Social Work
Teams**

**5. Counselling
Referrals**

6. Advocacy support

7. Agency Transfers

8. Aftercare

9. Access

10. Complaints

National Advocacy Service

Our National Advocacy Service is a critical service for foster carers across Ireland. Often when difficulties arise, foster carers can feel upset, hopeless, or in many cases, isolated. We can assign an independent advocate to explore individual and personal challenges, and to work together to find solutions.

The service ensures foster carers are aware of their rights, and how they can assert those rights in the hope of achieving a supportive and meaningful resolution. The National Advocacy Service received 107 referrals in 2024, which highlights just how important this support is for foster families. We are here to support all members in any way that we can.

Our aim is to provide a consistent, accessible, and accountable service by offering:

- A safe and supportive space for foster carers to reflect on the circumstances that have contributed to their current difficulties.
- A compassionate and non-judgemental response that encourages foster carers to share their experiences and express their hopes for the future.
- Clear, accessible, and timely information to empower foster carers to make well-informed decisions about the options available to them.

Benefits of engaging with our service:

- A sense of empowerment, gained through being actively listened to and seeing your voice influence outcomes and next steps.
- An objective perspective, offering space to reflect on concerns and identify areas for positive change.
- Clarity and insight into what is happening now, what may happen next, and what actions might be needed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone involved.
- Support in understanding professional viewpoints, including their concerns, reflections on past events, and thoughts on potential changes moving forward.
- A constructive model of communication, designed to strengthen relationships with other professionals through respectful, open, and collaborative dialogue.

"Thank you again for giving me the balance I need to deal with this."

- Increased competence and confidence, particularly for newly approved foster carers who may benefit from practical tools, tailored support, and time to adapt to the complexities of their role.

Issues related to allegations, welfare concerns, placement endings, communication, and grievances and complaints dominated the demand for our service in 2024. In addition to these, other important issues emerged and formed part of our individual advocacy. Some of these are below:

Financial concerns

Several referrals related to the financial implications of fostering, with a number of foster carers seeking support to explore and apply for enhanced payments. The rising costs of living and the hidden costs involved in fostering can place a financial strain on personal finances. In some circumstances, a loss of earnings was associated with the fostering experience, and foster carers felt financially disadvantaged since becoming foster carers. Financial concerns have a direct impact on retention of some foster carers.

Aftercare

Issues and concerns related to aftercare and the provision of financial and housing supports for young people were significant. Several foster carers requested support to address insufficient support for children with disabilities or complex needs who could not access education. Many young people reach the age of maturity while in secondary school, and many foster carers highlighted inequities in the system when this occurs. Foster carers requested support to push for a more integrated approach to aftercare with increased flexibility and increased collaboration with foster carers in aftercare supports planning.

Child Abuse Substantiation Policy (CASP)

CASP is the approach and framework within the current legislative framework to assess allegations of child abuse. It is informed by best practice, fair procedures, and ensures adherence to data protection protocols. Tusla gave a commitment to undertake a review of the CASP procedure, one year post implementation. IFCA's advocacy team were key contributors to this review process.

"Thanks for all your help. There are days I don't think I would have gone through it without you to ring. I appreciate all you have done. A million thanks is not enough."

Several key changes emerged which has led to CASP Version 2. One of the most significant changes arising was an amendment to the inclusion of foster carers in the policy. Only foster carers working directly with children outside of their fostering role would be referred to CASP as set out in CASP Version 2, October 2024.

While IFCA advocated and welcomed this amendment, there was no immediate clear and robust policy replacement. Tusla would now employ an Initial Assessment (IA) process for any allegations and welfare concerns about foster carers. The purpose of the assessment is to respond to and manage any risk of harm; the focus is on establishing and maintaining safety for the child through a safety plan. IFCA is involved in the development of a guidance document for foster carers about the allegation process.

Emotional Support – and the link to placement disruptions and endings

Foster carers are often supporting children with intense behaviours and reactions to previous trauma. This is often amid a scarcity of therapeutic and specialist services for high-needs children. Without adequate support, foster carers face a high risk of vicarious trauma. Addressing this issue is not only a matter of foster carer well-being but it is central to the quality and continuity of care provided to Ireland's most vulnerable children.

Several of the foster carers accessing the advocacy service valued the importance of being able to talk about this with an independent person. To feel heard and to have their feelings and experiences validated. Through exploring the lived experience of fostering, many highlighted the emotional impact it was having on them.



National Counselling Service

In 2024, the Irish Foster Care Association continued its commitment to supporting foster families across Ireland through our dedicated Counselling Service. Recognising the unique challenges foster carers face, we provided a compassionate, confidential space where foster carers could feel supported, heard, and understood.

Our Counselling Service is designed to offer foster carers a safe and welcoming space to explore their personal experiences, challenges, and emotional needs related to fostering. Members can access six free counselling sessions, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent access to mental health and emotional support. Throughout 2024, we provided counselling support to 32 foster families, each with their own story and set of complex circumstances. These sessions have proven to be a vital resource for families navigating the complexities and demands of foster care.

As we conclude a successful year, we are proud to report that our counselling service has made a significant impact on the well-being and resilience of foster carers throughout Ireland. Looking forward to 2025, our goal is to continue and expand the service, reaching even more families and further enhancing the quality of

support we offer. We remain steadfast in our mission to provide the best care possible for those who open their hearts and homes to children in need.

— “It gave me the space I did not know I needed. I felt truly listened to for the first time in a while.”

We extend our sincere thanks to Pobal for their continued funding and support. Their generous contribution has made this service possible and is a testament to the shared commitment to strengthening foster care in Ireland. It is through this funding that we have been able to support our foster carers in such meaningful ways and help them continue providing stable, loving homes to vulnerable children.

“The counsellor understood the foster care system and the pressures it brings – that made a huge difference.”

Learning & Development

In 2024, IFCA delivered a dynamic and responsive programme of learning and development opportunities, designed to meet the evolving needs of foster carers and professionals in the sector. These initiatives reflect our commitment to fostering a learning culture that supports resilience, reflective practice, and collaboration across the fostering community.

- A total of 66 learning events and courses were delivered, with 980 participants engaging across the year.
- IFCA collaborated with Tusla to co-host tailored regional training sessions for foster carers and practitioners in the Midlands, Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary, Kerry, Waterford/Wexford, Donegal, Galway/Roscommon, and Dublin South East/Wicklow.
- Two 8-week Circle of Security Parenting programs were facilitated by Joan Boland and Anne McCluskey, with 14 foster carers completing the course.
- Eight online Advocacy Forums were held for foster carers across the country, providing a valuable space to share insights, raise questions, and discuss experiences related to CASP and Signs of Safety. These forums enhanced access to support, fostered a stronger sense of community, and reinforced the importance of self-advocacy within the fostering network.
- Two legal webinars:
 - 'The Rights of Children with Disabilities' shared a working knowledge of legislation and systems in place in order to effectively support the realisation of rights for children with disabilities.
 - 'Care Orders and Enhanced Rights' outlined the different types of applications made on behalf of children in the care system, the importance of the voice of the child and best interests' principle in family

"This was one of the best courses I have ever done with IFCA: informative, dynamic, collaborative, educational supportive and helpful. I thoroughly enjoyed Chris's presentation and feel I really learnt a lot of practical skills that we are already using as a foster family."

law matters involving children, and how a judge decides between the competing interests of all parties in care proceedings.

- A series of seven, hour-long Lunchtime Practice Booster Sessions for practitioners was facilitated by Christina Enright. These sessions focused on practical and evidence-based approaches to trauma-informed care, including:
 - The impact of developmental trauma
 - Supporting recovery from trauma
 - Placement endings
 - Therapeutic communication with children
 - Reflective fostering practice
 - Lifestory work
 - Using research evidence in planning family contact.
- A monthly online self-care and peer support drop-in space for foster carers was facilitated by psychotherapist Marianne Dwyer. This safe and supportive space encouraged connection, reflection, and emotional wellbeing among foster carers.
- As part of Fostering Awareness Week 2024, IFCA hosted a panel discussion event titled *'It Takes a Village... Celebrating Foster Care Communities in Ireland.'* Chaired by Dr. Danielle Douglas, the panel explored the essential role of community in supporting children in care and their foster families. Contributions came from a diverse panel, including a foster carer, a school principal, a care-experienced young adult, the CEO of a youth advocacy service, and an education support worker working with unaccompanied minors.

BUSS® LEAPlets: Supporting Early Intervention Through Movement and Connection

The BUSS® (Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems) approach focuses on helping children who have experienced developmental trauma to strengthen how they use and experience their bodies, process sensory information, and manage emotions. These foundational skills are essential for everyday learning and relationships, both at home and in school. As many children in care experience challenges in these areas, the BUSS LEAPlets programme is open to all children in foster care.

— “I didn’t know where to start to
— meet all her needs, LEAPlets gave
— me lots of ways to help her and
— so much support.”

LEAPlets is an early intervention group programme where young children and their foster carers participate together in fun, structured sessions involving movement, music, sensory games, and stories. The programme helps foster carers better understand their child’s emotional and physical responses and offers practical ways to support their development.

In 2024, six LEAPlets groups ran in Dublin, Clonmel, and Kells, supporting 31 children (aged 3–6 years) and 30 foster carers from across the country. Each group ran for 11 sessions and was led by a trained BUSS facilitator with support from a multi-disciplinary team.

The LEAPlets pilot project is funded by the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal through Community Foundation Ireland. An independent evaluation of the pilot – funded by the What Works Building Evidence Scheme at the Department of Children, Equality,

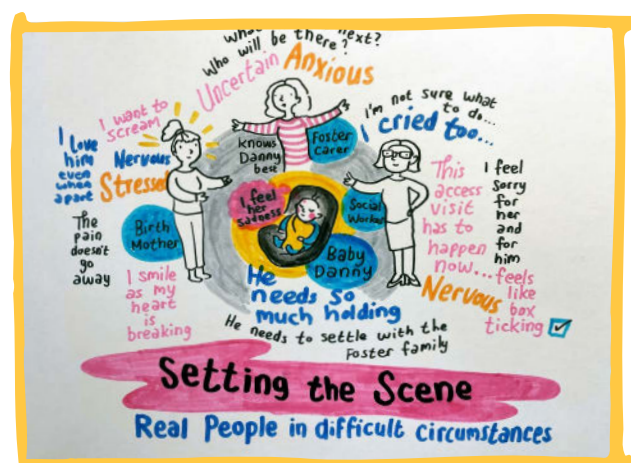
Disability, Integration and Youth, continued during 2024. Researchers from Trinity College Dublin and TUS Shannon conducted interviews with foster carers, practitioners, and stakeholders to assess the programme's impact. Both the pilot and its evaluation will be completed in 2025.

Promoting Better Outcomes for Babies and Young Children in Foster Care

This collaborative project, launched in late 2023, aims to improve outcomes for babies and young children in foster care by strengthening support for their parents, foster carers, and practitioners. The project is funded by the Katharine Howard Foundation through the Children's Promise Grants Programme and is overseen by a multi-agency working group including representatives from IFCA, Tusla, Childhood Matters, Barnardos, Youngballymun, Clarecare and TIGALA Guardian ad Litem service.

National Symposium

In May 2024, a national symposium titled "Holding the Baby in Mind in Child Protection and Fostering" was hosted at Maynooth University. The event brought together national and international experts to share research and best practice in infant mental health and child welfare.



- **Professor Harriet Ward** (University of Oxford) delivered the keynote address, sharing her research on improving long-term outcomes for infants in care.
- **Dr. Aidan Bohlander and Dr. Jenifer Goldman Fraser** (ZERO TO THREE, USA) presented on the *Safe Babies Court Team Approach*, an innovative model transforming child welfare systems to better support families and babies.
- Members of the Project Working Group also shared perspectives on:
 - Using a developmental lens in work with infants and their families
 - Navigating complexities in parent-infant relationships
 - The importance of reflective spaces for foster carers and practitioners

Throughout 2024, the Working Group progressed the design of a capacity building programme for foster carers and professionals, based on three key pillars:

1. **Contact** – Supporting high-quality, developmentally appropriate contact between babies in care and their parents.
2. **Assessment and Decision-Making** – Embedding infant mental health principles in parental capacity assessments and ensuring that decisions reflect the urgent developmental needs of infants.
3. **Intervention** – Creating reflective, infant-focused key working teams that include parents, foster carers, and practitioners to provide coordinated, responsive support.



"As always Christina made it so interesting, enjoyable and easy to follow. I will use the information in both my work and my personal life."

Children of Families Who Foster Project

In 2024, the Children of Families Who Foster Project Working Group completed the redevelopment of New Beginnings, a preparatory groupwork programme originally created by IFCA over 20 years ago. The updated programme is designed to support the birth children of foster carers, recognising their unique role and experiences within fostering families.

To ensure the programme reflects the voices of children and young people, the Working Group established a strong connection with the Tusla National Lead for Child and Youth Participation and the Tusla National Children and Young People's (CYP) Participation Group.

This initiative reflects IFCA's ongoing commitment to supporting the whole fostering family and ensuring the voices of all children are heard and valued.

Foster Journal

Foster Journal Issue 15, Protecting foster care, was based on the theme of our National Conference 2023.

At the conference, Dr Danielle Douglas gave a powerful keynote address and this journal issue opened with her article, 'Protecting foster care: an insider's perspective', which gave an insight into her personal experience of foster care, the lens through which she has developed her extensive professional research and practice.

In their article, 'Trauma in the foster care system: finding positive ways forward in practice', authors Lisa McCormack, Niamh Campbell and Dr Maria Lotty provided us with an insightful and timely look at trauma-informed practice in context of the current challenges in the fostering system.

In 'The protective capacity of reflective ability', Jim Cantwell championed the value and benefit of reflective practice and Caroline Roe and Agnes Feely expanded upon the theme of their conference workshop based on their important research, 'Risk factors and patterns of disruption in foster care in Ireland'. A refreshing perspective on the importance of fun and humour was provided for us in Dr John Digney's article, and in 'Rolling up our sleeves to stay connected and protected' Alison Digney outlined the vast array of benefits and improved outcomes associated with horticultural therapy.

Learning Events

January

Supporting Children who Have Been Traumatized through Exposure to Domestic Abuse – Christina Enright (National)

Lunchtime Bitesize Practice Booster: The Impact of Developmental Trauma on Children – Christina Enright (National)

Supporting Children through the Transition of Adolescent Development – Christina Enright (Midlands & Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary)

Safe Care and Safety Planning – Andrew Murphy & Valerie Duffy (National)

Understanding and Supporting Children who Present with Sexualised Behaviour – Christina Enright (National)

A Compassionate Approach to Experiencing Loss in Fostering – Marianne Dwyer (National)

Minding Yourself in Uncertainty: A Compassionate Space for Foster Carers - 10 monthly sessions – Marianne Dwyer (National)

Circle of Security Parenting – Anne McCluskey & Joan Boland (National)

February

How Good Record Keeping Supports Foster Placements – Sharon Kelly, Foster Carer (National)

Developmental Trauma Recovery: Caring for Children and Adolescents who have Experienced Trauma through Neglect, Abuse and Separation – Christina Enright (Waterford & Wexford)

Lunchtime Bitesize Practice Booster: How Do Children Recover from Developmental Trauma – Christina Enright (National)

BUSS LEAPlets Tallaght – Suzanne Hanway, BUSS Lead (Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare)

Social Skills Development in Traumatized Children – Christina Enright (National)

Supporting Children who Have Been Traumatized through Exposure to Domestic Abuse – Christina Enright (Midlands/Carlow, Kilkenny & South Tipperary)

Minding Yourself in Uncertainty: A Compassionate Space for Foster Carers - 10 monthly sessions – Marianne Dwyer (National)

Advocacy Service Online Advice Forum - Child Abuse Substantiation Policy (CASP) – Andrew Murphy & Wendy Gilsenan (Louth, Longford, Cavan, Meath, West Meath, Offaly, Monaghan and Dublin North)

Advocacy Service Online Advice Forum - Child Abuse Substantiation Policy (CASP) – Andrew Murphy & Roisin Dunne (Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow, Laois, Carlow, Wexford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Clare, Limerick, Waterford, Kerry & Cork)

Advocacy Service Online Advice Forum - Child Abuse Substantiation Policy (CASP)
– Andrew Murphy & Colleen Nichols
(Donegal, Roscommon, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Galway & West Cavan)

March

It Takes a Village - An Online Panel discussion – Dr. Danielle Douglas & others (National)

Lunchtime Bitesize Practice Booster: Placement Endings – Christina Enright (National)

Understanding and Responding to Anxiety in Childhood
– Peadar Maxwell (Kerry)

Blocked Care and Self-Care: Supporting Foster Carers to Stay Resilient in the face of Challenge – Christina Enright (Waterford & Wexford)

Helping Children and Teenagers to Develop an Ability to Understand, Express and Regulate their Anger in Ways that Support their Emotional Wellbeing
– Christina Enright (National)

Advocacy Service Online Advice Forum - Child Abuse Substantiation Policy (CASP)
– Andrew Murphy & Colleen Nichols
(Donegal, Roscommon, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Galway & West Cavan)

Advocacy Service Online Advice Forum - Child Abuse Substantiation Policy (CASP)
– Andrew Murphy & Wendy Gilsenan
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– Andrew Murphy & Roisin Dunne (Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow, Laois, Carlow, Wexford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Clare, Limerick, Waterford, Kerry & Cork)

April

BUSS Training Level One – Sarah Lloyd, Vicky Holland & Parent Mentor Ruth (National)

Self-Care through Self-Compassion
– Marianne Dwyer (National)

Just Right State: A Sensory Attachment Course for Foster Carers – Chris West (National)

Supporting Yourself and Your Children During times of Unpredictability, Fear and Stories of Suffering Across the World
– Christina Enright (National)

BUSS LEAPlets Clonmel – Tara Moloney, BUSS Lead (Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary)

BUSS LEAPlets Rockfield House, Kells
– Della Murtagh, BUSS Lead (Louth, Meath, Midlands, Cavan, Monaghan)

Responding to Lying and Stealing
– Christina Enright (Waterford & Wexford)

May

Safe Care and Safety Planning

– Andrew Murphy & Valerie Duffy, (Kerry)

Supporting the Time Children Spend with their Birth Families

– Christina Enright (Waterford & Wexford)

National Symposium - Holding the Baby in Mind in Child Protection & Fostering

– Professor Harriet Ward & Various (National)

Developmental Trauma Recovery: Caring for Children and Adolescents who have Experienced Trauma through Neglect, Abuse & Separation

– Christina Enright (National)

Placement Endings

– Christina Enright (National)

Legal Webinar - Rights of Children with Disability

– Tom Farrell of Mason Hayes & Curran Solicitors (National)

Advocacy Service Online Advice Forum

- **Signs of Safety** – Andrew Murphy & Roisin Dunne (Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow, Laois, Carlow, Wexford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Clare, Limerick, Waterford, Kerry & Cork)

Advocacy Service Online Advice Forum

- **Signs of Safety** – Andrew Murphy & Wendy Gilsean (Louth, Longford, Cavan, Meath, Westmeath, Offaly, Monaghan & Dublin North)

June

Lunchtime Bitesize Practice Booster: How Research Evidence Related to Trauma Informs Decision-Making and Planning of Family Contact

– Christina Enright (National)

September

Supporting Children to Recover from Emotional Neglect

– Christina Enright (National)

Lunchtime Bitesize Practice Booster: Therapeutic Communication to Gain Children's Thoughts, Feelings, Wishes and Needs

– Christina Enright (National)

BUSS LEAPlets Clonmel

– Tara Moloney, BUSS Lead (Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary)

Responding to Lying and Stealing

– Christina Enright (Waterford/Wexford)

Understanding and Supporting Children who Present with Sexualised Behaviour

– Christina Enright (Kerry)

Being Review Ready: Understanding and Engaging in Foster Carer Reviews

– Bridget McDonagh (National)

Lunchtime Bitesize Practice Booster: Promoting Reflective Fostering Skills

– Christina Enright (National)

Self-Care for Relative Foster Carers, a 4-part course

– Marianne Dwyer (Midlands & Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary)

October

Circle of Security Parenting

– Anne McCluskey & Joan Boland
(National)

Child and Adolescent Emotional Health in the Digital Age

– Peadar Maxwell
(Dublin SE & Wicklow)

Supporting Sibling Relationships

– Christina Enright (National)

Help Me Reach My Teenager

– Christina Enright (Galway & Roscommon)

Helping Children and Teenagers to Develop an Ability to Understand, Express and Regulate their Anger in Ways that Support their Emotional Wellbeing

– Christina Enright (Kerry)

BUSS LEAPLETS Rockfield House, Group 1– Della Murtagh, BUSS Lead

(Louth, Meath, Midlands, Cavan &
Monaghan)

BUSS LEAPLETS Rockfield House, Group 2 – Della Murtagh, BUSS Lead

(Louth, Meath, Midlands, Cavan &
Monaghan)

Understanding Financial Supports in Foster Care

– Karen Cahill (National)

Legal Webinar - Care Orders & Enhanced Rights

– Laura Warnock of Mason Hayes
& Curran Solicitors (National)

November

Developmental Trauma, Brain Development, Attachment and Behaviour

– Christina Enright
(Midwest/North Tipperary)

Eating Problems and Trauma

– Christina Enright (Kerry)

Placement Endings

– Christina Enright
(National)

Developmental Trauma Recovery

– Christina Enright (CKST)

Lunchtime Bitesize Practice Booster: Principles for Doing Lifestory Work

– Christina Enright (National)

Supporting the Time Children Spend with their Birth Families

– Christina
Enright (Donegal)

Branches & Hubs: Building Community and Connection

IFCA's Branch and Hub network continued to play a vital role in fostering connection, support, and shared experiences for fostering families across Ireland. A total of 52 Branch and Hub events were held throughout the year, with an estimated 2,660 participants in attendance. These events created opportunities for foster carers, children in foster care, and children who foster to come together, relax, have fun, and build meaningful relationships within their local fostering communities.

— “She really liked seeing others
— in foster care families. I think it
— helps normalise it. A party just
— for them, what’s not to like.”

Family Events

A total of 30 family-focused events were hosted, offering seasonal celebrations, outings, and inclusive activities for families. These included:

- 9 Easter Events, welcoming 649 attendees
- 12 Christmas Family Luncheons, enjoyed by over 1,400 participants
- 2 Christmas Pantomime Outings, attended by 200 people
- 1 Summer Event
- 5 Walk a Day in May events
- 1 October Midterm Event

Coffee Mornings and Evenings

Community-based coffee mornings and evening gatherings were hosted 18 times during the year, providing informal and supportive spaces for foster carers to connect, share experiences, and build local peer support networks.

Family Days Out

Branch and Hub events also featured a variety of fun and engaging family outings to much-loved destinations, including:

- Wild Ireland
- Causey Farm
- Castlecomer Discovery Park
- Newgrange Farm
- Old Jack’s Cottage
- Belvedere House
- Barnagh Greenway

“For our child it was an opportunity to play with her sibling in a safe environment.”

- Lough Key Forest Park
- Blackwater Open Farm
- Activate Waterford

These activities contributed to the sense of inclusion, belonging, and celebration that defines IFCA's work with fostering families throughout the year.

Christmas Regional Events

With funding support from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Tusla, IFCA delivered a series of Christmas regional events for children in foster care, children who foster, and foster carers across Ireland. These festive gatherings took place throughout November and December, in Donegal, Sligo, Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, Kildare, Offaly, Louth, and Cavan.

Designed to be inclusive and joyful, the events offered foster families the chance to socially connect, celebrate the season, and enjoy activities such as:

- Christmas meals and treats
- Cookie decorating and make-up demonstrations
- Arts and crafts, games, and discos
- Magicians, puppet shows, and live entertainment
- A special one-to-one visit with Santa for every child

For many attendees, these events were particularly meaningful. Some sibling groups, currently living with different foster families, had the opportunity to come together and share a Christmas celebration, creating treasured memories and capturing special moments in photos.

Foster carers accompanied and supported the children, with additional assistance from staff and volunteers. The events also provided a welcoming space for foster carers to relax, connect with one another, and strengthen ties within the wider fostering community.



Volunteers – The Heart of IFCA



IFCA is deeply grateful to the dedicated volunteers across the country who generously give their time and energy to support our work. In 2024, volunteers played a vital role in the delivery of our National Helpline, Branches, Hubs, and Family Events. Whether offering a few hours or a long-term commitment, each volunteer's contribution made a meaningful impact.

Volunteers are at the core of our ability to connect with and support foster families locally and nationally. We continue to encourage individuals across Ireland to consider getting involved. If you're interested in volunteering with IFCA in your area, please contact us at volunteering@ifca.ie.

Stories from Foster Care Podcast – Continuing to Grow and Inspire

Now in its third year, the Stories from Foster Care podcast series continues to grow in reach and impact, offering a vital platform for the voices of those with lived experience of the care system. The series, produced by the Irish Foster Care Association and kindly sponsored by the Department of Children, Disability & Equality, has become a key resource in raising awareness, fostering empathy, and deepening public understanding of foster care in Ireland.

This year's episodes featured a range of compelling and courageous conversations. Guests included foster carers, young people with care experience, authors, and advocates, each sharing their unique perspectives on the challenges and rewards of foster care.

Shaunagh Cunningham reflected on her early experiences before entering care and her current work as a passionate advocate through the Care Experiences project, as well as her role in Tusla.



Niall Sheehan and Lauren O'Toole, a father and his foster daughter, spoke candidly about the ups and downs of their fostering journey and the deep bond they've built.

Fiona Neary, author of *Parcels in the Post: Growing up with Fifty Siblings*, discussed fostering in Ireland in the 1980s and 90s, and how those experiences shaped her lifelong commitment to advocacy.

Josie Corr and Thomas Monahan, a foster carer and her now-adult foster son, explored the importance of supporting children in care through to adulthood, especially in navigating aftercare.

Sadie Harpur, co-author of *The Hidden World of a Foster-Girl*, shared her early experiences in care, her relationship with her twin sister, and the people who helped her find stability and hope.

Each episode is marked by honesty, warmth, and the powerful reminder of the difference that stable, loving foster care can make in a young person's life.

The Stories from Foster Care podcast is available on all major platforms and continues to be an important part of our advocacy and awareness work.

Walk a Day in May – Raising Awareness for Foster Care Across Ireland



Our annual awareness campaign, Walk a Day in May, once again brought people together across the country to highlight the importance of foster care in Ireland. The campaign encourages individuals, families, and communities to get out for a walk during the month of May and show their support for foster care and those involved in it.

This year's campaign was a great success, with fantastic engagement and photos shared from all corners of Ireland. Whether walking solo, with family, or in groups, participants helped spread a powerful message of solidarity and awareness for children in care and the vital role of foster carers.

Organised group walks took place in Kilkenny, Dublin, Mayo, Kerry and Wexford, bringing together foster families, social workers, and supporters to walk, connect, and celebrate the foster care community.

Fostering Awareness Week: Growing Hope, Fostering the Future



Fostering Awareness Week, held from 4th to 8th March, was a powerful and inspiring celebration of the transformative impact of foster care. Under the theme Growing Hope, Fostering the Future, a range of nationwide events brought visibility to the critical role foster carers play in supporting vulnerable children and young people, and the vital networks that help them thrive.

A standout feature of this year's campaign was a series of symbolic tree planting ceremonies in Dublin, Cork, Cavan, and Wexford. These ceremonies served as a poignant tribute to the deep roots foster care establishes for children,

as well as the strong, supportive communities that help them grow. The events were enhanced by the presence and endorsement of key public figures, including the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Minister Roderic O'Gorman, and several local council leaders, whose participation underscored a shared commitment to fostering.

The week also featured a diverse programme of community-based events designed to foster connection and awareness. Highlights included local coffee mornings, an engaging online panel discussion titled "It Takes a Village", and a thought-provoking talk with Sadie Harpur, co-author of *The Hidden World of a Foster Girl*. These activities provided valuable opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and recognition among foster carers, professionals, and the general public.

Throughout the campaign, a strong emphasis was placed on the importance of community support in successful fostering experiences. A member survey conducted during the week revealed that 76% of respondents found that taking part in community groups positively impacted their fostering journey, with 62% noting that community engagement was equally important for the children in their care.

We extend our sincere thanks to all those who contributed to the success of Fostering Awareness Week, whether attending events, planting trees, sharing their stories, or helping to amplify the message. Your continued support is helping to build a stronger, more inclusive future for all children in care.

Áras an Uachtaráin Garden Party

IFCA was honoured to attend a special garden party at Áras an Uachtaráin, hosted by President of Ireland / Uachtarán na hÉireann Michael D. Higgins and Sabina Higgins. The event celebrated the rich diversity of communities across Ireland, and we were proud to take part in this meaningful occasion.



Financial Statements





Where Our Funding Comes From

Tusla

Tusla continues as our key funder and partner in 2024 providing the core funding which enables IFCA to deliver its current range of supports to our members as outlined in this report. The Tusla funding amounted to 63% of our overall income in 2024.

Pobal

We received funding from Pobal through the SSNO (Scheme to Support National Organisations) grant which was provided to enable the development of our national member support services. IFCA was successful in securing the SSNO grant for 3 years ending in June 2025. The Pobal funding amounted to 10% of our overall income in 2024.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

We are delighted to receive two, one off grants from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth which enabled us to support our Christmas events and our popular podcast series. The total grant amounted to 1.7% of our overall income in 2024

Membership Income

Another strand of IFCA's income is generated through its membership fees and legal insurance payments, with 14% of our overall income coming from our membership base

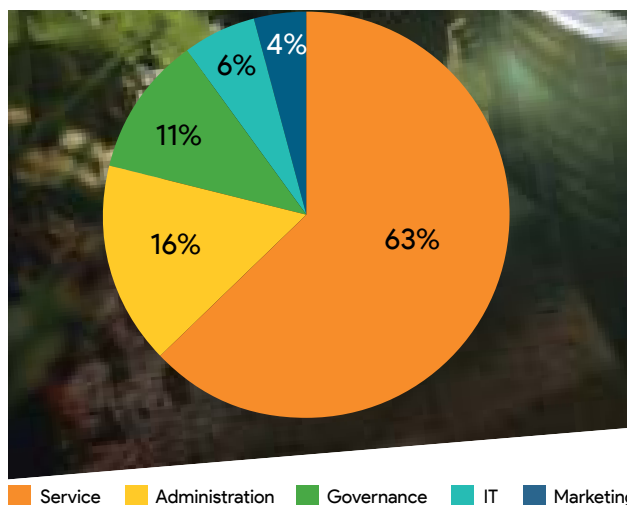
Fundraising & Donations

A welcome and very appreciated portion of our funding comes from donations and fundraising. These income streams amounted to 2% of our overall income in 2024.

Grant Funding

Grants awarded are critical to the development and innovation in IFCA's work. Funding awarded through grants such as Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Toy Show Appeal, Community Fund Foundation and Katharine Howard Foundation allow IFCA to explore and initiate projects that positively impact the fostering community, expand our reach and help us to contribute to the promotion and progression of foster care in Ireland. In 2024 grants awarded accounted for 9% of our funding.

How our funding is used



Income and Expenditure

Irish Foster Care Association CLG (A Company Limited by Guarantee and not having Share Capital)

Detailed Income and Expenditure Account Financial Year ended 31st December 2024

	2024 (€)	2023 (€)
Income		
Miscellaneous Income	219,210	168,727
Fundraising/Donations	12,890	9,050
Tusla funding	540,816	543,673
Tusla Funding for hubs/branches	17,094	47,481
An Pobal	90,981	86,036
Total Income	880,991	854,967
Expenditure		
Overheads	38,935	75,255
Payroll & Pension costs	481,963	515,649
Telephone & Postage	6,948	10,283
Conference/Seminars/Meetings	2,008	26,019
Learning & Development	29,352	34,894
Equipment/IT/Website costs	61,866	57,582
General Expenses	223,334	102,246
Foster Family social events	64,271	52,154
Depreciation	6,910	6,876
Total Expenditure	915,587	880,958
Deficit		
(Deficit) for the financial year	-34,596	-25,991
Other interest receivable or similar income	164	45
	-34,432	-25,946

Balance Sheet

Irish Foster Care Association CLG (A Company Limited by Guarantee and not having Share Capital)

As at 31st December 2024

	2024 (€)	2023 (€)
Total Fixed Assets		
Tangible Assets		6,910
	0	6,910
Current assets		
Debtors	35,659	17,420
Cash at bank and in hand:	298,998	239,776
	334,657	257,196
Creditors: amount falling due		
Within one year	236,256	131,273
Net current assets	98,401	125,923
Total assets less current liabilities	98,401	132,833
Net assets	98,401	132,833
Capital and reserves		
General Reserve	98,401	132,833
Members funds	98,401	132,833

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime and in accordance with Section 1A of FRS 102 'Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland.'

Board of Directors 2024 – Attendance at Board Meetings

Directors	Title	Total	Note
Róisín Clarke	CEO	8 out of 8	<i>Resigned - 28/9/24</i>
Raymond Nolan	Chairperson	11 out of 11	
Sandra Duffy	Vice Chair	10 out of 11	
Aaron Vickery	Co. Secretary	8 out of 11	
Brendan Gillen	Treasurer	8 out of 11	
Riccardo Panza	Trustee	6 out of 8	<i>Resigned - 11/10/24</i>
Harold Barber	Trustee	6 out of 11	
Aidan Waterstone	Trustee	7 out of 11	
Claire Corridan	Trustee	6 out of 11	
Brian Murphy	Trustee	1 out of 3	<i>Resigned - 11/4/24</i>
Stiofáin MacDáibhéad	Trustee	7 out of 9	<i>Resigned - 12/11/24</i>
Mary Doyle	Trustee	11 out of 11	
Irene Browne	Trustee	10 out of 11	





Thank You

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our dedicated staff, trustees, volunteers, and members for their unwavering commitment throughout the year. To our funders and supporters, your generosity makes our work possible. And to the fostering community we serve and stand beside every day, thank you for your strength, resilience, and trust. Together, we continue to build a brighter future for every child in care.

IFCA kindly acknowledges the funding we receive from our partners to support our services.



An Roinn Leanai, Míchumais
agus Comhionannais
Department of Children,
Disability and Equality





Irish Foster Care Association

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