



# The Reaching Out, Supporting Families Programme

## The story so far

June 2019

C E S

For Policy.  
For Practice.  
For Impact.



**COMMUNITY**  
FUND

# Acknowledgments

This booklet includes messages from an overarching evaluation of the Reaching Out, Supporting Families Programme, along with stories about the projects. CES would like to thank all of the projects who submitted their stories. CES would also like to acknowledge support from the National Lottery Community Fund.

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*Thirty six  
partnership  
projects  
supporting  
families  
to deal with  
adversity*

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# Foreword

**Kate Beggs**

*Northern Ireland Director  
The National Lottery  
Community Fund*



**When we opened this programme, we knew that to truly improve children's lives, a whole family approach was needed. For many of our grant holders, this approach was a new way of working. But we knew that this approach was most likely to create meaningful change.**

We also saw the potential for flexibility and collaboration – we knew projects could be stronger and have more impact working together. It has been encouraging to see how the partnerships, both formal and informal, have developed over the years. One of the highlights for us has been how they have shared learning to improve families' lives.

It's wonderful to see the projects coming together, and this shared learning is without a doubt improving practice and leading to better support for families.

We want to pay tribute to the role that CES has played in developing and fostering relationships between the projects, allowing for best practice and innovation in how we support families in Northern Ireland.

One of the most striking aspects of the programme is how diverse the projects are. They are supporting families coping with a range of issues, including learning disabilities or difficulties, autism, physical disability, health issues, and isolation.

All are equipping parents to overcome adversity, bringing families together to learn and helping families feel more connected to their community. That's why it is lovely to see all the stories in this booklet – many of them in the words of the families themselves.

This programme is very much about using a test and learn approach, and we're delighted that much of the innovation has happened thanks to National Lottery funding.

I want to commend all the projects on the difference they are making to families across Northern Ireland. We are looking forward to seeing how their work contributes to the continuing development of support and services for families in Northern Ireland.



# Introduction

Majella McCloskey

*Senior Manager*

*CES*



**In September 2015, the National Lottery Community Fund engaged CES to provide support to projects funded by the Reaching Out, Supporting Families Programme. The aims of the programme go hand in hand with the values of CES and what we do. They resonate with our beliefs that evidence, when combined with good implementation can make a real difference to the lives of families. We invest time in relationships and networks because they are key to sustaining knowledge and improvements to practice.**

Over the past four years a CES project team has supported Reaching Out, Supporting Families projects in different ways – from organising opportunities for people involved to come together and learn, to providing tailored, one to one support to help with implementation and evaluation. Masterclasses and workshops have provided access to expertise in topics such as Adverse Childhood Experiences, supporting parents, communications and partnership working.

Engagement has been at the heart of our approach, to understand the context for projects. All of them work with families experiencing adversity

and who consequently have diverse and complex needs. They operate in both busy urban environments and more isolated rural communities. The unique nature of the partnerships involved, the capacity, funding and infrastructure available to projects all have an impact on how they are implemented. For these reasons, CES has adopted a flexible, bespoke and responsive approach, to walk alongside the projects as they are delivered.

I would like to pay tribute to the Programme Steering Committee and their role in shaping, organising and communicating our annual learning and networking programme; and ensuring that our work is relevant to projects. Our thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund for their investment in both the Programme, and in CES's role. It has been a privilege for us to work alongside the organisations funded, and to see their work deliver real changes for their communities. We are delighted to showcase a flavour of the work of the Programme here. We are committed to continuing to work with all of you in the next phase of the Programme, and ensuring that the knowledge and learning that we have developed is put to good use and shared for the benefit of families in Northern Ireland.



# Reaching Out, Supporting Families

£25 million invested



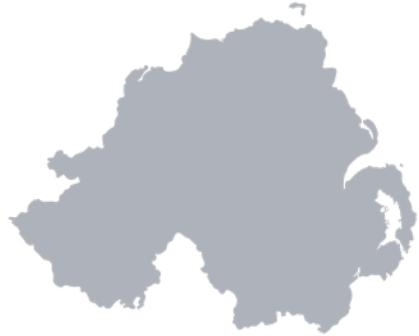
over 5 years in



36 projects



supporting families  
to deal with adversity



working to achieve

3 outcomes



## Project Activities



16 address the mental and physical wellbeing needs of families



5 support families who are marginalised



9 support the economic and/or educational empowerment of families



6 support families in crisis

## CES's evaluation shows projects achieving the outcomes through



3 building blocks

1



Greater skills, knowledge and understanding

2



Come together to learn

3



Part of the community they live in

Parents have increased confidence

Parents have new knowledge and skills

Enhanced family support services


## *The story so far*

Reaching Out, Supporting Families is a programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund in Northern Ireland. The Programme includes **thirty-six different projects aimed at helping families to deal with adversity** and to be part of the communities where they live.

While there are differences in the purpose, activities and approaches of each project, they share some common features. **All projects engage with families experiencing adversity** - including poverty, mental health problems, disability, unemployment, learning disabilities, domestic and gender based violence. **Services are flexible and responsive** to the families they work with.

**Partnership is at the heart of the Programme.** All projects are led by an organisation from the voluntary/ community sector and are delivered in partnership with at least one other organisation from the voluntary/ community sector or the statutory sector.

*Group or family activities, school based services, one-to-one supports, and capacity building for professionals.*

The types of activities, services and interventions delivered under the Programme include **group or family activities, school based services, one-to-one supports, and capacity building** for professionals.

One third of projects are delivered across the region of Northern Ireland, and the rest in specific urban or rural localities, or Health and Social Care Trusts. All projects are currently being delivered over five years, while one third will be extended by a further two years.

# Evaluating Reaching Out,

## *CES's role*

In 2015, the National Lottery Community Fund commissioned CES to work with the Reaching Out, Supporting Families Programme. The Fund wanted to support organisations involved to implement their projects, and to learn more about the changes for families engaging with the Programme.

CES's role has involved working with organisations from the outset to understand their needs and goals and to help them implement their projects.

Each year CES has designed and delivered events, masterclasses and workshops - covering themes such as *Adverse Childhood Experiences* and *Supporting Parents*, along with implementation and evaluation workshops. A steering committee and regular consultation with projects helps to ensure that events, workshops and meetings reflect the needs of grant holders. Learning and networking events aim to strengthen connections between projects and provide opportunities to build relationships and share experience.

## *Evaluating the Programme*

CES has been conducting an overarching evaluation of the Programme as a whole, and in early 2019 submitted an interim report to the National Lottery Community Fund. The report describes the kinds of activities undertaken by projects, the outcomes they are working towards, how they have adapted to challenges, and ultimately the difference that projects are making for families across Northern Ireland. The evaluation draws on CES's analysis of annual reports submitted to the National Lottery Community Fund, as well as CES's engagement with individual projects.

Here we summarise learning emerging from the evaluation report, along with stories from projects written by organisations and the changes they have reported for the families and children that they work with. The stories included in this brochure were written by some of the organisations involved in the Programme to share the journey, impact, and learning of their work so far. While all projects are working towards and achieving all three outcomes, their stories are showcased here to illustrate one of the programme outcomes.

# Supporting Families

## *Programme outcomes*

Projects are working towards three programme outcomes:

- 1. More children and their families will have greater skills, knowledge and understanding to overcome adversity**
- 2. More children and their families will come together to learn**
- 3. More children and their families will be part of the community they live in.**

## *Building blocks*

*The evaluation demonstrates that the outcomes are underpinned by three types of changes, or building blocks, which are enabled by projects.*

### **1. Parents and children have increased confidence**

This is the most common change reported by projects. Reports highlight increased confidence in the following aspects of parents' lives:

- *To parent*
- *To seek support*
- *To manage conflict*
- *To meet and form relationships in the community*
- *To champion services and advocate on their family's behalf.*

Reports from projects indicate also increased confidence for children. For children, confidence primarily relates to the ability to build relationships, express needs, to be more independent, and ultimately, achieve greater self confidence and self-worth.

### **2. Families have gained new and diverse knowledge and learning**

The evaluation shows that parents that have engaged with projects have enhanced their knowledge of children's learning and development.

Parents have developed skills in communicating and interaction, and are better able to support their child's education, development and life skills.

In the case of children with specific needs, parents have been supported to better understand their needs.

### **3. The Programme is enhancing support services for families**

Reports highlight a range of projects aiming to address a gap in service provision, for example in rural areas, or a need identified for a different way of working.

Research shows that families benefit when services collaborate and work together. The partnership approach in the Programme facilitates connections and relationships between organisations and services. This aims to support greater collaboration and integration. Workshops, training, masterclasses and networking events delivered by CES throughout the Programme have contributed to enhanced practitioner capacity and knowledge.

*“I am 100%  
more confident  
in my parenting  
because I am  
more confident  
in myself and I  
know I am not  
a failure.”*

# Programme

## Outcome 1:



*More children and their families will have greater skills, knowledge and understanding to overcome adversity*

Although projects deal with a range of adversities, all of them are working to enhance families' confidence and ability to tackle the distinct challenges that they are facing. Evaluation findings indicate that projects support change in three key ways:

- *Supporting stronger, happier families* – reports highlight improvements in the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of project participants, as well as a reduction in stress and anxiety and improved social-emotional skills, and ultimately, resilience.
- *Building parental capacity* – parents are developing greater self-efficacy and sense of ability to deal with the adversities facing them. Reports highlight improved understanding of children's developmental needs; increased understanding of the importance of positive reinforcement; support to develop mechanisms to deal with problematic behaviour and support to deal with life transitions and major life changes.
- *Increasing family safety and stability* – helping families to devise strategies to establish routines, to set boundaries, become more organised, and ultimately support stability in the home. In some cases, early intervention has helped the most vulnerable families avoid involvement with statutory services and family separation.

The stories that follow show some of the ways that projects have supported families to help them develop knowledge and understanding to overcome adversity.

# +Family Life Project

*A Positive Life*



*"I would like to suggest that Positive Life is very well named, as your organisation has had a major positive impact on all my family."*

This is a quote from a mum who contacted the +Family Life Project at Positive Life at a time when her family was being torn apart as a result of a diagnosis of HIV some years ago. She and her family engaged in a course of group and individual counselling sessions which helped them deal with their issues calmly and constructively. They have now turned a corner and while their journey is not over, they can look towards the future with optimism.

**The creation of a Northern Ireland where HIV attracts no more or less significance than any other serious long term condition.**



In addition to counselling from our partner agency Relate NI, families can also access practical support from Advice Space (formerly CAB). Throughout the year families come together at events to share their experiences and so reduce the feelings of isolation that can accompany a diagnosis of HIV. Mums and dads, who in year 1 of the project would have stood by and watched as their children took part in activities, are now joining in themselves as their confidence grows.

At Positive Life, we help individuals see that their diagnosis is not an ending but rather the beginning of a new

stage in their lives. We provide a safe space for them to talk about their fears and information to help overcome them. We help them develop the skills to overcome the stigma of living with a condition like HIV and to find their own solutions, so they and their family can continue to play an active role within their community.

The +Family Life Project is playing an important part in achieving the overall aim of the organisation – the creation of a Northern Ireland where HIV attracts no more or less significance than any other serious long term condition.

# Northside Family Support Programme

*Artillery Youth Centre*

**The idea for our project came from conversations we were having with young people and parents. We had just completed a very successful project helping young people back into school, college or into work. Our project was aimed at young people but we found ourselves helping their parents and family members to get back into education or find jobs.**

At the same time, we became increasingly convinced of the need to address the issues our young people were facing in the context of their families as the most important influence in their lives. It was apparent to us that supporting families was the way to best deliver youth services to the young adults we were working with.



In our conversations, we talked to parents young and old, grandparents, children and young people. We looked at the key themes of our work (employment, education, empowerment and poverty) and thought how these might translate to work with the whole family. We came to the notion that we could support 50 families over a five year period at all levels using youth work with its voluntary ethos to build a partnership that would improve outcomes for young people and their families.

# *Isn't it necessity that's the mother of invention?*



**We have helped  
families to work,  
learn and have  
fun together.**

And that's what we've done. We have helped parents into employment (23 at last count); supported young people through tricky exams – transfer tests, GCSEs and the like; helped young and old learn new skills such as first aid, cooking, homework skills, driving theory and skills that helped them directly into employment; built networks of parents and young people who better understood their rights and the skills and confidence to negotiate those same rights; and we have helped families to work, learn and have fun together.

# Routes to Resilience

*Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre*



The aim of the Routes to Resilience programme is to provide opportunities for families to increase their skills, take time out from dealing with issues and look at alternative methods of dealing with them. Focused on the importance of play for both children and families as a whole, the families include migrants, families involved in the justice system, and families at risk. All members of the family were targeted, with the idea that any positive change experienced would result in a positive outcome for children under twelve.

*"I've changed the way I deal with my family, I've realised that I have to adapt to life in Belfast and change the way I do things from how I did in Nigeria. Routes to Resilience supported my family through this process." — participating mother*

**“I can be changed by  
what happens to me.  
But I refuse to be  
reduced by it.”  
(Maya Angelou)**



The challenges our families faced were language, poverty, confidence, mental health, opportunities, cultural differences and integration, to name but a few. Through our programme we have provided bespoke, focused sessions/programmes to encourage language development, employability skills, community development and integration for the whole family. We have delivered our sessions/programmes across Belfast in local community settings and have exceeded our targets. We have engaged with over 200 families. *Learning how to say NO* and *Bend don't Break* were very popular with our mothers/grandmothers.

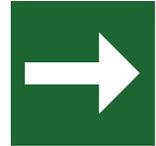


Our children's voices were heard through creative bespoke programmes such as children's participation, digital arts and play days. These programmes encouraged our children to look at their identity and importance of communication within their family circle and beyond.

# Right 4 U

*The Cedar Foundation*

**The feedback we get  
from this service is  
extremely positive.**



**All parents have hopes, dreams, aspirations and want the best for their children. Parents of children with autism are no different and our project supports children, young people and their families to achieve this.**

Right 4 U has supported 69 children and young people with autism over the past three years. Our service is about the young person and their families and what they want to get from Cedar. The team

has provided support such as developing a young person's social and communication skills, developing a daily routine, transition to secondary school and developing friendships. We also support parents to develop their knowledge of ASD through training sessions that improve their understanding of autism. These groups have also encouraged friendships between families.

Two ten-year-old boys from Co. Tyrone came to the service for support with personal safety, understanding their emotions, developing friendships and

*The impact was immediate, with both parents reporting that their sons independence skills had significantly improved.*

exploring social outlets. With the introduction of daily schedules into the family homes, the impact was immediate, with both parents reporting that their son's independence skills had significantly improved. They were getting up, washed and dressed independently.

We suggested the boys go out socially together as they had similar interests. This was a great success and through our family events the boys bonded very quickly. We proposed they meet on a weekly basis with the staff member and they were delighted. We started to go to play parks and leisure facilities

and their friendship blossomed. The feedback we get from this service is extremely positive. One parent advised *"I would highly recommend this service and more so Leanne for her patience and understanding of my son's needs. I want to express my gratitude for your help and support over the past few months. Thank you so much!"*

We hope to continue our positive work and reach many more families living in the Western Trust area.

# Step Up Step Down

*The Fostering Network*

**Partnership.  
Collaboration.  
Together.**

Step Up Step Down is a support care service delivered by The Fostering Network and The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, working in partnership in which foster carers support families on the edge of care to stay together. Social workers and Family Support Hubs refer families to the scheme. Engagement with the service is voluntary. Families can be involved for up to 15 months. Those families who have used the service have built skills to sustain their families, and have mechanisms for coping which have made their family ties more robust.

Committed, resourceful, experienced Family Support Foster Carers are working in true partnership with families, providing parent mentoring sessions, and short respite breaks for children. We also meet family needs through linking families with community supports, providing effective training, delivering residentials and bringing everyone together for fun activities.





*“Less  
shouting,  
more  
listening  
and we are  
happier  
together  
as a family.”*

The last words go to the families...

*“We were at our wits’ end, not knowing what to do for our son, and not getting any answers. We finally feel with Step Up Step Down that we are getting somewhere, and it’s making a positive difference for our whole family.” – Dad*

*“My mum and I have special time all the time now. She puts her phone away and listens to me, and I get to pick cool stuff we can do together. I love it.” – 11 year old*

# Fathering Families

*Men's Action Network*



## **YOU SAVED ME by Skunk Anansie: A social father's representation of his Hero's Journey.**

As protectors, providers teachers, mentors, partners and life developers of children to the next generation, social fathers with responsibility for their own and non-biological children can be overwhelmed, unacknowledged or unvalidated.

We offered safe spaces to explore, understand and find ways forward with life events and traumas that social fathers have experienced, such as domestic and sexual abuse, addictions, suicide ideation, depression, low self-esteem, relationship/parenting difficulties emotional wellbeing alongside practical support with benefits, housing, and legal issues relating to child access.

*"I think how a small moment could change/enrich/make my life better, even when I thought it was over."*

250+ social fathers,  
with partners and other  
family members have  
engaged with us to  
holistically support the  
family unit as a whole.



Social Fathers - valued, validated and celebrated themselves, their place, purpose and contribution to healthier, happier, safer, stronger family life and society as a whole. 250+ social fathers, with partners and other family members have engaged with us to holistically support the family unit as a whole.

The impact of our project is best left to the quote of one social father who referenced the song 'You Saved Me', which speaks to the experience of many who have engaged with Fathering Families:

*"I think about my help, my saving moments, and how far I've come so just thanking you and all at*

*Fathering Families who saved me, you are all amazing. I think how a small moment could change/enrich/make my life better, even when I thought it was over.*

*I can only prove how much I love someone if I'm allowed to show them, my beautiful daughters are getting there.*

*That wee song, I remember walking into see you, I hadn't told anyone anything really and you had a brilliant way of making me feel comfortable and safe and also strong for the first time (I was taking control of myself). WOW. So yes you saved me."*

# Here & Now Family Service

*The NOW Group*

NOW Group's Family Service is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland. This unique project supports expectant and new parents with a learning disability, difficulty or autism in the Greater Belfast Area. Our families have had 40 babies since the service started three and a half years ago.

Previously there was no specialist support for parents with learning difficulties or autism and there was a lack of engagement from these families with mainstream services for fear of social service involvement. Parents were scared to ask for help or to admit they were struggling. 30% of the families we have worked with have a child registered on the Child Protection Register.

**30% of the families  
we have worked  
with have a child  
registered on the Child  
Protection Register.**



Each family has a dedicated key worker who supports them to achieve their goals and family aspirations through one-to-one interventions including home visits and support to attend appointments. We also provide a range of peer support groups, day trips and advice through our project partner Family Planning Association.

*“It is important to me as a parent to be able to help my child to read and to tell stories.”*



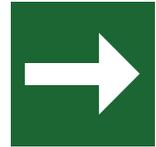
We have successfully supported 10 children to be de-registered during the project so far. One mother who struggled with her own reading skills said, *“The staff have helped me with reading and storytelling and I can do this with my child, it is important to me as a parent to be able to help my child to read and to tell stories.”*

NOW Group believes that with the right support, people with a learning disability, difficulty or autism can do anything they wish, including being parents, and this is a wish coming true through our Family Service.

# Supporting Families North Belfast

*New Lodge & Duncairn  
Community Health Partnership*

**We provide  
support to  
families facing  
poverty.**



Google is now “our arbiter of all things” so when looking for information on North Belfast I found:

- “Legacy of the Troubles still felt”
- “1/3 of children live in poverty”
- “Some of the highest levels of health inequalities in Northern Ireland”

It makes for grim reading, yet it negates the many positive things – the people, families, parks, landscape, historic buildings, shops and transport as well as a diverse and vibrant community and voluntary sector.

Through our holistic care pathway, we provide support to families facing poverty, increasingly reliant on food banks, dealing with additional needs and challenging behaviours. Consequently, a picture emerges of demoralised, stressed and socially isolated parents struggling with everyday life.

So how does SFNB work? We use the 3 tier Hardiker Model as the basis for our care pathway:

- Tier 1: Universal children and parents’ programmes across 24 primary schools
- Tier 2: Family support interventions
- Tier 3: Counselling.

*“I am 100% more confident in my parenting because I am more confident in myself and I know I am not a failure.”*

We could outline facts and figures about impact, but we'll give our last words to participants:

*“The counselling is a great resource given our limited budgets. We had three pupils who really needed somebody to talk to. They have been calmer in the past few weeks. I don't know what has changed them, but they were very volatile and had reached crisis point, running out of school. They haven't been sent to me recently.”*  
– Principal



*“I still have times when I go in to a low mood, but I can step out of it. I am more aware of the children and they are becoming more independent as they are getting older. I am 100% more confident in my parenting because I am more confident in myself and I know I am not a failure. Life isn't all rainbows and butterflies.”* – Mum

**A ringing endorsement?  
We'll leave it with you.**

*“Everything has  
improved...  
family meetings,  
more healthy  
dinners, less time  
in my room and  
more time spent  
with mum.”*

# Programme

## Outcome 2:



*More children and their families will come together to learn*

The defining feature of this outcome is ‘improved family relationships.’ All projects are working towards stronger, more positive connections between family members. Evaluation data suggests two distinct categories of change for children and families:

- *More cohesive families* – families spending more time together, communicating better, siblings feeling better supported, and overall improved family relationships. In some instances, this time together has facilitated learning and/or more play. For others, the fact that they are spending time together represents a significant improvement. Supports received have led to some families embarking on major milestones together, such as leaving the house together as a family for the first time, or their first holiday.

- *Greater engagement with education* – in terms of parents/ carers supporting their children’s learning at home, and more positive family involvement in school life. Several projects partner with schools, working with parents and children in a dedicated, tailored way, that complements and supplements the supports provided by the school. Some project’s evaluation data illustrates positive progress in children’s educational attainment, improved behaviours and outlook, and a reduction in absenteeism.

The stories in this section provide just a few reflections of how the Programme has enabled better family relationships through whole-family support and show the importance of learning for family wellbeing.

# Supporting Families of Deaf Children through Active Play

*Action Deaf Youth*

**Around two thirds of deaf children arrive at primary school having not attained a good level of development in the early years and this gap gets wider as they progress through the school system. The onus is on us, as a community, to close this gap and ensure that deaf children realise their full potential. Deafness is not a learning disability hence there should be no reason why deaf children underachieve so significantly.**

We hoped to enhance young deaf children's holistic development and support their parents to form secure attachments utilising play and play therapy as agents

of change. Over 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents with no experience of deafness. A diagnosis of deafness can be devastating, as one family told us: *"We were completely lost in navigating the reality and emotions of our son's diagnosis. The team at Action Deaf Youth transformed this worrying and distressing time for us into something very positive and full of hope. They quickly, but gently, guided us to a place of happiness."*

We established weekly group play programmes across Northern Ireland to bring deaf children and their parents together. We have developed bespoke 'Sign & Play' programmes to support parents to develop effective playful communication and equip them with the skills and confidence to open up the world of books for their child.



We established weekly group play programmes across Northern Ireland to bring deaf children and their parents together.



*“I am witnessing first hand that my daughter’s deafness should not hold her back in the future and she has some wonderful deaf role models.”*

In the words of one of our parents, “Our daughter was born deaf in January 2016 and our family was plunged into a whole new world which we knew nothing about. Action Deaf Youth have travelled every week from Belfast to Omagh to provide amazing sensory play experiences for our daughter... They have given me insight into the real world of deafness, away from the medical terminology and jargon... I am witnessing first hand that my daughter’s deafness should not hold her back in the future and she has some wonderful deaf role models.”

# Family Assistance Dogs

*Assistance Dogs Northern Ireland*

*“Without her, some cases wouldn't have made it to court and secured a conviction.”*



**Did you know at this moment in time Assistance Dogs Northern Ireland (ADNI) have 51 dogs/puppies working throughout Northern Ireland and we have a further eight dogs to place? ADNI “Train Dogs to Transform Lives.” The majority of these dogs are working within family homes. However, we have Therapy Dogs working in a prison, hospice, court and school settings.**



Our current project is for children with autism and full-time wheelchair users up to the age of 12. Autism Anchor Dogs reduce ‘bolting’ behaviour. Disability Dogs are trained to meet their specific needs. Our dogs provide safety, independence, companionship and positively impact family life.

ADNI have 51 dogs/  
puppies working  
throughout  
Northern Ireland  
and we have a  
further eight  
dogs to place.



Our biggest challenge has been sourcing volunteer foster carers for our ADNI puppies. This role requires a 24/7 commitment to care and train the puppy, which can take up to 18 months for a wheelchair user. When the training is finished our foster carers have to hand the dog back for placement with a family. We at ADNI would like to take this opportunity to thank ALL our volunteers. In 2016 we introduced the Autism Family Member Fostering Programme, where a parent trains an ADNI puppy for their child. Unfortunately, this programme is not suitable for every family. This programme has proven to be a success, parents reporting changes within the family home even before the puppy is placed.

We have placed our first:

- Hospice Therapy Dog, Darcey
- Prison Therapy Dog, Jingles
- School Therapy Dog; *"Echo has done what no human has been able to do."* – Aideen
- Connie, the first Court Assistance Dog in Europe; *"Without her, some cases wouldn't have made it to court and secured a conviction."* – Handler

Our aim is to continue providing assistance dogs not only for autism, full-time wheelchair users, but for hospices, courts, prisons and schools.

# Family First

## *Brain Injury Matters*

**It was just like any other day. Then a phone call saying her son was dead. When she got there her son was lay lifeless. It was any parent's worst nightmare.**

Thankfully Paul survived. However, his accident left him with an Acquired Brain Injury. His journey was only beginning. Daily tasks became a struggle. Paul became anxious. He struggled to comprehend what was happening to him.

His mum felt so helpless grieving for the child she once had. With nowhere and no one to turn to...

Then Family First came into their lives. For the first time mum felt someone actually listened understood and acknowledged what the family was experiencing.

**We see the whole child not just the Acquired Brain Injury.**



*"It was as if someone lifted a huge weight off our shoulders."*

*"Family First was a lifeline to us..."*

*"We are learning how to live this new life and by having such a great charity behind us I feel excited for what the future holds..."*

We see the whole child not just the ABI. We put "Family First". We build on the strengths of the family and walk their journey with them. We are Brain Injury Matters Family First Project. We work with children age 0-12 with Acquired Brain Injury and



*Evidence-based practice forms the foundation of all the Family First work.*

their families across Northern Ireland. We work with the whole family unit to enable everyone to better manage the impact of Acquired Brain Injury in daily life. We support families through homebased interventions, workshops and online support. Evidence-based practice forms the foundation of all the Family First work.

The service is in partnership with the Department of Psychological Services, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

# Five Circles Project

*Destined*

**Families in rural County Derry were crying out for a project that supported the entire family and not just the child with the learning disability. Support for children with a learning disability was scarce and when it came to the rest of the family the support was almost non-existent. People were frustrated and upset.**

We set out on this journey to help 100 families and are delighted to have supported many more. Our after-schools club is the only one in rural Derry for children with a learning disability. One of our parents, who has 3 children with a learning disability who all attend, describes it as being a lifeline for her family.



Our Rhyme Time sessions support babies and toddlers with disabilities whilst bringing new parents together to form a support network at a challenging and important time in their lives. These same parents, along with others, also attend our carers group, which provides important training delivered by health professionals.

*"These families have formed lifelong friendships and we're confident that they'll be spending many more special occasions together long after our project has come to an end."*



We are delighted to see more young people participate in our siblings' group which now has over 50 children. These children have formed new friendships and are coming together on a regular basis not just to socialise but to support one another.

Our family days have become events that people eagerly await and it has been our pleasure to bring together over 1,000 people from the local community to celebrate special occasions throughout the calendar year from Easter to Christmas.

**We set out on this journey to help 100 families and are delighted to have supported many more.**

These families have formed lifelong friendships and we're confident that they'll be spending many more special occasions together long after our project has come to an end.

# Disability Matters

*Kids Together Belfast*



*"The impact the charity has had on my family and son's lives has been significant. We feel part of a really special community. And on this rollercoaster of a journey it really helps!!"*

Disability matters is our project's name

Supporting families with disability is our aim

Two converted garages and passion from within

Families living with disability, was where it was to begin.

Inclusion, acceptance and improved family life

Where life is challenging and can be filled with strife

So through programs and sessions and family support

We stand as a rock with our garrison and fort.



**Supporting families with  
disability is our aim.**

Don't take my word as gospel or everything as true

Just take a listen to this quote and you definitely won't feel blue...

*"The impact the charity has had on my family and son's lives has been significant. We feel part of a really special community. And on this rollercoaster of a journey it really helps!!"*

An explosion of referrals, requests and phone-calls

For our specialist team, who don't believe in brick walls

Dedication, understanding and our desire from within

Changes lives for the better, equipping them to win!!

# Supporting Our Families Together

*The Speedwell Trust*



**The Supporting Our Families Together (SOFT) Project aims 'to work in partnership with families and the wider community in Cookstown to help our children and young people reach their full potential at school.'** The SOFT consortium of 21 organisations was established in 2016 as a five-year project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The Speedwell Trust is the lead partner.

The SOFT project:

- Is tailored to meet the needs of families facing challenges that may impact on their children's development and educational learning.
- Provides a holistic approach to early intervention at the key transitional stages of a child's development between ages 4-12 years, offering families skills and knowledge to overcome the challenges that they encounter.
- Creates opportunities and responds to local needs and gaps in services that have been highlighted by the local community and consortium partners.



The SOFT consortium of 21 organisations was established in 2016 as a five-year project.

*Working in partnership with families and the wider community in Cookstown to help our children and young people reach their full potential at school.*



# Family Insight Project

*Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)*

Finding out your child has sight loss can be devastating for parents. They can feel isolated, disempowered, unsure of the future and unsure of how they can best support their child. A diagnosis impacts on the whole family. Siblings can often feel forgotten, even grandparents can feel ill-equipped to support their child and grandchildren, putting strain on entire family relationships.

Family Insight is led by RNIB in Northern Ireland, in partnership with Angel Eyes NI. The project aims to support and empower families affected by sight loss.



*Families often stay in touch and many who have been supported through the project continue to engage, sharing their knowledge and supporting new families.*

The project aims to support and empower families affected by sight loss.



We want families to feel fully equipped to:

- Understand their child's eye condition, how it affects their sight and its future impact.
- Access support both at home and in school.
- Help children with sight loss reach their full educational and social potential.

High numbers of referrals demonstrated a need for this kind of service, but it put a strain on the project's resources. We also faced a geographical challenge when planning events in rural areas with limited transport links.

It was vitally important to us to ensure families had access to the support they needed. We realised that often one service cannot meet all the needs of a family.

Through developing partnerships with Angel Eyes NI, Guide Dogs and Sense we have pooled our resources to offer families a more integrated support network. Running joint events has allowed us to offer more tailored activities and publicising other organisations' events has allowed us to offer families a range of events and services across a wider area. We've also found that the connection between services is important to families as it creates clearer referral pathways and lessens confusion. Events such as the family weekends, have led to support networks outside of the project. Families often stay in touch and many who have been supported through the project continue to engage, sharing their knowledge and supporting new families.

# Family First

*Women's Aid ABCLN*

Supporting children  
and their mothers  
whose lives have been  
devastated by  
domestic violence.

The National Lottery Community Fund provides life saving money that allows us to support children and their mothers whose lives have been devastated by domestic violence. They have been controlled and abused within their own homes. All of these children were put on the Child Protection Register due to abuse suffered. This raised safeguarding concerns in relation to parenting and neglect causing them significant risk. The perpetrators of the domestic violence caused physical and emotional harm, coercive destruction and mental ill health.



Working alongside the Family Intervention team within Social Services, the Family First team offers understanding, compassion, practical and emotional support within the family home. Supporting children and their mothers individually and through family together activities, we restore hope, begin to heal and ultimately strengthen the family relationships. The family participate in support from the Family First team. They are struggling, vulnerable and

*“This support saved my life, I don't know how else to say it” – Mum*



potentially facing their children entering the care system. The main focus of this vital support is to prevent the children from entering the care system and maintaining them safely within their mother's care.

We supported 153 families. 111 children were Pre-register and 44 were on the Register. Following engagement, 38 children were removed from the Register, 28 were prevented from going onto the Register.

*“My support worker is nice, kind and never cross. I learned I need to stay calm and regulated. I loved you coming to talk to me. It helps with home, so you don't explode.*



*Well, I am not sure what you could do better, obviously I'm calmer now. I would draw a sad face for before and a wee happy face for after” – Boy aged 7 and three quarters!*

*“This support saved my life, I don't know how else to say it” – Mum*

*“The children were moving towards removal; this service was exactly what was needed” – Social Worker FIT*

# TinyStart

*TinyLife*

Over the first three years, our parent support groups had 3,000 attendees; our baby massage classes 1,250; our baby sensory sessions engaged 269 families; and we provided home-based visits to 133 families.

## Can we help tiny premature babies overcome some of the difficulties of being born too soon and help them catch up with their peer group by the time they go to school?

We know that extremely premature babies, those under 32 weeks or 1500g, do less well in school due to difficulties in development and delays in comparison to infants born at full term. We wanted to find out if parents would benefit from additional help to advance and keep track of their infant's development.

The Tinystart Project brought together TinyLife and Lifestart to form a partnership to see if they could make a difference.

The project delivers a range of support services across three Trusts, including parent groups, child development activities, home visits and baby massage classes. Over the first three years, our parent support groups had 3,000 attendees; our baby massage classes 1,250; our baby sensory sessions engaged 269 families; and we provided home-based visits to 133 families. Parents of premature babies are usually anxious, stressed and nervous, however those on the programme reported feeling happy, positive, relaxed, and confident.





*“Many of the original babies are now in school and, from what the parents tell us, doing really well.”*

The funding also enabled us to deliver the Lifestart Growing Child Programme along with Lifestart. The programme helped parents cope with the arrival of a premature infant(s), understand the needs of their baby/ies and support parents in relation to their child’s physical and learning development.

Many of the original babies are now in school and, from what the parents tell us, doing really well.

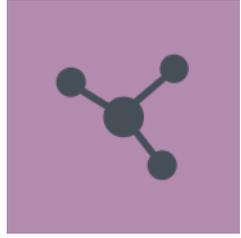
Comments from parents:  
*“TinyLife have been extremely helpful throughout such a stressful time. The family support officers are amazing! I have been able to attend various classes with TinyLife, enabling me to interact with other parents who have experienced something similar.”*

*“This is one chance  
a month to be  
with people who  
understand.  
We don't have to  
talk about it but it's  
enough to know  
I'm not alone.”*

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# Programme

## Outcome 3:



*More children and their families will be part of the community that they live in*

Community is defined in different ways depending on the project, the type of families that they are working with, and the supports already available to those families.

Many projects have facilitated access to new opportunities for families, through signposting, developing resources, educating, and informing families about supports, and facilitating access to employment or volunteering opportunities. These opportunities help to reduce isolation, build networks of support, and experience a greater sense of belonging. Projects have helped families to accept the need for support, assisted them to identify and articulate their support needs; and, subsequently empowered families to seek supports. Reports show improved participants' capacity to contend with stigma, particularly those working with groups at risk of discrimination.

Projects provide a safe, non-discriminatory place which is vital in enabling trust, respect, and mutual understanding. There are opportunities

for families to come together with those experiencing similar adversities e.g. through community/family fun days, parent support groups and parents' forums. Parents and children have made new connections, developed peer relations, and increased their network of support. These shared experiences have helped reduce families' sense of isolation and enhanced their ability to cope.

The following stories illustrate some of the ways in which the Reaching Out, Supporting Families Programme has contributed to families' engagement with communities of all kinds, and the positive impact this has had on family wellbeing.

# Reaching Autism Families Together

*Autism NI*



*"At the end of the programme he was sleeping through the night and was a much more confident and happier boy."*

Early Intervention is key! Autism NI's RAFT (Reaching Autism Families Together) project is a structured visual early intervention programme that provides support and practical solutions for families that have children on the autistic spectrum. The RAFT project has supported 550 families within the Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey area, providing up to six sessions of one to one support within the home.

**The RAFT project has supported 550 families within the Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey area, providing up to six sessions of one to one support within the home.**



The sessions provide a safe and relaxed environment for parents to have an opportunity to express any concerns they may have about their child's development and support needs. Many concerns that parents express surround their child's capacity to make friends, the school environment, and behaviour.

Our job is to support the parents in implementing a bespoke visual structure to address these concerns. Research suggests that a visual structure provided at the correct level is one of the most proven ways to enable a child to reach their full potential. After implementation of the bespoke visual structure created by the RAFT team, many parents report to us that it is "life changing". One parent said, "I have just finished

*a 6 week programme from the RAFT team. From the first week of using visuals my son went from getting up 15+ times during the night to just 2 or 3 times. At the end of the programme he was sleeping through the night and was a much more confident and happier boy."*

Many of our parents also tell us that they feel isolated and lonely, so we refer them onto Autism NI's local support groups. These groups are set up to help reduce isolation, improve mental health and overall well-being of the parents through meeting peers in a safe and understanding environment. Families tell us, "I thought I was the only one but through attending my local support group, I know I am not alone."

# Family Learning and Integration Project (FLIP)

*Barnardo's*

*"This is the first time I left the house and did something for myself since I moved to this country 6 years ago."*



**FLIP was established to create a culture of learning and resilience with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) families in two schools in South Belfast.**

The journey of FLIP began with a simple idea of giving people, who are new to the country, a boost in their confidence and facilitating them in being part of their communities. And to contribute to and continue a

happy life in Northern Ireland, whilst being proud of their culture, language and heritage. But how do you know that you are doing a good job if the community you are working with speaks over 30 different languages and has different customs and celebrations? We address these challenges through the constant review of our work and designing and providing new interventions, whilst always having the voice and opinion of the people who we work with at the heart of every intervention we deliver.



**To date, 243 parents and children have benefited from interventions.**



A mum who came to one of our capacity building programmes said, *“this is the first time I left the house and did something for myself since I moved to this country 6 years ago”*. This mum was a highly skilled professional who could not transfer her qualifications and work in her field whilst in Northern Ireland. After the Parent Active Learning Programme, she was signposted to various upskilling programmes paving her way to new career opportunities. She is now in full employment and is actively contributing to her new community, including joining a Board of Governors in her children’s school.

To be able to make those beautiful stories a reality FLIP is working in collaboration with other agencies in the sector to add value to existing programmes and maximise their impact. We aim to be sustainable and to empower ethnic minority families in South Belfast to build a strong community.

To date, 243 parents and children have benefited from interventions like: Parents Active Learning, Parent Infant Program, Individual Support, Drop In, Language Made Fun and Language Together, Men’s Work.

# Me, Myself, I & Us Project

## Contact

**We support families  
with the best  
possible guidance  
and information and  
practical support.**

**We are Contact – For Families with Disabled Children NI. We understand that life with a disabled child brings unique challenges, and we exist to help families feel valued, supported, confident and informed.**

We support families with the best possible guidance and information and practical support. We bring families together in local groups and online, to support each other by sharing experiences and advice. And we help families to campaign, volunteer, fundraise and shape local services to improve life for themselves and others.

The Me, Myself I and Us project delivers a unique personal development programme for mums, dads and siblings.



We also provide support activities aimed at improving the physical health, mental health and emotional well-being of those in a family involved in caring for a child with a disability or life limiting condition. The activities also provide an opportunity for peer support and friendship.

*“This is one chance a month to be with people who understand. We don’t have to talk about it but it’s enough to know I’m not alone.”*  
Mum (Omagh)

*“Living with a disabled child can have profound effects on the entire family.”*

*Nancy E. Reichman; Hope Corman; Kelly Noonan*



*“The programme has helped me understand that the stress of having a disabled child is affecting my family and relationship, it has given me tools to help me communicate and cope better.”*  
Dad (Belfast)

92% of siblings responding to a post-programme survey agree or strongly agree that they have learnt how to get on better with their mum/dad/carer. 83% have learned to get on better with their brother/sister.

*“I really value this programme. I have noticed that families who have gone through the programme seem to need less support.”*  
Social worker (SE Trust)

# Get Together - Bereaved Families Discovering

*A partnership project between  
Cruse Bereavement Care  
and Corrymeela*



Isolation is such a huge part of grief. But when a 10-year-old from Saintfield whose Mummy died of cancer meets a 12-year old from Syria whose Daddy died of a heart attack, there is a quiet understanding that lights a fire of hope between them. And after a weekend of play and art and memory-making, sharing cups of tea and treasure hunts on windy beaches, parents and children alike return home with a little more confidence and resilience.

Get Together – Bereaved Families Discovering, is a community of families and volunteers from all over the world who come together for activity days and residentials at a magical place on the North Coast of Northern Ireland. As one 11-year-old put it, it is a place “*that helps you overcome your shadow.*”

Thanks to The National Lottery Community Fund, Get Together began in 2014 as a partnership between Cruse Bereavement Care and Corrymeela. We aimed to work with 50 bereaved families over five years, to reduce isolation, increase resilience and raise community awareness. Since the project began, 79 families have come together to have fun, learn to laugh again and feel understood.



Since the project began, 79 families have come together to have fun, learn to laugh again and feel understood.



*“Get Together helped my family come closer again, be more open with each other.”*

As one Mum put it: *“Get Together helped my family come closer again, be more open with each other. It made me realise that smaller things like painting together are therapeutic, despite the mess! It helped me to know that we’re going to be okay.”*

A child wrote after a weekend at Corrymeela: *“You don’t need to be afraid of the nights, you will get to plant, draw and play. It’s so fun, and I am someone whose daddy died.”*

Our hope for the future is that many more bereaved families—both local and newcomers to NI—will meet at Get Together, to discover they are no longer alone in their grief.

# Empower

## *Dyslexia and Dyspraxia Support (DADS)*

The Empower Project was devised as a result of the experiences of parents who shared their stories with DADS over 20 years. We realise each family's journey, frustration, pain and needs are unique. Empower is about awareness raising of the difficulties facing a family where one or more children are impacted by a learning difficulty. From the day that a parent recognises that their child is different, they face a lifetime of battles to try and get society to understand or to assist that child. Empower works with children, parents, siblings, the family circle, health and education professionals so that the life of each child might be made easier.

**Empower is about awareness raising of the difficulties facing a family where one or more children are impacted by a learning difficulty.**



*“The activities for the children are fantastic and are a real lifeline for my son.”*



To date 6,753 people have participated in Empower activities. Our aims are to:

1. Decrease social isolation,
2. Increase integration/ community belonging,
3. To mitigate the effects of learning related difficulties and
4. To improve support for families.

We evaluate after every activity carried out and implement changes as per feedback. The demand for our training courses/ workshops is far beyond what we anticipated. We see:

- The success of Club Ausome-our youth club, and the Learning Buddy Hubs-our small group sessions addressing difficulties young

- people are having in school.
- Children grow in confidence in themselves and their abilities.
- Parents feeling supported when they ring the Information Line
- The shared experiences and learning that parents give to each other at all sessions.

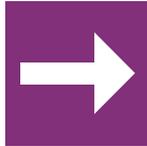
Parents have told us:

*"My children and I have made so many friends who understand our difficulties and can help us with so many things."*

*"I have 3 children all with autism. Empower has allowed my kids to try new things, venture to new places, gain social skills, have fun in a caring environment. This Project has been invaluable for my entire family."*

# Moving Up, Moving On (MUMO)

*Forthspring Inter Community Group*



*“I don't  
know where  
I would be.”*



The MUMO project works with children, schools, parents and families in the particularly disadvantaged Woodvale/Springfield interface area in Belfast. The project operates from Forthspring – the oldest dedicated cross-community centre in the city, situated right beside the interface gate.

**The MUMO project works with children, schools, parents and families in the particularly disadvantaged Woodvale/Springfield interface area in Belfast.**



This is 'Patricia's' experience:

*"We live in West Belfast. I have three children... At the moment I am living in a Hostel... The children's dad is only allowed to stay over two nights a week... Finding MUMO was such a big relief; to be able to get some support for the kids... I was feeling so guilty - the guilt kills you when you can't get things for the kids... The support I get at MUMO is amazing..."*

*In the summer MUMO arranged family trips. I went on two and the kids went on all of them... it was a relief for the children to come to MUMO. It helped them be more social with other children. They have made new friends - including cross-community which is brilliant. My boy's behaviour*

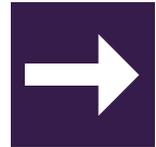
*has improved big time... he is able to spend time with me when my daughter is at MUMO, and the one-to-one he has with the staff there has helped too.*

*I was going through a very rough time, they gave me the feeling that I was strong enough to get through it. They told me to try not to worry - that there was light at the end of the tunnel... now I have the Hostel flat... they gave me some practical ideas... getting children into a routine, and doing star charts... I go to counselling with Relate.*

*I look forward to coming here - it gets you out of the house and meeting other people. It is good listening to other parent's stories, to support one another, and share experiences. If it wasn't for here I don't know where I would be."*

# Family Focus Project

## *Guide Dogs for the Blind*



**87% of families report improved levels of resilience.**

The first four years is recognised as the most stressful period for parents in NI who are living with a child with sight loss. Through National Lottery Community funding we have engaged with 55 families and run six monthly groups as well as two coffee & chat groups over the last three years with our partners, Sense and Angel Eyes NI.

Our dream was to create early years groups for families to meet, bring their other children (siblings) and watch their children flourish in structured and free-play sessions.

‘Habilitation’ is the process whereby children affected by sight loss or disability attain, keep and improve skills and functioning for daily living. This magic word, ‘Habilitation’, started off as a strange language but has become our parents’ best friend. Embedded within the play sessions are goals for each child focused on movement, conceptual development and support strategies, with their specific needs and milestones addressed.

Family happiness and resilience emerged from parent-to-parent

*“If I could just go back I would have loved to meet other parents in the early years.”*

*Guide Dogs 'Parent experience of raising a child with sight loss: research, 2015.*

chats and coffees, watching how their children learned to help themselves at snack time, coats-off time, circle time, song time and play time. 87% of families report improved levels of resilience.

Through ‘Time to Play’ and our partnership led groups, we have seen mums, dads, grandparents and even teachers turn up to support their children to grow.

*“I love our wee group and today was my favourite session. The atmosphere was wonderful.”*

*“How much fun was this morning? We had a ball and can’t wait until the next one.”*

*“Thank you so much for this morning. [Our child] had a ball and we will be back next month.”*



# Same-Sex Family Support Project

*HERE NI*



*The first official meetup was a Halloween party which was attended by 20 people, and last year we had 78.*

The Same-Sex Family Group came about as a result of the High Court ruling that same-sex couples could adopt in 2013 and the rise of fertility treatment for same-sex partners. In 2015, HERe NI joined with sector partners The Rainbow Project to apply for funding to run this group. We now have a family group in Belfast and in Derry.

**The group aims to bring same-sex couples and their children together for support, socialising and peer support.**



The group aims to bring same-sex couples and their children together for support, socialising and peer support. Some families can feel isolated; there may not be many other families like theirs in their area, work or in their children's school. They may face discrimination and their relationships may not be valued.

We began by coming together in safe spaces and when confidence levels grew we ventured out as a group to events in the wider community. We have a Family Picnic in the grounds of Belfast City Hall during Pride week, which is open to all to raise visibility of all types of families. There is a family friendly event at Foyle Pride, which is well attended. This level of visibility is vital for the children in the

group, it leads to affirmation of their family type as they would rarely see evidence of this in their school or early years settings.

We host a weekly Rhyme Time session for children aged 0-4 in the Belfast LGBT Centre which is a thriving group. It's an informal and relaxing session which we all look forward to. We also provide 1-1 support and group workshops for families in need.

The Belfast group has grown dramatically over the past few years. The first official meetup was a Halloween party which was attended by 20 people, and last year we had 78. The Derry group is steadily growing too.

We aim to continue to provide this life enhancing support to our families.

# Families Together Project

## *Parenting NI*

### I am Families Together

I came into existence to support families in Antrim and Strabane who might be having a hard time. In the beginning I was so enthusiastic to help and to let people know what I could offer, I was more focused on what I could provide rather than the actual needs of the family.

It soon became clear: families did not know me; they did not trust me; why should they tell me about their problems?

I started to listen more closely to what families were saying: everyone agreed parenting can be tough; and like many parents, they often felt alone or isolated, but they did not want pity or 'experts' telling them what to do. They wanted to meet other parents in the same boat.

I began to change how I offered my help. I created safe places



for parents to meet where they could keep their dignity and develop their own strengths using our services when needed.

One parent who attends one of our Parenting Cafés recently said to me *"Now I've got somewhere to turn when things get too much: a place to have fun, laugh or cry and help each other along the way. I do not feel so alone because I have Families Together."* Her child told me: *"My family feels better because mum is happier,*

*“My family feels better because mum is happier, she doesn't shout as much at home and explains how to do things.”*



*she doesn't shout as much at home and explains how to do things. I've made new friends. Sometimes we go to the park and share picnics together. I loved hearing my mum laughing with the other mums when they showed us how to skip!”*



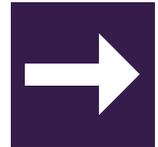
I am Families Together; I am flexible, adaptable and work best when I respond to the needs of families rather than imposing services. Families are the ongoing guide to my work.

**I am Families Together;  
I am flexible, adaptable  
and work best when I  
respond to the needs  
of families rather than  
imposing services.**

# Lakeland Brighter Futures Family Support

*Positive Futures*

**Project helps families find the sun behind the clouds**



The Brighter Futures Project is making a dramatic difference to rural families with a child with a disability in the west of Northern Ireland. The project - run by Positive Futures - is reducing people's isolation, improving the mental health of parents and providing new opportunities for children.

Project Manager Pauline O'Hagan said: *"We were shocked to discover the many other dark clouds families were living under - issues such as depression, domestic violence, homelessness, siblings with suicidal thoughts, single dads with no support. With*

*our support, families now feel they have a voice, have made new and lasting connections and are excited about the future again. We help them find the sun behind the clouds."*

Wendy has four sons, two of whom have an autistic spectrum condition. She said: *"Before Brighter Futures came along, we would just spend most of the time in the house. I was tired, lonely, had no time to myself and felt useless. But all the boys now take part in fun activities and I managed to go to college and gain some qualifications. I am now looking forward to the future."*

*"Before Brighter Futures came along, we would just spend most of the time in the house... the boys now take part in fun activities and I managed to go to college and gain some qualifications. I am now looking forward to the future."*

Yvonne's son Jamie (10) has a learning disability and autism, which can, on occasions, lead to challenging behaviour. Yvonne said: *"Before Brighter Futures, [he] couldn't even make a trip to the shop. For example, he couldn't understand the idea of having to queue. Now he can go with a shopping list, pick things up and pay for them at the till. Even the chance to go for a cup of coffee or out for a meal with your husband can make all the difference in the world. It's like golden time for us."*



# Community Help in Learning & Development (CHILD)

*Rural Area Partnership in Derry (RAPID)*



In 2013, community engagement was at a low point in Rural Derry, with family support services non-existent, villages becoming “sleeper towns” and families living in isolation. Something needed to change, and the Reaching Out, Supporting Families Programme provided the vehicle for this to happen. Six communities, with RAPID as the lead, came together to design a family support programme tailored

specifically to the needs of rural families, to be delivered locally and open to everyone. Our programme has not only provided much needed family support services but has reignited community life across rural Derry, with one beneficiary stating the project has *“created more social capital and community cohesiveness than has been here before.”*



**786 families and 1,184 children regularly take part in our community-based activities and a further almost 3,000 children have benefited from the pre and primary school programmes.**

Our main challenge has been the sheer demand for our programmes. 786 families and 1,184 children regularly take part in our community-based activities and a further almost 3,000 children have benefited from the pre and primary school programmes. To tackle our programme's waiting lists, we began working closely with other agencies including the Western Health & Social Care Trust, ASCERT, Libraries NI, The Community Safety Wardens and the PSNI. This enabled us to maximise time and resources so that a full timetable of services could be offered right across the six communities.

The impact of our project goes far beyond the numbers taking part, with one parent describing the project as a "lifeline". She adopted a baby at 6 weeks but trying to bond with her baby and make contact with other parents was very overwhelming. She felt the CHILD project provided great informal support, describing the facilitators as "very welcoming - I never felt left out or different. I didn't carry the child through pregnancy but these intimate programmes helped facilitate the bonding experience."

The CHILD project has reached many families over the past four years and now these relationships are firmly established and communities are empowered to go from strength to strength.

# Touching Lives, Transforming Families

*Sense, the National Deafblind and  
Rubella Association*



*“It is great  
having some  
where to go  
regularly  
that I can  
bring all my  
children to.”*

Three boys sat quietly colouring-in on the sofa. They signed, they understood each other, but their parents looked bewildered. The translator arrived, spoke in the family’s first language, and a ray of recognition dawned on their faces.

Katie, the family support worker, met the family again, this time at the hospital... this is week 6 of living in Northern Ireland. The Trust translator had to leave early, Katie quickly recorded the feedback from the medical professional and the parents look stressed. Katie walked the family to the bus stop and waited until they boarded the correct bus.

To date, Touching Lives, Transforming Families has supported 200 families with vision impairment and/or hearing loss with additional/complex needs.



Later in the afternoon, Katie arranged a three-way phone call with Dad and the translator – an explanation of the earlier medical feedback. Sounding relieved, Dad thanked Katie and Sense.

To date, Touching Lives, Transforming Families has supported 200 families with vision impairment and/or hearing loss with additional/complex needs. When the child is referred into the project we complete a home visit, but that's just the start of their journey.

We have connected families with their local communities through parent groups, Saturday clubs, family fun days and sibling workshops, and assisted parents with daunting hospital and community appointments.

We have provided bespoke training for family members and professionals. The National Lottery Community Fund has enabled us to provide support to families where English was not their first language. We work in partnership with the five Health and Social Care Trusts.

Our aim is for our families to make sense again of their jumbled world and to make connections in their local community. We plan to support as many as we can.

One parent told us, *"It is great having some where to go regularly that I can bring all my children to. It is really great to see them having fun together especially with other kids who they share the same personal experience with."*

# The SPACE (Supporting Parents and Children) Project

*SPACE*



Space have co-ordinated the Newry and Mourne Family Support Hub since its inception. Each month we witnessed increasing referrals for families where no service was available and, in our hearts, and minds, we knew that children cannot benefit from services that do not exist! Having gathered the evidence and established a need for change, Space along with Hub partners drafted a proposal to fill the gap for families with nowhere

else to go. Thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund we have been able to deliver our flexible and family led support service for four years.

The project supports families who are experiencing difficulties which pose a risk to family stability, but who do not currently meet the eligibility criteria for statutory Tier 3 services. These families require a helping hand in order to prevent their circumstances from escalating. Our service is available to children, parents, carers, guardians, grandparents, and

Over the last three years, SPACE have supported 851 families, resulting in improved outcomes for 1,413 children.



*“I feel better myself and this has impacted on my kids positively.”*

most of our referrals are from families in the Newry, Mourne and South Armagh area. We aim to help families develop resilience and coping skills; develop parenting and home management skills; strengthen family relationships and support them to engage and contribute positively to their community.

Over the last three years, SPACE have supported 851 families, resulting in improved outcomes for 1,413 children. We have delivered 432 hours of evidence-based parenting programmes, 13 weeks of summer activities; 11 information sharing events and 51 weeks of evidence-based group work with children. Other families have received 1:1 bespoke home-based support during times of crisis; including practical house-work, signposting to other services, behaviour management and parenting support.

One parent with poor mental health told us *“We are in a much better place because of Space. I feel better myself and this has impacted on my kids positively. My daughter is going to the Friends Programme and I have put my name down to volunteer at Summer Scamps.”*

# To be continued...

## *Other learning emerging from the evaluation*

**The stories in this brochure have each provided a snapshot of the kinds of impact Reaching Out, Supporting Families is enabling for families across Northern Ireland. Analysis of data and reports from projects indicates three further changes arising for families:**

- *Families are empowered:* reports suggest that with the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, confidence and self-efficacy, families are more empowered. Parents and children have regained their independence and feel in greater control of their future.
- *Families are experiencing better quality of life:* through improved health and wellbeing, stronger family and peer relations, and new opportunities.
- *Enhanced sense of community:* parents and children are becoming closer as a family, establishing new connections within the neighbourhood, and accessing new opportunities.
- *The Programme is enabling an enhanced community of family support services in Northern Ireland.* By delivering services in partnership, projects are crossing sectoral boundaries and fulfilling a commitment to working collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and families.

## **Church of Ireland Board of Social Responsibility: Adoption Routes – TESSA: Therapeutic, Education and Support Services in Adoption**

TESSA supports adopted children and their adoptive families by helping children recover from their previous and often traumatic experiences, build their self-esteem, build a bond with their new adoptive families, and settle into their new lives. It also supports educational professionals to better understand the challenges that some adopted children face, helping them to achieve better educational outcomes.

## **Kinship Care NI – Kinnections**

Kinnections supports positive outcomes for children who are being supported by kinship carers through giving them and their carers access to better emotional and financial support. This project aims to provide ongoing support and reassurance, resulting in kinship carers engaging and enjoying being part of a kinship community within their local area and ensuring that children remain in a safe, loving, committed home with all of their basic needs met.

# Further Information

## *Other projects funded by the Reaching Out, Supporting Families Programme include:*

### **MindWise New Vision – NI Families Network**

This project aims to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of children who are at risk of developing significant mental health problems if early intervention measures are not identified and addressed, with a view to reducing their need for more intensive or long term support from statutory/other services.

### **NI Children’s Hospice – Stronger Together – NI Children’s Hospice Family Support Service**

Stronger Together aims to provide a coordinated service to families that need both practical and emotional support, to help them to maintain resilience and family relationships through lengthy treatment and potential bereavement. This support aids families across Northern Ireland to look after themselves and each other, to strengthen family relationships, to work together to continue caring for their child, and to support and nurture siblings.

### **South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association – Lough Shore Family Action Project**

This project, delivered in partnership with local primary schools, supports families in the southern shores of the Lough Neagh area to improve, build, support and nurture family relationships. It provides interventions to support families through different phases in life including; ante-natal, post-natal, early years, pre-school, and primary and post primary school transition. Outcomes from this project include; increased access to activities and support services in rural communities, empowering parents, reduced isolation and a greater sense of belonging in the community.

### **South Tyrone Empowerment Programme – Linking Families and Communities**

This project delivers holistic family support to BME (black and minority ethnic), Migrant and Traveller families, from the Mid Ulster Council area and the ABC Council area. Support is provided through individual mentoring, parenting support groups, outings, activities and social events to help families to build confidence; deal with challenging life events; improve family learning; make new friends, and link in to community activities and services.

# Project Contact Details

## 1. A Positive Life

### *+Family Life*

www.positivelifeni.org  
028 9024 9268

## 2. Action Deaf Youth

### *Supporting Families of Deaf Children Through Active Play*

www.actiondeafyouth.co.uk  
028 9099 2779

## 3. Artillery Youth Centre

### *Northside Family Support Programme*

www.artilleryyouthcentre.org  
028 9035 1332

## 4. Assistance Dogs Northern Ireland

### *Family Assistance Dogs*

www.adni.org.uk  
info@adni.org.uk  
Tel: 028 7776 8761  
Mob: 075 5796 0599

## 5. Autism NI

### *Reaching Autism Families Together*

www.autismni.org  
028 9040 1729

## 6. Barnardo's

### *Family Learning and Integration Hub*

www.barnardos.org.uk  
028 9066 8766

## 7. Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre

### *Routes to Resilience*

www.burc.org  
028 9096 1111

## 8. Brain Injury Matters

### *Family First*

www.braininjurymatters.org.uk  
info@braininjurymatters.org.uk  
028 9070 5125

## 9. The Cedar Foundation

### *Right 4 U*

www.cedar-foundation.org  
mt.cassin@cedar-foundation.org  
Tel: 028 9046 1834  
Mob: 077 2505 1120

## 10. Church of Ireland Board for Social Responsibility

### *TESSA: Therapeutic, Education and Support Services in Adoption*

www.tessani.org  
028 9046 9211

## 11. Contact

### *Me, Myself, I & Us*

www.contact.org.uk  
028 9262 7552

## 12. Cruse Bereavement Care

### *Get Together - Bereaved Families Discovering*

www.hopeagain.org.uk  
elaine.roub@cruse.org.uk  
Tel: 028 9079 2419  
Mob: 079 5134 8168

## 13. Destined

### *Five Circles Project*

www.destined.ie  
charlene@destined.ie  
028 7778 1141

## 14. Dyslexia & Dyspraxia Support (DADS)

### *Empower*

www.empowernetwork.co.uk  
028 7939 5237  
028 9581 6852

## 15. Forth Spring Inter Community Group

### *MUMO - Moving Up, Moving On*

www.forthspring.org  
mumo@forthspring.com  
028 9031 3945

## 16. The Fostering Network

### *Step Up Step Down*

www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk  
jade.irwin@fostering.net  
The Fostering Network NI: 028 9070 5056  
Step Up Step Down: 028 9041 3678

## 17. Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

### *Family Focus Project*

www.guidedogs.org.uk  
034 5143 0193

**18. HERE NI****Same-Sex Family Support Project**

www.hereni.org  
www.rainbow-project.org  
HERE NI: 028 9024 9452  
Rainbow Project: 028 9031 9030

**19. Kids Together Belfast****Disability Matters**

028 9061 1034

**20. Kinship Care****Kinnections**

www.kinshipcareni.com  
028 7137 3731

**21. Men's Action Network****Fathering Families**

www.man-ni.org  
028 7137 7777

**22. Mind Wise New Vision****NI Families Network**

www.mindwisenv.org  
028 9040 2323

**23. New Lodge and Duncairn****Community Health Partnership****Supporting Families North Belfast**

www.communityhealthpartnership.co.uk  
claire@communityhealthpartnership.co.uk  
Tel: 028 9074 5588  
Mob: 075 8512 5743

**24. Northern Ireland Childrens' Hospice****Stronger Together - NI Children's Hospice****Family Support Service**

www.nihospice.org/childrens-hospice  
028 9077 7635

**25. The NOW Group****Here & Now**

www.nowgroup.org  
028 9043 6400

**26. Parenting NI****Families Together Project**

www.parentingni.org/parents/  
families-together/  
078 8742 9054

**27. Positive Futures****Lakeland Brighter Futures Family Support**

www.positive-futures.net  
028 9147 5720

**28. RNIB****Family Insight Project**

www.rnib.org.uk/family-insight  
www.angeleyesni.org/family-insight-project  
RNIB: 028 9032 9373  
Angel Eyes: 028 9094 1632

**29. Rural Area Partnership****in Derry Limited (RAPID)****Community Help in Learning  
and Development (CHILD)**

www.rapidni.com  
caroline@rapidni.com  
028 7133 7149

**30. Sense, the National Deafblind****and Rubella Association****Touching Lives - Transforming Families**

www.sense.org.uk  
Joyce.Rainey@sense.org.uk  
077 6847 0755

**31. South Lough Neagh****Regeneration Association****Lough Shore Family Action Project**

www.southloughneagh.com  
028 3885 2550

**32. South Tyrone Empowerment Programme****Linking Families and Communities**

www.stepni.org  
028 8775 0211

**33. SPACE****The SPACE (Supporting Parents****and Children) Project**

www.space-ni.com  
allison@space-ni.com  
028 3083 5764

**34. The Speedwell Trust****Supporting Our Families Together (SOFT)**

www.softprojectcoostown.org  
families@softprojectcookstown.org  
028 8776 7392

**35. TinyLife****TinyStart**

www.tinylife.org.uk  
028 9081 5050

**36. Women's Aid ABCLN****Family First**

www.womensaidni.org  
028 9024 9041



*CES is registered as a Charity in Ireland,  
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