

Pre-budget submission
Childhood Development Initiative
August 2023



In an average month, **CDI** works with **456 children** and **51 parents**

In **2022**, we: worked directly with **5,471 children**

Supported **613** parents,

Delivered training to **1,056** professionals working with children and families.



About Us

Mission

We will improve outcomes for children by delivering quality, integrated, evidence-informed services and workforce development through partnership and innovation.

Vision

Every child in Ireland is thriving, healthy, happy, and free from poverty.

Values

- We work in partnership with people, taking a strengths-based and family- and child-centred approach focused on children's rights, responding to needs, and driving change.
- We use evidence, innovation, and prevention and early intervention approaches to underpin our work.
- Tallaght is our home, and we prioritise the needs of this community. We are also committed to transparently sharing our learning to inform policy and practice nationally and internationally.
- We are respectful, inclusive, collaborative, and relationship-focused, and believe in having fun while we work hard.

What We Do

We are devoted to improving the lives of children, families, and communities in Tallaght and throughout Ireland. Our key programmes concentrate on:

- Antenatal and baby supports
- Parent education, support and capacity building
- Early intervention speech and language supports for children, parents and educators
- A suite of literacy initiatives from birth to eight years of age, including the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Doodle Den, Doodle Families, and Doodle STEAM
- Relationship-building and conflict-resolution skills for children, parents and those who work with them

Training for Professionals

We provide comprehensive training and expert advice to professionals who work with children and families, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to make real improvements in the lives of children and families.

Our History and Impact

At CDI, we have a rich history of positively impacting the lives of children. Our journey began with a vision to create a brighter future for every child. Over the years, we have designed and implemented a suite of evidence-informed interventions, which have been demonstrated to make a significant difference in the lives of children and families.

Current and Upcoming Programmes

An innovative approach to foster communication and language development among children through our Chit Chat Programme.

Addressing youth mental health, school engagement and wellbeing through our Nova programme. Our Nova programme creates the context to provide better support and resources for children and families.

Enhancing parent's (and therefore children's) engagement in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Maths (STEAM) through our Doodle STEAM programme, an initiative designed to spark creativity and foster critical thinking skill

Development of a parents' hub on our website to make it easier for parents to access information

The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) supports the pre-budget submissions of our colleagues in the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA), the Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN), the Wheel, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), and many other organisations who have been working to improve outcomes for children, families, and communities.



Child Poverty

“So if there is low income in the family and if, you know, finances are really, really tight, that children often suffer the brunt of that in school, even to have the resources when they present at school”.

Service provider discussing poverty in Tallaght (CDI, 2021)

What we know

Those living in disadvantaged communities have the greatest need but often have the poorest access to services.

45% of children in Tallaght live in disadvantaged or very disadvantaged areas (Pobal, 2017).

Population figures have shown an increase in those at risk of poverty (13.1% in 2022, compared with 11.6% in 2021). More than 671,000 people are currently living in poverty in Ireland, of which 188,602 are children (CSO, 2022).

Almost half of one-parent families (43.5%) live in deprivation.

In 2022, 7.2% were unable to afford to keep their home adequately warm (CSO, 2022).

The child-related social welfare payment only covers 61% of what it costs to put a child through secondary school (Vincentian MESL Research Centre, 2023).

Consumer prices rose by 6.6% from May 2022 to May 2023, the twentieth straight month where the annual increase in the CPI has been at least 5.0% (CSO, 2023).

What Government needs to do

- 1 Relax and expand the eligibility criteria for means-tested social welfare payments, including the Medical Card, the Working Family Payment (WFP), Fuel Allowance, and social housing and rental supplements.
- 2 Ensure that the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit has adequate staff to leverage cross-departmental knowledge and expertise on the interconnected issues of child poverty.
- 3 Adopt percentage targets aimed at reducing poverty and deprivation among particularly vulnerable groups such as children, lone parents, jobless households, and those in social housing.
- 4 Increase core social welfare payments in line with the cost of living.
- 5 Implement measures to ensure that children are guaranteed at least one nutritious meal every day, irrespective of whether they are in school.
- 6 Extend the Fuel Allowance from 28 to 32 weeks, include those receiving WFP and increase the weekly amount in line with home energy inflation.

Homelessness

What we know

As of May 2023, 12,441 people are accessing emergency accommodation (hostels/ family hubs/ other temporary accommodation) in Ireland, 3,699 of which are children (Peter McVerry Trust, 2023).

The fear of being homeless is a major source of anxiety for many families (CDI, 2023).

Children are impacted by parental stress, no matter how well parents try to hide it. Homelessness is an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) which may have serious, long-term impacts on health and social outcomes.

"They've no childhood... they still have needs... there's no play area for them, they're confined to one room. There's no sitting area in that one room unless it's on the bed."

Parent discussing their experience of homelessness in South Dublin (Quinlan and Bolger, 2019)

What Government needs to do

- 1 Ensure that all children and young people living in homeless services have access to adequate homework and play space.
- 2 Increase the Homeless HAP and HAP payments in line with market rent and introduce a homeless-specific budget, ensuring adequate funding and resources for physical health, mental health, and addiction support.
- 3 Allocate additional resources to ensure all children and teenagers living in Family Homeless Services have access to the services of a Child and Youth Development Worker.
- 4 Commit to no children being homeless by 2030 and prioritise the provision of a home for families with young children.

"If we were settled and secure, we would be ten times better and happier, and so would the kids"

"My child has anxiety at two years old over going through the homeless."

Parent's discussing their struggles with housing in Tallaght (CDI, 2021)

Children with Additional Needs

What we know

Currently, in Tallaght, waiting lists are as follows:

- Thirty-six months for Primary Care (PC) Psychology.
- **Forty-eight months (approx.) for Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT).**
- 12-14 months for a PC Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) initial assessment and a further 24 months for PC SLT intervention.
- **One early years' service in Tallaght has 18 of its 60 children waiting for a specialist assessment.**

Many parents are putting themselves in debt to fund private assessments, even though this does not necessarily reduce the waiting time for an intervention.

CDI welcomes the fact that CDNT referrals for under one year olds are accepted and seen straight away and that once accepted by CDNT, families can avail of workshops and parent clinics while waiting for interventions. The PC Psychology and SLT drop-in clinics are also invaluable to families with children awaiting needs assessments.

We also recognise that professionals working in these services are committed, hardworking, and frustrated by the lack of resourcing.

Navigating these complex systems with a lack of supporting information adds to the stress already felt by parents.

"The main problem with waiting lists is that you don't know where you are. Sometimes you're on one waiting list to even get onto the main waiting list"

Parent's discussing their struggle with accessing services in Tallaght (CDI, 2019)

What Government needs to do

- 1 Adequately resource PC services and CDNT (financial, technical, and human) so that every child can receive an assessment and the recommended therapeutic service(s) in a matter of weeks rather than years.
- 2 Establish a dedicated child Public Health Nursing service, as committed to in First Five, as a critical element of an early intervention system.
- 3 **Require that a clear plan is communicated to parents regarding the timelines for assessment AND intervention.**
- 4 Each area is to be resourced to create one point of contact for parents of children with additional needs (diagnosed or suspected) so that they do not have to manage multiple services and are kept up to date with wait times.

"It's horrible thinking that no one is there to support you. No one is there to listen to you. Just even to talk to someone."

Parent's discussing their struggle with accessing services in Tallaght (CDI, 2019)

Mental Health

What we know

Services are seeing children under the age of five with anxiety and social stress. The impact of the pandemic is only beginning to emerge in this regard. Many parents have also lost networks, confidence and motivation to engage in their communities, resulting in increased isolation, reduced support and often exacerbated stress.

Research in Tallaght by Trinity College Dublin found that:

- 3,552 young people are suffering from anxiety, and 550 suffer from severe stress.
- Between 3,181 and 3,434 were estimated to have experienced depression, approximately one-third of whom experienced severe depression.
- Between 3,390 and 3,654 suffered from anxiety.
- Approx. 2,000 young people experienced stress, this being severe for over a quarter (CDI, 2019).
- 1 in 10 people under the age of 35 have attempted to take their own life. (Healthy Ireland Survey 2022)

International evidence has also shown that young people aged 12 to 25 years have the highest incidence and prevalence of mental illness, yet their access to mental health services is the lowest of all age groups (McGorry et al., 2013)

“Like we have a year-long waiting list. Sure it is useless! For young people, young people need something the day they need it. We need 24/7 services. We need services at weekends.”
Service provider, (CDI, 2019)

What Government needs to do

- 1 Ringfence funding to reduce and ultimately remove mental health service waiting lists.
- 2 Develop and resource a triage system for children currently on waiting lists so that they are prioritised according to need and, where appropriate, referred to alternative or interim supports.
- 3 Evaluate the pilot delivery of counselling services in schools and extend the model learnt from the pilot.
- 4 Address the longstanding gaps in GP provision in Tallaght.

“Lack of resources, the waiting list, the services are overstretched. As a result of that, they are upping the threshold for certain referrals.”
Service provider, (CDI, 2019)

Prevention and Early Intervention

What we know

The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is the key community-based mechanism through which Government aims to prevent poverty and its impacts on children and families.

The ABC Programme has received no funding increase since 2016 and has been informed that a 2% reduction in the budget will be applied in 2024. This is, in effect, a reduction of approximately 12% in real terms, given inflation rates. ABC areas are struggling to recruit and retain staff and deliver at the same level due to this underfunding.

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- **Supported 613 parents**
- Delivered training to 1,056 professionals working with children and families to enhance their capacity to achieve positive outcomes.

What Government needs to do

- 1 Address the deficit of €500k in the national ABC Programme budget
- 2 Retrospectively apply the 4% cost of living increase received by all other Tusla grantees in 2022 to the national ABC Programme'
- 3 Ensure that Tusla retains a ring-fenced budget for the ABC programme and that prevention and early intervention continue to be resourced as critical elements of a continuum of provision.

We also need to do more about child poverty and disadvantage. We know that poverty restricts child opportunity, and it casts a shadow over their lives"

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