



# Early Learning Initiative

National College of Ireland



*Supporting Parents, Communities  
and Services in the Education of Children*



# End-of-Year REPORT 2023-24

CHY 9928

[WWW.NCIRL.IE/ELI](http://WWW.NCIRL.IE/ELI)



## VISION

*Our long-term vision is that ELI will lead the way in providing first class educational support programmes within local communities, thereby enabling children, young people and their families to develop the dispositions, skills and knowledge needed to achieve their educational, career and life goals.*

## MISSION

*Working in partnership with Government and local communities to support educational journeys and achievements.*



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## 1. Introductory Letter

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI), National College of Ireland (NCI), with the support of our loyal partners, enables at-risk children to thrive in education, career and life. In 2023-24, 19,860 people across Ireland engaged in ELI's programmes. Satisfaction rates and learning indicators remain high with children's language, literacies and cognitive skills continuing to improve. This End-of-Year Report summarises this year's achievements with more information on our website: [www.ncirl.ie/eli](http://www.ncirl.ie/eli) I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone involved and to note some highlights this year.

### **Creating inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable families and communities**

Local, national and world events challenge us to consider how ELI addresses the heightened violence and intolerance, in homes, on the streets and virtually, which our children are growing up with. They confirm the need for ELI's long-term restorative sustainable prevention and early intervention approaches in continuing to create peaceful inclusive spaces, where learning is seen as enjoyable and something positive to be shared. In this report, you will read how through our amazing partnerships (SDG 17) we are delivering on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and our ethical responsibilities to people and planet, while setting the stage for long-term sustainable communities (SDG 11), where all children thrive in education, career and life (SDG 10).

### **Multifaceted complex nuanced responsive supports for children, families and communities**

When ELI was established in 2006, our focus was ensuring that vulnerable children received a quality education (SDG 4), which we consider the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development. Over the years, the work has become much more nuanced, complex and multifaceted with children's health and wellbeing (SDG 3) a critical element of all of programmes. In partnership with our colleagues in Tusla and HSE (SDG 17), building capacity at local and national level for early warning, risk reduction and management of early childhood and parental health risks is an important part of our work as we supported 19,000+ vulnerable at-risk children and parents across Ireland this year. Our community action research methodology (SDG 16) enables us to ensure that children, parents and professionals have a voice in how ELI develops to meet emerging critical needs and serious gaps in essential child and family disability, mental health, educational and other services.

### **Best wishes to the New National Home Visiting Programme Office in Tusla**

No poverty (SDG 1) is central to our ambition that the 12,400 babies born into poverty each year in Ireland receive the vital support they need to flourish. We are delighted that through the Children's Fund, set up to honour the memory of the children who died in Mother and Baby Homes, a new National Home Visiting Programme has been established in Tusla with the objective of increased availability and accessibility of evidence-based home visiting services nationwide.

### **Thank You**

Once again, thank you to our many partners (SGD 17) for working with us to reduce poverty, prevent inequality, create sustainable communities and improve the education, health and well-being of at-risk children, young people and families across Ireland. We look forward to continuing to partner with you in 2024-25. If you want to know more about how you can become involved in ELI, please come talk to us. Together we are changing lives.



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Dr Josephine Bleach,  
Director, Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland

## 1.1. 2023-24 Key Indicators of Impact



# 19,860

## Participants Engaged



# 16,533

## Home Visits Completed



# 9,387

## Parents Engaged



# 96%

## Indicators of Satisfaction

(n= 2,535) participants were satisfied with their engagement



# 90%

## Indicators of Learning

(n= 2,135) participants learned knowledge or skills



# 33

## Corporate Partners Supporting ELI



# 323

## Interagency Meetings







# 209





## Volunteers Engaged



## 1.2. UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

NCI has put sustainability at the very heart of its 5-Year Institutional Strategy with ELI actively contributing to NCI's delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the scale and scope of the global goals is unprecedented, partnership is key to their delivery. It is only through collaboration can we uphold our basic responsibilities to people and planet, but also set the stage for long-term success through ELI's prevention and early intervention programmes that consider a quality education the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development. Recognising that the challenges are multifaceted, this following table illustrates our SDG priorities and deliverables.

SDG	PRIORITY	DELIVERABLES
 <p><b>1 NO POVERTY</b></p>	Building resilience and empowering people living in poverty and vulnerable situations	<p>Ambition to provide Home Visiting to 12,400 babies born into poverty each year in Ireland</p> <p>Lead agency of Area Based Childhood Programme, which aims to address child poverty</p>
 <p><b>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</b></p>	Promoting well-being and healthy lives for children and parents	<p>Making learning fun and something to be shared</p> <p>Building capacity for early warning, risk reduction and management of early childhood and parental health risks</p> <p>Incorporating Infant Mental Health, Restorative &amp; Trauma Informed Practice, Critical Incident Management</p>
 <p><b>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</b></p>	Ensuring equal access to all levels of education, in particular children in vulnerable situations	<p>Children developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being</p> <p>Proficiency in literacy, numeracy, information and communications technology (ICT) skills</p> <p>Completing higher and further education</p>
 <p><b>5 GENDER EQUALITY</b></p>	Empower and promote gender equality for all	<p>Empowering fathers as parents – equal responsibility for their children's health, wellbeing and education</p> <p>Empowering women and girls to achieve in education and career</p>

SDG	PRIORITY	DELIVERABLES
 <p><b>10</b> REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>	<p>Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status</p>	<p>Providing inclusive universal plus prevention and early intervention supports for children and families with a particular focus on disadvantaged and marginalized populations</p>
 <p><b>11</b> SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>	<p>Creating inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable communities</p>	<p>Opening NCI up to the community as a safe welcoming place, where ‘good things happen’</p> <p>Supporting the development of Dublin’s Inner City as a peaceful, inclusive, safe, restorative and resilient community.</p>
 <p><b>16</b> PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</p>	<p>Ensure public access to information and promote peaceful, responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making</p>	<p>Empower and support local children and families to engage in their local community. Provide safe inclusive participatory networks through our Restorative Practice, Parenting Support and Home Visiting Programmes</p>
 <p><b>17</b> PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</p>	<p>Engage in effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships</p>	<p>Cross-sectoral partnerships with statutory, corporate, voluntary and community organisations are integral to the achievement of ELI’s strategic prevention and early intervention innovations.</p>

### 1.3. Thank You



We would like to pay tribute to the generosity of all our donors, who range from Government to businesses to Trusts/Foundations to individuals. Your investment in children’s futures is greatly valued and is making a huge difference to their lives. We would also like to acknowledge the support of all those who gave their time and expertise on a pro bono basis.

We are continually seeking additional partners and would welcome the opportunity to talk to interested companies and individuals. Please contact ELI’s Assistant Directors, Catriona Flood (by phone: 086 0296894 or by email: [catriona.flood@ncirl.ie](mailto:catriona.flood@ncirl.ie)), or Brigina O’Riordan (by phone: 086 7965572 or by email: [brigina.oriordan@ncirl.ie](mailto:brigina.oriordan@ncirl.ie)).



## 1.4. 2023-24 Overview

National College of Ireland (NCI) is an independent not-for-profit third level institution providing programmes in business and IT to a diverse group of students from non-traditional backgrounds. In 2006, NCI established the Early Learning Initiative (ELI), as part of its mission to address educational underachievement in marginalised communities. ELI has grown from 400 participants (children, parents and professionals) to 19,860 and moved beyond its initial Dublin Docklands catchment area to supporting other communities across the country.

Part of NCI's Strategic Plan, ELI's National Centre ([Chapter 3](#)), is working to support communities across Ireland to deliver high quality Home Visiting and Parent Engagement Programmes, in line with the Irish Government's First 5 A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028

<b>National Centre</b>	<b>Families</b>	<b>Professionals</b>	<b>% Expenditure</b>
ParentChild+ (18-36 months)	437	78	28%
Home from Home	113	29	9%
Sláintecare Community Mothers Project	1,000	30	18%
My Place to Play	2,695	165	20%
Home Visiting Alliance	0	293	7%
Research Projects	105	10	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,350</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>100%</b>

Dublin's Inner City ([Chapter 4](#)) focuses on universal plus, wrap around, holistic integrated supports for children, parents, and families through the delivery of high-quality Home Visiting, Parent Support, Literacies and Educational Guidance Programmes. Dublin's Inner City is a best practice demonstration site for ELI's National Centre and other communities across Ireland. Programmes, having been successfully piloted and evaluated in Dublin's Inner City, are manualised and rolled out to other areas through the National Centre.

<b>Dublin's Inner City</b>	<b>Families</b>	<b>Professionals</b>	<b>% Expenditure</b>
Educational Guidance	452	39	10%
Literacies & STEM	3,679	337	23%
Parent Support Groups	884	82	22%
Home Visiting	493	58	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,508</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>100%</b>

ELI is a partnership ([Chapter 2.4](#)) between families and professionals from statutory, corporate, voluntary and community organisations. Eighteen years of sustained cross sectoral collaboration has paid dividends due to the goodwill, enthusiasm and determination of our wonderful partners. In 2023-24, ELI teamed with:

- ✓ 1,587 professionals from community, statutory and voluntary organisations.
- ✓ 33 corporate organisations and foundations along with 209 volunteers.
- ✓ Irish Government through the Docklands and East Inner City Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, Tusla, HSE, Children and Young People's Services Committees, Sláintecare, Rethink Ireland, Science Foundation of Ireland and the North East Inner City (NEIC) Initiative.

## 2. Finance, Governance and Strategy

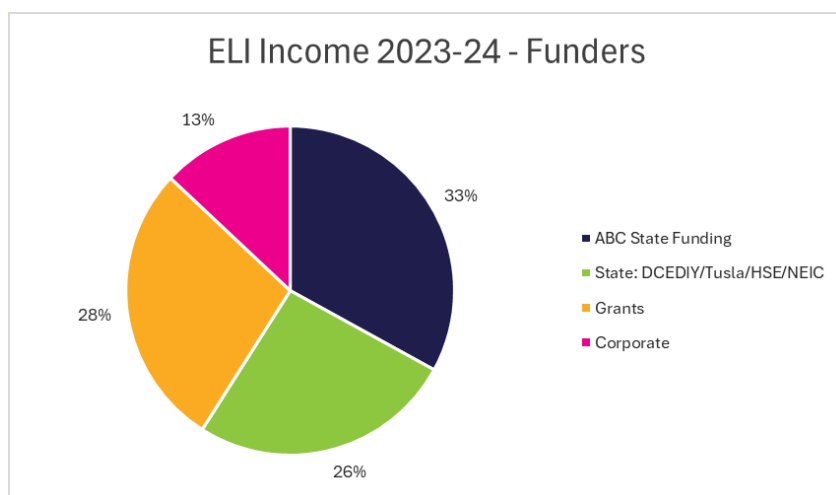
National College of Ireland is committed to good governance and has in place systems and processes to achieve our Early Learning Initiative's (ELI) objectives in an ethical, effective, efficient, accountable and transparent manner. This section accounts for ELI's 2023-24 income and expenditure along with its governance structures, strategy and communications.

### 2.1. Finance

ELI has tightly managed income and expenditure to ensure that programme and partner outcomes and commitments have been fully achieved. It is financed by a mix of statutory and philanthropic funding. This section details the income, expenditure and budgets for ELI's National Centre, Dublin's Inner City and Docklands & East Inner City Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programmes.

#### 2.1.1. Income 2023-24

ELI raised a total income of €2.45m in 2023-24, up from €2.4m in 2022-23; €1.45m (59% up from 58% in 2022-23) came from statutory funding (ABC, Tusla, NEIC, DCEDIY and HSE) with the remaining €1m (41% slightly down from 42% in 2022-23) coming from our corporate partners, grants, trusts, foundations, and individuals. There was a decrease in grants (28% compared with 30% in 2022-23) and an increase in corporate and individual funding (13% compared with 10% in 2022-23).



We would like to pay tribute to the generosity of all our donors, many of whom are long-term valued partners in improving outcomes for children, families and communities. A special thank you to Michael Hartwell (Partner, Deloitte), Declan Quilligan (Managing Director, Citco Fund Services), Sandra Foley (Managing Director, State Street), Joe O'Reilly (Executive Chairman, Chartered Land) Deirdre Giblin (NCI Director of Development and External Engagement) and Susan Dargan (Independent Director) for their invaluable input as part of our ELI Development Committee. We would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of Dan O'Connor and Sean Reilly, long term members of the Development Committee, who oversaw the expansion of ELI from its roots in Dublin Docklands to supporting other communities across Ireland.

Did you know that by five years old, 90% of the human brain has already grown? Support vulnerable children’s early brain development and subsequent educational achievement by donating what you can to [Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland | Online Fundraising \(idonate.ie\)](https://www.idonate.ie).

If you are interested in partnering with ELI, please contact Josephine Bleach, ELI Director (by phone: 086 8153600 or email: [josephine.bleach@ncirl.ie](mailto:josephine.bleach@ncirl.ie)) or Assistant Directors, Catriona Flood (by phone: 086 0296894 or by email: [catriona.flood@ncirl.ie](mailto:catriona.flood@ncirl.ie)) and Brigina O’Riordan (by phone: 086 7965572 or by email: [brigina.oriordain@ncirl.ie](mailto:brigina.oriordain@ncirl.ie))

### 2.1.2. Expenditure 2023-24

The combined spend for ELI for the 12 months to June 2023 was €2.65m (up from the previous year of €2.4m). The spend for the National Centre (1027) was €962K (up from €759k in 2022-23) with Dublin’s Inner City (106 and 1028 - including the ABC funding) €1.7m (up from €1.6m in 2022-23). More details of the breakdown in income and expenditure can be found in the relevant National Centre ([Chapter 3.](#)) and Dublin's Inner City ([Chapter 4.](#)) sections.

	Income 2023-24	Expenditure 2023-24	Surplus/Deficit	Projected Expenditure 2024-25
	€	€	€	€
Docklands & East Inner City Area Based Childhood (ABC)	800,537	862,998	(62,461)	850,000
Dublin's Inner City	833,745	827,608	6,137	800,000
National Centre	818,452	961,456	(143,004)	800,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,452,734</b>	<b>2,652,063</b>	<b>(199,329)</b>	<b>2,450,000</b>

#### Notes:

- The costs above represent the direct costs incurred. They do not include overheads and services provided by NCI, such as accounting, payroll, marketing. It is estimated that this would account for 20% additional cost or €530,413.
- Spending exceeded income for both the National Centre and Dublin’s Inner City. This was due to the timing of payments, increased activities and related delivery costs, both pay and non-pay, both locally and nationally. It will be covered by restricted funding received in 2022-23, which was retained in reserve to cover contracted 2023-24 programme costs.
- The ABC overspend, which is covered by philanthropic funding for Dublin’s Inner City, reflects actual programme delivery costs rather than the Tusla ABC grant.
- ABC funding from January to June 2025 is subject to its inclusion in the Government’s 2025 Budget and the projected expenditure will be amended to reflect the 2025 ABC budget agreed with Tusla.
- ELI National Centre and Dublin’s Inner City Projected Expenditure 2024-25 is based on NCI’s Strategic Plan, costs in previous years, pledged funding and outstanding grant applications. It will be amended in December 2024 to reflect funding received and additional pledges/grants.

## 2.2. Governance

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) is a department of National College of Ireland (NCI), an independent, not-for-profit higher education institution and a registered charity which operates under a Governing Body of 15 members. As a department of NCI, ELI operates under and adheres to all NCI's policies and procedures including financial, management, human resources, contracts, reporting and governance.

The generous commitment of Brendan McGinty, Chairperson of NCI's Governing Body; Gina Quin, President of NCI; and other members of NCI's Governing Body and Executive Board has been critical to the success of ELI in improving outcomes for children and young people. Membership of NCI's Governing Body and ELI Committees are listed below with more information on NCI and ELI Governance is available on our website: [www.ncirl.ie](http://www.ncirl.ie).

NCI Governing Body as of June 2024	
Chairperson - Mr. Brendan McGinty Michael Brady Barbara Cotter Brigid McManus Prof Patrick Clancy Dr Anu Sahni Sheila Nunan* Maureen Brogan Gina Quin – College President	Tony O'Malley Dr Kevin Hargaden* Michelle Moore Tre Robert NCISU President Mr Kieran Kelly Kevin Callinan Dr Donnchadh Ó Madagáin - Secretary and Registered Officer

\*Members of Governing Body who sit on the ELI Advisory Committee, which in turn reports to Governing Body.

ELI is a discreet centre within NCI with its own dedicated staff and Advisory Committees. The ELI Advisory Committee has authority from NCI's Governing Body to provide oversight of ELI's compliance and financial responsibilities and advise on the ELI's delivery of services and strategy. The Advisory Committee is in turn responsible for the oversight of three sub committees: ABC Steering Group, National Steering Group and the ELI Development Group.

The leadership and expertise shown by Mary Doyle, Chairperson of the ELI Advisory Committee; Michael Hartwell Chairperson of the ELI Development Committee; Margaret Kernan, Interim Chairperson of ELI National Steering Group and the other members of the ELI Advisory Committee and Steering Groups has been invaluable in the development of ELI. We thank them for their advice, guidance and support over the past year and look forward to working with them in 2024-25.

ELI Advisory Committee as of June 2024 is set out below:	
Chairperson – Mary Doyle Gina Quin, President NCI Sheila Nunan*, NCI Governing Body Dr Kevin Hargaden*, NCI Governing Body Mike Hartwell, Chair of ELI's Development Committee Margaret Kernan, Interim Chair of ELI's National Steering Group	Dan O'Connor, Tom O Connor Brian Hatton Joe O'Reilly Denise Hall Deirdre McCarthy Sean Reilly – resigned December 2023 Michael O'Riordain - joined April 2024

ABC Steering Group as of June 2024 is set out below:	
Interim Chairperson – Josephine Bleach, NCI Director Donnchadh Ó Madagáin, NCI Finance Director Geraldine Duff Dan O’Connor (Resigned October 2023) Tom O’Brien Emma Nugent	Lorraine Doherty, John Peelo (Resigned June 2023) Denise Hevey, Dara Terry (Resigned November 2023) Denise McDonald Niall Heneghan
ELI Development Group as of June 2024 is set out below:	
Chairperson – Michael Hartwell Sean Reilly (Resigned December 2023) Dan O’Connor (Resigned October 2023) Sandra Foley Declan Quilligan Susan Dargan	Dr Deirdre Giblin, NCI Director of Development and External Engagement Dr Josephine Bleach, ELI Director Lana Cummins, ELI Assistant Director Brigina O’Riordan, ELI Assistant Director
ELI National Steering Group as of June 2024 is set out below:	
Interim Chairperson: Margaret Kernan Prof Jimmy Hill, NCI Vice President Dr Josephine Bleach, ELI Director Anne Fitzpatrick	Dan O’Connor (Resigned October 2023) Tony White Lisa Fox Christine McCann



## 2.3. Strategic Planning

In an increasingly fragmented complex world, strategic planning is a key element of ELI's strength, durability and success. Since 2007, ELI focused on the delivery and sustainability of its programmes within the Dublin Docklands. Our 2015-20 Strategy defined a new phase with its aims to establish ELI as a national initiative with national impact. Our 2020-25 Strategy, which is now incorporated into NCI's 2022-27 Strategic Plan built on this work, developing incrementally a twin-track approach of

- Sustaining and evolving our Dublin's Inner-City Hub on page 43.
- Advancing as a National Centre in Parent Child Home Visiting and Family Engagement on page 22.

The following table outlines the relevant key themes and objectives in NCI's Strategic Plan.

Priorities	Objective	ELI Actions
<p><b>1. Students</b> <i>(for ELI, these are the children, parents and professionals who engage in our programmes)</i></p> <p>Foster a distinctive NCI graduate and a well-balanced graduate body that aligns to our mission in terms of distinctive and flexible modes of learning (access) and internationalisation</p>	<p>Be a recognised leader in sustainability, with our commitments evident across our physical infrastructure, programmes, research &amp; graduate attributes</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop and deliver first class educational support programmes to 4,000+ children and parents in Dublin Inner City, contributing to SDGs: 1 'No Poverty'; 4 'Quality Education'; 5 'Gender Equality'; 10 'Reduce Inequality'; and 11 'Sustainable Cities and Communities'</li> <li>2. Design and develop opportunities to enhance the capacity of the 500+ staff in 77 organisations contracted to deliver an ELI programme through relevant professional development and role flexibility opportunities</li> <li>3. In collaboration with NCI colleagues, 1) Develop links with relevant international partners to share learning and research; 2) Engage in Erasmus and other relevant EU programmes</li> </ol>
<p><b>2. Staff</b> Support and train all of our staff to be agile and responsive in meeting the needs of students, employers and other key education partners.</p>	<p>Utilise sustainable practices to recruit, support &amp; retain staff who excel in their roles</p> <p>Align staff performance with NCI strategic objectives &amp; sustainable practices.</p>	<p>Design and develop opportunities to enhance the capacity of the 90 ELI staff employed by NCI to deliver through relevant professional development and role flexibility opportunities.</p>

Priorities	Objective	ELI Actions
<p><b>3. Teaching</b> Develop and maintain successful programmes, distinctive in our design, delivery and assessment and aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.</p>	<p>Future-Proof NCI's portfolio of programmes &amp; ensure alignment with sustainability strategy.</p> <p>Sustainable optimisation of digital &amp; physical campus.</p>	<p>Design and deliver a series of programmes with faculty across NCI to enhance skills development and access to HE in alignment with SDG 4 'Quality Education'; 5 'Gender Equality and 10 'Reduce Inequality</p>
<p><b>4. Research</b> Invest in a step change in research and innovation capability, in a manner that is closely connected to our distinctive offering.</p>	<p>Expand research infrastructure commensurate with sustainable research strategy ambitions &amp; achievements.</p> <p>Exploit sustainable research partnership opportunities &amp; networks.</p>	<p>Implement NCI's research strategy with a focus on disseminating learning through social media, papers and conferences, securing research partnerships and funding.</p>
<p><b>5. Access</b> Guided by our mission, vision and values, NCI will continue and develop its focus on delivering accessible higher education.</p>	<p>Reinforce NCI's distinctiveness in the sector as leader in sustainable access &amp; lifelong learning.</p> <p>Integrate NCI &amp; ELI to maximise impact &amp; enhance our collective &amp; sustainable distinctiveness.</p>	<p>Scale up a sustainable model of Home Visiting programmes across Ireland as chair of the Home Visiting Alliance and the development of the National Model of Home Visiting as per the First 5   A Government Strategy For Babies &amp; Young Children.</p>
<p><b>6. Positioning</b> We will build on our foundation of distinctive education provision in our chosen fields and will become increasingly recognised as a valued, distinctive provider.</p>	<p>Amend our HEA funding status &amp; position a Sustainable NCI for success in achieving Delegated Authority from QQI.</p> <p>Enhance the employability, sustainability attributes &amp; work-readiness of NCI Graduates &amp; to deepen vertical relationships with employers across a range of NCI activities.</p>	<p>Align ELI's strategy with NCI's Institutional Strategy to enhance NCI's impact and contributions to SDGs: 1 'No Poverty'; 4 'Quality Education'; 5 'Gender Equality'; 10 'Reduce Inequality; and 11 'Sustainable Cities and Communities</p>

Described as ambitious and innovative in both the Irish and international context, ELI continues to develop **pioneering inclusive and diverse programmes** that address the needs of the children, families, and local organisations in Dublin’s Inner City and across Ireland.

Being part of the NCI, a vibrant third-level institution that the local community sees as “our college”, is essential to realizing our vision. Since 2006, we have welcomed local children, parents, families and services into NCI. The opening of our new Spencer Dock campus continues this tradition. Supplementing Spencer Dock will be a new Play Lab and Sanctuary Space in our Mayor Square campus along with dedicated child and family facilities in the National Centre for Research and Reconciliation (NCRR) on Sean McDermott St.

Dublin’s Inner City is a sustainable proven model, which requires vigilance and monitoring to ensure accountability, consistency, quality and fidelity to the original vision and NCI’s Governing Body’s commitment to its local community. Retaining and expanding existing funding streams is important to sustain the work.

From 2015 onwards, space to host ELI events and provide community services became scarce. The opening of Spencer Dock in 2023 has changed this landscape providing a new impetus to our work. The opening of the PlayLab facility at NCI Mayor Square building in November 2024 will provide dedicated space for the delivery of ABC parent and child groups and events, home visits for families living in temporary or overcrowded accommodation and the Saturday Parenting365 groups for children with additional needs and disabilities.

Longer term, as part of a National Centre for Research and Remembrance (NCRR), ELI will have additional space on Sean McDermott St for the provision of community-based family and parenting supports along with other relevant educational and community activities.

ELI’s National Centre continues to develop with work continuing on moulding its identity, structures and processes. Its priority is to deliver on ELI’s mission to bring home visiting and family engagement programmes to every community in Ireland, thereby ensuring that the 12,400 children born into poverty each year get the support they need to thrive in education, career and life. Securing sustainable multi-annual funding for the National Centre is critical to its future and ongoing development.

2024-25 is a significant year for ELI with the establishment of a National Home Visiting Programme office in Tusla and ongoing development of National Model of Home Visiting as part of the [First 5 | A Government Strategy For Babies & Young Children](#). These initiatives, along with the DCEDIY What Works Building Evidence Project, will shape both the strategy and the work of ELI at both local and national level for the foreseeable future.

For more information about ELI’s Strategic Objectives, please contact Dr Josephine Bleach (By phone 086 81536000 or email [josephine.bleach@ncirl.ie](mailto:josephine.bleach@ncirl.ie))

## 2.4. Partnerships

ELI enables children, their families and communities, to acquire the skills and self-confidence needed to benefit fully from the educational system. All our partners understand the challenges faced by local communities across Ireland and are genuinely committed to making a real, measurable and positive difference to the lives and learning successes of children and young people. This section outlines how, in 2023-24, our partners supported us in improving outcomes for children and young people through sharing their expertise, resources and learning. Thank you to everyone who partnered with ELI last year. We really appreciate your friendship, generosity and commitment to helping us ensure that children and young people across Ireland achieve their educational, career and life ambitions. We look forward to working with you again in 2024-25 and building on past successes.

### 2.4.1. Government Partnerships

The Government, through its sustained support and interest in ELI, is directly ensuring a more cohesive, equal and successful society. Implementing Government policy, in particular Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028 (DCYA 2023) and First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (DCYA 2018) is a key ELI priority.

**The Area Based Childhood (ABC)** Programme enables us in collaboration with our colleagues in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY); Tusla and local partners address key educational and social issues for children and families in the Dublin Docklands and East Inner City. More information on is available on page 38.

**The DCEDIY What Works Learning Together and Building Evidence Funds** grants to the [Home Visiting Alliance](#) feed into the development of a national standardised model for early childhood home visiting in Ireland as outlined in First Five. They have raised the visibility of early childhood home visiting in Ireland; built the capacity of the existing home visiting programmes to support vulnerable children and parents to thrive and have led to the establishment of a new National Home Visiting Programme Office, which will lead out on the scaling up of home visiting across Ireland. More information is available on page 37.

**Sláintecare, Prevention is better than cure**: The development of Community Families Programme is an exciting collaboration with the HSE, Tusla, Katharine Howard Foundation and 7 Community Mothers sites across Ireland with the programme launch planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2024. More information is available on page 34.

**My Place to Play** is being mainstreamed across Ireland through a multi-agency Implementation Working Group comprising Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) National and local areas, Tusla Partnership, Prevention and Family Support (PPFS) National, the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) in the DCEDIY, thereby ensuring that babies and toddlers living in homeless/ emergency/ overcrowded and international protection accommodation are provided the opportunity to develop and learn through play. More information is available on page 35.

#### 2.4.2. North East Inner City (NEIC) Programme Implementation Board

The NEIC Programme Implementation Board led by an independent chair, Jim Gavin, has been very supportive of ELI since its inception. We would like to thank Jim Gavin, Olivia Brody and the NEIC Programme Office for their ongoing support to ELI during what has been a challenging year for the NEIC, particularly after the riots in November.

NCI President and ELI Director/Assistant Director sit on Subgroup 2: Education and Training and Subgroup 3: Improving Family Wellbeing respectively. ELI was delighted that NEIC funding was continued in 2023-24 for Restorative Practice, Doodle Den, Parenting Coordinator and Educational Guidance at second level. Additional funding was received for the English As A Second Language programme, Talking Heads and for Parenting 365. We were also pleased to be involved in the development of the next NEIC Strategic Plan and the very productive conversations on the future emerging needs of children and families living in the NEIC.

#### 2.4.3. Corporate Partners

Without the substantial, long-term financial and voluntary support of our corporate partners, much of the ELI's work would not be possible. We applaud their visionary insights and genuine commitment to making a real, measurable and positive difference to the lives and learning successes of children and young people across Ireland. We are continually seeking additional corporate partners and would welcome the opportunity to talk to interested companies. Please contact Brigina O'Riordan (by phone: 086 7965572 or email: [brigina.oriordan@ncirl.ie](mailto:brigina.oriordan@ncirl.ie)) for more information on how your organisation could get involved with ELI.

#### 2.4.4. Other Communities across Ireland, EU and globally

ELI, through the National Centre, is a centre of excellence, from which communities can learn how to improve the educational and life chances of vulnerable children and their families. Over the past year, a range of diverse national and international organisations expressed an interest in learning more about ELI and we are delighted to share our learning with them. If you are interested in learning more about and collaborating with ELI, please contact ELI Assistant Catriona Flood at [catriona.flood@ncirl.ie](mailto:catriona.flood@ncirl.ie).

#### 2.4.5. Influence and Advocacy

Central to ELI's impact is influencing collective efforts that improve the life chances of children, young people and their families. Advocating on their behalf through networking and interagency collaboration ensures ELI achieves this goal. We are members of the Prevention & Early Intervention Network (PEIN), which is a network of evidence-based practice, advocacy and research organisations that share a commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people, and their communities and are represented through all of the ABC Learning Communities. We are also members of the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) alongside our ongoing participation in networks established through The Wheel. We chair the Home Visiting Alliance, which represents the collective national voice of early childhood home visiting. This year we joined International Step by Step Association (ISSA), a leading international learning community throughout Europe and Central Asia. These networks allow us to work collaboratively with others in the field to harness a wealth of expertise and resources and work towards common goals to positively influence policy and practice and advocate for the needs of families and children across the country.



#### **2.4.6. Research Partnerships**

A focus on research and innovation in response to quality assurance and everchanging contexts with a priority on enhancing research partnerships, both formal and informal, and knowledge management systems is key to ELI's strategic research ambitions. Engaging with our colleagues in NCI and other research institutions through knowledge dissemination, brokerage and synthesis is at the forefront of ELI's ambition to advance policy and services for children and families. If you are interested in collaborating on a research project with ELI, please contact ELI Research Lead Kate Darmody at [kate.darmody@ncirl.ie](mailto:kate.darmody@ncirl.ie). More information on [ELI's Research](#) is available on page 38.

#### **2.4.7. Local Docklands and Inner City Dublin Communities**

One of the great strengths of ELI has been our local cross sectoral network of public health nurses, early years, after school and youth services, schools, TDs, community, statutory and corporate organisations. As well as directly supporting implementation, their involvement in the ABC Steering Group, Consortium and various Working Groups actively informs the development of all our programmes. Together we are changing children's lives. More information is available on [page 43](#).

#### **2.4.8. Colleagues in the National College of Ireland**

NCI staff, from various Departments, work very closely with us to ensure that ELI delivers our programmes and research to a high standard and best practice is adhered to. Through their interactions with ELI's partners at national and local level, they demonstrate NCI's long-standing commitment to widening participation in higher education and ensuring that children in the area will progress successfully to third level. NCI's 2022-27 Strategy recognises ELI as an integral part of the NCI landscape. Together, we are achieving NCI's strategic goal to be recognised worldwide for excellence in sustainability, access, innovation and research in education for children, young people and families living in social disadvantage. More information is available on [ELI's UN SDGs](#) and [Strategic Planning](#).

#### **2.4.9. NCI Governing Body and ELI Advisory Committees**

NCI takes full responsibility for the financial, management, contractual, reporting and governance requirements of ELI. The generous commitment of Brendan McGinty Chairperson of NCI's Governing Body; Gina Quin, President of NCI; and other members of NCI's Governing Body and Executive Board has been critical to the success of ELI in improving outcomes for children and young people. ELI is a discreet centre within NCI with its own dedicated staff and Advisory Committees.

The leadership and expertise shown by Mary Doyle, Chairperson of the ELI Advisory Committee; Mike Hartwell, Chairperson of the ELI Development Steering Group; Margaret Kernan, Interim Chairperson of ELI National Centre Steering Group and the other members of the ELI Advisory Committee and Steering Groups has been invaluable in ensuring that ELI operates ethically and effectively in the best interests of children and families.

## 2.5. Communications

Communication is key to ELI's engagement with all its partners and its ability to influence practice, policy and theory. During 2023-24, we communicated with multiple audiences through a mix of social media, conferences/webinars and papers along with traditional print and media coverage. Networking enabled us to expand our learning support networks and develop relationships with other similar organisations, who are committed to improving outcomes for children. It also enhanced our ability to reach new and potential corporate partners who expressed interest in our work during the year.

### 2.5.1. Social Media

ELI's social media presence builds connections, shares achievements, and informs stakeholders about our programmes for children, families, and the community. Our social media platforms provide essential updates and promote access to our full range of activities and programmes for children, young people, parents and families across the community. In addition, social media platforms connect us with broader professional communities enabling skill-sharing and insights exchange locally, nationally and internationally. An example of social medias' impact is our participation in the Prevention and Early Intervention Summit where ELI highlighted the findings from the Home Visiting Alliance feasibility report, emphasizing the importance of home visiting services in Ireland to support children and parents.

Over the year ELI continued to reinforce our message around family well-being and self-care for parents and signposted to our extensive suite of parent and child groups, parenting courses, ParentChild+ activities, STEM Family Learning and Coding projects, and Zoom Ahead with Books Virtual Book Club.

Other content included suggested activities, news and updates from all programme areas including 0-2 Home Visiting, ParentChild+, Doodle Den, Zoom Ahead with Books, Early Numeracy, Stretch Graduate, STEM Learn and Play, My place to Play, Restorative Practices, Talking Heads, Tuition Support and Discover University.

There was substantial growth across all four of our social media platforms, particularly in LinkedIn and Instagram.

Social Media Platform	Total Followers end June 2023	Total Followers end June 2024	Increase in 2023-24	% Increase in 2023-24
Facebook	3,297	3,518	221	6
Instagram	1,109	1,312	203	16
Twitter (X)	1,407	1,483	76	5
LinkedIn	692	827	135	16
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6,505</b>	<b>7,140</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>9</b>

### 2.5.2. Networking

Networking is a vital tool to fulfil our mission of working in partnership with Government and local communities to support educational journeys and achievements, as well as being fundamental to our community action research approach. In 2023-24, members of the ELI team attended 347 interagency networking events or meetings. Of these, 82 were related to the ABC Programme, 171 were Dublin's Inner-City related and 94 involved the National Centre. Key criteria for networking are the individual's and organisation's commitment to improving outcomes for children and their ability to work in partnership with others. Priority is given to networks that are focused on early childhood development, educational disadvantages and support for parents. Learning more about, or having an input into Irish and European policy, especially when it concerns children's learning and development, is highly valued.

### Key networks in 2023-24 included:

- Home Visiting Alliance
- Infant Mental Health Network
- International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS)
- Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN)
- School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin
- Young People at Risk (YPAR) Steering Group and Working Groups:
  - o Roma Working Group
  - o 0-5 Working Group
  - o 5-12 Working Group
  - o Hard to Reach Working Group
  - o Children in Emergency Accommodation Working Group
- Community and Voluntary Sector organisations e.g. Childrens Rights Alliance, Aontas, The Wheel
- Parent Strategy Group
- Community Families Oversight and Support Group
- Homeless organisations e.g. Depaul, Focus Ireland, Crosscare
- Community Safety Partnership
- Children and Young Persons Services Committees (CYPSC)
- DCU STEAM Network
- Growing up in Ireland Policy & Research Advisory Group
- National Centre for Research and Remembrance

## 3. National Centre for Parent Child Home Visiting Family Engagement

### 3.1. Introductory Letter

Committed to NCI's mission to change lives through education, ELI has embraced local partnerships around Ireland to ensure that children and parents have the disposition, skills and knowledge to achieve their educational, career and life goals. Through the lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals such as 'No Poverty' and 'Quality Education' we see a continued need for prevention and early intervention where parent child relationships are at the core of building solid foundations and growth for children, families, and local communities around Ireland.

#### Strategic Growth

Throughout 2023-2024, we have strengthened our national programmes and reach in visible and discreet ways, made possible by continued collaboration with government partners and state agencies. The National ParentChild+ Strategy has provided us with the tools to plan for the future of ParentChild+ through sustainable planning of our internal resources and capacity alongside national policy and local need. This strategic infrastructure allows us to support 14 communities to implement ParentChild+.

With support from DCEDIY, CYPSC and Tusla, we have reached 2,695 families through My Place to Play, our largest reach of the programme to date. Families in international protection, homeless accommodation, domestic violence, Traveller communities and families fleeing the Russian War in Ukraine have benefitted from the programme despite their daily challenges.

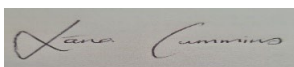
Community Families is an exciting initiative for ELI with seven sites around the country. Supported by an oversight group with representatives from Tusla and the HSE, this year has seen the introduction of a CRM system to support Home Visitors and organisations in digital literacy and data capacity building. A Senior Specialist has been appointed to provide support to Community Families to implement the model and ensure consistency across all sites. Working together at local level to support national policy is at the forefront of this home visiting programme.

#### Research

NCI's newly launched Research Strategy 2023-2027 is centred on five sustainability goals. These goals have deepened our collaborations and community action research approach across departments in NCI and helped ELI's National Centre achieve the highest rate of research output to date. With national and international conferences, paper publications, submissions and progressions we are delighted with the opportunity to share ELI's learnings with academic communities.

#### Thank you

Thank you to all our partners who make ELI's work possible. 2023-2024 saw the continuation of the cost of living, the international protection and housing crisis, and ongoing waitlists for children with disabilities. Without the vision, support, and collaboration of all involved, ELI would not be able to support the parents and children who need us most. With your support, we will continue to find ways to ensure children across Ireland are supported to achieve their educational, career and life goals.



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Lána Cummins, ELI National Assistant Director

### 3.2. Overview

From the beginning, NCI envisaged ELI acting as a Centre of Excellence from which other communities and governments, nationally and internationally, could learn how to improve the educational and life chances of children and their families across Ireland and further afield. As ELI's activities grew exponentially, balancing local programme delivery with national advocacy and mainstreaming activities was challenging. As part of NCI's Strategic Plan, a National Centre for Home Visiting and Family Engagement was established to capture and build on its achievements to date and its strategic ambitions.

The National Centre is a focal point for knowledge management, capacity-building, communication and influencing in relation to educational disadvantage, access and ELI's growing expertise in supporting other communities to deliver high quality Home Visiting and Family Engagement programmes, in line with the Irish Government's First 5 A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028. The overall goal is to capture new knowledge and practices in these areas and disseminate them locally, nationally and internationally. It supports and learns from ELI's work in Dublin's Inner City and uses it as an example of best practice from which other communities can learn.

**At present, the National Centre supports a combination of the following activities:**

1. Scaling up sustainable models of Home Visiting programmes across Ireland.
2. Research and innovation in response to quality assurance and everchanging contexts.
3. Building partnerships to increase influence and impact.
4. Sustaining and developing the portfolio of Dublin's Inner-City Programmes.

**ELI's National Centre programmes and initiatives include:**

<b><i>National Centre for Parent Child Home Visiting and Family Engagement</i></b>	<b>Families</b>	<b>Professionals</b>
ParentChild+ (18-36 months)	437	78
Home from Home	113	29
Sláintecare Community Families	1,000	30
My Place to Play	2,695	165
Home Visiting Alliance	0	293
Research Projects	105	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,350</b>	<b>605</b>

This section summarises the activities of ELI's National Centre for Home Visiting and Family Engagement

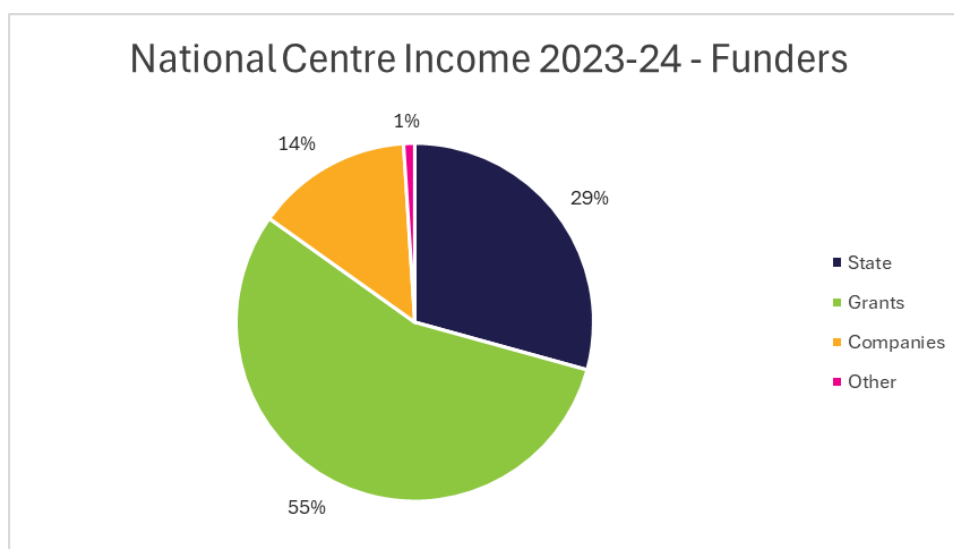


### 3.3. Finance and Governance

This section accounts for ELI’s National Centre 2023-24 income and expenditure along with its governance structures. Financed by a mix of statutory and voluntary funding, including DCEDIY, Tusla and the HSE, it has tightly managed income and expenditure to ensure that programme and partner outcomes and commitments have been fully achieved.

#### Income

The income for the National Centre was €818K (down from €947k in 2022-23). The following graph illustrates the breakdown in income with 55% from grants, up from 46% in 2022-23; 15% from corporate and individual funding, down from 19% in 2022-23; and 29% from the State, primarily DCEDIY and Tusla, down from 36% in 2022-23.



We would like to pay tribute to the generosity of all our donors, many of whom are long-term visionary partners, who saw the need to expand ELI’s work to ensure Ireland’s most vulnerable children, families and communities thrive. A special thank you to Michael Hartwell (Partner, Deloitte), Declan Quilligan (Managing Director, Citco Fund Services), Sandra Foley (Managing Director, State Street), Joe O’Reilly (Executive Chairman, Chartered Land) Deirdre Giblin (NCI Director of Development and External Engagement) and Susan Dargan (Independent Director) for their invaluable input as part of our ELI Development Committee. We would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of Dan O’Connor and Sean Reilly, long term members of the Development Committee, who oversaw the expansion of ELI from its roots in Dublin Docklands to supporting other communities across Ireland.

Did you know that by five years old, 90% of the human brain has already grown? Support vulnerable children’s early brain development and subsequent educational achievement by donating what you can to [Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland | Online Fundraising \(idonate.ie\)](https://www.idonate.ie)

If you are interested in partnering with ELI, please contact Josephine Bleach, ELI Director (by phone: 086 8153600 or email: [josephine.bleach@ncirl.ie](mailto:josephine.bleach@ncirl.ie)) or Assistant Director, Catriona Flood (by phone: 086 0296894 or by email: [catriona.flood@ncirl.ie](mailto:catriona.flood@ncirl.ie))

## Expenditure

The spend for the National Centre for the 12 months to June 2024 was €961K, up from €759k in 2022-23. This increase was due to payment schedules, higher costs, both pay and non-pay along with expansion in Research, My Place to Play and Sláintecare Community Families activities. It will be covered by restricted funding received in 2022-23, which was retained in reserve to cover contracted 2023-24 programme costs. The following table illustrates the breakdown of costs for national programmes.

<i>Programmes</i>	<b>Actual Costs 2023-24</b>	<b>Projected Costs 2024-25</b>
	€	€
Home Visiting Alliance	63,188	70,000
ParentChild+ National Office	107,396	115,000
ParentChild+ National Sites	253,870	300,000
My Place to Play	189,801	165,000
Sláintecare Community Families	168,492	50,000
Research & CRM Projects	178,711	100,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>961,458</b>	<b>800,000</b>

### Notes:

- The costs included above represent the direct costs incurred of providing the Programmes. They do not include any charges for services provided by NCI such as accounting, payroll, marketing, which is estimated at 20% of the above costs (€92,292).
- The ELI National Centre's Projected Expenditure 2024-25 is based on NCI's Strategic Plan, costs in previous years, pledged funding and outstanding grant applications. It will be amended in December 2024 to reflect funding received and additional pledges/grants.

## Governance

The National Steering Group provides oversight and direction for ELI's National Centre. It oversees the development of a National Centre for Parent Child Home Visiting and Family Engagement, which supports other organisations across Ireland to implement ELI's home visiting and parent support programmes as well as its research strategy and management. We thank Margaret Kernan, Interim Chair and all Steering Group members listed below for their advice, guidance and support over the past year and look forward to working with them in 2024-25. We welcome Tony White as the incoming chair.

ELI National Steering Group as of June 2024 is set out below:	
Interim Chairperson: Margaret Kernan Prof Jimmy Hill, NCI Vice President Dr Josephine Bleach, ELI Director Anne Fitzpatrick	Dan O'Connor (Resigned October 2023) Tony White (incoming Chair) Lisa Fox Christine McCann

### 3.4. National Home Visiting Support

Developing and scaling up sustainable models of Home Visiting programmes across Ireland so that the 12,400 children born into poverty each year in Ireland get the support they need to thrive in education, career and life is a key priority for ELI. To achieve this, ELI's National Parent Child Home Visiting and Family Engagement Support Centre, supports the delivery of high quality evidenced-based sustainable models of Home Visiting and family engagement programmes across Ireland. This is a complex task in an everchanging policy and societal context. Our work ensures that the structures, processes and training to enable high quality governance, accountability and implementation of home visiting programmes in different organisations are in place and working. This section details this work.

- **ParentChild+ National Home Visiting Training, Research and Support Centre**, facilitates the sustainable expansion of ParentChild+ to new communities, providing comprehensive support to Managers, Coordinators, and Home Visitors nationwide. Now operating in 14 locations, including Dublin Docklands, ELI ensures consistent quality through staff training and support. With the support of the ReThink Scaling Education Fund, the National Centre has embedded quality assurance practices to guide the programme's growth with integrity. The ParentChild+ Senior Specialist and the new National Support Coordinator are key to delivering training, support, and oversight, ensuring fidelity across all sites.
- **ParentChild+ National Programme**, is a pre-literacy and parenting programme that strengthens families and prepares children to succeed academically. Over a two-year period, Home Visitors model oral language, reading and play in their twice-weekly visits. The families then continue the activities in their own time, thereby enabling the ParentChild+ child and their siblings to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills.
- **Home from Home Programme**, a specially adapted home visiting programme for families living in homeless/emergency accommodation. Organisations around Ireland have started the process for implementation.
- **Sláintecare Integration Fund: Community Families Programme Development Project** in collaboration with the HSE, Tusla, Katharine Howard Foundation and 7 Community Mothers sites across Ireland. Our goal is that every first-time parent in Ireland will be offered the updated home visiting programme.
- **My Place to Play Project** in collaboration with Tusla, CYPSC and International Protection Accommodation Services in the DCEDIY. It aims to enhance parent-baby interactions and children's physical (tummy time), emotional (sense of safety, wellbeing and belonging), cognitive and language development for infants living in homeless/emergency/international protection/overcrowded accommodation.
- **Home Visiting Alliance**, a collaboration of 5 Irish evidence-based early childhood home visiting programmes (Community Mothers, Infant Mental Health, Lifestart, ParentChild+, Preparing for Life) represents the collective national voice of early childhood home visiting.

### 3.4.1. ParentChild+ National Centre

Expanding ParentChild+ to marginalised communities across Ireland is a key priority in ELI's 2020-25 Strategic Plan. Our goal is to ensure that all children, regardless of their background or location, receive the necessary support to enter school equipped with the language, literacy, and numeracy skills for educational success.

**The ParentChild+ National Home Visiting Training, Research, and Support Centre** drives the sustainable growth of the ParentChild+ and Home From Home programme into communities, offering extensive support to Managers, Coordinators, and Home Visitors nationwide. Currently, ParentChild+ operates in 14 locations, and the Home From Home programme runs in seven locations across the country. ELI maintains high standards through ongoing staff training and support. The ParentChild+ Senior Specialist, along with the newly appointed National Support Coordinator, play a crucial role in providing training, support, and oversight to ensure program fidelity and enhancement across all sites.

**The Rethink Ireland Scaling Education Fund** supports the ParentChild+ National Team in advancing the next phase of implementation and sustainability. With this backing, ELI developed a ParentChild+ National Strategy for 2023-2024, aimed at building on the programme's national success. The strategy focuses on scaling the programme nationwide through a network of community and national partners, while ensuring sufficient capacity, resources, governance, and sustainability. An implementation plan was also created to outline the steps needed to meet strategic goals. Together, the strategy and plan form a three-year blueprint for ParentChild+ National, fostering creative planning to help the programme reach its full potential across Ireland. Additionally, an EU Development Plan was developed to enhance research and implementation through European partnerships.

### Training and Professional Development

Home Visiting and Parent Support Programmes are local peer-led community lifelines for most at-risk young children and their families. Continuous professional development is critical to ensure that Coordinators and Home Visitors have the dispositions, skills and knowledge to effectively engage our most vulnerable children and families, particularly those experiencing intergenerational poverty, unemployment, violence/abuse, social isolation, trauma, mental health issues, educational disadvantage, international protection, homelessness/emergency accommodation.

In 2023-24:

- Mandatory training was provided for all Home Visitors with weekly supervision supplemented by additional training in self-care and restorative practice.
- All Home Visitors have been supported to engage in eLearning with 1,676 hours of CPD completed nationally from a range of courses offered both internally and externally.
- The team were upskilled in Presentation and Interview Skills:
  - 2 Coordinators from the Louth ABC site presented online at the ParentChild+ International Conference in New York.
  - 25 Coordinators and Home Visitors are pursuing academic/professional qualifications:
    - 6 Home Visitors engaging in a level 5 in subjects such as Child Health and Wellbeing and Computers for Beginners.
    - 13 Home Visitors engaging in a level 6 in subjects such as Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting.

- 3 Home Visitors engaging in a level 7 in subjects such as Leadership, Governance and Change Management in Home Visiting.
- 1 level 8 in BSc Counselling & Psychotherapy.
- 1 Home Visitor is pursuing a level 9 in Early Childhood Studies.
- Communities of Practice:
  - 18 Coordinators attended 3 Community of Practice Day sessions online and received up-to-date training in quality assurance, fidelity to the programme, leadership practices, how to navigate CSO data and Pobal Deprivation Index, and self-care.
- Mentoring and Support
  - 18 Coordinators attended monthly online support sessions relating to managing and supporting staff.

### 3.4.2. ParentChild+ National Programme Delivery

Originally from the US, the ParentChild+ Programme is an innovative, home-based literacy and parenting programme that strengthens families and prepares children to succeed academically. For over 16 years, ELI has delivered ParentChild+ to vulnerable families with children aged 16 months to 3 years in Dublin. Beginning with 15 families in 2007, numbers have grown to 437 in 2023-24 and 14 sites across Ireland. In 2023-24, the programme was expanded to a new site in Tullamore.

#### Programme Delivery

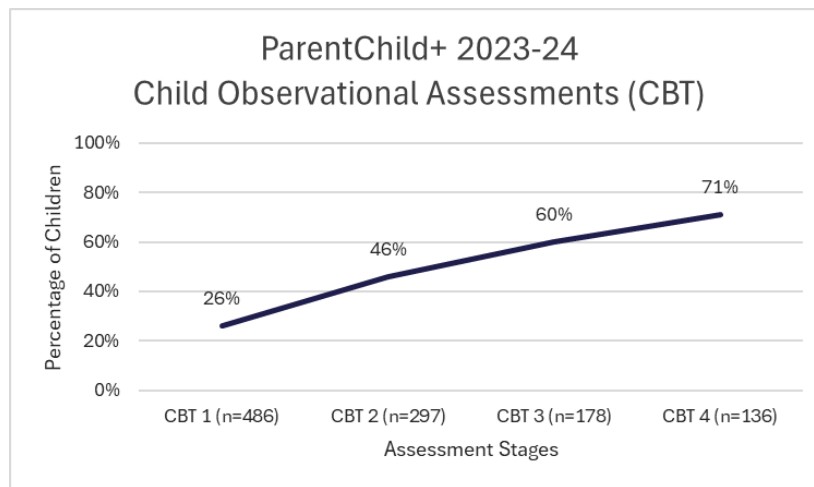
- 437 families across Ireland received 13,212 home visits from September 2023 – June 2024.
  - 12,912 in home visits, 85 outdoor visits, 182 video call visits and 33 phone call visits.

<i>ParentChild+ Area</i>	<b>Started</b>	<b>No. of families</b>	<b>No. of Home Visitors</b>
<b>NCI Dublin's Inner City, D1,2,3,4,8</b>	2007	167	26
<b>Dublin South City Partnership, D4,6,8,12</b>	2009	12	4
<b>ABC Grangegorman/Daughters of Charity, D7</b>	2014	26	5
<b>Garryowen Community Development, Limerick</b>	2015	49	5
<b>Galway Rural Development Ballinasloe, Galway</b>	2015	21	5
<b>Liffey Partnership (ABC), Ballyfermot, Dublin</b>	2017	30	6
<b>St Ultan's, Cherry Orchard, Dublin</b>	2017	12	3
<b>Blue Skies Initiative (ABC), Clondalkin, Dublin</b>	2019	12	5
<b>Louth ABC (ABC), Dundalk, Louth</b>	2019	41	5
<b>Youth New Ross, Wexford</b>	2021	18	3
<b>Brill FRC, Waterford</b>	2021	16	3
<b>Galway Rural Development Tuam, Galway</b>	2022	12	3
<b>Parents First, Tullamore, Offaly</b>	2023	12	3
<b>Louth ABC (ABC), Drogheda, Louth</b>	2024	9	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>437</b>	<b>78</b>

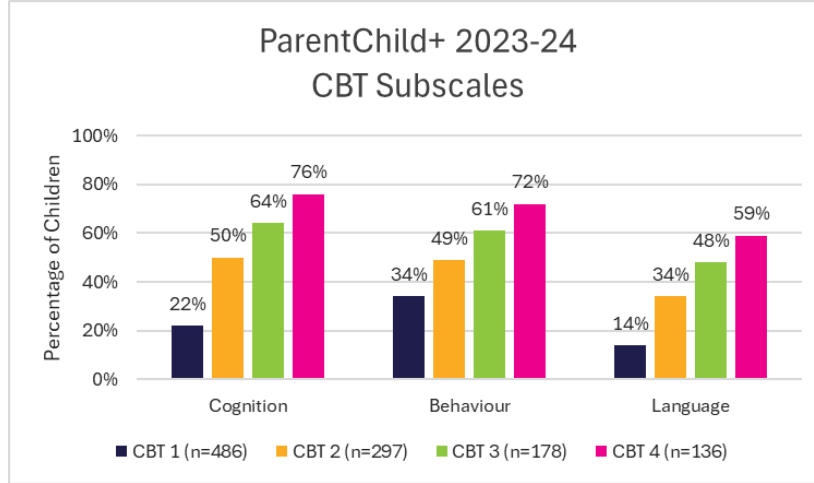
## ParentChild+ Programme Assessment- Child Behaviour Trait (CBT) and Parent and Child Together (PACT)

To monitor the developmental trajectory of the children and highlight the areas of learning and interaction that need to be addressed, Home Visitors complete two observational assessments (Child Behaviour Trait (CBT) and Parent and Child Together (PACT)) at four points throughout the programme: (after the 6th visit , after the 44th visit , after the 68th visit , and at the 92nd visit). In the following graphs, the percentages displayed are calculated based on the proportion of Home Visitors answering 'often' or 'always' in the CBT and PACT assessments. According to the coding scheme, children scoring 'often' (4) or 'always' (5) tend to meet their developmental milestones, and parents scoring at this level indicate positive parent-child relationships. Data from all national sites were collated and are reported in the graphs below.

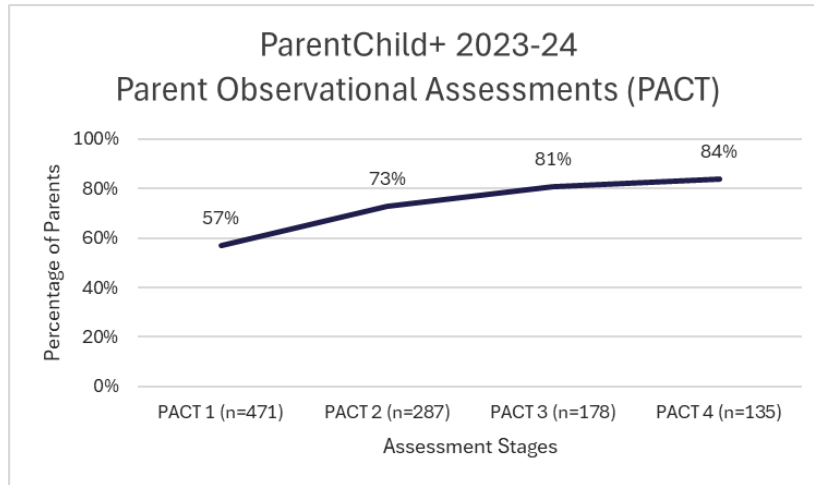
The percentage of children reaching their developmental milestones across the twelve ParentChild+ sites gradually increased throughout the programme, from 26% at the beginning of the programme to 46%, 60% and, finally, 71% on completion of the programme. The percentage of children reaching their developmental milestones after completing the full programme is the same as from 2022-23 (71%).



Children engaging in the programme demonstrated developmental increases across the three CBT subscales (cognition, behaviour and language) at each stage of the programme. As can be seen below the greatest overall increase was found in the percentage of children reaching their developmental milestones in the area of cognition (54%), followed by increases in language (45%) and behaviour (38%), the same pattern as the assessment scores in 2022-23.

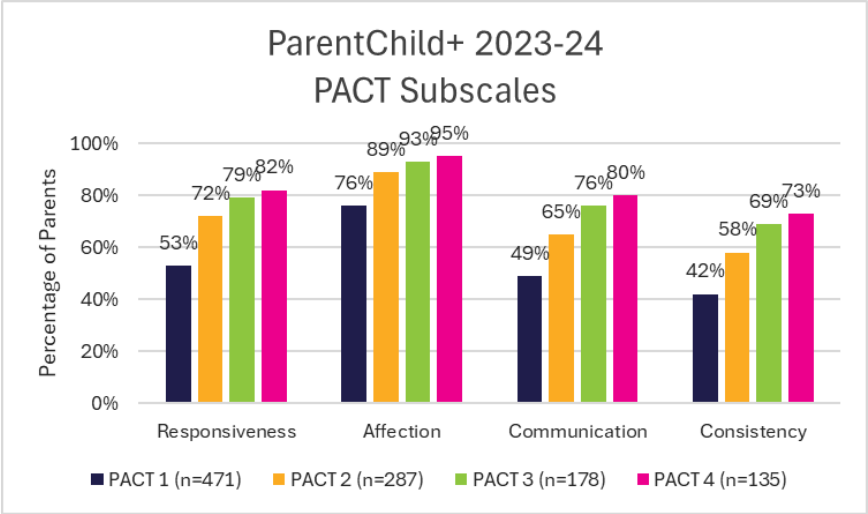


There was also a significant increase in the percentage of parents across all ParentChild+ sites having high-quality interactions with their children from 57% at PACT 1 to 84% at PACT 4, roughly the same as parents at PACT 4 in 2022-23 (83%).



The percentage of parents having interactions of good quality with their children showed improvements in all four areas of assessment (parents' responsiveness to their child, parent's affection toward their child, parent's communication with their child and parent's consistency with their child) at each stage of assessment. This was particularly evident in parents' positive communication and consistency with their children (31%). This was followed by increases in responsiveness (29%) and affection (20%). This followed a similar pattern as assessment scores in 2022-23.





**Comments from parents included**



*“The programme is set so well in order to educate and guide parents about parenting and also to know what the child likes.”*



*“...We both loved every minute. I found it very beneficial for my son, and couldn’t give [Home Visitor] enough credit for everything she has done for us both over the last 3 years.”*



*“Speaking with [Home Visitor] on Tuesdays and Thursdays made me feel better not just as a person but as a mother too. Couldn’t not fault [my Home Visitor] as a Home Visitor, she helped me not only see [my child’s] potential but as an ASD mammy things are harder but very doable.”*

### 3.4.3. Home from Home Programme

The Home from Home Transition Programme is an intensive weekly home visiting programme developed by our Home Visiting Team in Dublin’s Inner City (DIC) in for families living in emergency/ homeless accommodation, which provides an integrated plan of intervention and support for families with children aged 16 months onwards. An adaptation of the ParentChild+ programme, its overall aim is to meet the needs of families living under the duress of homelessness, who would not be able to commit to a two-year programme and twice weekly visits. It has been delivered in DIC since 2019 (see [Section 4.4.5.](#)). The Home from Home National Centre is committed to scaling up Home from Home in a sustainable way. This year saw 6 sites plus DIC deliver the programme nationwide.

#### Programme Delivery

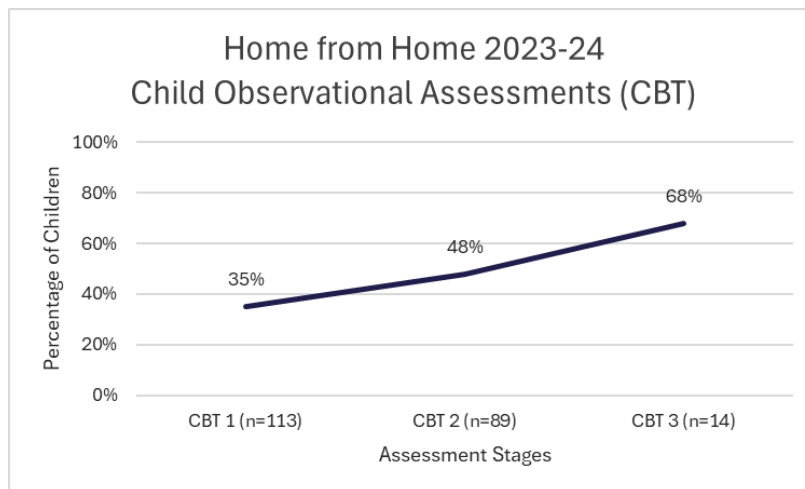
- 113 families nationally received 1,188 home visits from September 2023 – June 2024
  - 1,164 indoor visits, 6 outdoor visits, 18 video call visits

<i>Home from Home Area</i>	<b>Started</b>	<b>No. of families</b>	<b>No. of Home Visitors</b>
<b>NCI Dublin’s Inner City D1,2,3,48</b>	2019	38	15
<b>Dublin South City Partnership D4,6,8,12</b>	2021	8	1
<b>Blue Skies Initiative (ABC), Clondalkin, Dublin</b>	2021	10	4
<b>Youth New Ross, Wexford</b>	2022	40	3
<b>Brill FRC, Waterford</b>	2023	10	3
<b>Dundalk (ABC), Louth</b>	2024	4	2
<b>Drogheda (ABC), Louth</b>	2024	3	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>113</b>	<b>29</b>

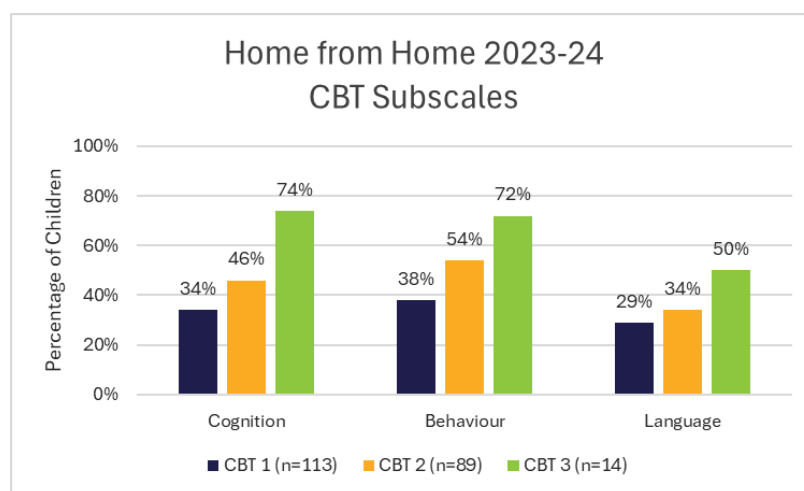
#### Programme Assessment- Child Behaviour Trait (CBT) and Parent and Child Together (PACT)

For the Home from Home Programme Home Visitors complete a baseline CBT and PACT after the 2nd visit and a second CBT and PACT after the 12th visit. Due to the nature of the programme many families may be relocated to other accommodation and finish the programme at this stage. For any family that continues with the programme after the 12th visit, a final CBT and PACT assessment are completed after their final visit. (Please see [Section 3.4.2.](#) for further details on these assessments).

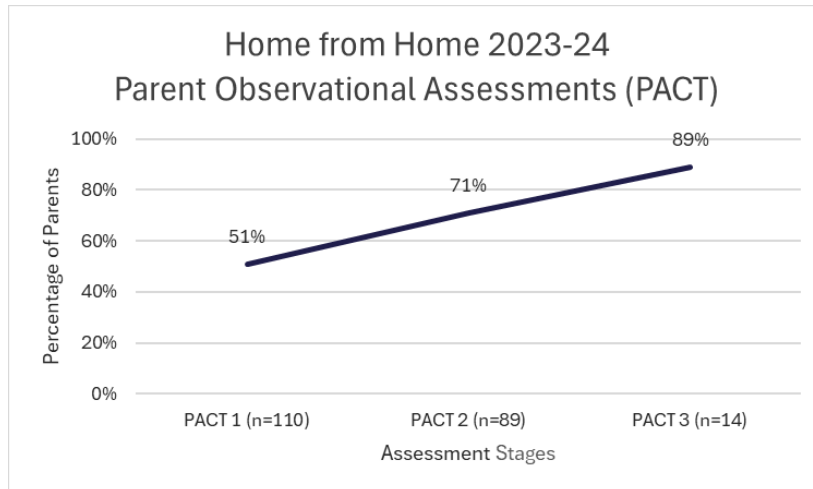
As can be seen in the graph below, 35% of the children in the 2023-24 Home from Home National cohort were reaching their developmental milestones on entering the programme. The average percentage score of children reaching their developmental milestones increased by 13% at CBT 2, and by another 10% at CBT3. These results are comparable to 2022-23, where 33% of children were reaching their milestones at CBT 1 and 48% at CBT 2. Fourteen families from a few HFH sites have progressed past the initial 12 visits and have completed the third stage of assessment. As the national sites become more established, there has been a noticeable progression and increase in families participating from 2022-23, where only the first 2 assessment stages could be reported.



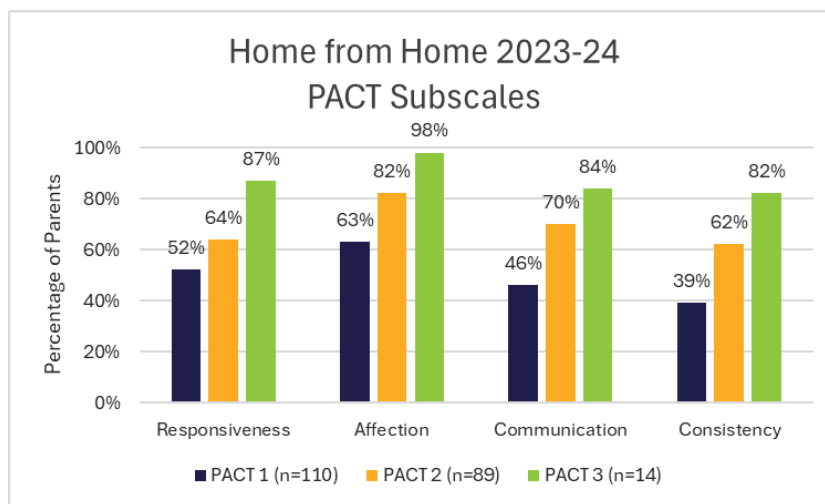
Children engaging in the programme demonstrated developmental increases across the three CBT subscales (cognition, behaviour and language) at each stage of the programme. As can be seen below the greatest overall increase was found in the percentage of children reaching their developmental milestones in cognition (40%), followed by increases in behaviour (34%) and language (21%).



There was also a significant increase in the percentage of parents across all Home From Home sites having high-quality interactions with their children from 51% at PACT 1 to 71% at PACT 2, and 89% at PACT 3. A greater number of parents began the programme exhibiting positive interactions with their children than in 2022-23 (45%), yet those assessed again at PACT 2 were comparable (70%).



The percentage of parents having interactions of good quality with their children showed improvement in all four areas of assessment. This was particularly evident in parents' consistency with their children, which increased by 43%. This was followed by increases in communication (38%), responsiveness (36%), and affection (34%).



#### Comments from parents included



*"We are homeless and this programme provides learning opportunities to our child in the limited space."*



*"... [M]y child's speech and social skill has improved."*



*"What I love [is my child was] led to build relationships. Not everyone knows what everyone's child needs ... [the Home Visitors] get to know the child, what works, and focuses on strengths as every child is at different journey. The books was big thing for [my child], he's reading books, and singing too ..."*

### 3.4.4. Sláintecare Community Families Programme Development Project

Commencing in 2019 as a collaboration with the local Community Mother Programmes, Tusla, HSE and the Katharine Howard Foundation, this project is a good example of a future-orientated policy-focused prevention and early intervention initiative, where practice and policy intersect in the collaborative strategic planning and transformation of an evidenced based early childhood home visiting programme. Following a National Review of the Community Mothers Programme, Ireland's first evidenced based home visiting programme, in 2019, the Sláintecare Integration Fund and matched funding enabled the development of Community Families, an updated, evidence-based and integrated national home visiting programme which aims to improve outcomes for children and families in pregnancy and early childhood. Community Families is a community home visiting programme, which puts parents first, empowering them through trusted relationships with a Home Visitor during pregnancy and their child's early years. It provides information and support and builds friendships and connectivity in local communities.

#### Aims:

- To support the special bond between parents and their children and recognise that this is at the core of subsequent child and family outcomes from health and wellbeing to learning and succeeding in life.
- To improve children's lives by developing trusted relationships between experienced Home Visitors working in partnership with parents. This is done through home visiting and promoting the development of supportive community networks.
- This professionally delivered Programme is not a 'one size fits all' approach; instead, it has the built-in flexibility to respond to all families and their unique needs and circumstances. The Programme empowers families to develop confidence as they grow and build their local peer support networks, accessing supports and services within their local community.

The Community Families National Oversight and Support Group (NOSG), co-chaired by Tusla and the HSE, was established in 2022 and has responsibility for the oversight, implementation and development of the Community Families Programme. Together, we are supporting the current seven Community Mothers Programme sites to transition to the standardised Community Families model.

#### Programme Delivery

- 7 organizations in Dublin (ELI), Limerick, Kerry, Longford, Westmeath, Tipperary, Laois and Offaly.
- 1,000 families received home visiting annually with 2,400 involved in parent support groups.
- 30 Home Visitors upskilled and improved the quality of their service to families.
- 8 NOSG meetings were held with 2 consultation meetings with sites.
- Readiness assessment, completed in December 2023, found that all 7 sites operate high quality services and are committed to and ready for the implementation of Community Families at grassroots level to further benefit the communities they work in. Continued communication, collaboration, resourcing and funding is required to maintain the momentum.
- A Senior Implementation Specialist was recruited in November 2023 to support existing sites to implement Community Families to a high standard and with fidelity to the model.
- The CRM system to support data collection across sites is due to be fully operational by October 2024.
- Launch of the Community Families model is planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2024.

### 3.4.5. My Place to Play Programme

My Place to Play (MPTP) is an innovative, portable programme aiming to enhance interactions between parents and their children from birth to the toddler years living in homeless/emergency/overcrowded accommodation. The programme provides age-appropriate toys and activities to nurture physical, emotional (sense of safety, well-being and belonging), cognitive and language development. The original concept was designed for infants and included a playmat that doubles as a bag for the toys to give infants a place to enjoy crucial tummy time. In 2021-22, in collaboration with speech and language therapists, an extension of the programme for toddlers was developed and piloted. These packs focus on providing toddlers aged one to three years with a sense of well-being, belonging and self-identity. They aim to support toddlers' overall development including communication, social and physical development.

To develop MPTP further, ELI led a multi-agency National Implementation Group comprising of Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) National and local areas, Tusla Partnership, Prevention and Family Support (PPFS) National, Tusla Homeless Liaison, the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS). The project became a leading example of the upscaling of a multi-agency, collaborative and responsive project from local to regional to national level. In 2022-23, MPTP was identified by the DCEDIY as a resource to respond to the needs of families of young children fleeing the Ukrainian war and those living in International Protection crisis. In 2023-24 programme was extended to reach Traveller families and families living in domestic violence accommodation. Commissioned through CYPSC National and in continued collaboration with PPFS, Tusla, the Early Learning Initiative worked through local CYPSC networks and City and Childcare Committees to reach families.

#### Programme Delivery

- 5 national organisations collaborated on the My Place to Play project (CYPSC, PPFS, IPAS, ABC and Tusla).
- Packs were distributed across 23 counties in the Republic of Ireland
- 1,297 Infant Mats were purchased for families living in emergency and homeless accommodation nationally this year:
  - 10 mats were delivered to families in Dublin's Inner City by ELI.
  - 1,287 mats were delivered across 74 organisations and delivered to families nationally.
- 1,398 Toddler Packs were purchased nationally this year.
  - 15 packs were delivered to families in Dublin's Inner City by ELI.
  - 1,383 packs were delivered across 69 organisations and delivered to families nationally.
- 165 professionals attended 6 online briefing sessions on the infant and toddler packs facilitated by a Speech and Language Therapist and MPTP Coordinator.
- Tip sheets for how to use the packs were translated into 15 different languages.



*(Photo of the My Place to Play toddler pack)*

## Participant Feedback

Parents and practitioners are asked to complete an evaluation two weeks after the parent has received the My Place to Play mat or pack. In total 57 parents and 36 practitioners completed the evaluation.

Feedback was positive with 98% (n=56) of parents reporting having the mat/pack makes it easier to play with their baby/toddler. Parents said that the mat did so by providing them with the space to play with their baby that was safe and comfortable. Parents that received the pack noted that their children enjoyed the variety of colourful, age-appropriate toys and that they provided fun opportunities for parent-child bonding and for the children to practice colours, shapes, and communication skills. Practitioners agreed with these sentiments, with 94% (n=34) reporting that the mat and pack provided more opportunities for the parents to play with their children, and valuable learning opportunities for child development. All parents and practitioners (n=93) would recommend the mat and pack to other parents.

Practitioners were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the briefing sessions, 96% (n=67) found the sessions interesting and the content easy to understand. 87% (n=60) believe that the content will support the improvement of the quality of their practice and a further 90% (n=63) felt that they are confident in making changes in their workplaces after the briefing sessions.

### Comments from participants included

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*"It's nice to know you are using toys that are fun for your baby and help them to learn. Having the ideas to go along with each toy was great. I like how the toys can be used in so many new ways too. It also makes you get down on the floor more and really see how much your baby is enjoying being with you." [Parent]*



*"As a child and youth worker ... most of our clients are hard to reach with little to no resources. Most of the babies and toddlers I work with experience developmental delays, and there has been few cases of baby flat head, as there is no room to play, explore or develop. These packs have really helped as mums can now use these mobile bag packs to go to the park. Collaborating with My Place to Play has helped most of the families we are linking in with living in emergency accommodation ...." [Practitioner]*

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### 3.4.6. Home Visiting Alliance

Established in November 2020, the Home Visiting Alliance (HVA) is a collaboration of 5 Irish evidence-based early childhood home visiting programmes: Community Mothers, Infant Mental Health, Lifestart, ParentChild+ and Preparing for Life. A subgroup of the Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN), the HVA represents the collective national voice of early childhood home visiting from pre-birth or during pregnancy. It is committed to supporting the development of a national standardised model for early childhood home visiting in Ireland as outlined in *First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* (DCYA 2018).

The purpose of the Home Visiting Alliance is to:

- Promote home visiting from pre-birth or during pregnancy as an essential early years vital service for children, parents and families.
- Support member organisations, collectively and individually, to strengthen and broaden the impact of home visiting in Ireland.
- Contribute to policy development and implementation in relation to early childhood home visiting from pre-birth or during pregnancy locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Share our common learning at programme, approach, implementation, and policy levels.

#### Programme Delivery

- 10 executive group meetings chaired by the Director of ELI with the ELI Administrator providing administrative assistance.
- Research
  - 83 stakeholders, including representatives from Departments of Taoiseach and Children, HSE, Tusla and local politicians attended The DCEDIY What Works Feasibility Study on the Scaling Up, Expansion and Replication of Home Visiting Programme in Ireland in October 2023. [Early Childhood Home Visiting in Ireland – Feasibility Study – Home Visiting Alliance \(hva.ie\)](#)
  - DCEDIY What Works Building Evidence Collaborative Exploratory Study of Data Definitions, Knowledge, Frameworks and Practices across Early Childhood Home Visiting Programmes is underway with the draft framework and logic model completed.
  - 100 stakeholders attended the first consultation meeting in April 2024 with presentations from the DCEDIY, Tusla ABC and Community Families Programmes.
  - Continued to support UNITES Project, MUI on the development of standardised approaches to home service delivery in Ireland. Expected publication is September 2024.
- Training:
  - 110 Home Visitors attended The Wheel Training Links Programme webinars
  - 70 attended *The Impact of Hidden Harm through Substance Use* (20th October)
  - 40 attended *Building Resilience for Home Visitors Supporting Families Experiencing Mental Health* (24<sup>th</sup> November),
  - Further funding has been secured to deliver more training in 2024-25
- Advocacy and Communication
  - Engaging with local and national politicians, The Wheel and Children’s Rights Alliance (development of national model and sustained resourcing of home visiting); Family Resource Centres (delivery of home visiting) and national Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) service (transition from home visiting to HSCL)
  - HVA website, developed through What Works funding: [Home Visiting Alliance – Home Visiting Alliance \(hva.ie\)](#), is now fully operational.

### 3.5. Research and Innovation

Research, evaluation and innovation are central components of ELI's commitment to evidence-based practice and strategic sustainability. Considered essential to understand the evolving needs of the community, they enable the creation of meaningful solutions that build on community strengths and improve outcomes for at-risk children, young people and families. They also provide evidence of impact for our funders in addition to making important contributions to growing the knowledge base of early intervention and prevention in Ireland.

NCI's Research Strategy is completed and incorporates ELI's real-life action research methodology. Key strategic priorities for 2024-25 include strengthening ELI's research infrastructure and outputs in collaboration with our NCI colleagues.

This section outlines ELI's 2023-24 key research and innovation projects. If you would like any further details on the progress of any of the projects listed below you can follow our [ResearchGate page](#) or contact ELI Research Lead, Kate Darmody on [kate.darmody@ncirl.ie](mailto:kate.darmody@ncirl.ie).

#### 3.5.1. Community Action Research (CAR)

Encompassing research and praxis aimed at promoting educational equity, facilitating empowerment, building resilience and sustainability in our community, ELI's grassroots CAR initiatives and capacity building efforts empower individuals, nurtures inclusive education, and builds resilient families and communities.

ELI's Community Action Research (CAR) approach collects the voices of participants, including children, young people, parents, other family members, staff and corporate volunteers, across all programmes through a variety of methods such as evaluation forms (paper based and online), focus groups etc. Each year evaluations are reviewed, and common indicators identified. These include indicators of participation; programme satisfaction; participant learning and parental involvement. In addition, children's learning continued to be measured for specific programmes through a range of child and parent focused measures including the 0-2 Parent and Child Observation tool (0-2 Home Visiting Programme), the ParentChild+ Measures (Child Behaviour Traits – CBT, Parent and Child Together – PACT, and Home Learning Environment - HLE), Assessing Children's Phonics, Writing, Sight Vocab and Social Skills (Doodle Den), and Assessing Children's Understanding, Knowledge and Skills in Coding (Robotic Coding Club Programme).

In January 2024, ELI held an internal CAR Day focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with staff reflecting on how their programmes contribute to the SDGs.

#### 3.5.2. Research and Innovation Projects

The following is a list in alphabetical order of the exciting research and innovation projects that our research team along with their colleagues in ELI and across NCI worked on in 2023-24. Building on our community action research evaluations, they take a more in-depth approach to improving our understanding of emerging challenges in practice, policy and theory.

## ABC Outcomes Framework

In 2022, ELI commenced its implementation of the ABC Outcomes Framework developed by the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme to provide a more comprehensive approach to reporting on the collective impact of ABC Programmes. ELI is one of the 12 services implementing ABC Programmes across Ireland. This framework is being implemented incrementally, with the Outcomes Framework being piloted with two of our ABC programmes in 2023-24: ParentChild+ in Dublin's Inner City and the ABC-funded Doodle Den sites. Training on data collection took place in July and August 2023. Data collection will continue throughout 2024-25, and work is ongoing to implement the Outcomes Framework with other ABC-funded programmes.

## Gender in STEM

In 2023-24, ELI collaborated with colleagues in the NCI School of Psychology to explore gender balance in STEM. As part of this research project, we piloted new evaluations in the Robotic Coding Club with both children and parents which explore concepts such as belonging in STEM, gender stereotypes and self-efficacy. This research project aims to bring intersectional, gendered analysis to STEM programmes for children as there is a dearth of literature in this area. These evaluations have been piloted with one school in 2023-24 and we aim to continue data collection in 2024-25.

## Home Visiting Alliance DCEDIY What Works Building Evidence Project

To support the implementation of the First Five Strategy and the national model of Home Visiting, a collaborative exploration of Common Data Definitions, Knowledge, Frameworks and Practices across Early Childhood Home Visiting Programme commenced in 2024. This will support home visiting programmes, service providers, commissioners and policy makers in learning how to use data to identify gaps in home visiting service delivery, both locally and nationally, to track and review data, and to share evidence-informed evaluation of services and approaches. It is a first step in building a viable data collection infrastructure to support the sustainable growth of early childhood home visiting incrementally over the next ten years. It is building the capacity of all involved to collect, mine, analyse and publish data on their home visiting services and use this data to improve outcomes for children and their families across Ireland.

## Home Visiting Alliance DCEDIY What Works Sharing Knowledge Project

Limited knowledge exists about how to build the infrastructure and service systems necessary to scale up evidence-based home visiting programs with fidelity to their models and adapt them for new target populations. Part of the development of an agreed approach Home Visiting as per the First Five Government Strategy, the feasibility study proposed an infrastructure, processes and funding for the replication, scaling up and expansion of early childhood home visiting programmes across Ireland so that every child, parent and family can avail of a home visiting programme that meets their needs. The report [Early Childhood Home Visiting in Ireland – Feasibility Study – Home Visiting Alliance \(hva.ie\)](#) was launched in October 2023 and we are delighted to say that a National Home Visiting Office has been established in Tusla with support from the Government's Children's Fund.

## NEIC Parenting Programme Needs Assessment

A Needs Assessment survey was distributed to parents in the NEIC, the second iteration of this survey since it was first done in 2022. 20 responses in total were received with 13 parents responding to an online survey and 7 attending a focus group.

While there were mixed feelings about parenting programmes or support, 70% highlighted issues, needs and concerns for their children. 29% mentioned concerns around their child's mental health with another 29% noting concerns around lack of services and amenities such as afterschool activities and housing concerns. 45% indicated they faced barriers accessing parenting supports, including time issues, work schedules, childcare as well as delays in accessing speech and language therapy.

These concerns were reflected in a second survey distributed to the Parent Strategy group in Spring 2024 with 32 parents responding. The biggest issue was lack of services or supports for children with additional needs, with 38% of parents (n=12) mentioning this. Safety and anti-social behaviour also featured strongly in the response.

## ParentChild+ and Stretch Graduate State of the Moment Review

To help us better understand the impact of and connection between ParentChild+ and Stretch Graduate programmes on families we carried out a research project that pulled together a substantial amount of qualitative and quantitative data gathered over the last 17 years. While ELI has had an indisputably positive effect on the families it has served, what is emerging from the most recent data is that the prevalent needs of families have evolved significantly over the last few years. Case studies bring to life the rapid increase in diverse nationalities, migrants and asylum seekers who have additional language challenges, difficulty securing housing, and finding work and an unfamiliar system to get to grips with. More importantly, we are seeing a rapidly growing number of children with developmental delays and additional needs.

## Parenting365

The Parenting365 programme is a targeted programme for parents of children aged 1-6 years who are presenting with a developmental delay or who have been diagnosed with an additional need. A research project was conducted in the early stages of the programme development to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of children with additional needs, and their families, and to evaluate the Parenting365 programme. In collaboration with the NCI School of Psychology, ELI is analyzing the qualitative data generated from this research with the goal of publishing the findings in 2025.

## Restorative Practice Longitudinal Data Project

Since 2014, ELI in collaboration with the ABC and NEIC is aiming to develop Ireland's first restorative community in Dublin's Inner City. In 2023-24, ELI collated eight years of data from ELI's restorative practice initiatives and wrote a paper to share the lessons learned during the journey to support RP implementation in local organisations and community development. This paper has been submitted as a journal article and is awaiting publication.

## **SFI Parental Attitudes and Awareness of STEM and Digital Technologies**

Over the past 10 years, NCI, with support from SFI, has enabled 3,000 children annually to access STEM education, develop key digital skills and build positive STEM identities. Recognising the critical role parents play in early STEM learning and the speed at which STEM is changing due to advances in AI, this participatory research aims to better understand parents' perceptions, thereby helping design programmes that support parents to increase they and their children's engagement, skills and knowledge in these areas.

## **SFI STEM Family Learning and Robotic Coding Projects**

As part our SFI STEM Family Learning Project, we are collaborating with the School of Computing to translate practice into theoretical frameworks and disseminate the learnings from our virtual Robotic Coding Clubs, Family e-Learning and our Stem Play and Learn Home Visiting Summer Programme. Findings indicate an increase in children's STEM skills and knowledge, and improvements in positive attitudes and confidence in STEM for children and parents.

## **Student Childcare Study**

Students in third-level education who are parents must consider their childcare options to attend college and engage with their studies. However, the cost, availability and flexibility of childcare in Ireland can be a significant barrier to many student parents attending college or finishing their studies. Research suggests that while students who are parents face additional barriers to accessing and continuing with further education, they are motivated by the positive impact that their education will have on their children (Wainright & Marandet, 2010). ELI began work on a research project in partnership with the Students' Union in NCI and the Union of Students in Ireland, which aims to find out about student parents' experiences of childcare services, and to identify any barriers to childcare for this cohort. A survey was distributed to colleges across Ireland via our partner USI in 2023-24. USI has used the preliminary results in their Pre-Budget Submission 2024 to advocate for increased funding to support parents to engage with further education. The results will be available in 2024-25.

## **Supporting English as an Additional Language (EAL) Learners**

Since 2019, ELI has been responding to the growing needs of EAL learners in Dublin's Inner City by developing pilot EAL support programmes. In 2022, a research study was designed to investigate the efficacy of two EAL support programmes, Listen Here and Talking Heads, in improving learners' language proficiency. In 2023-24, ELI collaborated with University College Cork to develop a policy paper on EAL learners: [Towards a plurilingual Ireland: planting the seeds of linguistic social justice in Education – Public Policy](#)

### 3.5.3. Research Dissemination

In line with NCI's Research Strategy, ELI continues to disseminate its academic and policy learning through papers and conferences. The following is a list of publications in alphabetical order:

#### Conference Presentations

- Alcalá, A., White, F., Dennehy, H., Darmody, K. Cummins, L. *Your Children, Your Say: Experiences of Meitheal in the Dublin Mid Leinster Area*. (2023, September). PEI Summit, Limerick, Ireland.
- Alcalá, A., Cummins, L., O'Neill, S., Darmody, K. *Experiences of Engaging with the Parenting365 Programme*. (2023, August). EECERA 31<sup>st</sup> Conference, Lisbon Portugal.
- Alcalá, A. & Mihalka, R. (2023, 27-28 October) *STEM Play & Learn: Exploring the effects of a STEM play-based home visiting programme*, CARN, Manchester, England.
- Alcalá, A., White, F. (2023, 8 November) *Assessing the Effectiveness of a Prevention-Focused Programme: A Comparative Study against National Norms*, Growing up in Ireland Conference, Dublin, Ireland.
- Bleach, J. & Byrne, M. (2023, 21-22 September) *Early Childhood Home Visiting – A Collaborative Person-Centered Community Approach*, PEI Summit, Limerick, Ireland.
- Bleach, J., Byrne, M. (2023, 27-28 October) *Early Childhood Home Visiting – a collaborative person-centred community approach*, CARN, Manchester, England.
- Bleach, J. (2024, 18 June) *Delivering on UN Sustainable Development Goals through Community Action Research*. NCI Research Day, Dublin, Ireland.
- Byrne, M., Darmody, K., Kent, G., Lambert, J., & Mulligan, B. *Developmental Outcomes of Infants from an Area of Socio-Economic Disadvantage: A Comparison with National Norms*. (2023, July). World Association of Infant Mental Health 18<sup>th</sup> World Congress, Dublin, Ireland.
- Cummins, L. (2023, 1 September) *Social Class Dynamics in Mother's Experiences of Early Childhood Disability Services*, EECERA, Lisbon, Portugal.
- Cummins, L. (2023, 21-22 September) *Social Class Dynamics in Mother's Experiences of Early Childhood Disability Services*, PEI Summit, Limerick, Ireland
- Cummins, L. (2023, 27-28 October) *Social Class Dynamics in Parental Experiences of Children's Disability Services*, CARN, Manchester, England.
- Cummins, L., Alcalá, A. (2023, 27-28 October) *Longitudinal studies with families in disadvantaged and transient communities – what works?*, CARN, Manchester, England.
- Cummins, L., Alcalá, A., Goulding, S. (2023, 1 September) *Parenting365*, EECERA, Lisbon, Portugal.
- Goulding, S. (2023, 1 September) *An exploration of the experiences of ParentChild+ Home Visitors participating in a self-care CPD training programme*, EECERA, Lisbon, Portugal.
- Mihalka, R. & Ryan, N. (2024, 18 June) *Keeping the Connection*. NCI Research Day, Dublin, Ireland.
- Mihalka & R., Steenson, C. (2024, 13-14 June) *Early Numeracy and STEM Play and Learn for an inclusive and sustainable future*, DCU, Dublin, Ireland.
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- Wheatley, E (2023, 25 November) *The Effective Use of Community-led Restorative Approaches in North-East Inner-City Dublin*, Restorative Practices Ireland National Conference, Kildare, Ireland.
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- Byrne, M., Cummins, L. & Mabika, S. (2023) My Place to Play: An interagency Approach to Supporting Infants and Young Children in Emergency Accommodation. *Education Matters Yearbook 2023*, 80-83.
- Cummins, L. & Byrne, M. (2023) My Place to Play: an interagency approach to creating a dedicated place to play for infants and their families living in emergency accommodation, CARN Bulletin 25, 9-13.
- Darmody, K. & Mihalka, R. (2023) Parents’ voices through the pandemic: How a community action research project shaped a parent-child engagement programme, CARN Bulletin 25, 14-18.
- Hill, R. (2023) Childhood Restored – Anything but Covid; an alphabet of artwork and poems by primary school children in the North-East Inner-City, CARN Bulletin 25, 19-24.
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- O’Neill, J., Goulding, S. Alcala, A. (2023) Parenting 365: A family-centred support programme for children with developmental delay and additional needs. CARN Bulletin 25, 3-8.
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## 4. Dublin's Inner City Programmes

### 4.1. Introductory Letter

Since 2006, ELI has partnered with our local Dublin's Inner City community partners to improve the educational aspirations and outcomes of children and young people. Delivering and sustaining an innovative suite of Home Visiting and Family/Community engagement programmes, while responding to complex and challenging emerging needs is the key focus of the Dublin Inner City team. This section of the End of Year Report gives the 2023-24 highlights ELI's Dublin's Inner City programmes, including the ABC and NEIC programmes.

#### **Dublin Inner City Centre of Excellence and Spencer Dock**

Dublin Inner City Centre continues to be seen as a Centre of Excellence from which other communities can learn. Over the course of 2023-24, ELI moved to NCI's new Spencer dock building, increasing the space available for ELI programme delivery, and offering space for local community groups. Children and young people's well-being and education continue to be at the heart of everything we do. Family engagement increased overall with 5,602 families participating in an ELI programme in 2023-24. Our ABC 0-2 home visiting programme has successfully transitioned to the new National Community Families model and will be launched in the Autumn 2024.

#### **Responding to the Challenging Environment and Emerging needs**

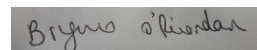
Dublin Inner City continues to face complex challenges including high numbers of families living in homelessness, IPAS and other emergency accommodation, as well as persistent issues of poverty, long disability service waiting lists, addiction, and crime. ELI saw a rise in demand for tailored services such as Home from Home visiting for families living in emergency accommodation, where participation increased by 41%, Parenting365 for children with additional needs and disabilities, Talking Heads afterschool clubs focused on English language support, and Stretch Graduate programme for families with children aged 4+ in need of ongoing support. With the support of our valued partners and funders we were able to meet this demand and work continues to secure sustainable funding for these essential programmes.

#### **November Critical Incident and Subsequent Riots**

The critical incident and subsequent riots in November 2023 were a low point of the year. ELI was part of the NEIC Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG), which supported a coordinated response in the immediate aftermath. ELI Home Visitors were a critical lifeline for vulnerable children and families during this time, as they checked in with families, offering support, helping to ease their fears and encouraging them to return to parent and toddler groups, schools and services. Our Restorative Practice Coordinator facilitated a dedicated Communities of Practice and supported professionals and services dealing with the incident.

#### **Thank You**

As always, our fantastic partners came together this year and supported children and young people to thrive, despite the many challenges facing them. This report highlights the enormous impact they have made on the lives of families living in the area. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved with our Programmes. We look forward to working with you all again in 2024-25.



Brígina O'Riordan  
Assistant Director, Dublin Inner City

## 4.2. Overview

At three years of age, there are already big differences in language and mathematical development between children depending on their family circumstances. This gap continues to widen if it is not addressed before children start pre-school. Dublin's Inner City Home Visiting and Parent Support Programmes help parents to develop their children's social, language and thinking skills from an early age and thereby ensuring that their children enter school ready to learn.

While support in the Early Years is undoubtedly essential, continued input throughout a child's life is needed to sustain the gains made through prevention and early intervention. ELI's wrap-around approach builds an excitement about education through multiple progressive sustained interventions in the same family, street and community with learning seen as enjoyable and something to be shared between families, schools, services and our corporate partners. These practices sustain high levels of parental involvement and increases the likelihood of children, with continued enthusiastic committed support from their parents, progressing through the education system to third level, and developing the skills, knowledge and dispositions required to achieve their educational, career and life goals.

### **ELI's pioneering portfolio of programmes in Dublin's Inner City include:**

- **Home Visiting and Parent Support** (N=1,377 families) – supporting positive home environment through playful learning interactions.
- **Literacies** (N= 3,679 children) – improving social, emotional, language, coding and thinking skills.
- **Educational Guidance** (N=452 young people) - accessing education and career opportunities.
- **Capacity Building, Training and Mentoring** (N=336 professionals) – building professionals' skills to collectively improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

### **Objectives:**

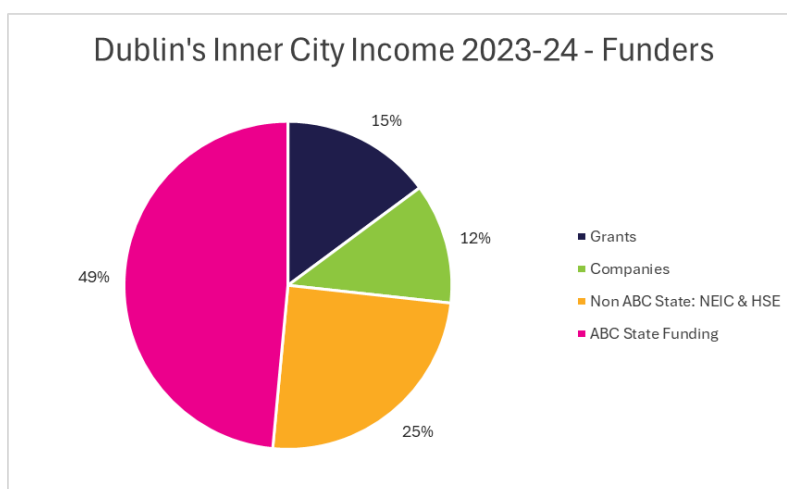
- Enable children and young people to develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions they will need to achieve their educational, career and life goals
- Increase parental involvement and skills in supporting their children's development and education
- Ensure smooth transitions, continuity and progression in learning for children moving from home to early years' settings to local schools, afterschool services and on to higher education
- Promote a safe, secure, caring, holistic, restorative learning environment at home, in school, after-schools and youth organisations in Dublin's Inner City community
- Support family needs through interagency collaboration in Dublin's Inner City
- Sustain a world class research and development site for ELI's National Centre, where innovative ideas can be trialled and tested before being scaled up for mainstreaming and/or adaption in other communities.

### 4.3. Finance and Governance

This section accounts for ELI's Dublin's Inner City 2023-24 income and expenditure along with its governance structures. Financed by a mix of statutory and voluntary funding, including Tusla, HSE and the NEIC, it has tightly managed income and expenditure to ensure that programme and partner outcomes and commitments have been fully achieved.

#### Income

The income for the Dublin's Inner City was €1.6m (up from €1.4m in 2022-23). The following graph illustrates the breakdown in income with 49% from ABC Programme, down from 55% in 2022-23, 25% from other State sources, primarily NEIC and HSE, up from 18% in 2022-23; 15% from grants, down from 20% in 2022-23, 12% from corporate funding, up from 7% in 2022-23.



We would like to pay tribute to the generosity of all our donors, many of whom are long-term visionary partners in improving outcomes for at-risk children and families in Dublin's Inner City. A special thank you to Michael Hartwell (Partner, Deloitte), Declan Quilligan (Managing Director, Citco Fund Services), Sandra Foley (Managing Director, State Street), Joe O'Reilly (Executive Chairman, Chartered Land) Deirdre Giblin (NCI Director of Development and External Engagement) and Susan Dargan (Independent Director) for their invaluable input as part of our ELI Development Committee. We would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of Dan O'Connor and Sean Reilly, long term members of the Development Committee, who saw the need to ensure that children and young people in Dublin Docklands had the support they needed to thrive in education, career and life.

Did you know that by five years old, 90% of the human brain has already grown? Support vulnerable children's early brain development and subsequent educational achievement by donating what you can to [Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland | Online Fundraising \(idonate.ie\)](https://www.idonate.ie)

If you are interested in partnering with ELI in Dublin's Inner City, please contact Brigina O'Riordan, ELI Assistant Director (by phone: 086 7965572 or by email: [brigina.oriordan@ncirl.ie](mailto:brigina.oriordan@ncirl.ie))

## Expenditure 2023-24

The combined spend for Dublin's Inner City Programmes (including the ABC funding) for the 12 months to June 2023 was €1.7m (up from €1.6m in 2022-23) with expenditure on the ABC Programmes amounting to €863k (down from €883k in 2022-23) and €828k (up from €732k in 2021-22) through the NEIC, HSE, corporate donations and grants. This increase in expenditure was due to higher costs, both pay and non-pay along with the expansion of home visiting in homeless/international protection centres and parent support groups. It will be covered by restricted funding, which was retained in reserve to cover contracted 2023-24 programme costs. The following table illustrates the breakdown of costs for national programmes.

Programmes	Actual Costs 2023/24	Projected Costs 2024/25
ABC 0-2 Home Visiting	180,184	180,000
ABC ParentChild+	289,824	300,000
ParentChild+/Home from Home	161,920	150,000
Stretch Graduate Home Visiting+	130,222	100,000
<b>Home Visiting Programmes</b>	<b>762,150</b>	<b>730,000</b>
ABC 0-3 Parent Support Groups	101,083	70,000
Parent Support Groups	43,023	30,000
Parenting 365	87,101	80,000
ABC Restorative Practice Parenting	57,299	60,000
NEIC Parenting Coordinator	69,152	70,000
<b>Parent Support Groups</b>	<b>357,658</b>	<b>310,000</b>
ABC Early NumeracyYears	72,900	60,000
ABC Zoom Ahead with Books	31,647	30,000
ABC Doodle Den Programme	130,058	130,000
NEIC Doodle Den	56,991	60,000
Trauma Sensitive Sessions	15,149	-
Stretch Challenges	22,839	20,000
Robotic Coding Clubs	41,717	40,000
DCEDIY Talking Heads	-	100,000
Literacies Second Level	29,766	20,000
<b>Literacies &amp; STEM</b>	<b>401,067</b>	<b>460,000</b>
NEIC Educational Guidance	102,889	90,000
NEIC Brighter Futures	66,842	60,000
<b>Educational &amp; Career Guidance</b>	<b>169,731</b>	<b>150,000</b>
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>1,690,606</b>	<b>1,650,000</b>

**Notes:**

- The costs above represent the direct costs incurred. They do not include services provided by NCI, such as accounting, payroll, marketing. It is estimated that this would account for 20% additional cost or €338,121.
- ABC funding from January to June 2025 is subject to its inclusion in the Government’s 2025 Budget and the projected expenditure will be amended to reflect the 2025 ABC budget agreed with Tusla.
- Dublin’s Inner City Projected Expenditure 2024-25 is based on NCI’s Strategic Plan, costs in previous years, pledged funding, outstanding grant applications as well as proposed programme expansion for 2023-24. It will be amended in December 2024 to reflect funding received and additional pledges/grants.

**Governance**

The ABC steering group provides oversight and direction for ELI’s Dublin Inner City Programmes (DIC), in particular the Area Based Childhood (ABC) grant. We thank all steering group members listed below for their advice, guidance and support over the past year and look forward to working with them in 2024-25.

ABC Steering Group as of June 2024 is set out below:	
Interim Chairperson – Josephine Bleach, NCI Director	Lorraine Doherty
Donnchadh Ó Madagáin, NCI Finance Director	John Peelo (Resigned June 2024)
Geraldine Duff	Denise Hevey
Tom O’Brien	Dara Terry (Resigned November 2023)
Emma Nugent	Denise McDonald
Dan O’Connor (Resigned October 2023)	Niall Heneghan

## 4.4. Home Visiting and Parent Support

This section outlines Dublin’s Inner City Home Visiting and Parent Support Programmes, which aim to improve children’s overall development and school readiness by supporting parents/guardians to provide a positive home environment through playful learning interactions. These programmes developed in collaboration with local parents and services are the ABC 0-2 Home Visiting Programme; ABC 0-5 Community Parent Support Groups; ParentChild+; Home from Home Transition Programme; Stretch Graduate; STEM Play & Learn; Parenting365; NEIC Parenting Programme and Restorative Parenting.

### Objectives:

- To increase parental skills, knowledge and engagement in all areas of their children’s development and learning.
- To develop oral language, social, emotional, literacy, and numeracy skills of children so that they enter school with the skills needed for success in education and life.
- To provide resources and materials to create a stimulating home learning environment.
- To provide the information parents need to successfully navigate the Irish systems (healthcare, housing, education) for themselves and their children.
- To ensure effective transitions for children at key developmental stages and between home, hospital, early years’ service, school, statutory and community services.
- To enhance and develop the existing interagency collaboration within the area and co-facilitating community support groups with other agencies to support specific family’s needs.
- To enable children and their families to experience a safe, secure, stable, caring, holistic, and restorative learning environment in their home, in services (statutory and community) and community.

Home Visiting Programmes	Children	Parents
ABC 0-2 Home Visiting Programme (0-2 years)	168	170
ABC ParentChild+ (16-36 months)	169	174
Home from Home	38	38
Stretch Graduate Home Visiting	32	32
Stretch Graduate Support Calls	56	56
STEM Play & Learn	30	30
<b>Total – Home Visiting</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>500</b>

Parent Support Programmes	Children	Parents
ABC Parenting Group Support Sessions (0-5 years)	680	680
ABC 0-5 Summer Programme	110	110
Restorative Parenting (0-11)	0	19
Parenting365	94	91
NEIC Parenting Programme	0	42
Triple P	0	43
<b>Total – Parent Supports</b>	<b>884</b>	<b>985</b>

#### 4.4.1. ABC 0-2 Home Visiting

The ABC 0-2 Years Home Visiting Programme, which is an adaptation of the Community Mothers Programme, has been in operation in the ELI since 2015. A universal, prevention-focused home visiting programme, it supports families to improve children's (from pre-birth to two years of age) wellbeing, developmental and learning outcomes while increasing parental skills, knowledge and engagement. In 2023-24, the 0-2 Programme began the transition to the Community Families model, which is an updated, evidence-based and integrated national home visiting programme which aims to improve outcomes for children and families in pregnancy and early childhood. This new model will be fully implemented by September 2024. Further information on this project can be found in [Section 3.4.4.](#)

#### Programme Delivery

- 168 families took part over the year.
- 1,647 overall home visits took place in 2023-24 (1,570 indoor, 74 outdoor, 4 video calls)
- 89 families participated in trips (National Gallery of Ireland, NCI Christmas Party, ChildVision Farm).
- 168 referrals into the programme were received. The team continued to work in partnership with the families' Public Health Nurses, and Family Support Practitioners to provide continuity of care and share the one key message of integrated support.
- In addition to maintaining good relationships with social work departments and homeless hubs, this year there was a growth in engagement with families in Direct Provision.
- The team received training and support with the transition to the Community Families model.



*(0-2 Programme children at ChildVision Event)*

#### Child and Parent Observation Tool

The Child and Parent Observation Tool was developed in 2018-19 to track the wellbeing and development of the participating children and their parents as they progress through the programme. The 1st Observation is completed after the 4th visit, the 2nd Observation is completed after the 12th visit and the remaining stages of observations are completed every 12 visits thereafter. As the frequency of visits and length of programme varies across individual families participating in the 0-2 Programme, the number of observations reported on each year may change.

The below table presents the observations of the parents and children engaging in 2023-24 and the percentage of those scoring often or always at each of the observation stages. Lack of social support and isolation continued to be issues for participating parents throughout the programme, however there were promising developments in parents' knowledge and confidence as they progressed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Observation, increasing by 16% and 15% respectively. This data highlights the importance of the 0-2 programme to support local families and improve knowledge and confidence in times of need.



	Obs 1 (N=126)	Obs 2 (N=83)	Obs 3 (N=45)	Obs 4 (N=12)*	Obs 5 (N=2)*
<b>Parent Observations by Home Visitor</b>					
<b>Social Support</b>	34%	31%	29%	25%	50%
<b>Isolated</b>	30%	27%	36%	17%	0%
<b>Health</b>	50%	70%	60%	58%	100%
<b>Warmth</b>	96%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Responsiveness</b>	90%	95%	98%	100%	100%
<b>Knowledge</b>	46%	61%	62%	67%	0%
<b>Confidence</b>	74%	88%	89%	75%	0%
<b>Child Observations by Home Visitor</b>					
<b>Responds to parent appropriately</b>	90%	98%	91%	100%	100%
<b>Developing as expected</b>	94%	92%	96%	92%	100%
<b>Healthy</b>	95%	92%	98%	100%	100%
<b>Appropriate diet</b>	90%	93%	87%	100%	100%
* Note: Because few families still need support by Observation 4 & 5, these numbers are too low to compare for overall trends. These were included to show how many long-term families participated with us this year.					

## Participant Feedback

Most parents (94%; n=76) found the programme useful/beneficial and 99% (n=79) would recommend the programme to a friend. Ninety-five percent (n=77) of parents reported learning new approaches and ideas from their Home Visitor and 95% (n=77) feel confident using these. In reporting specifically on what they learnt from engaging in the programme, 93% (n=75) of parents noted practical tips around playing and interacting with their baby and 89% (n=72) noted practical tips for supporting their child's development. This includes tummy time and sensory play, tips on supporting their child's development, and tips on caring for their baby including sleep and nutrition.

### Comments from parents included



*"[HV] has been absolutely amazing and professional Home Visitor. Always very positive with loads of useful advice. I like her non-judgemental attitude, always providing reassurance and support."*



*"In summary, my experience with the 0-2 Programme has been overwhelmingly positive. It has not only supported my child's wellbeing, development, and learning but has also provided essential social support, reduced isolation, and improved my own health and wellbeing. Additionally, the program has equipped me with valuable knowledge, skills, and materials to support my child's learning at home, contributing to the overall improvement of our home environment. I wholeheartedly agree that the program has been instrumental in enhancing both my child's and my own experiences, and I am grateful for the support and resources it has provided. We eagerly anticipate being part of the ParentChild+ program in the near future."*

#### 4.4.2. 0-5 Community Parent Support Programme

The ABC 0-5 Parent Support Programme, now in its ninth year, was developed and piloted in collaboration with local parents and professionals. It has a dual purpose of supporting positive parent-child learning interactions as well as linking parents with the other parents and local supports. All the sessions are based on best practice: Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2000), Síolta the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE 2006), Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (2015), Parents Together Community Course (Parents Plus & NCI 2008) and ParentChild+ Programme.

##### Programme Delivery

- Approximately 680 families engaged in groups in 2023-24.
- 15 groups were held across the year (Storytelling, Song-time, Fitness for Mams, Read, Rattle and Roll, Infant Massage courses, Baby and Toddler Group, All Weather Folk (Outdoor Group), Plastic-free Playgroup, Storytelling in Mandarin and Gateway).
- 27 families engaged in the 3 Baby massage courses.
- 24 families engaged across 4 Read, Rattle and Roll courses.
- Two new groups were developed this year:
- A pilot plastic-free playgroup. This has received very positive feedback from parents and will continue in 2024-25.
- A new group for residents of an International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) centre.
- A themed play event was held in Spring – 35 families attended.
- 4 summer programme groups with 110 families were delivered.
- 65 books and 80 activity and crafts packs were gifted to families.
- 15 social media posts related to Groups were posted to communicate with families and professionals.



*Parents and children engaging in a play group*

##### Facilitator observations

At the end of each session, group facilitators complete an observational tool to document the learning outcomes across various group sessions being delivered. The most commonly supported area of development during the sessions was social skills (90%). This was followed by speech and language skills (89%) and concentration skills (88%). Each of the group's sessions aimed to incorporate one of Aistear's themes. The most featured theme was wellbeing (98%), which was followed by identity and belonging (97%). The group's sessions also aimed to focus on parent learning, with 95% of the sessions including a parent topic, e.g. safety, self-care, supporting communication, etc.

## Participant Feedback

Evaluations revealed high levels of satisfaction for the groups with 96% of parents (n=52) reporting that they were glad they attended and that they felt supported by the group's facilitator. Most parents indicated that they learned new approaches and ideas at the group sessions (80%, n=43). Ninety-six percent of parents indicated that groups supported them in developing their child's social, language and thinking skills. Also, 83% (n=45) of parents reported experiencing positive benefits to their own well-being and their child's development.

### Comments from parents included

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*"The staff are amazing. They are so welcoming, and they have such a beautiful manner with all the children that attend. My son absolutely loves them, and he gets their full attention when he speaks with them. Absolute heroes." [Parent attending the Charleville Mall Playgroup]*



*"I joined with my partner [name] and it was wonderful to be welcomed as a dad. A lot of classes and sessions naturally exclude the father in these situations or do not actively encourage such participation. I was welcomed, felt comfortable and thoroughly enjoyed the experience and learning. I think these sessions are hugely valuable for babies, parent and bonding between the two." [Parent attending the Baby Massage Group]*

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### 4.4.3. Parenting365 Programme

The Parenting365 Programme supports parents and families of children with additional needs. Addressing the many challenges faced by these children, it involves 6 weeks of developmentally targeted group play sessions in a safe and inclusive environment, in which parents' interaction and engagement with their children is supported by a trained play facilitator. Parents receive take-home resources to extend their children's learning and development. A weekly parent support group via Zoom enables them to meet with other parents of children with additional needs and have access to support from professionals such as occupational and play therapists. Parenting365 is a unique and highly sought-after programme with a high demand for enrolment from parents since the programme started in 2021. Another popular feature of the programme is the active and encouraged involvement of siblings. Research is a principal component of this programme and further details about the Parenting365 research project can be found in [Section 3.5](#).

#### Programme delivery

- 91 families, with a total of 94 children (including 32 siblings) engaged in the programme across 3 terms.
- 53 families attended the full programme, including both play sessions and parent support groups – 62 children were enrolled on the programme.
- Families not enrolled on the full programme but connected to ELI through other programmes were given the opportunity to attend the parenting support sessions conducted via Zoom. 91 parents in total engaged in these sessions.

- The 6-week online parenting programme featured 7 guest speakers delivering 7 unique sessions to parents across the 3 terms. Topics and experts included: Building Communications – delivered by Early Intervention Specialist; Sensory System – delivered by Play Therapist; Children with Anxiety – delivered by a Senior Lecturer in Early Years Education.
- Engagement from fathers remained high on this programme with 73 fathers participating.
- 4 summer play events were held in NCI with 17 children attending.
- 1 reunion event was held after term 1 in NCI with 8 families attending.

### Facilitator Reflections

Facilitators fill out an observational tool after the sessions to document learning outcomes over the course of the programme. The most commonly supported area of child development across the sessions was fine motor skills (74%), followed by gross motor skills and social/emotional skills (72%). The high levels of father participation are of particular note with Parenting365, with facilitators reporting that 83% of the time both parents of the child (Mother and Father) enrolled in the programme attended the sessions. There were also high levels of sibling participation in the sessions, with facilitators reporting that 78% of the time siblings of the enrolled child would attend and participate.

### Participant Feedback

Satisfaction rates for the programme were high with 100% (N=34) of parents reporting that the programme was beneficial to them and 91% agreeing that it was beneficial to their child. At the beginning of the programme parents are asked to set goals for themselves and their children. For themselves, parents identified areas for improvement such as promoting social skills, better understanding their child's needs, being more supportive, and developing more effective communication with their child. On completion of the programme 48% of parents achieved the goals they had set and 19% were close to achieving their goals. Common goals that came up for the children were to gain confidence and social skills, to improve language and communication skills, and to develop better self-awareness and more effective self-regulation skills. On completion of the programme 33% of parents reported that their child had achieved the goal that had been set for them and 19% of parents reported that their child was close to achieving the goal.

### Comments from parents included

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*“A fantastic programme, I wish there were more places and groups like this available. Can't fault anything, absolutely amazing and the staff make it an even better environment. No judgement just support.”*



*“The programme is excellent and not a bad word to say. It was amazing for my child and myself to understand each other better.”*



*“[Child] absolutely loved the play session on Saturday, and I can't tell you how nice it was to walk into a room and not have any anxiety or feel we have to explain things about him because everyone else in the room was in the same position. It was just so lovely we all enjoyed it so much”*

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#### 4.4.4. ABC ParentChild+ Programme

Originally from the US, the ParentChild+ programme is an innovative, home-based literacy and parenting programme that strengthens families and prepares children to succeed academically. For over 17 years, we have been delivering ParentChild+ to vulnerable families with children aged 16 months - 3 years in Dublin's Inner City. Beginning with 15 families in 2007, the numbers have grown to 167 families in 2023-2024. The National ParentChild+ Centre, established in January 2020, supports implementation. More details on ParentChild+ National can be found in [Section 3.4.1.](#) of this report.

#### Programme Delivery

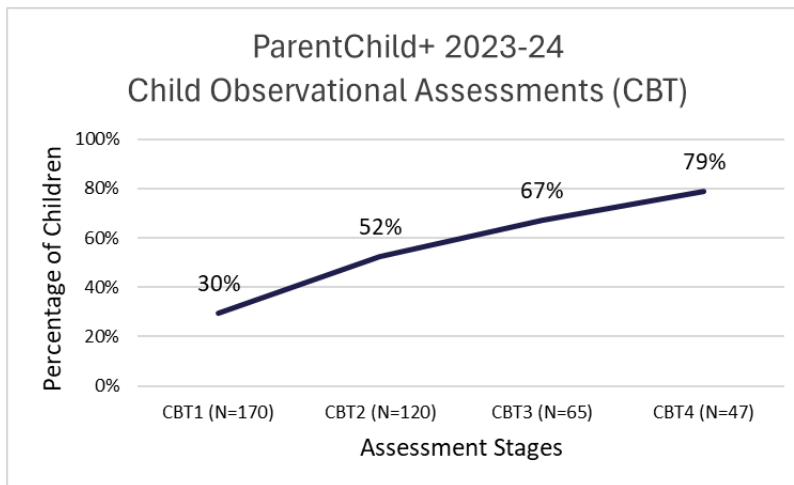
- 167 Families participated in ParentChild+ in Dublin's Inner City and Dublin 8 this year, engaging in 4,754 home visits, 125 video call visits, 8 phone call visits and 3 outdoor visits.
- 43 families completed the programme and graduated. Graduations were held in NCI in January and June
- 37 families left the programme before completion. This is often due to relocation out of the service area.
- 78% retention rate which is a slight decrease from 82% in 2022-23.
- 70 female and 97 male children took part in the programme.
- 157 female adults and 10 males participated in the programme.
- 38 different nationalities were represented amongst the cohort. The three largest nationalities represented were 40% Irish, 13% Chinese and 7% Romanian.
- 24 ParentChild+ Home Visitors and 4 Programme Coordinators delivered the programme to families in 2023-24. A Mandarin-speaking Home Visitor joined the team this year to work with Mandarin speaking families.
- 139 referrals were received from the ELI 0-2 Home Visiting Programme, Family Support Workers, Public Health Nurses, Local schools, Social Workers and other Non-profit organisations and charities.
- 13 ParentChild+ themed social media posts were posted on the ELI social media channels.



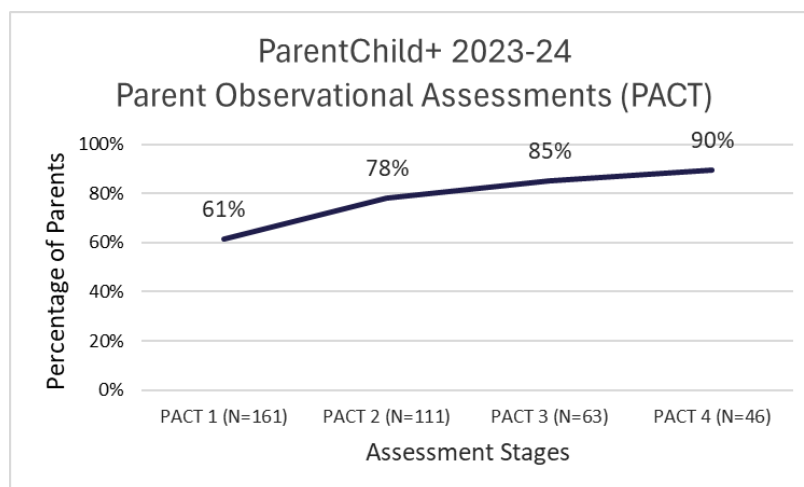
**(ParentChild+ DIC Graduation  
2023-24)**

## Programme Assessment- Child Behaviour Trait (CBT) and Parent and Child Together (PACT)

Throughout the programme Home Visitors complete two observational assessments (CBT and PACT). For more information on the assessments please see [Section 3.4.1](#). As can be seen in the figure below, the percentage of children reaching their developmental milestones in Dublin's Inner City has gradually increased throughout the programme, from 30% at the beginning of the programme to 52%, 67% and, finally, 79% on completion of the programme. This 49% increase is lower than the improvement on that of the 2022-23 cohort (60%) but, this is slightly higher than the 2023-24 increase across all ParentChild+ sites nationally (45%, see [Section 3.4.2](#).) Children engaging in the programme demonstrated developmental increases across the three CBT subscales (cognition, behaviour and language) at each stage of the programme.



Overall, there was a positive increase (29%) in the percentage of parents having high-quality interactions with their children from 61% at PACT 1 to 90% at PACT 4. Similar to the CBT assessment, a lower increase was seen this year to the 2022-23 cohort (37%). The percentage of parents having interactions of good quality with their children showed improvement in all four areas of assessment (parents' responsiveness to their child, parent's affection toward their child, parent's communication with their child and parent's consistency with their child).





## Parent & Child Engagement

Both children and parents showed positive engagement across their visits in 2023-24. The percentage of children Home Visitors reported as fully engaged for their visits was 71%, this is about the same level of engagement as was seen in 2022-23 (73%). 25% percent of children were reported as somewhat engaged with the visits and just 4% were not engaged. Eighty-four percent of the parents were reported as fully engaged in their visits in 2023-24, which is the same level of engagement as 2022-23. Fourteen percent of parents were somewhat engaged while just 2% were not engaged with the visits.

## Learning & Feedback

Satisfaction rates remained high with most parents reporting they found this programme to be useful (97%, n=68). Most parents reported feeling confident using the strategies learned for reading and playing with their child (99%, n=69). All parents reported learning new approaches and ideas from participating in the programme (n=69). Ninety-three percent of parents reported their children benefited in the areas of attention span (n=64) and 91% in social skills (n=62), and 84% reported that their children improved in their numeracy (n=58) and 81% in their literacy skills (n=56). Furthermore, every parent would recommend the programme to another parent (n=67), and 99% of parents (n=69) felt supported by their home visitor.

### Comments from parents included

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*“The continuity with the Home Visitor, over the course of the programme our son really built a strong bond with [Home Visitor] and looked forward to her coming each week. He enjoyed exploring the toys and books, the alternation each week worked well. Also getting down on the child's level to play or read.”*



*“I have more confidence in myself, I developed imagination and playing more creatively with my toddler. My social skills also improved, I'm not that shy anymore and feeling more comfortable in interaction with other people.”*

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### 4.4.5. Home from Home Programme

The Home from Home Transition Programme is an intensive weekly home visiting programme developed by our Home Visiting Team in Dublin's Inner City for families living in emergency/ homeless and Internal Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS). It provides an integrated plan of intervention and support for families with children aged 16 months onwards. An adaptation of the ParentChild+ programme, its overall aim is to meet the needs of families living under the duress of homelessness, who would not be able to commit to a two-year programme and twice weekly visits. It has been delivered in Dublin's Inner City since 2019. In 2023-24 we have seen a rise in demand for this programme and we have found that strong relationships formed with managers in services provision have fostered a smooth referral pathway to Home from Home. These relationships have also facilitated referrals to other ELI programmes for families where relevant and appropriate.

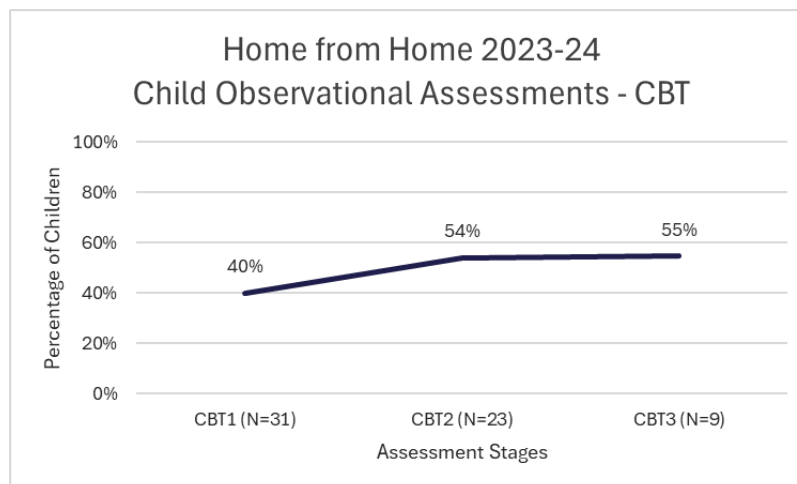


## Programme Delivery

- 38 families participated in the Home from Home Programme in 2023-24.
- 15 emergency accommodation services referred families from B&Bs, Homeless Family Hubs, Sonas Women’s and Children’s Refuge. The team has built relationships with IPAS centers to support the families in the International Protection (‘asylum’) process.
- 389 visits took place, including 371 indoor visits, and 18 video call visits.
- 7 Home Visitors delivered the programme to families in 2023-24.
- 19 interagency meetings took place this year.
- Our relationship with the Roma community has grown this year due to targeted efforts into recruiting families such as onboarding a Romanian Home Visitor to support families.
- ELI participated in the Young People at Risk (YPAR) Children in Emergency Accommodation Working Group and ‘Friends of Gateway’, a multi-disciplinary group to support International Protection Asylum-seeking families.

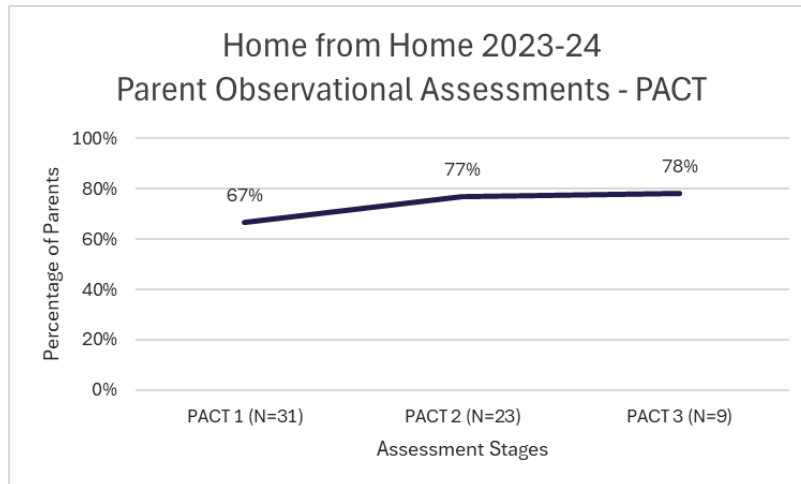
## Programme Assessment- Child Behaviour Trait (CBT) and Parent and Child Together (PACT)

Throughout the programme Home Visitors complete up to four observational assessments (CBT and PACT), depending on the need of participating families. For more information on the assessments please see [Section 3.4.2](#). As can be seen in the graph below, 40% of the children in the 2023-24 Home from Home cohort were reaching their developmental milestones on entering the programme. This year’s cohort started at a slightly higher baseline when compared to last year, with 33% of children in 2022-23 reaching their developmental milestones at CBT 1 (N=20). 54% of children were meeting their developmental milestones at CBT 2 this year, compared to 43% of children in 2022-23. There was an additional of 1% at CBT3. For most of the children engaging in the programme this year, they demonstrated 14% increase at the first two stages of the programme, and developmental increases across the three CBT subscales (cognition, behaviour and language).



The 2023-24 cohort of parents experienced a positive improvement in their interactions with their children from the first to the second assessment with a total increase of 13%. Similar to the CBT data, PACT 1 this year represented a slightly higher baseline when compared to last year, with 63% of parents

showing positive parent interactions at PACT 1 in 2022-23. For most of the parents engaging in the programme across the first two stages of the programme, their interactions improved by 10%, and the good quality of interactions with their children showed improvement in all four areas of assessment (parents' responsiveness to their child, parent's affection toward their child, parent's communication with their child and parent's consistency with their child).



### Parent and Child Engagement

Parents were fully engaged for 75% of the visits, and children were fully engaged for 77% of the visits. Parents' levels of engagement were less than that of the ParentChild+ cohort (84%), however, the percentage of children fully engaging with the visits was greater than that of the ParentChild+ cohort (71%) and has greatly increased from 2022-23 (54%).

### Participant Feedback

Fifteen of the parents provided feedback through exit evaluations and end of year evaluations. All parents reported that they found the programme useful (n=14) and felt confident using the strategies learned for reading and playing with their child (N=15). Ninety-three percent of parents also reported that their child has improved their language and their numeracy skills and 87% reported that their child has improved in the areas of attention span and social skills (n=13).

#### Comments from parents included

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*"It was really helpful to have a friendly, non-judgmental listening ear."*



*"My Home Visitor is very spontaneous and always go with what my boy is interested at that moment. She is also brilliant telling him the stories and exploring beyond the book. Besides that he really encourages him to use his creativity."*

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#### 4.4.6. Stretch Graduate Programme

The Stretch Graduate Programme, a research-based prevention and early intervention programme, was designed as a follow up to ELI's ParentChild+ programme, aiming to retain connection between ELI and the families throughout the child's educational journey, with a staggered step-down approach offering bespoke signposting to other programmes and services both within ELI and externally. The programme aims to continue enhancing parental competence and confidence regarding their children's holistic development, enhance positive parenting practices and parental and family wellbeing while increasing children's readiness to transition to pre-school/primary school. The programme comprises three pathways that families can join depending on their level of need. Pathway 1 provides home visits and Pathway 2 provides regular support by phone, Pathway 3 provides themed family educational events and can be a supplement to Pathways 1 and 2. Also offered is a STEM Play & Learn summer programme aiming to combat summer learning loss. Please see [Section 3.5.](#) for details on research projects related to this programme.

#### Programme Delivery

- 88 families engaged, 32 families receiving home visits and 56 receiving termly check-in calls.
- 386 family home visits were delivered (71 parent focused and 315 parent and child focused)
- 239 termly check-in calls were made to 56 families. The average call duration was 20 minutes.
- 69 referrals were made to other ELI programmes
- 205 resource packs were provided to families.
- 8 Events were held with 100 families attending including a Christmas party, 4 workshops in partnership with Dublin Port, a recycling event, event about dental hygiene and a STEM event
- 30 families and 6 Home Visitors participated in STEM Play & Learn; a 6-week Summer Home Visiting Programme, engaging in 155 in-house visits.

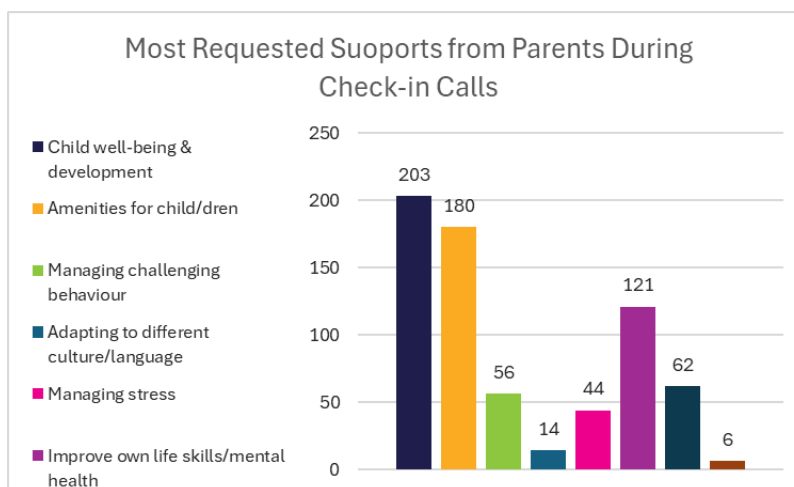


*(A STEM open-ended activity)*

#### Home Visitor Reflections

Home Visitors complete reflections after every visit. These capture data on types of child development encouraged in the visit, how well the family is doing, and referrals to other programmes. In 2023-24, Home Visitors reported that the parents and children were doing very well on 54% and 66% of the visits, respectively. For parents, this represents a 7% decrease compared to 2022-23 (61%), and for children this represents a 16% decrease compared to last year (82%). Notably, Home Visitors reported both parents and children were not doing well on only 1% of the visits. Home Visitors aimed to encourage many different types of child development during the visits with the most targeted area being communication (83%), followed by concentration (70%) and fine motor skills (68%).

Data is also collected during the check-in calls related to the support needs of families.



### Participant Feedback

Satisfaction rates were high with 89% of parents who completed a home visiting evaluation (n=25) reporting that they found the programme to be useful. 93% (n=26) felt supported by their Home Visitor and 96% (n=27) would recommend the programme to a friend. Parents reported that the programme benefited their child in areas such as literacy, social and emotional skills, and speech and language. 93% of parents (n=26) agreed that the programme gave them new ideas and approaches to how they can improve interactions with their child. Parents also provided feedback from several events and workshops run throughout the year. Themes of the events included dental hygiene and sustainability. 98% of parents who attended (n=63) agreed that the events were valuable learning opportunities for their children and 97% (n=62) found the events to be enjoyable.

A post-programme survey for STEM Play & Learn was completed by parents in which all agreed that the programme provided valuable learning opportunities for their child (N=27). Furthermore, parents observed an improvement to their child’s skills in several areas such as numeracy skills and social and emotional skills (85%, n=23). Parents also noted a positive impact on the frequency of home learning activities, such as reading at home with their child and doing more construction/building activities with their child both had a 30% increase from the pre programme evaluation. Finally, parents reported that they are now more confident in supporting their child's learning after completing the programme (85%, n=23).

### Comments from participants included



*“We liked the way the Home Visitor adapted to our needs and that she was flexible in rearranging the visits. All the toys included the whole family, not only one child. We felt very supported throughout the year, and we are also very grateful to be part of this programme.”*  
[Parent on the Stretch Graduate Programme]



*“It’s not just about the child, [Home Visitor] would ask how I was doing too. It was nice being asked to attend events and everything like that.”* [Parent on the Stretch Graduate Programme]



*“Cannot fault anything at the event. All the displays and activities were very educational as well as immersive. My children really got fully involved in everything”* [Parent attending the Sustainability Event]

#### 4.4.7. NEIC Parenting Programme

The NEIC Parenting Programme aims to identify and enhance the coordination of parenting programmes and referral pathways across all age groups in the NEIC. This is done in collaboration with the NEIC Parenting Strategy Steering Group, Parent Support Champions, parents and providers of parenting programmes. A key goal is to establish a Parenting Forum and involve parents in the design, delivery and evaluation of parenting supports and programmes.

Our NEIC Parenting Support Programme Coordinator also delivers the Triple P Programme courses and workshops. For more information see [Section 4.4.9](#).

##### Programme Delivery:

- 9 NEIC Parenting courses (Triple-P and Circle of Security) with 42 parents in attendance.
- 16 parents engaged in the parenting forum.
- 179 parents were referred to a service, course or to other support services.
- 53 professionals from 53 organisations were engaged in the Parent Strategy Meetings to explore how we can use existing resources effectively to support parents.
- Skills Audit was conducted to identify what programmes professionals can deliver, their level of skill and availability to deliver programmes using an interagency approach
- Listening to issues arising – difficulty engaging parents and culture around parenting supports. Perception can be seen as parents are failing.
- A second iteration of the Parents Needs Assessment Questionnaire was distributed to parents in the community. For more details, see [Section 3.5: Research and Innovation](#).
- Engaged with 75 organizations to map existing services and resources for parents in the NEIC.
- 34 social media posts were published to advertise the work being done.
- Coordinator created an informal channel (WhatsApp) to communicate with parents and send resources, information about available programmes etc.

#### 4.4.8. ABC Restorative Parenting Programme

The ABC Restorative Parenting Programme supports healthy parent-child relationships through the development of parents' self-awareness, communication skills, and self-care practices. It helps parents to engage mindfully rather than reactively, seeking to understand their children's behaviour, and taking time to reflect on the types of interactions that are helpful and supportive. In 2023-24, the Restorative Parenting programme only took place in Term 1 due to staff shortages.

##### Programme Delivery

- 2 parents engaged in 1 Restorative Parenting course at a local primary school.
- 14 parents engaged across 5 workshops focused on the role of self-care in parenting and supporting children's transition to school.
- 1 parent engaged in 3 one to one parent support sessions.
- Trauma Informed Sensory Sessions continued after being piloted last year. 1 group took place with 8 sessions. 5 children were enrolled in the programme.

#### 4.4.9. Healthy Communities Triple P Programme

In 2023-24, the Healthy Communities Triple P Programme was piloted with families in the NEIC for the first time. The programme is made up of two elements – Group Triple P and Discussion groups. Group Triple P is a broad-based 6-week parenting intervention with parents learning about strategies to promote child development and manage misbehaviours. Discussion groups are standalone workshops on five different topics, including; Dealing with Disobedience; Managing Fighting and Aggression; Developing Good Bedtime Routines; Hassle-free Shopping with Children; and Hassle-free Mealtimes with Children.

#### Programme Delivery:

- 3 Group Triple P programmes were delivered in this pilot year. 29 parents took part in the programme across the 3 groups. The age range of the children was from 2 ½ - 12 years.
- 4 Discussion Groups were delivered – 14 parents attended.
- The programme will continue in 2024-25.

#### Participant Feedback

Evaluations showed high levels of satisfaction with 83% (n=5) of parents rating their overall experience of the programme 4 out of 5. 100% (N=6) of parents stated that they were satisfied with the support they received from the programme facilitators and that as a result they are more effective in addressing difficult behaviours. Parents also indicated that their personal relationships improved throughout the course of the programme. 67% (n=4) revealed an improved relationship with their child/children and 50% (n=3) saw an improvement in their relationship with the whole family.

#### Comments from parents included

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*“The programme helped me prepare for difficult situations with my son before they happened. Now I always check to see if his needs are met before leaving the house, for example.”*



*“The facilitators were absolutely amazing, really knowledgeable and helpful. Very patient and down to earth.”*

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## 4.5. Literacies & STEM

ELI's Literacy, Numeracy and Coding Programmes focus on supporting parents, services and schools to develop children's social, language and thinking skills from an early age; thereby, ensuring that the children and young people in the area continue to develop the skills needed to achieve their educational, career and life goals. These programmes, developed through careful collaboration with local services and schools, are Early Numeracy Programme, Zoom Ahead with Books, Doodle Den, STEM Family Learning, Robotic Coding Clubs, NCI Challenges, Tuition Support, Language Cafés and Talking Heads.

### Objectives

- Enable children and young people to continue to develop the skills they will need to achieve their educational and career goals.
- Develop a learning rich environment in Dublin's Inner-city.
- Support parental involvement in their children's education and learning.
- Encourage children's and families' interest and pleasure in Literacy, Numeracy and Coding.
- Widen participation in higher education within Dublin's Inner-city.

Literacies & STEM Programmes	Children	Parents
Early Numeracy Project (0-8 years)	1,187	1,780
Zoom Ahead with Books (4-6 years)	1,078	1,617
Virtual Book Club	45	67
Doodle Den	90	135
NCI Challenges	754	49
STEM Family Learning (6-9 years)	129	106
Robotic Coding Club	167	19
Tuition Support	43	0
Language Cafés	74	0
Talking Heads	112	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,679</b>	<b>3,773</b>

### 4.5.1. ABC Early Numeracy Programme

Beginning in 2011 with funding from the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI), this programme is aimed at improving early year's numeracy and mathematical skills from birth to six years of age. With funding from the ABC Programme, this programme has grown from 16 organisations and 498 children in 2011-12 to 32 organisations and 1,187 children in 2023-2024. The programme revolves around the three community Early Numeracy Weeks. This year's themes were Positional and Directional Language (Week 1, Shape (Week 2) and Counting (Week 3). Working group meetings and onsite mentoring are provided by ELI to support practitioners to reflect on and improve the quality of the programme and their practice using the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide as a resource.



## Programme Delivery

- 1,187 children and 1,780 parents engaged in the programme across the three terms.
- 13 early years services, 11 schools, 3 afterschools and 5 libraries engaged and received numeracy cards and activity packs to be used at home and in the school/service. 1 ASD class participated. The children in this class were older but the activities were developmentally appropriate.
- One school accessed the resources through an online platform called Seesaw.
- 9 numeracy-themed social media posts were published in 2023-24.
- 15 organisations hosted their own numeracy-themed activities and events throughout the programme which families were invited to attend, approximately 50 in total.

## Participant feedback

Upon the completion of each numeracy week, both staff and parents provided feedback through online or paper evaluations. Over the three terms, 389 parents and 152 staff members submitted evaluations. This year, we saw a significant increase in parent feedback when compared to 2022-23, with an additional 101 parent evaluations being recorded this year.

Parents' satisfaction reports were highly positive, with 99% of people who answered about enjoyment levels (n=359) agreeing that their child enjoyed the activities, as well as 99% (n=360) indicating they would recommend the program to a friend. The numeracy cards provided to parents were used by 90% of those who answered a question about these (n=317). The overall resources and activities provided during numeracy week received very positive feedback, with 98% (n=370, out of a total of 378 responses) believing they helped their child understand the numeracy theme. Additionally, 97% of parents agreed that their child improved their numeracy skills during the programme (n=367 out of a total of 377 responses). The majority of parents also noted that the numeracy programme was a great way to talk and play with their child more (97%, n=361 out of a total of 377 responses).

These positive insights were echoed in the staff evaluations. Staff felt the programme was both an enjoyable experience (91%, n=139) and a valuable learning opportunity (97%, n=147) for the children and parents involved. Furthermore, staff reported that the most important aspects of the program for children's learning were the stories, songs, and rhymes (81%, n=124).

## Comments from participants included

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*"This activity made me more aware of the benefits in encouraging children learning through play. The tools provided were beneficial in delivering it to the children. They gain a better understanding through props as well" [Staff]*



*"I love the home cards, after a busy day in work. It's nice to have something quick and easy to complete with my daughter that follows on from her learning in creche." [Parent]*



*"It was great my child got to go to the library. He was so excited telling me about this. I forgot about the library and will bring him there now. He asked me to read the book the woman in the library read to him so I will bring him shopping for this." [Parent]*

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#### 4.5.2. ABC Zoom Ahead with Books

The Zoom Ahead with Books project encourages parental involvement and promotes children's enjoyment and motivation to read for pleasure. With family members acting as book buddies, the programme is designed for children attending preschool, reception, junior infants, senior infants and 1st classes.

##### Programme Delivery

- 1,078 children and their families in 13 primary schools and 1 preschool participated in the programme.
- 9,000 books were read over the 3 weeks, i.e. each child, on average reading on average 3 books a week. Some schools continued the programme due to high level of success.
- Some schools had translations of the books available for families with English as an Additional Language. There were also translations into Ukrainian, Polish, Romanian, Mandarin for the prompt cards, which provide words related to the themes and ideas for things to talk about.
- All children received their resource pack including parents' questions to support reading, individual documents for each week, colouring pencils and copybook in which to include their drawings.
- The school exhibition events took place in person and children received a framed picture of their artwork to bring home.
- Schools were encouraged to take library visits, where families were given the opportunity to apply for a library card.
- Two schools had their exhibition at their local library. Some local pre-schools who didn't take part in the programme visited the exhibition in the library.
- 45 families participated in a Virtual Book Club with 218 books and activity packs posted directly to family homes during 2023-24.



*Child's drawing of Luke Kelly*

##### Participant feedback

Post-programme evaluations were distributed to children and their book buddies, as well as staff. 189 book buddy evaluations were returned, an increase from the 153 collected in 2022-23. There was a decrease in staff feedback with just 12 evaluations being returned, compared to 43 in 2022-23.

Feedback for both programmes was highly positive, with 98% (n=160 out of a total of 164 responses) of book buddies agreeing that it was an enjoyable experience for both them and the child. Along with this, 91% (n=11) of staff agreed that the program was enjoyable for the children involved. 82% of staff (n=9) noted that the program increased children's enthusiasm for reading. The majority of book buddies (97%, n=177 out of a total of 182 responses) and staff (75%, n=9) found the programme to be a valuable learning opportunity for the children. In line with this 96% (n=166 out of a total of 173 responses) of children

agreed that the programme helped them with their reading. Book buddies also reported that they became more aware of the child's learning after participating in the program (57%, n=107). Twenty-eight percent of book buddies (n=51) were provided with translated materials to participate fully in the programme. There were 28 returns for the virtual book club in which 89% of parents who took part in the Virtual Book Club reported that their child learned something from taking part in the programme.

### Comments from participants included

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*“Yes, it was very good as it helped to develop my son's creativity and imagination, and we had great moments at home with the books to draw and talk about the stories” [Parent]*



*“I loved drawing my pictures with my mammy” [Child]*



*“Huge enthusiasm among the children for the programme and the parents. Lots of parents commented on how much their children enjoyed it” [Staff]*

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### 4.5.3. Doodle Den

Doodle Den is an evidence-based after school programme that aims to address literacy needs amongst senior infants' children (aged five to six-years of age) using a range of fun learning activities.

#### Programme Delivery

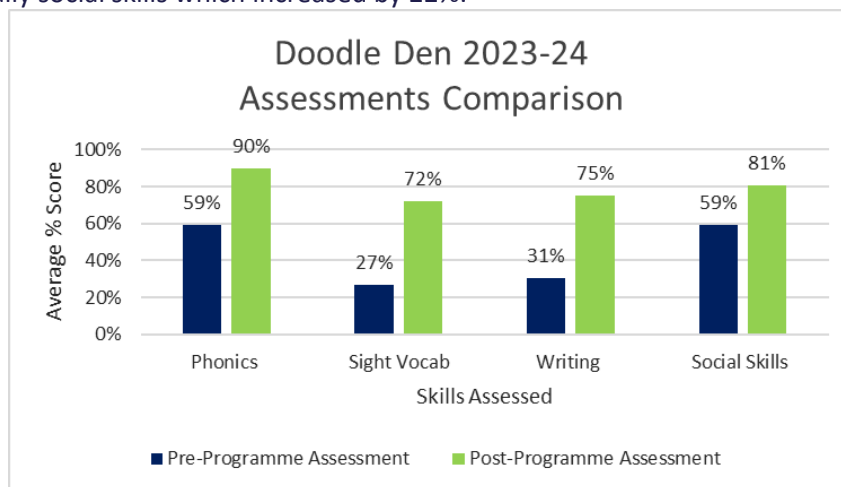
- 90 children enrolled in the programme across the 3 ABC (N=43) and 3 NEIC sites (N=47) with 65 children completing the programme.
- 48 children, 68 parents and 26 siblings attended the Graduation ceremony in June 2024.
- 5 schools (n=58) entered data on the literacy need of the children attending Doodle Den.
  - 45% of children (n=26) had a high level of literacy need, 34% (n=20) medium and 21% (n=12) a low level.
- 5 schools reported on the numbers of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) (n=61) and a Special Educational Need (SEN) (n=52).
  - The percentage of children with EAL was 51% (n=31), an increase on those with EAL in 2022-23 (40%).
  - 8% (n=4) had a SEN, lower than the 17% of children in 2022-23.
- 2 family events were held in Charleville Mall Library and with Fighting Words, a local creative writing organisation. Parent events were held regularly at each site, including a Christmas party.
- 15 volunteers from KPMG and PWC took part in the programme.



*(St. Laurence O'Tooles students in their own-designed t-shirts)*

## Doodle Den Assessments

Assessments were conducted with the children at the start of the Doodle Den programme and again in June of 2024 as they completed the programme. These assessments evaluated the children’s phonics, writing skills, sight vocabulary, and social skills. As shown in the graph below, average scores across every assessment area improved. The largest increase was observed in children’s sight vocabulary scores, which increased by 45%. This was followed by writing skills, which increased by 44%, phonics which increased by 31%, and finally social skills which increased by 22%.



In comparison to last year’s scores, the pre-programme assessment averages for phonics and writing skills were similar. This year, the average pre-programme sight vocabulary was 27% compared to 26% in 2022-2023. Writing skills had the largest difference with a 31% average this year compared to 38% in 2022-2023. In addition to this, the post-programme results show a slight improvement from last year with writing skills being improved by 1%, phonics being improved by 3% and sight vocabulary being improved by 5% when compared to the 2022-2023 data.

## Participant Feedback

Satisfaction rates for the programme were high, with all parents (N=31) reporting that it was an enjoyable experience for the children. Parents also reported that the programme helped their child, particularly with reading ability (81%, n=25), and writing ability (71%, n=22). The biggest benefit reported by the parents was that the programme helped their child make friends (84%, n=26). Ninety-six percent (n=27) of children who took part in Doodle Den agreed that the programme was an enjoyable experience for them.

All staff noted that the programme benefitted the children’s reading skills and writing skills (100%, N=12). 92% (n=11) of staff found that the programme assisted in the children’s understanding and listening skills.

### Comments from participants included



*“My daughter has made plenty of friends in Doodle Den, also facilitators are very good at understanding her as child can be very shy, also Doodle Den has made child want to go to school more” [Parent]*



*“I believe Doodle Den helped my child have an interest in reading at home, my child now asks for books and magazines instead of screens” [Parent]*



*“Watching the children grow and their parents assisting in their learning. Management of the programme is exceptional, thank you!” [Staff]*

#### 4.5.4. NCI Challenges

The NCI Challenges are designed to encourage the development of cross-curricular skills as well as encouraging parental involvement in their children’s education and schools. The inter-school challenges promote the development of children’s literacy, numeracy, maths skills, general knowledge and social skills through playing board-games like Monopoly (money, numbers, problem-solving), Rummikub (numbers, pattern, sorting) and the Table Quiz (general knowledge, literacy).

#### Programme Delivery

- NCI Challenges in 2023-24 consisted of three events: Table Quiz, Rummikub and Monopoly, with a total of 754 children involved across 14 local primary schools.
  - For the Table Quiz event children were divided into quiz teams of 7 children each.
  - Children were entered as individuals for Rummikub and Monopoly. Four to five children played on each board and a parent/volunteer acted as the referee/banker.
- 15 corporate volunteers from Mason Hayes and Curran, BNP Paribas, and Morgan Stanley supported the three events.



(Monopoly Event)

#### Participant Feedback

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 98% (n=123) of children reporting that they enjoyed participating in the challenges. Each parent also agreed that it was an enjoyable experience for the children who took part (N=46). Additionally, 95% of staff members who were present stated that the challenges provided a valuable learning opportunity for the children involved (n=19). Volunteers agreed that they were happy they took part in the events (N=10). The biggest motivation for volunteers was a feeling of making a difference in the community with 90% of volunteers noting this in their evaluation (n=9).

#### Comments from participants included

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*“The children learned the concept of the game. How to use money and great on the spot thinking. Great game to bring into the home” [Teacher]*



*“I think becoming part of the schools team worked really well, and allowed us relate to the kids, engage them and have fun with them” [Volunteer]*



*“Rummikub is fun and challenging” [Student]*

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#### 4.5.5. STEM Family Learning Events

A series of STEM events were developed to ensure that the parents whose children we have supported through their early year's education will have the confidence, understanding, skills and knowledge to continue to support their children's education.

#### Programme Delivery

- 4 in-person STEM events were held separately in 2023-24:
  - 1 event was held on Science Week in NCI with 37 families.
  - 1 event was held in July 2023 (STEM Family summer event) with 36 children and 22 volunteers attending.
  - 2 events were held at the Doodle Den graduations in NCI with 56 families and 1 volunteer from KPMG in attendance.



(Science Week Event)

#### Participant Feedback

The STEM events carried out throughout the year have continued to show positive feedback with all parents agreeing that the programme was an enjoyable experience for their child (N=57) and 96% of agreeing that the STEM event they took part in was a valuable learning opportunity for the children who took part (n= 55). Finally, the feedback from the child survey was positive, as 79% of children would recommend taking part in the event to a friend (n=41). Children who took part in the events mentioned that some of their favourite things about the events were learning how to make a catapult and making skittle art.

#### Comments from participants included

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*"Cannot fault anything at the event. All the displays and activities were very educational as well as immersive. My children really got fully involved in everything" [Parent]*



*"Range of activities so everyone had something to do and could use different skills on each activity" [Professional]*



*"It will give him a better understanding of the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths for his future education and also as a parent it provides me of a better understanding of the skills that are needed." [Parent]*

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#### 4.5.6. Robotic Coding Club

Robotic Coding Club is a collaboration with NCI's School of Computing. Participants learn about robotics, programming and electronics with an mbot, which is a robot that offers opportunity to begin exploring their engineering skills through building the robots and provides a range of possibilities for students to learn STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

#### Programme Delivery

- 90 students took part in Term 1 Coding Clubs in 4 schools
- 73 children and 19 parents attended a final coding event in the schools – 6 volunteers supported from KPMG, Kennedy Wilson and BPN Paribas.
- 77 students taking part in Term 2 Coding Club in 2 afterschools and 1 primary school, after which a prizegiving ceremony was held.
- 3 schools received a laptop for each child to be able to engage in Coding Club
- There was low parental involvement this year, a continuing trend from last year since face-to-face programmes in schools and services resumed.
- 5 children (aged 10-12) attended the 4-week Virtual Coding Club. All were provided with the resources they needed to take part in the programme from home.
- An Advanced Coding Club developed for older students (12-17) was piloted in July 2024



*(Robotic Coding Club event)*

#### Participant Feedback

Students completed evaluations before and after the programme to assess participants' attitudes, learning disposition towards STEM, and aspirations for post-secondary education. Seventy-nine percent (n=71) of students enjoyed attending coding club, and 60% (n=54) reported that they would take part again if they had the chance. Plans to attend third level education were high, with 74% (n=67) of students expressing a desire to pursue third level education after taking part in the programme. Post-programme, students reported increased confidence in their skills, with confidence in computer skills growing by 51% (n=46) and coding skills by 45% (n=41). The learning outcome most noted by the children was that they learned to make the robot light up and move with code as 83% (n=66) referred to learning this in the post-programme survey.

The majority of parents indicated that they believe STEM skills are crucial for their child's future education and career goals (89%, n=16). Parents believed that the programme was a valuable learning experience, with 89% (n=16) reporting that the programme improved their child's STEM skills. Finally, 94% (n=17) of parents noted that they would recommend the coding club programme to other parents.

The coding events that took place throughout the year were a great opportunity for further learning and enjoyment for the families involved. This is conveyed through the parents' evaluations in which all parents



agreed that the STEM events were a great learning opportunity and an enjoyable experience for them and their child (N=18). Despite there being a multitude of activities and games, the most popular game was robot football with 80% (n=56) of children picking it as an enjoyable activity. Finally, staff who attended the events agreed with the parents that the programme is a valuable learning opportunity and an enjoyable experience for all children involved (N=7).

#### Comments from participants included

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*“Very enjoyable for my grandson he was very interested in this programme” [Grandparent]*



*“Volunteers very nice and friendly” [Child]*



*“Improves their STEM skills. Gives them computer and typing skills and teaches them maths skills they will need in secondary school such as basic algebra and functions. Also helps with problem solving skills” [Tutor]*

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#### 4.5.7. Language and Tuition Support

ELI’s Language and Tuition Support programmes aim to provide second level students with extra opportunities for learning in a safe and positive environment. This year, ELI received funding from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to expand the Talking Heads programme to primary school students for the first time. Talking Heads is a programme focusing on conversational English for students with English as an Additional Language delivered fully by volunteers.

#### Programme Delivery

228 young people participated in language and tuition support sessions, delivered both virtually and face-to-face.

- 24 students enrolled in Leaving Certificate Maths tuition support. 4 weekly sessions (2 Ordinary Level and 2 Higher Level) were held across 22 weeks.
- 2 weekly Maths sessions (1 Ordinary Level and 1 Higher Level) for Junior Certificate students were run over 27 weeks with 13 students enrolled.
- 5 students enrolled in Leaving Certificate Irish Tuition Support, which catered to both Higher and Ordinary Level students. The format was changed last year and shortened to 30-minute oral sessions (5 per week) with 1-2 students at a time. This group started in March and ran for 6 weeks to prepare students for their Oral examinations, with an average of 5 students in attendance each week.



*(Foreign Language Café)*

- Irish Tuition Support for Junior Certificate students did not run this year.
- 74 students attended 2 Language Cafés were held in NCI and Central Bank - 19 in Spanish, 51 in French and 47 in Irish.
- 40 secondary school students engaged in Talking Heads which ran over 14 weeks with an average of 21 students attending each week. 6 volunteers delivered the programme.
- 72 students took part in the pilot Talking Heads for primary level students which was offered to all 9 eligible NEIC schools in collaboration with City Connects. The programme ran 60 sessions in total. 2 volunteers supported the delivery of this pilot programme. Talking Heads for primary level students will be continuing in 2024-25.

## Participant Feedback

New evaluations were developed for the pilot year of Talking Heads with Primary School students. 91% of students in both Secondary and Primary School (n=48) enjoyed taking part in Talking Heads. 65% (n=31) agreed they would like to continue to take part in more classes to learn English. 88% (n=46) more comfortable speaking English after the sessions. All volunteers agreed that they were happy they volunteered with this programme and said they would volunteer again (100%, N=4 each).

After taking part in the Language Cafés, 85% of students (n=41) agreed that they were more interested in learning their target language. 91% of teachers agreed that these were valuable learning opportunities for the students in their class (n=10). All of the volunteers who supported the Language Cafés (N=11) said they were happy they took part in the ELI volunteer programme.

### Comments from participants included

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*“It is fun, we play games” [Talking Heads Primary, Student]*



*“Varied questions, learning new vocab from the people around me, all of the volunteers had new accents to learn from and get used to.” [Language Café, Student]*



*“Teachers have commented on how one child in particular has just completely changed and is so chatty now with adults and confident speaking English” [Talking Heads Primary, Teacher]*

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## 4.6. Educational Guidance

The Educational Guidance Programmes aim to support young people, parents and communities to understand the education system and know what steps they might need to take to access further education and advance their career opportunities. This supports the children and young people in the local community to achieve their education, life and career goals.

These programmes, which are developed through careful collaboration with local schools, afterschools and youth and community services are Educational Guidance; A Day in the Life; NEIC Brighter Futures Restorative Practices; Discover University; and Third Level Internships.

Objectives:

- Raise children's and young people's educational and career expectations.
- Support young people and their parents to successfully navigate the education system and access interesting career opportunities.
- Widen participation in higher education within Dublin's Inner City.

Educational and Career Guidance	Young People	Parents
Educational Guidance (fifth/sixth class)	185	0
Educational Guidance Exhibition (Secondary)	75	5
A Day in the Life Events	47	0
Discover University (14-17 years)	54	12
NEIC Brighter Futures Restorative Practices	94	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>17</b>

### 4.6.1. Educational Guidance Programme

Educational Guidance is a project-based learning career guidance programme for primary (fifth and sixth class) and secondary (first year) students. The programme enables students to explore career aspirations and opportunities and raises awareness among students and their parents of the importance of third level education in the pursuit of certain careers.

#### Programme Delivery

- 260 students from 7 schools engaged across both Primary and Secondary level programmes.
- 185 students from 5 primary schools attended an in-person tour of Dublin Port.
- 5 parents attended an online information seminar about 3<sup>rd</sup> level options.
- 30 career projects were submitted by students.
- 3 judging sessions for the career projects were held in-person in NCI with 17 volunteer judges from Citco, Glenveagh, McCann Fitzgerald LLP, Central Bank, PWC, BNP Paribas, Deloitte, and Maples giving project feedback and announcing the winning project at each session.



*(Educational Guidance trip to Dublin Port)*

## Participant Feedback

Responses from this year's participating students indicate that the key learning outcomes of the programme were achieved. 84% (n=106, out of a total of 128 responses) of students reported that they learned about the time and level of education required to achieve their educational and career goals, with 72% (n=91, out of a total of 127 responses) of students wanting to go on to college when they finish school. Finally, 57% (n=71 out of a total of 129 responses) of students reported that they improved their research skills during the programme.

Teachers also completed a survey after taking part in this programme which similarly showed very positive feedback. All teachers (100%, N=6) agreed that the programme is a valuable learning opportunity for the children in their class. As well as this, all teachers involved (100%, N=6) believe that the programme made the children more aware of how their educational choices can have an impact on their future career. All of our corporate volunteers (100%, N=14) reported being happy with their experience as a volunteer, expressed interest in being a volunteer again, and would recommend the experience to a colleague.

### Comments from participants included

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*“Through the research necessary to complete the project students have become more aware on the dynamics and process necessary to pursue a career” [Teacher]*



*“I learned that people are able to work together and that everyone can take part in the 'STEM'” [Student]*

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## 4.6.2. A Day in the Life

A Day in the Life is a careers event for secondary school students to have the opportunity to meet and chat with corporate volunteers and people from diverse careers. Through the event, students chat with different professionals over the course of an hour, all from different educational and career backgrounds and working in different job sectors.

### Programme Delivery

- 2 *A Day in the Life* events were held in November 2023 and May 2024 over 3 sessions
- 47 students attended the events from 3 local schools.
- Corporate Volunteers from Glenveagh, Central Bank, Deloitte, McCann Fitzgerald, McGarrell Reilly and 5 volunteers working across Trinity College Dublin, HSE, Belvedere Youth Club, and an Garda Síochána all participated in the event.
- 41 students participate in an additional *A Day in the Life* event which was held in June 2024 as part of Discover University.

## Participant Feedback

All 47 students responded to a post-programme survey. Responses from the survey indicate that 68% (n=32) reported knowing more about different careers after the event, and 62% (n=28, out a total of 45 responses) felt more confident discussing their future careers. Additionally, 60% (n=28) of students now have a clearer idea of the career they would like to pursue.

Positive outcomes were also reflected in the teacher post-programme survey. All teachers (N=6) reported that students had meaningful engagements with professionals and gained more knowledge about their career options, as well as the event being a valuable learning opportunity for the students. All volunteers (N=17) expressed that they would volunteer with ELI again.

#### Comments from participants included

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*“I think learning that you don't need college or a specific degree to do a specific thing was key in deciding what I want to do, especially in case I find the job I originally wanted is boring”*  
[Student]



*“Very well organized and good mix of careers”* [Teacher]

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#### 4.6.3. NEIC Brighter Futures Restorative Practice

In 2016-17, Restorative Practices (RP) was one of the Mulvey Report recommendations to support the North-East Inner City (NEIC) community envision and plan for a better future for people in the area. ELI delivers Opening the Door and Relationship Keepers Programmes along with other restorative-focused activities to support local children and young people to develop a greater sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, sense of community, empathy, and emotional literacy; improve their communication skills and build mutually respectful relationships with young and old alike.

#### Programme Delivery

91 young people (aged 12-24 years) participated in restorative-focused activities facilitated in-person, through primary and secondary schools, youth services, corporate organisations and National College of Ireland.

- 80 young people engaged in Learning and Development opportunities during 2023-24.
- 36 young people (TY and Fifth Year, 15-18) from Larkin Community College and SWAN Youth Service (17–24-year-olds) trained as ‘Relationship Keepers’, to create a sense of connection and belonging within their school and youth community.
- 44 young people participating in Discover University (DU) engaged in restorative practice training at the beginning to prepare them for their DU experience, to support them in building relationships and their overall experience. This training was co-facilitated by corporate volunteers from Arthur Cox, as part of the relaunch of Opening the Door.



*(Community of Practice Leinster House)*

- 11 young people engaged in Mentoring and Support opportunities during 2023-24. This is still a relatively new area of practice, previously only developed as part of the adult offering for RP and will be developed further in 2024/25.
- 5 young people (First Years) and 1 school staff member from O'Connell Secondary School engaged in a Student Listening Circle, in Leinster House. Topics included drug intimidation, inclusion, belonging and transition to secondary school.
- 6 young people (17-24) and 3 youth leaders from SWAN Youth Service engaged in Listening Circles, in person, to discuss inclusion, belonging, social pressures and challenges living in the NEIC.

### Participant Feedback

Of those participating in Relationship Keepers training, 100% (N=9) agreed or strongly agreed that the training was useful and that the skills learned will support them as a Relationship Keeper, and following training 78% (n=7) felt confident leading in restorative circles. All participants felt they were able to participate in discussions and felt listened to. Following their training, the majority of participants reported feeling confident being a Relationship Keeper (89%, n=8). Eighty percent of corporate volunteers (n=4) who co-facilitated RP training at Discover University agreed that volunteering enhanced their job satisfaction. Additionally, 100% (n=5) said they would volunteer with ELI again.

### Comments from participants included

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*"The most useful thing about it was the communication and how it was easy to talk and say what we want." [Student]*



*"I learned how to use circles as a way to build relationships." [Student]*



*"The interactive nature of the session, without pressurizing the young people to volunteer, meant that they volunteered organically in their own time." [Volunteer, Opening the Door programme]*

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### 4.6.4. Discover University

Discover University is a summer programme held in NCI every June that aims to give young people the opportunity to experience a taste of life at NCI and to see college as part of their future.

### Programme Delivery

- 54 young people participated in Discover University 2024.
- 10 NCI students and 5 NCI staff were recruited as team leaders and project leaders to mentor and guide young people through the programme.
- Project Leaders were from the Schools of Psychology, Business, Early Childhood Education and Care and Computing in NCI.
- 41 volunteers from 8 local corporate organisations supported ADITL shared career & education experiences, participated as dragons for Dragons Den giving feedback on projects, and judged the final projects.



- Students on the programme participated in talks with NCI Library and Clubs and Socs, events such as A Day in the Life and Restorative practice workshops, drama workshop, attended tours of Jigsaw, Salesforce, Holy Child Preschool, and also a sports day in Ringsend Park funded by Dublin City Council.
- 43 students attended a graduation ceremony and presented their projects. This event also featured an award ceremony where students received a certificate for their participation. 13 parents attended along with other family members.
- Lord Mayor James Geoghegan attended the graduation ceremony as a guest speaker.



*(Students and Volunteers in Discover University Dragon's Den)*

### Participant Feedback

A post-programme survey of students (N=39) revealed that the vast majority of students found the programme enjoyable (95%, n=37) and would recommend it to a friend (84%, n=32). This enjoyment from the students aligns with feedback from parents (N=12), who unanimously agreed that the programme was an enjoyable experience for their child. Students reported that they gained a better understanding of higher education (79%, n=30), increased excitement about continuing to higher education (72%, n=28) and are better prepared for third level education (69%, n=27). The students also showed significant development in their ability to work with different types of people (85%, n=33), in line with this, parents agreed that their child's social, personal, and critical thinking skills improved (50%, n=6).

Responses from team leaders (N=10) were extremely positive, with everyone agreeing that they would recommend the experience to a friend. All team leaders (N=10) reported that the programme helped develop their leadership and communication skills and improved their facilitation skills and ability to work with young people. Project leaders (N=3) also had a very positive experience and would recommend it to a colleague and agreed that they were happy they participated. Finally, the majority of our corporate volunteers (92%, n=45) indicated they would recommend the experience to a colleague and 100% (N=47) said they would volunteer again.

### Comments from participants included



*"I really liked how interactive and exciting a lot of the activities. Especially things like the drama activities and tours. The team leaders were also very friendly and cooperative with us throughout" [Student feedback]*



*"My child was more engaged than expected so you were able to keep her concentration well and made her enjoy it enough to keep her coming back" [Parent feedback]*



*"My background is working with communities experiencing disadvantage and I really think it's important that young people from those communities are given opportunities to thrive in education, I also felt that I got experience of working with young people in an age group that I don't always work with, I really enjoyed the experience" [Project Leader feedback]*



## 4.7. Capacity Building, Training and Mentoring

Long-term sustainable change requires continued innovation and upskilling. While changes in one family and service is always welcome, it is the collective impact on the community that will ensure that children and young people are growing up in a safe happy learning environment. ELI's aim is to collectively improve outcomes for children, young people and families through the provision of high-quality services. Continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, which embed learning within services and allow for the dissemination of knowledge among practitioners and parents, is a critical element of ELI's work. Training, peer learning, communities of practice and on-site mentoring from ELI staff support practitioners to improve their practice and successfully manage innovation and change. Training and mentoring are provided in Home Visiting; My Place to Play; Digital Technology; Numeracy; STEM; Literacy; Síolta and Aistear; Restorative Practice; Self-care and Emotional Literacy.

### Objectives:

- Empower and support professionals to be competent, confident, collaborative and restorative in their roles.
- Improve the quality of service and learning environments provided by local services and schools through the provision of professional development, mentoring and networking.
- Enhance interagency collaboration and support the development of a shared/Meitheal communitywide consistent approach to service delivery for children, young people and families.
- Improve the educational, life and career outcomes for the children and young people.
- Build a strong, happy, positive and supportive community

Capacity-Building – Training and Mentoring	Professionals
Early Years Professionals	105
Restorative Practice Training Courses	92
Restorative Practice CPD	174
Restorative Practice Trainers	12
ELI Interns	9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>403</b>

### 4.7.1. Early Years Professionals and RP Self-care

As part of the ABC Programme, there are a number of different CPD and Mentoring opportunities aiming to support practitioners in their role as early years educators and embed best practice within services, including:

- 22 early years educators attending 3 Early Numeracy Working Group meetings – a reflective space and peer learning opportunity (average of 7 attendees per meeting)
- 31 participants attended 3 Pre-Numeracy Workshops – shared planning for the upcoming numeracy week (average of 10 attendees per workshop)
- 276 numeracy mentoring support meetings were provided to schools and early childhood education care services throughout the year through phone and Zoom calls.

- Home Visitors and Group Facilitators completed 1,218 hours of CPD training
- 3 Home Visitors completed a QQI Level 6 Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting.
- 49 Early Years Professionals including ELI Home Visitors and Doodle Den facilitators engaged in 4 self-care sessions.

#### 4.7.2. NEIC Restorative Practice

Restorative Practice (RP), which is funded by the North-East Inner City (NEIC) Task Force and Government’s ABC Programme, is an approach to building and maintaining relationships and resolving conflict in a wide range of community organisations, while complementing other approaches, i.e., coaching, mediation, and restorative justice.

#### Programme Delivery

- 68 different organisations participated in the NEIC restorative practice initiative.
- 466 individuals attended restorative practice events — 278 individuals participated in training, workshops and events, while 188 participated in communities of practice.
- 45 participants engaged with Getting Started with Restorative Practice (introductory) training across three courses.
- 29 participants engaged with Moving Forward with Restorative Practice (intermediate) training over two courses.
- 12 participants engaged with Leading with Restorative Practice (advanced) training in its first pilot delivery over one course.
- 18 teachers, principals, SNAs, and other community professionals participated in the Drumcondra Education Centre summer course ‘Restorative Practices for Classrooms and School Communities’ during July and August 2023. A third summer course, ‘Restorative Leadership: Embedding Restorative Culture in Schools’, which was due to be piloted in July 2023 did not run due to low numbers.
- 174 professionals engaged in continuous professional development, including:
  - 40 professionals from one primary and one post-primary school and 13 professionals from the HSE’s Children’s Disability Network Team in the NEIC attended individualised CPD training.
  - 15 professionals supporting Opening the Door and Discover University programmes engaged in introductory RP workshops.
  - 69 professionals and community members attending CPD workshop events to increase their knowledge of NEIC’s RP strategy and ways of working.
  - 37 professionals engaging in the ParentChild+ Programme, both in the NEIC and nationally, engaged in introductory and refresher training in restorative practice.
- 12 professionals continued to engage training/facilitation activities, ongoing mentoring and support, and course facilitation, both online and in-person. 15 support sessions were delivered during 2023/24.
- 138 mentoring and support visits took place in total across the community — 60 face-to-face, and the remaining 78 using video conferencing platforms, video calls or phone calls.

- 188 community professionals and community members attended 10 monthly in-person community of practice meetings in 2023/24, with an average of 19 attendees per month. A number of these meetings invited guest speakers from the NEIC community from a range of backgrounds and professions. Topics included poverty, disadvantage, violence, polarisation, inclusion and belonging, empowerment and citizenship. One of these communities of practice took place in the wake of incidents in November 2023 and was specifically organised to support those professionals in the NEIC who were indirectly affected by what had happened.



*(Summer course for teachers)*

### Participant Feedback:

The majority of participants (93%, n=39) agreed that the knowledge and skills learned are transferable to their role, and 93% (n=39) reported they are likely to implement or have started implementing the skills learned into their practice. Both these figures were about the same as those of 2022-23 (97% and 91% respectively).

Pre-programme, 63% (n=44) of participants who responded to the pre-programme survey rated their level of knowledge on Restorative Practices as poor or fair. Upon completion of the training, the majority of participants who completed post-programme surveys rated their knowledge of Restorative Practices as good, very good, or excellent (95%, n=41). The most common motivation for doing the training was ability to deal with conflict, with only 53% of participants rating their ability to deal with conflict as moderately high or very high before taking part in training. Post-programme, 74% of respondents rated their ability to deal with conflict as moderately or very high, representing a 21% increase.

### Comments from participants included

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*“Since practicing what I've learned, particularly in relation to forming sentences that are phrased in a way that people feel heard, not attacked. By implementing this, I have found that clients are more open to discussing how they are feeling and resolving issues in a way that doesn't go straight to them getting heightened in the conversation.”*



*“I work a lot with stakeholders from different disciplines who understand things very differently and use different languages. RP is helping facilitate communication which is difficult in this setting.”*



*“I think that RP will be very useful in Primary School. Starting to build better awareness of each other in our class and to solve problems and difficulties as they occur. It is also a skill for life for the children and the teachers.”*

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### 4.7.3. Third Level Internship

The Third Level Internship programme offers NCI students the opportunity to develop their personal, academic and professional skills, while becoming active in their local community.

#### Programme Delivery

- 9 successful applicants, 4 for the General ELI Internship and 5 for the Research Internship- studying Psychology (6), Business (1), Early Childhood Education and Care (1) Human Resources (1) and Masters of Science (1).
- 4 General Interns assisted in various tasks across multiple programme areas including the delivery of Coding clubs, Language Café events, Doodle Den and social media analytics
- 5 Research interns worked on a varied range of tasks throughout the internship, including monitoring and evaluation of programme delivery; data analysis; conducting literature reviews; assisting with report writing; supporting with the design and delivery of research projects; and data collection including attending ELI events.
- 10 NCI students- Computing (3), Business (3), Psychology (3), Early Education and Care (1) were recruited as team leaders for the Discover University programme this summer. Team leaders assisted with the daily running of the summer programme whilst ensuring that young people attending were supported through each activity and project work.

#### Participant Feedback:

Two interns completed an end of year evaluation. Both agreed that the internship was rewarding and provided them with meaningful work that helped their career development.

#### Comments from participants included

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“The programme was brilliant, everyone around the office was great to work with and very kind. The work can be tedious at times but nothing is really too difficult. The work is very rewarding when seeing the EOY report etc.”



“The team gave adequate support and consideration to my study schedule and gave me tasks which could be comfortably completed without putting too much pressure on me.”

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## 4.8. Corporate Volunteer Programme

ELI's Corporate Volunteer Programme, which began in 2010 with eight volunteers, provides diverse and rewarding volunteering experiences to the staff of ELI's corporate partners. Partners include Irish and multi-national organisations from the finance, technology, construction and legal sectors who are largely based in Dublin's Inner City and IFSC area. The programme gives employees the opportunity to interact directly with children and their families in the community in which they work. The programme offers mutual benefits – allowing corporate staff to enhance their own interpersonal communication skills while simultaneously making a positive difference to the educational life chances of the people in their locality. As can be seen from the table below, volunteers engage in an array of roles across many of ELI's programmes.

### Programme Delivery

In 2023-24, 209 (195 corporate; 14 other) volunteers contributed to a range of ELI's programmes. This is a 27% increase on last year's volunteer numbers.

It was fantastic to have a diverse mix of professionals from the working world visit schools, participate in classroom practices, support Doodle Den, Discover University and attend student events such as the Monopoly Challenge in June, the Table Quiz in April, STEM events and exhibitions throughout the year at NCI. New volunteering opportunities included Talking Heads at primary level to support new pilot afterschool clubs for English as Additional Language (EAL) learners.

There was positive engagement between ELI and our key corporate partners during the year, who were keen for their staff to engage in ELI programmes. There were some challenges with volunteers committing to regular weekly volunteering due to variable work schedules. Sign-up for one-off events and workshops was more popular for this reason.

We would also like to acknowledge the number of volunteers (corporate and otherwise) who contribute to ELI's work through our four voluntary committees – ELI Advisory Committee and its 3 subcommittees - Development Committee, ABC and National Centre Steering Groups.



*(Volunteers judging a Discover University project)*

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Number of Volunteers</i>	<i>Lead Corporate Partner</i>
<b><i>Mentoring and Support</i></b>		
ELI Advisory Committees and Steering Groups	19	Land Development Agency, McGarrell Reilly; Clancourt, Deloitte, Citco, State Street
Volunteering Link People in Companies	26	AIB, Arthur Cox, Basis.point, BNP Paribas, Central Bank, Citco, Deloitte, GAM, Glenveagh, Google, HubSpot, Kennedy Wilson, KPMG, Land Development Agency, Maples, Mason Hayes and Curran, McCann FitzGerald, McGarrell-Reilly, Morgan Stanley, Northern Trust, PWC, State Street, Virtu Financial
Skills Sharing	6	Deloitte, Google
<b><i>Afterschool and Community Programmes</i></b>		
STEM Events	27	Basis.point, Central Bank, Citco, Deloitte, Glenveagh, KPMG, State Street
Doodle Den Afterschool Programme	15	KPMG, PWC
Restorative Practice	6	Arthur Cox
<b><i>Primary Level Programmes</i></b>		
Educational Guidance	11	Central Bank, Maples, McCann Fitzgerald, Volunteers from other companies/ organisations
NCI Challenges	15	BNP Paribas, Maples, Mason Hayes and Curran, Morgan Stanley
Coding Clubs	6	BNP Paribas, Kennedy Wilson, KPMG
<b><i>Second Level Programmes</i></b>		
Discover University	36	Arthur Cox, BNP Paribas, Central Bank, Citco, Deloitte, Mason Hayes and Curran, Maples, Morgan Stanley, PWC
A Day in the Life Careers Events	10	Central Bank, Maples
Language Cafés	16	Central Bank, Citco, Deloitte, GAM, Glenveagh, Maples
Talking Heads EAL Support	7	Central Bank, Citco, Deloitte, Glenveagh
Educational Guidance	9	BNP Paribas, Citco, Glenveagh
A Day in the Life, Language Café, Discover University	13	Volunteers from other companies/organisations
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	

## Participant Feedback

Post-programme surveys this year reflected a continued trend of positive feedback from our volunteers with 92% (n=118) of our participants reporting that they were happy they volunteered. Furthermore 90% of volunteers reported feeling safe and supported by the ELI staff. 98% (n=125) of volunteers agreed that they would volunteer with ELI again if given the chance and 88% (n=113) would recommend the experience to a colleague.

### Comments from participants included

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*“The event was organised extremely well so it was easy to quickly get to grips with what was required of me and how best to facilitate the children's experience”*



*“Very welcoming team from ELI. Well-structured intro/training. Props and questions list. Very motivated and engaging students”*

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## 5. Looking Forward 2022-23

Accessing inclusive quality education is the foundation to improving people’s lives, sustainable development; and a peaceful and prosperous world ([UN SDGs](#)). Described as ambitious and innovative, ELI will continue in 2024-25 to provide pioneering inclusive and diverse programmes in Dublin’s Inner City and across Ireland. Our multi-layered flexible plans ensure that critical support is provided to vulnerable children and families across Ireland during these uncertain times.

Vision, Mission, and Ethos permeates all aspects of ELI. We remain committed to the NCI’s mission of changing lives through education and partnering with others to ensure that at-risk children across Ireland have the social, language, literacy, and numeracy skills they need for success in education, employment, and life. Community Action Research (research defined, undertaken, analysed, and evidenced by members of the community) continues to be at the core of our programme development, knowledge management and planning processes. Ownership, responsibility, integrity, and commitment remain core principles with creativity, innovation, and experimentation at the heart of everything we do.

### 5.1. Strategic Innovation

A key objective of NCI’s 2022-27 [Strategic Plan](#) is to continue to provide transformative ‘cradle to college’ accessible education services, both locally to Dublin’s Inner City and nationally. Being part of the NCI, a vibrant third-level institution that the local community sees as “our college”, is essential to realizing our vision. Since 2006, we have welcomed local children, parents, families and services into NCI. The opening of our new Spencer Dock campus continues this tradition. Supplementing Spencer Dock will be a new Play Hub and Sanctuary Space in our Mayor Square campus along with dedicated child and family facilities in the National Centre for Research and Reconciliation on Sean McDermott St.

Balancing forward thinking innovative strategic planning with prudent day-to-day operations in Dublin’s Inner City and across Ireland will continue in 2023-24 with ELI and their partners prioritising support for at-risk children and their families to successfully navigate and thrive through these challenging times.

Dublin’s Inner City, a sustainable proven model, will continue to deliver universal plus, wrap around, holistic integrated support for children, parents, and families through high-quality Home Visiting, Parent Support, Literacies and Educational Guidance Programme. Fidelity to ELI’s original vision and NCI’s Governing Body’s commitment to its local community remains key along with developing the funding streams required to sustain the work.

The National Centre’s identity, structures, and processes continue to evolve. Its key priority is ELI’s mission to bring home visiting and family engagement programmes to every community in Ireland, thereby ensuring that the 12,400 children born into poverty each year get the support they need to thrive in education, career and life. Securing sustainable multi-annual funding for the National Centre is critical to its future as is supporting local organisations to source their own funding to deliver ELI programmes.

2024-25 is a significant year for ELI with the establishment of a National Home Visiting Programme office in Tusla and ongoing development of the National Model of Home Visiting as part of the [First 5 | A Government Strategy For Babies & Young Children](#). These initiatives will shape both the strategy and the work of ELI at both local and national level for the foreseeable future.

NCI's Research Strategy is completed and incorporates ELI's real-life action research methodology. Key strategic priorities for 2024-25 include:

1. Strengthening ELI's research infrastructure and outputs in collaboration with our NCI colleagues.
2. DCEDIY What Works Collaborative Exploratory Study of Data Definitions, Knowledge, Frameworks and Practices across Early Childhood Home Visiting Programmes.
3. SFI Parental Attitudes to STEM and Digital Technologies Research.

## 5.2. Risk Assessment and Contingency Planning

NCI's Governing Body along with the executive and management teams meet regularly to discuss risk and contingency plans. ELI is addressed at these meetings and is included in NCI's general risk register. Regular risk reviews and contingency planning continue with the issues arising addressed at ELI Advisory Committees and Steering Groups.

## 5.3. Operational Priorities

Delivering high quality universal plus parent child support services remains a priority as is our aim of extending these programmes beyond Dublin's Inner City to local community organisations across Ireland. Long-term sustainable partnerships with key agencies such as Tusla and HSE at both national and local level is key to this work.

Direct programme delivery of Dublin's Inner City innovative portfolio of Home Visiting and Family/Community engagement programmes is critical. Oversight of its activities to ensure delivery on its original mission and evolution to address emerging needs is a key task of the ABC Steering Group.

While supporting other organisations to deliver ELI's Home Visiting and Family Engagement programmes is the responsibility of the National Centre, it also leads out ELI's research activities. Led by the National Steering Group, work will continue on defining our national ambition, identity and focus as well as building the capacities and structures required to scale up our programmes across the country.

Increased need and complexity both locally and nationally has been challenging. Meeting those needs in a time of funding constraints has been difficult. However, we will continue to rise to the challenge. Securing the long-term multi-annual funding needed to deliver high quality responsive trauma-informed programmes that improve outcomes for at-risk children and families will continue to be a priority in 2024-25 as will upskilling our dedicated staff, volunteers and partners to negotiate change and emerging issues, both at local and national level.

## 5.4. Changing Children's Lives through Partnership

ELI's achievements are the result of sustained cross-sectoral collaboration with our network of partners, adding a unique value to our programmes. Together we do so much more to support at-risk children and families across Ireland. We would like to thank all our wonderful partners for their sustained support.

With another challenging year ahead in 2024-25, we are confident that, with support from our fantastic partners, we can continue to provide critical supports during a historical and life-changing era and help thousands of children achieve their long-term educational, career and life dreams.



**Early Learning Initiative**  
National College of Ireland