POWERFUL PARENTING

CDI

**Powerful Parenting
Annual Programme Report**

2023/2024 Academic Year

CDI
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Acronyms

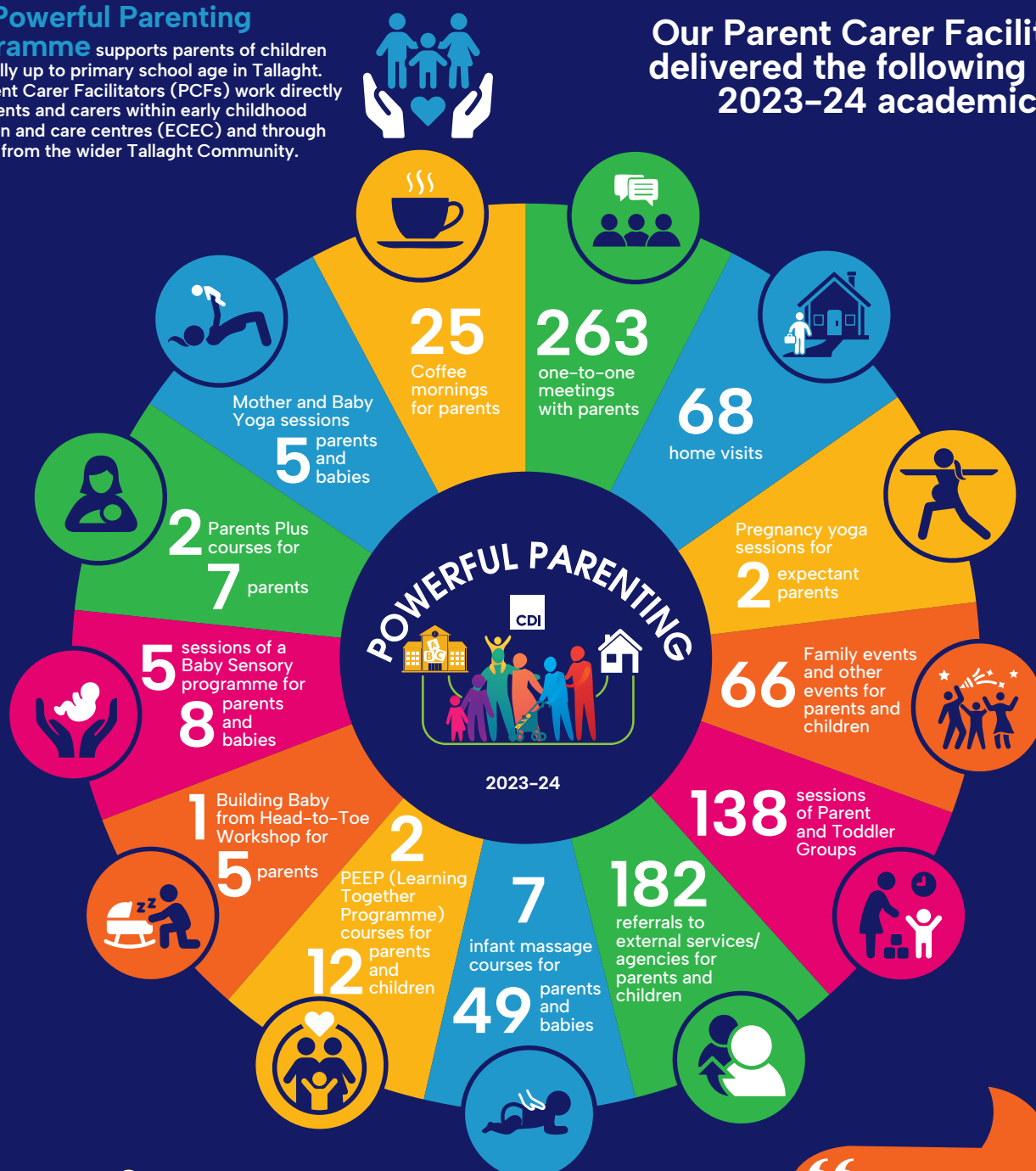|	
ABC	The Area Based Childhood Programme
AIM	Access and Inclusion Model
ATTI	Antenatal to Three Initiative
CDI	Childhood Development Initiative
CPRA	Comprehensive Scale for Parenting Resilience and Adaptation
CYPSC	Children and Young Peoples Services Committee
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EYHLE	Early Years Home Learning Environment
GUI	Growing Up in Ireland
HLA	Home Learning Activities
HLE	Home Learning Environment
IPAS	International Protection Accommodation Services
IQR	The Interquartile Range
NCS	National Childcare Scheme
PAPS	Psychological Adaptation to Parenting Scale
PCF	Parent Carer Facilitators
PEAs	Parent Engagement Activities
PEIP	Prevention and Early Intervention Programme
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
THLE	Toddler Home Learning Environment
TOPSE	Tool to Measure Parenting Self–Efficacy
WEMWBS	Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

1. KEY POINTS

Reach: Our team of seven Parent Carer Facilitators supported the parents of between 163 and 200 children across ECEC settings, the wider community and parental courses in the academic year.

The Powerful Parenting Programme supports parents of children antenatally up to primary school age in Tallaght. Our Parent Carer Facilitators (PCFs) work directly with parents and carers within early childhood education and care centres (ECEC) and through referrals from the wider Tallaght Community.

Our Parent Carer Facilitators delivered the following in the 2023–24 academic year:

POWERFUL PARENTING
CDI
2023–24

25 Coffee mornings for parents

263 one-to-one meetings with parents

68 home visits

2 Pregnancy yoga sessions for **2** expectant parents

66 Family events and other events for parents and children

138 sessions of Parent and Toddler Groups

182 referrals to external services/ agencies for parents and children

7 infant massage courses for **49** parents and babies

2 PEEP (Learning Together Programme) courses for **12** parents and children

1 Building Baby from Head-to-Toe Workshop for **5** parents

5 sessions of a Baby Sensory programme for **8** parents and babies

2 Parents Plus courses for **7** parents

Mother and Baby Yoga sessions **5** parents and babies

78% of parents reported that engaging in the programme helped them improve their child's learning and development at home

81% increase in fathers attending coffee morning, family events, and one-to-one meetings compared to last year

Regarding the parents' quality of interactions with the PCFs, **98%** reported that it was good, very good, or excellent, with **73%** of parents reporting the quality as excellent

Quotes from Parents

"When starting this I wasn't coping very well with my child who is still waiting to be diagnosed with autism. I feel this really got us both out and support we needed to cope better"

"Baby toddler group was a great support. I really enjoyed the baby massage as well. It was lovely to have those things and they helped give a routine and something to look forward to. We also got to attend a baby music class which was enjoyed"

2. ABOUT POWERFUL PARENTING

Powerful Parenting is the Childhood Development Initiative's (CDI) evidence–informed parenting support model. CDI recognises the fundamental role that parents play in their children's lives, impacting social and emotional development, behaviour, education, and physical health (DCYA, 2015, 2018). Powerful Parenting actively supports Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services in Dublin 24 through the provision of dedicated Parent Carer Facilitators (PCFs) who foster engagement and partnership with parents. The PCFs are strategically positioned in geographical areas identified as having high levels of disadvantage based on the Pobal Deprivation Index[1]. Based in Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, PCFs support parents of children from zero to six years old in their community, in their homes, as well as within the ECEC centres to improve outcomes for children and families.

Powerful Parenting provides formal and informal support to improve: 1) Parental resilience and coping skills, 2) Parental engagement in children's learning and development, and 3) Parenting competence and confidence (self–efficacy). The parental engagement activities carried out by the PCFs to achieve these outcomes include; one–to–one meetings, home visits, coffee mornings, family events, referral support and parent education programmes. As well as working with parents of children attending specific ECECs, PCFs work with parents in the wider community through the delivery of parenting education programmes, and by hosting weekly Parent Toddler Groups. Currently, the programme monitors outcomes for some of these short–term parenting education interventions, namely Infant Massage, Circle of Security and Parents Plus, alongside the overall monitoring of the Powerful Parenting Programme. We are also working with a number of organisations to develop referral processes so that we can provide targeted supports early on where needed.

The short interventions that are offered as part of the Powerful Parenting Programme, depending on demand and availability, are as follows:

Infant Massage:
These courses are designed for babies from birth to one year, alongside their parent or caregiver. Infant massage courses help to deepen the connection between parent and baby. The course typically runs over five consecutive weeks.

Parents Plus Early Years Programme:
A practical, solution–focused and evidence–based course that builds on parent strengths while enhancing child development and building parent–child communication. It can be delivered over 6–12 sessions to groups of parents or to individual families.

Circle of Security Parents Programme:
An 8–week reflective, in–person group designed to help parents build strong, secure relationships with their children. Focusing on helping parents to understand their child's needs and behaviours while reflecting on their own experiences as a parent.

4TheFamily:
A 4–week programme for parents that aims to provide simple tips to improve family life by focusing on four key aspects: play, parenting, health and technology. The programme is delivered to a small group of parents or on a one–to–one basis with families.

Building Baby from Head to Toe:
An introductory workshop for parents and caregivers of children aged between 0 – 2 years on the topic of Infant Mental Health. This workshop explores a range of tools that parents and caregivers can use to support their baby's social and emotional wellbeing.

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[1] The Pobal Deprivation Index assigns areas HP Index scores based on Ireland's average levels of social indicators of community health (such as income and unemployment rates) to determine an overall amount of deprivation or privilege impacting local populations.

PEEP Learning Together Programme:
An effective, evidenced-based programme which aims to support parents to develop sensitive and responsive relationships with their babies and young children and to improve the home learning environment. It is delivered to groups over a period of 4–6 weeks.

CDI's **Powerful Parenting Programme** has evolved from the beginning of the organisation's establishment. CDI was incorporated in 2007 as part of the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP), a joint initiative of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and The Atlantic Philanthropies, driven by a local consortium which began in 2003. The first piece of work was a needs analysis titled How Are Our Kids? Study published in 2004[2], where 79 families in West Tallaght were randomly selected to be interviewed, followed by a public conference to gather further community feedback about the study. This research and community consultation, and a thorough review of research literature on child development, the impacts of poverty, and on the social and economic health of the West Tallaght community informed the creation of the **Powerful Parenting Programme**, known as the Early Years Programme at that time. Since then, CDI has expanded and adapted the model to the community and further utilised available research to create the current multi-modal system of evidence-based universal and targeted supports that focuses on numerous areas of need, accessibility, and coordination with other local supports, (Leitão, 2022).

2023–2024 Programme Overview

In the 23/24 academic year, PCFs supported parents in six ECEC services, as one service ended their engagement with CDI in November 2023. The programme offered a range of universal supports to all parents within these settings and neighbouring areas whilst also providing additional targeted support to those who needed it most. Additionally, having received funding through the Children and Young Peoples Services Committee (CYPSC), CDI employed a PCF to specifically work with families living in International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) from August 2023. Information on our work with parents in IPAS is reported separately.

The PCF team are equipped to deliver multiple interventions and supports to parents through our multi-modal approach, and the specific needs of parents and families each academic year determine how our supports will be offered. During the 23/24 academic year the PCF team had some staff vacancies coupled with a delay in the training of new staff to deliver key interventions, both of which impacted on the delivery of certain parental education courses and on the continuity of supports offered. Short interventions to enhance parental capacity and confidence in their parenting role were delivered at the discretion of the PCFs based on the needs of parents and families in their area. During the year, two Parents Plus[3] courses were delivered to seven parents (six mothers and one father), and seven Infant Massage courses were delivered to 49 parents (46 mothers and three fathers). Twelve parents also received the PEEP Learning Together Programme[4]. Along with these parental education courses, PCFs also facilitated or arranged for the delivery of a range

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[2] This full report is available on CDI's website at https://www.cdi.ie/app/uploads/2024/04/2004_How_Are_Our_Kids.pdf

[3] Parents Plus is a 6–8-week parenting intervention that focuses on positive parenting, and positive discipline techniques. Accessed from
https://www.parentsplus.ie/parents/ on 02 October 2023.

[4] The PEEP Learning Together intervention helps parents, carers and practitioners make the most of the learning opportunities in everyday life, supporting their babies' and young children's learning through play.

of sessions to support parents' knowledge, such as Paediatric First Aid training, 4TheFamily short courses and Building Baby from Head-to-Toe workshops.

Following stakeholder consultation, CDI made the decision to combine the Antenatal to Three Initiative (ATTI) with the **Powerful Parenting Programme**. As ATTI focused on strengthening supports for expectant and new parents across the Tallaght area, PCFs began to increase and widen their parental engagement activities to include antenatal supports and support for parents in the first three years of their children's lives. Based on this merger, revised outcomes and activities informed the development of a new logic model and aligned monitoring and evaluation plan, which provided the context for implementation in the following academic year.

The goal of all CDI interventions is to build enough research that an evidence-informed programme develops into an evidence-based programme. As a part of this process, there have been two external evaluations for **Powerful Parenting** in 2013[5] and 2022[6]. These external evaluations, and CDI's own programme monitoring have revealed that there are still adaptations to be made to **Powerful Parenting**, and unique difficulties to evaluating this varied and complex model. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the **Powerful Parenting Programme** is important to constantly assess its effectiveness, maintain an up-to-date evidence base to inform the programme design, and continuously maintain and improve the programme. This process can be reviewed in more detail in the sections below.

[5] This full report is available to read on CDI's website at https://www.cdi.ie/app/uploads/2024/01/Evaluation-of-the-Early-Years-Programme-of-the-Childhood-Developm.pdf.
[6] This full report is available to read on CDI's website at https://www.cdi.ie/app/uploads/2024/05/evaluation-of-pp-1.pdf.

3. METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This section provides an overview of the programme data collection processes, the measures used to assess parental resilience and coping skills, the home learning environment, and programme benefits, and data analysis. This is some of the important context that was considered when CDI interpreted the statistical results.

3. 1 Data Collection and Participants

a. Parent Carer Facilitator Reports

PCFs routinely collect output data while implementing programme activities and interventions. Each PCF submits a report to CDI every two to three months, detailing their progress and outputs achieved. The key output areas collected in PCF reports include referrals made to external services and agencies for both the parents and their children (such as financial, mental health and speech and language services); parental attendance at engagement activities (including home visits, coffee mornings and family mornings); observed changes in parents; and the emerging needs of the parents and children. While referral data were logged as either being for the parent or child to better understand the support utilised, this was difficult to clean and collate, as referrals were often incorrectly double counted by being labelled as for both the parent and child. Despite this difficulty, the data presented below is accurate and does not include accidental double counting.

b. Parent Surveys

Parents were invited by the PCFs to complete a survey online through an email and/or WhatsApp link. The survey was completely optional and administered at the beginning of the academic year (between September and November 2023)

and at the end of the academic year (between May and June 2024). Of note, although the seventh service that ended its work with CDI had hosted a PCF through November, no data were collected from that service. These surveys assessed the achievement of key elements explained below, and full details are provided in Appendix I: Parent Survey Assessments. Key elements of the parent survey are:

i.   Me and My Family:
This segment of the survey collected parent/child demographics and household characteristics at the beginning and end of the programme to gain an understanding of the parents engaging with the service. This includes information on ethnicity, primary language, disabilities, parents' gender, age, parent(s) working status and educational attainment, type of household (one or two parents), marital status, accommodation type, refugee status, and health insurance status[7].

ii. Parental resilience:
Parental resilience was measured in both pre– and post–surveys using the adapted Comprehensive Scale for Parenting Resilience and Adaptation (CPRA) scale, which consists of several sub scales for dimensions of parenting resilience and adaptation. The **Powerful Parenting** survey included one dimension of the CPRA; the Psychological Adaptation to Parenting Scale (PAPS) (Sugao et al., 2022) as this was identified as relevant to key programme outcomes. PAPS consists of 19 questions grouped into five key dimensions, assessed on a 5–point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These five subscales are: lack of self–confidence, possibility of coping*[8], love for child*, self–esteem*, and self–responsibility. Scores range from 19 to 95, with lower scores indicating stronger parental resilience and coping skills.

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[7]   Insurance status and medical cards can be used as a proxy for income status.

[8]   These dimensions are reverse scored, so that the scores range from 5 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree).

iii. Home Learning Environment

The Home Learning Environment Index (Melhuish et al., 2001) assesses the quality and nature of the learning environment provided by caregivers at home, and was measured in both pre- and post-surveys. The scale consists of seven questions and is scored based on the number of days the child engages in a home learning activity each week relevant to their age. There are two versions of the Home Learning Environment (HLE): the Toddler Home Learning Environment (THLE) for parents of children under 36 months and the Early Years Home Learning Environment (EYHLE) for parents of children aged between 3–7 years. Scores for both the THLE and the EYHLE range between 0 to 49, with higher scores indicating a more positive home learning environment.

iv. Benefits of the Powerful Parenting Programme:

Six potential benefits were assessed in the post-survey as follows: improvement in parent's involvement in their child's learning and development; parent's coping skills; parenting skills; parental mental health; parent's ability to deal with the stress of parenthood, and 'other' benefits. A multi-response question at the end of the survey also offered an opportunity to capture how parents felt they benefitted from the programme, particularly beyond those measured.

v. Thoughts about the Powerful Parenting Programme

In the post-survey, parents were asked two questions about the quality of interaction with the PCFs and the quality of parental support offered by PCFs. These two questions used a 5-point Likert scale with the rating options: Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, and Excellent. In addition, parents were asked an open-ended question for feedback and potential ways to improve the programme.

c. Programme Participants:

A total of 74 parents across five ECEC settings completed the pre-survey with **Powerful Parenting**, while 54 parents across five ECEC settings completed a post-survey. Due to issues with staff vacancies, one ECEC setting did not collect pre-survey data, while another setting did not collect post-survey data. After matching pre- and post-data sets, there were 26 sets of data from parents across four ECEC settings available for full analysis. As demographic data was gathered in both pre- and post-surveys, all available, non-duplicate demographic data (n=101) was utilised to understand current characteristics of the **Powerful Parenting** community.

d. Parental Surveys–Short Interventions

There were two short interventions implemented in the 2023/24 programme year that CDI attempted to assess.

i. Infant Massage

Parents who took part in Infant Massage courses were invited to complete a survey in the first week of the course, and again in the last or second to last week of the course. The survey used the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) which consists of 14 questions about parents' mental wellbeing in the last two weeks. Parents were also asked an open question at the end of the survey, allowing them to offer any comments about the course.

Intervention Participants:

29 parents completed the survey at the beginning of the Infant Massage course, and seven completed it at the end. Only six parents completed both surveys, so these data will not be analysed because numbers are too small to have confidence in the results. However, responses to the open-ended question will be used to provide general feedback and participant quotes.

ii. Parents Plus

Parents were invited to complete a survey during the first week and the fifth or sixth week of the course. Parent Plus Early Years was evaluated using an adapted Tool to measure Parenting Self–Efficacy (TOPSE) consisting of three subscales: play and enjoyment; discipline and setting boundaries; and learning and knowledge. Parents were also asked an open question at the end of the survey to offer any comments about the course overall.

Intervention Participants

Only one parent completed a survey at the beginning of the course, and no surveys at the end were received, so there were not enough data for analysis.

3.2 Data Analysis

The PCF reports were collated to track programme outputs, identify commonly observed changes in parents, and the emerging needs of families. All data from the parental surveys were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel.[9]

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[9] Statistical tests conducted include frequency tables, descriptive analyses, and Wilcoxon signed rank tests, as the data violated the assumption of abnormality.

4. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

This section is an overview of the statistical data analysis. Demographic information, such as gender and ethnicity, are provided as additional context to consider when interpreting the results. The statistical tests that were used looked at **differences** between key outcomes at the beginning and end of the programme and determine how **likely** it is that these differences exist due to natural differences in people. When a result is statistically **significant**, that means there was less than a 5% chance that these differences were due to natural differences. A significant difference is some of the evidence that would suggest that **Powerful Parenting** contributed to the change in parent outcomes. All results must be interpreted together and within the context of the

community to fully understand the programme's impact. Please refer to the Discussion of Findings section for full interpretation. In this report, "n =" means the number of participants.

4.1 Parents' Profile

A total of 101 participants provided demographic data. Please refer to Appendix II: Demographic Breakdowns for full demographic information. Characteristics of these parents and families are shown in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1: Parents' Demographics (n=101)

Parent Gender — Male 16%, Female 84%

Parent Age — 35–44 48%, 25–34 39%, 24 or younger 4%, 45–64 9%

Parent Ethnicity — Non-White Background 16%, Other White Background 16%, Irish 68%

Figure 2: Family Demographics

Types of Parents (*n*=101) — Caregiver/Guardian 1%, Father 13%, Mother 86%

Family Primary Language (*n*=100) — Not English 26%, English 74%

Parent Relationship (*n*=95) — Cohabitating 28%, Married 48%, Single 14%, Separated/Divorced/Living Alone 10%

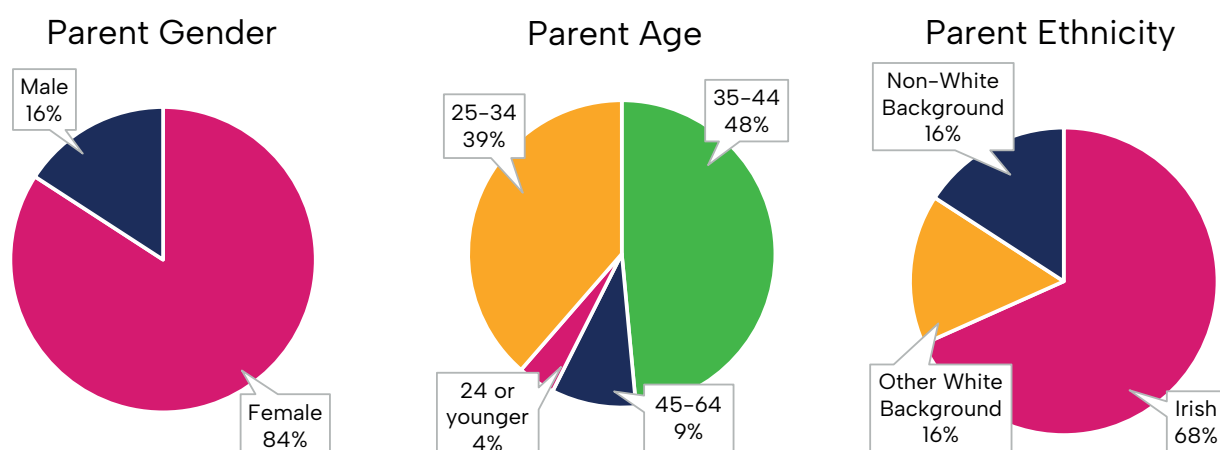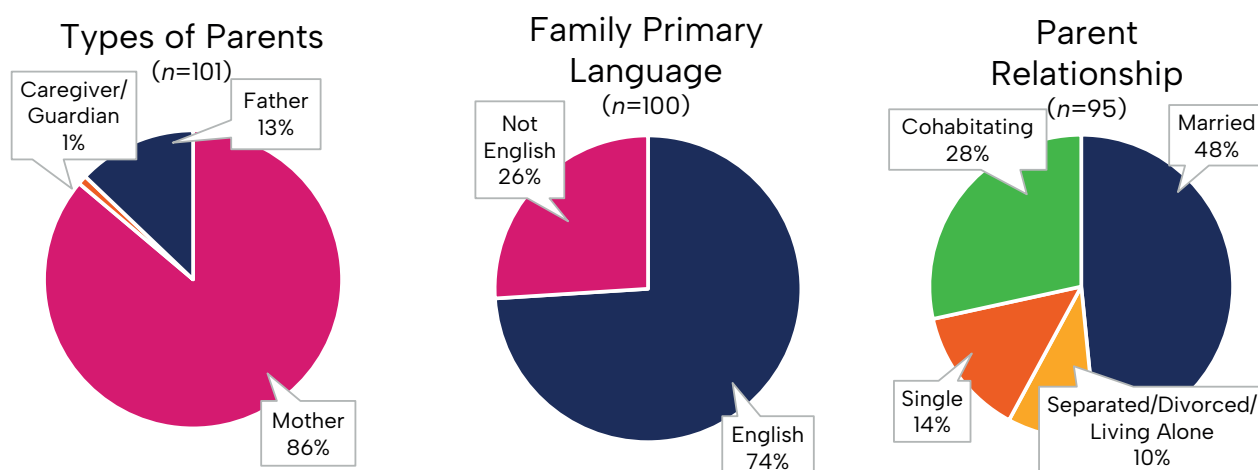## 4.2 PCF Reports: Programme Outputs

Parent engagement activities

The PCFs implemented various Parent Engagement Activities (PEAs), including conducting home visits, organising family mornings, coffee mornings, parent and toddler groups, and one-to-one meetings with parents. Throughout the academic year, the number of parents who could avail of support and activities led by a PCF varied, depending on programme staffing levels. For example, at times of peak staff vacancies the parents of 163 children within the ECEC services could avail of support, which increased to the parents of 181 children having access to PCF support when there were higher numbers of PCFs in post. Similarly, PCF support was available to parents attending weekly parent and toddler groups, some of whom did not yet have children within an ECEC setting. The parents of between 163 and 181 children across six ECEC services participated in at least one activity during the year. Detailed below are the instances of attendance or participation, which likely includes double counting (i.e., multiple instances of attendance by the same parent).

Home visits were undertaken as needed by PCFs, and involved visiting the family in their own environment, providing support, and discussing any issues concerning the child and the family. 68 home visits were conducted this year, with PCFs supporting parents in relation to mental health, delivering food and clothes hampers, sharing information about how to access specialist services, providing support to parents with children who have additional needs, and delivering welcome packs to families with new babies. PCFs reported that parents were welcoming of the visits and that the approach helped with the development of positive relationships.

The most popular PEA was family mornings, where 38 different sessions were held to provide a space for parents to engage in activities with their children, while also fostering community among families. PCFs organised different activities for family mornings, including family fun days, Christmas events, Easter events, outings to the farm, and end-of-year celebrations. There were 554 total instances of attendance from mothers, 336 from fathers, and 109 from other attendees.

One-to-one sessions were another key mechanism in reaching parents and are essential for discussing specific family or child-related concerns. The PCFs usually met with parents to discuss how their child was settling into the service to build relationships, link parents to other services provided by CDI or in the wider community, and to support with form-filling. There were 263 individual meetings, with 204 sessions held with mothers, 57 with fathers and two other caregivers.

PCFs organised 25 coffee mornings to create opportunities for informal support and shared learning among parents, noting that parents often discussed parenting themes such as school readiness or toilet training. There were 251 total instances of attendance from mothers, 78 from fathers, and 10 from other family members.

Parent and toddler sessions were delivered throughout the academic year, providing opportunities for peer relationships, informal support and advice sharing between parents and by PCFs. Attendance was not recorded for parent and toddler groups in this academic year, but on average between four to eight parents attended each weekly session. Some of these parents would have had children registered with the ECEC service, but parent and toddler groups also engage parents whose children are not yet old enough to have commenced engagement in an ECEC.

The final category of PEAs is other events, which captures holiday parties, Paediatric First Aid classes, Smoothie Bikes and Dad's lunches, Building Baby from Head-to-Toe workshops, and any other event not captured by the other categories. There were 28 other events, with a total of 186 instances of attendance by mothers, 102 by fathers, and 28 from other family members. Refer to Figure 3 below for breakdown of the sessions for home visits and PEAs over the year.

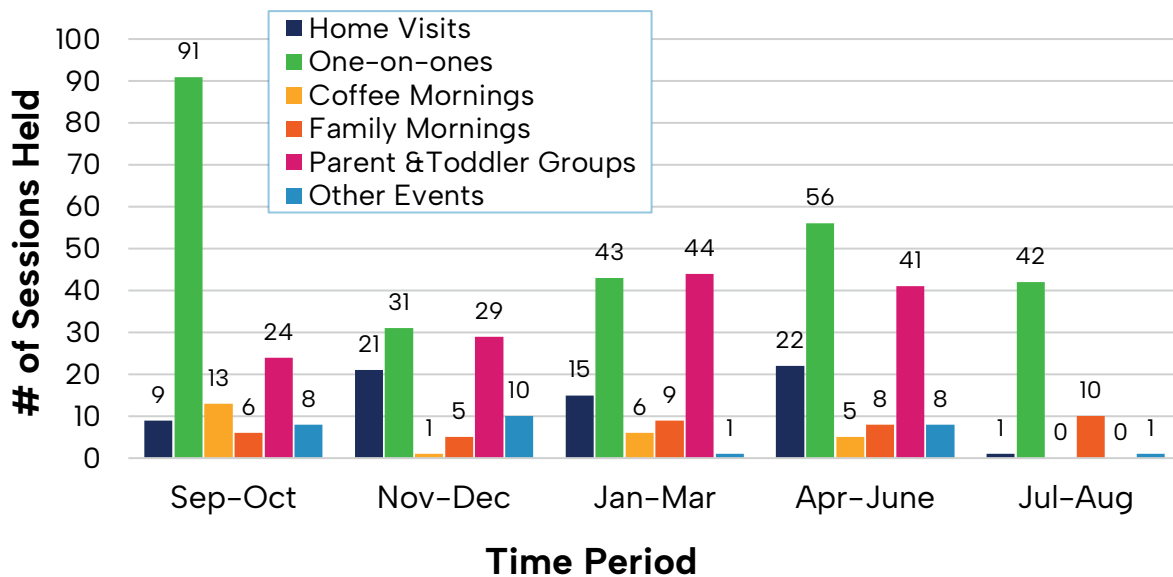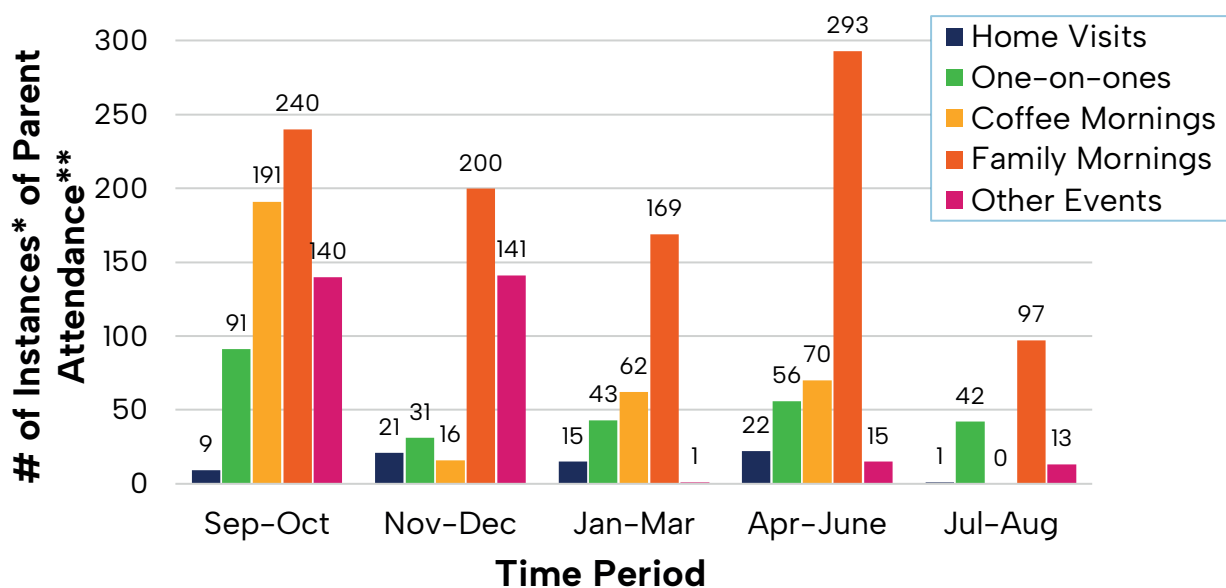**Figure 3: Parental Engagement Activity (PEA) Session**

Figure 4: Parental Engagement Activity (PEA) Attendance

Note.

* Data are presented as instances of attendance because parents can attend multiple group sessions and receive multiple home visits or one-on-ones, and therefore these numbers do not represent total parents engaged.

** Attendance was not recorded for the Parent & Toddler Groups.

Linking parents and children with available resources in the community

Linking parents with resources in the community is a key part of the PCF role. The PCFs completed 182 referrals for financial support, mental health support, assessments of need for children, parenting support, speech and language therapy, and education, learning, and behavioural support. Seventy–five of these referrals were for children and 107 for parents. Refer to Figure 5 below for breakdown of referrals made during the academic year.

Figure 5: Number of referrals
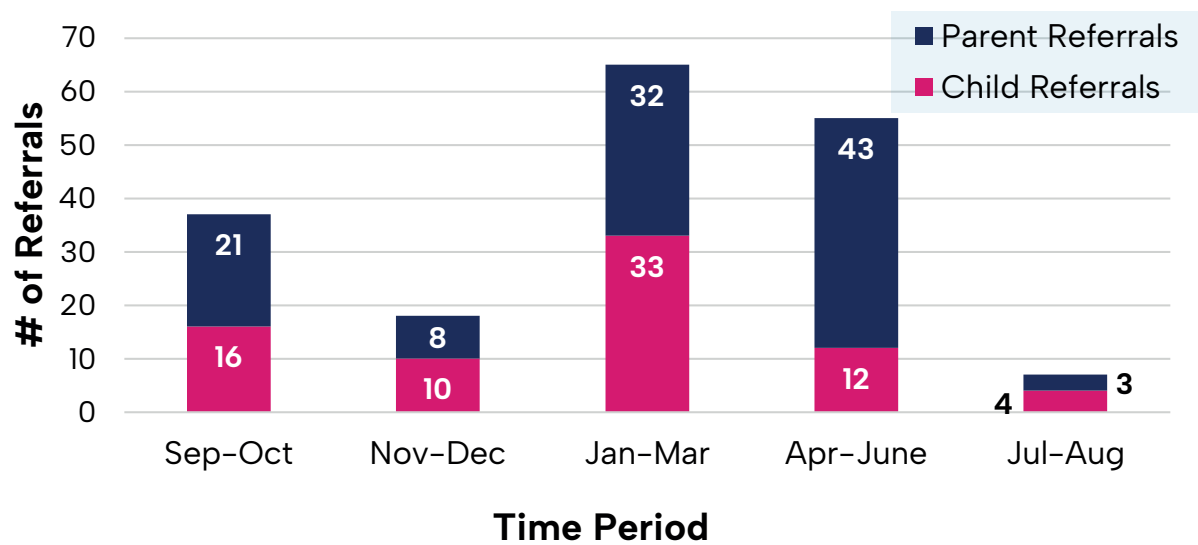
4.3 PCF Reports: The Emerging Needs of Families

PCFs provide periodic reports on the emerging needs of the families they support. These can be summarised as offering crucial support in navigating transitions, addressing immediate needs (e.g., food, clothing, emotional support), and fostering community connections. Persistent financial and social challenges remained significant strains, particularly for vulnerable families, as detailed below.

September to December 2023
There was an increase in families new to Ireland, with many engaging with early years services for the first time. The PCF team facilitated transitions from home to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) by strengthening relationships among parents, educators, and children, and creating a welcoming space for families. For returning families, the focus was on transitioning children to primary school and accessing school places. PCFs supported children with additional needs through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) application process and goal–setting with families. The team also offered assistance with forms, and funding applications (e.g., the National Childcare Scheme: NCS). Language barriers created challenges in helping children adjust to school.

After the Hallowe'en midterm break, PCFs noted increased emotional and financial strain amongst parents, particularly those parenting alone. Families faced pressures from life events such as separations, legal proceedings, health issues, and social challenges. The observed impact of these issues on some children was stress and behavioural concerns, including aggression. Barriers to accessing services were identified during this period, with long waiting lists for public services leading some families to pursue costly private assessments. Knowledge gaps among parents about the Irish education system were also noted.

January to March 2024
At the start of 2024, PCFs noted emerging needs in relation to food poverty, mental health support, and assistance with clothing. Parents also sought help with behavioural concerns and parenting skills. Parents presented with high levels of stress related to children transitioning to primary school or other services. Immigrant families reported feeling isolated due to rising living costs and limited travel opportunities, so PCFs organised social events to foster community connections. PCFs continued offering support for families experiencing separation, economic strain, and personal hardship.

April to June 2024
PCFs noted increased responsiveness to the supports provided to parents and families during this period. Families continued to face challenges in relation to food poverty, housing insecurity, addiction, depression, behavioural issues in children, parenting struggles, and domestic violence. PCFs noted some emerging needs in relation to social isolation among ethnic minority mothers and community safety issues, including open drug exchanges and concerns about older children's involvement in drug-related activity.

4.4 PCF Reports: The Observed Impact of the Powerful Parenting Programme

The PCFs reported that parents expressed more confidence in their children's readiness for the move to primary school. They credited the activities provided by the early years educators since Christmas for helping their children develop the skills necessary to transition successfully. The PCFs also reported strong engagement from parents in early years' activities, particularly for children with additional needs who were transitioning to primary school.

Parents demonstrated increased confidence and social skills, improved parenting abilities, and greater participation in events for both children and adults. Many parents appeared happier and more independent, often taking the initiative to source additional help or services for themselves or their children. This increased engagement was particularly noticeable among families preparing for their children to start primary school. Parents appeared to be more emotionally ready after participating in school readiness meetings and receiving guidance from PCFs on preparing their children for the transition.

4.5 Parental Surveys

Twenty-six parents completed surveys at both the start and end of the academic term, and so analysis of parental resilience and home learning environment only included data from these families. Of note, as two parents from the same family completed both surveys, the data are representative of 25 families. Characteristics of these parents are shown in figures below (Figure 6: Parental survey parent demographics), and refer to Appendix II: Demographic Breakdowns for full details.

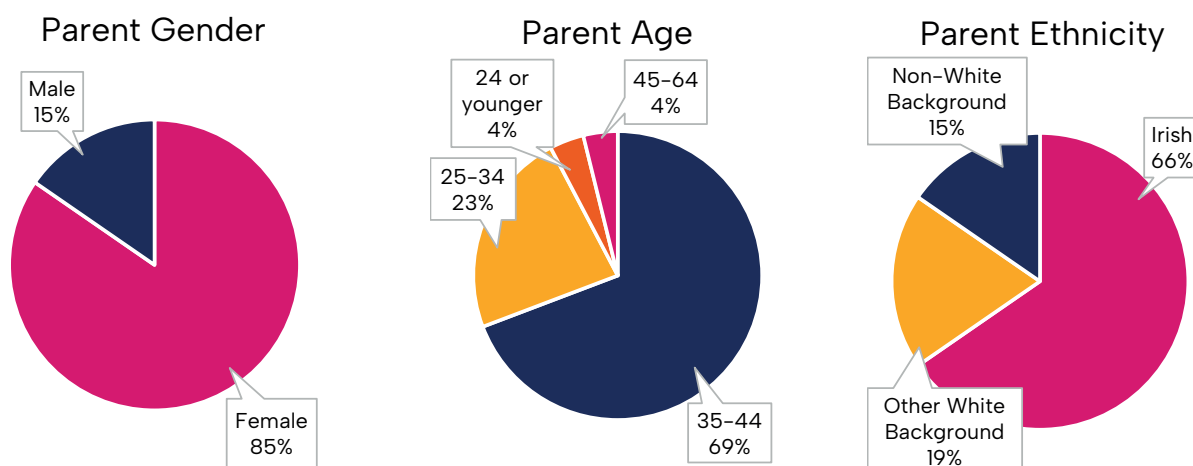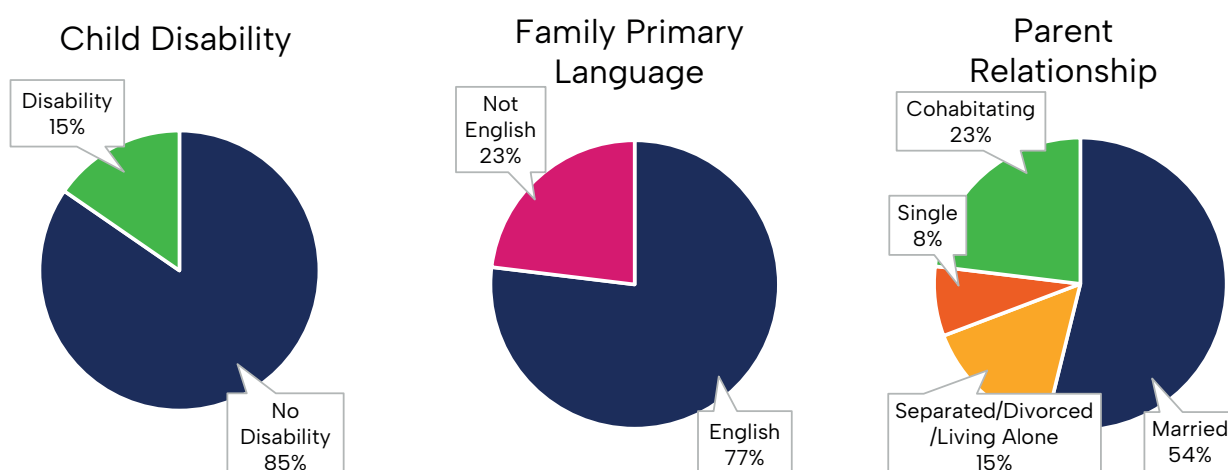**Figure 6: Parental Survey Parent Demographics (n=26)**

Parent Gender

- Male 15%
- Female 85%

Parent Age

- 24 or younger 4%
- 25–34 23%
- 35–44 69%
- 45–64 4%

Parent Ethnicity

- Non–White Background 15%
- Irish 66%
- Other White Background 19%

Figure 7: Parental Survey Family Demographics (n=26)

Child Disability

- Disability 15%
- No Disability 85%

Family Primary Language

- Not English 23%
- English 77%

Parent Relationship

- Cohabitating 23%
- Single 8%
- Separated/Divorced /Living Alone 15%
- Married 54%

Parental resilience

One of the intended outcomes of the **Powerful Parenting Programme** is to improve parent's resilience and coping skills. In the pre – survey, the median parental resilience score was 41 (IQR[10] = 13.5) and after completing the post survey, it was 38 (IQR=13.5). While this decrease in scores indicates that resilience may have improved in parents, there was not a significant[11] difference[12].

Home Learning Environment

While there were not enough data to analyse for the Toddler's Home Learning Environment (up to the age of 36 months), there were 21 matching sets of data for the Early Years Home Learning Environment (EYHLE) for preschoolers aged 3–7 years. At the beginning of the programme, the median score was 36 (IQR = 8.5), and at the end of the programme, the median score was 34 (IQR = 12), however, there was no significant[13] difference[14].

[10] IQR stands for interquartile range, which is a statistical term used with non–normally distributed data. About 50% of a population's scores above and below the median should fall within this range.

[11] $p = 0.421$; $Z = -8.04$

[12] Resilience scores violated the assumption of the data following a normal distribution, so data were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed–Rank Sum test.

[13] $p = 0.925$; $Z = -0.09$

[14] Home learning environment scores violated the assumption of the data following a normal distribution, so data were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed–Rank Sum test.

Benefits of the Programme

At the end of the programme, parents were asked how **Powerful Parenting** had benefitted them. There were 54 responses received, and as these data were only collected at the end, all responses were included. Please refer to Figure 7 below for full breakdown.

Figure 7: Self–Reported Benefits
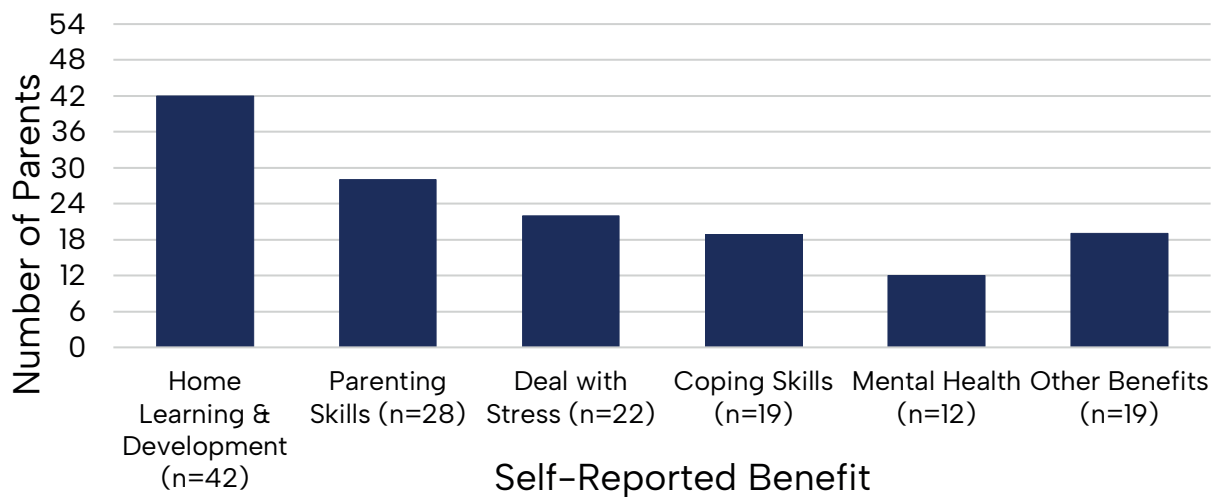
Of these 54 respondents, no one reported no benefits of the programme; 38.9% (*n*=21) reported they had gained in one area, 35.2% (*n*=19) reported gaining 2–3 benefits, and 26% (*n*=14) reported gaining four or more benefits. Please refer to Figure 8 below for full breakdown.

Figure 8: Total Benefits Gained for Participants
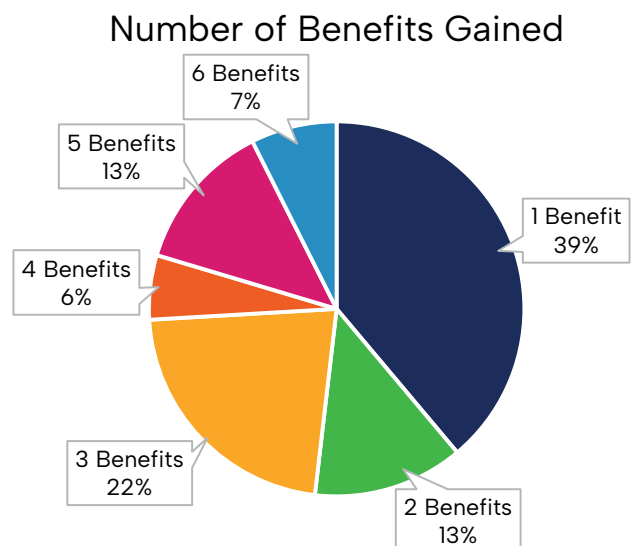
Parents' Views of the Quality of their Supports

On completion of the academic year, parents were asked about the quality of interactions with the PCFs, and the quality of parental supports offered, with 52 participants providing feedback. Regarding the quality of interactions with the PCFs, 98.1% (n=51) of parents reported that it was either good, very good, or excellent; with 73.1% of parents reporting the quality as excellent. Regarding the quality of supports provided, 96.2% (n=50) reported that it was either good, very good, or excellent; with 67.3% of parents reporting the quality as excellent. Participants were also asked for feedback and ways to improve the programme in an open question, and most respondents reported that they were satisfied with the programme and felt there was no need for improvement. Some key quotes from parents are provided below.

> *When starting this I wasn't coping very well with my child who is still waiting to be diagnosed with autism. I feel this really got us both out and support we needed to cope better and also just nice to chat and meet with other mammies.*

> *Baby toddler group was a great support. I really enjoyed the baby massage as well. It was lovely to have those things and they helped give a routine and something to look forward to. We also got to attend a baby music class which was enjoyed by both myself and my son.*

While there were not enough data from the measures used for the Infant Massage class to analyse, participants did share their thoughts using open–ended questions. Some of the quotes are shared below.

> *Brilliant programme, coordinators were excellent. It was so lovely to get a chance to have dedicated bonding time with my baby once a week.*

> *Really enjoyed the company and relaxed setting in this programme. Feels good to engage with other mothers in the community.*

> *Really helpful and it has been incorporated in my baby's daily routine.*

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The 2023/2024 academic year saw the continued application of the **Powerful Parenting Programme** in seven ECEC services in Dublin 24 and in the wider community through a team of seven PCFs. Due to challenges with response rates and attrition in data collection before and after the programme, this report was largely descriptive, and most of the data provided were from the PCFs, such as recorded observations and records of attendance. While both parental resilience and parental engagement in children's learning (HLE) were measured, there was no statistically significant improvement in either. All of the parents who completed surveys at the end of the year reported gaining at least one benefit, with almost half reporting that they gained three or more benefits. Almost all parents receiving PCF support also reported that quality of interactions and the quality of supports offered by the PCFs were good, very good, or excellent.

This was the first year that parental resilience was measured, and while the measure chosen is relevant to key outcomes of **Powerful Parenting**, it is important to note that available measures were limited. The chosen measure has not yet been validated with fathers and caretake/guardians, and has only been validated in Japanese, not English. It is possible that the resilience measure itself is not fully adequate for detecting parental resilience in the Irish community. While no comparable research was found for parental resilience, there is research comparable for HLE from another CDI programme, Doodle Families, as well as from a recent study utilising data from the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study. Doodle Families is an eight–week family literacy programme for families with children 6–7 years of age that aims to increase parental involvement in their children's learning and development. In the 2023/24 programme year, the median HLE score in Doodle Families (pre = 30; post = 31.5) respondents was lower than those engaging with **Powerful Parenting** (pre = 36; post = 34). Neither programme had

a significant improvement in HLE. While it is not clear why **Powerful Parenting** had higher scores, a major difference between the two groups is that **Powerful Parenting** works with parents of children before they enter primary school, and Doodle Families works with children that have entered primary school.

McMullin and colleagues (2020) calculated a national average score of home learning activities (HLA) from GUI's first cohort wave of children at three years old, utilising scores from the first six questions of the HLE measure (the analysis above used seven questions). They found the national average HLA score was 29.3, and when the **Powerful Parenting** HLE data were calculated using only HLA questions (first six questions), the average was 29.8 at the beginning, and 29.0 at the end of the programme. This indicates that the current **Powerful Parenting** families are on par with national averages, but programme impact cannot be determined because there was no way to differentiate data that came from families that had just joined this year, from families that had received support for years. Regardless, these are encouraging results as socio–economic disadvantage has been linked with lower rates of HLA than national norms in Ireland (Kent & Pitsia, 2018). Higher HLE scores are associated with better vocabulary and can compensate for the negative effects of family educational disadvantage on language development (McGinnity et al., 2017).

Those engaging with **Powerful Parenting** become more international when compared to the previous year, with 14% fewer participants reporting as Irish (68% vs. 82%), and about one in four parents reported primarily speaking a language other than English with their child, a 10% increase from the previous year (26% vs. 16%). PCFs reported that they continued to support parents and families with issues caused by poverty,

such as access to basic resources like food and clothes, mental and physical health issues, and typical community needs like navigating life transitions, and fostering community connections. They also reported responding to needs explicitly involved with supporting a more diverse community, such language differences causing difficulties with children transitioning into school, gaps in knowledge about the Irish school system, and feelings of isolation during the winter holidays. There was also an increase in attendance by fathers in parental engagement activities, such as one–to–one meetings, coffee mornings, family events and other events, from the previous academic year. When attendance of fathers (573 instances of father attendance) was compared to the previous academic year (316 instances of father attendance), there was an 81% increase in attendance by fathers. The PCF team have persistently promoted the importance of father's involvement in children's learning and development, employing various practical strategies to reinforce this message, and encourage fathers and male role models to engage in young children's lives.

Because of the merge of the Antenatal to Three Initiative (ATTI) and **Powerful Parenting** programmes, supports for parents antenatally and with children aged under three years were offered through parent and toddler groups, infant massage training, parenting workshops, and other events and activities carried out by the PCF team. However, the impact of these activities has not been fully explored, with some parents receiving supports from the programme not being included in evaluation and feedback mechanisms. For example, some parents who attend parent and toddler groups do not yet have children in the ECEC setting, so many of these parents would not have been invited to take the parental survey. In addition to this, insufficient data were collected from the various short interventions to

allow analysis, so current feedback mechanisms were unable to be fully utilised. Issues with data collection for group parenting interventions is a known challenge across other ABC sites and family support services in Ireland due to inconsistent and low attendance, and drop–off of participation at the end.

The low return of surveys has been an ongoing issue, with the challenge in gathering adequate matching data recurring since 2020. The highest sample collected was 43 in the 2020/2021 academic year, but was generally in the 30s. While more data are gathered in the pre– and post–intervention surveys (generally around 50–70 each), these numbers are still below 50% of programme participation. **Powerful Parenting** targets vulnerable families who are often dealing with significant stress and poverty related issues, and as is frequently noted by the PCFs, some parents are distrustful and fearful of services. Current data collection methods require non–anonymous data collection, the survey is long (around 50–60 questions), and it requires parents submitting data both at the beginning and end of the year. This methodology is standard with CDI's programmes and creates more rigorous and strong data for analysis. However, for **Powerful Parenting**, there has not been adequate data collection to confidently generalise findings, and lower percentages of matched data compared to total participants than other programmes further add to these limitations. Building trust with PCFs is recognised as an influencing factor, but data collection was higher in the pre–surveys (74) compared to post–surveys (54), suggesting that time to build trust over time does not increase participant responses. While the PCFs can provide rich anecdotal and qualitative data, and parents feedback about programme benefits and quality of PCF supports in the post–survey was adequate, the low return of surveys limits monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

Powerful Parenting has a progressive, universalistic design[15] and a multi–modal approach, offering activities aimed at achieving different outcomes to all parents of children attending the ECEC services and local community. The programme also acts as a bridge to other services and supports through PCFs assisting with referrals to external services. However, the current surveys did not measure for dosage of intervention to determine to what extent parents have engaged, and how long they have engaged in the available supports. The programme is needs–led and full engagement is not the goal, as engagement is led by the needs, availability, and will of parents. Some parents may not be able to engage as much due to instability in their lives, increased work schedules, or caring responsibilities, and it can take over a year for PCFs to build a sufficiently strong relationship with parents to enable them to fully engage. A key foundation for providing parental supports is the development of rapport and a trusting relationship with parents. Feedback from these parents is valued and needed, but they may not show improvements on key outcomes or attend activities for some time, if at all.

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[15] CORU is Ireland's health regulator. All Speech and Language Therapists must register with its Therapy Board, which maintains the professional register, approves training, and sets conduct and practice standards.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review of findings above along with discussion points, the following recommendations are:

- As the PCF team begin to engage more with expectant and new parents whose children are not attending an ECEC services, PCF progress reports should be revised to ensure these and expectant parents, newly referred parents, and parents who have previously participated, are clearly documented to better analyse quality of supports and impacts across different key developmental periods, and the overall impact of the programme.

- Considering the importance of PCFs building relationships with parents in the programme, gathering data to capture this essential work and progression of relationships should be included.

- The recording of referrals to external services or agencies should be amended to counting family referrals rather than individual children and so avoid accidental double–counting.

- Attendance of Parent and Toddler groups should be recorded.

- Parental surveys should collect self–reported dosage of supports availed of during the academic year, at the end of the year.

- Given the increase in English as a second language for families, parental surveys should collect data on languages spoken to determine how CDI can better accommodate international parents.

- CDI should re–evaluate how the Powerful Parenting Programme is monitored, particularly data collection processes, and alter the analysis plan as needed to better fit the needs of the community and to increase responses from parents.

- The promotion of dads and male role models in children's lives should continue to be a consistent focus of the PCF team and the ECEC services that we partner with.

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Appendix I: Parent Survey Assessments

Table 1: Parental Resilience Questionnaire

Subscale/Question					
Lack of Self–Confidence					
I have a lot of concerns about parenting	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Sometimes I don't know what to do about parenting	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I often get lost when raising children, and I'm worried whether it's correct	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I'm not confident in myself	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Possibility of Coping					
I feel that I have time to spend freely*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that I get relaxed for any length of time*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I release my stress moderately*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think I manage my time well*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Love for the Child					
I love my children*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I strongly want to protect my children*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Having children makes me feel warm*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Subscale/Question					
Self–Esteem					
I can overcome difficulties*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am able to do what is good for my child's health*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can understand my feelings by myself*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am proud of myself raising a child*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Self–Responsibility					
I think it's my fault that my child doesn't stop crying	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel like my child's cry is blaming me	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel empty when I'm raising a child	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel like I'm not valued	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Note.
* Indicated questions that are reverse scored (i.e. 5–1, as opposed to 1–5).

Table 2: Early Years Home Learning Environment (EYHLE)

Subscale/Question								
On how many days in an average week does…								
…anyone at home read to the child?	0 days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
…anyone at home help the child learn the ABC or alphabet?	0 days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
…anyone at home help the child learn numbers or counting?	0 days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
…does anyone at home help the child learn songs, poems or nursery rhymes?	0 days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
…anyone play games [board games, jigsaws, card games etc] with the child?	0 days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
…the child paint, draw, colour, or play with playdough at home?	0 days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
…anyone at home play active games with the child (e.g., football)?	0 days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
About how many children's books does the child have access to in your home now, including any library books? Would you estimate	None		Less than 10 books		10 to 20 books		21 to 30 books	More than 30 books

Table 3: Benefits of Programme

What have you gained from the Powerful Parenting programme?	
The programme has helped me find ways to improve my child's learning and development at home	☐
The programme has helped me to improve my parenting skills	☐
The programme has helped me to improve my coping skills	☐
The programme has helped me to develop better mental health	☐
The programme has helped me to deal with the stresses and challenges of parenthood	☐
The programme has helped me in other way	☐
Any comments about the programme: what worked well? areas for improvement?	[Open Response]

Appendix II: Demographic Breakdowns

Table 4: Total Demographic Breakdown

Demographic Category	Number*	Percentage**
Parent Gender	n=101	
Female	85	84.2%
Male	16	15.8%
Parent Age	n=101	
24 or younger	*	4%
25–34	39	38.6%
35–44	49	48.5%
45–64	9	8.9%
Parent Ethnic Breakdown	n=101	
Irish	69	68.3%
Any other white background	16	15.8%
Black African	***	1%
Asian Indian/ Pakistan/ Bangladesh	8	7.9%
Any Other Asian Background	***	2%
Latinx	***	1%
Other	***	4%
Child Ethnic Breakdown	n=98	
Irish	69	70.4%
Any Other White Background	14	14.3%
Black African	***	1%
Asian Indian/Pakistan/Bangladesh	6	6.1%
Any Other Asian Background	***	2%
Other	6	6.1%

Demographic Category	Number*	Percentage**
Primary Language Spoken with Child	n=100	
English	74	74%
Other Language	26	26%
Marital Status	n=95	
Married	46	48.4%
Relationship (Living Together)	27	28.4%
Single (Never Married)	13	13.7%
Relationship (Not Living Together)	***	4.2%
Separated	***	4.2%
Divorced	***	1.1%
Disability	n=97	
Child has No Disability	84	86.6%
Child has Disability	11	11.3%
Unsure	***	2.1%
Education	n=88	
No Formal Education	***	1.1%
Primary Education	***	2.3%
Lower Secondary Education	7	8%
Upper Secondary Education	18	20.5%
Technical or Vocational Qualifications	10	11.4%
Non-degree Qualifications	8	9.1%
Professional Qualifications	9	10.2%
Third Level Bachelor's Degree	8	9.1%
Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma	10	11.4%
Postgraduate Degree	13	14.8%
Other	***	2.3%

Demographic Category	Number*	Percentage**
Employment	n=95	
Unable to work to due disability/sickness	***	1.1%
Student	***	1.1%
Unemployed	***	3.2%
Looking after home/family	24	25.3%
Part-time Employment	25	26.3%
Full-time Employment	38	40%
Other	***	3.2%
Accommodation	n=93	
Experiencing Homelessness	***	1.1%
Renting from Voluntary/Cooperative Housing Body	6	6.5%
Renting from Local Authority	22	23.7%
Renting from Private Landlord	25	26.9%
Living Rent-Free	***	1.1%
Own a Home with a Mortgage	35	37.6%
Own a Home Outright	***	1.1%
Other	***	2.2%
Refugee Status	n=98	
Not Refugee	96	98%
Refugee	***	1%
Don't Know	***	1%

Demographic Category	Number*	Percentage**
Insurance	n=92	
Full Medical Card	35	38%
Private Health Insurance	21	22.8%
No Health Coverage	29	31.5%
Medical Card and Private Insurance	***	4.3%
Other Health Coverage	***	3.3%

Note.

* Although 101 participants submitted demographic information, some participants selected "I prefer not to say" to some questions.

** Percentage is calculated from those that chose to answer each demographic category.

*** Numbers less than 5 are censored to avoid revealing potential identity of participants.

Table 5: Parental Survey Parent Demographic Breakdown

Demographic Category	Number*	Percentage**
Parent Gender	n=26	
Female	22	84.6%
Male	*	15.4%
Parent Age	n=26	
24 or younger	*	3.8%
25–34	6	23.1%
35–44	18	69.2%
45–64	*	3.8%
Parent Ethnic Breakdown	n=26	
Irish	17	65.4%
Any Other White Background	5	19.2%
Asian Indian/ Pakistan/ Bangladesh	***	7.7%
Latinx	***	3.8%
Other	***	3.8%
Child Ethnic Breakdown	n=26	
Irish	18	69.2%
Any other white background	5	19.2%
Asian Indian/ Pakistan/ Bangladesh	***	7.7%
Other	***	3.8%
Language	n=26	
English	20	76.9%
Other Language	6	23.1%

Demographic Category	Number*	Percentage**
Marital Status	n=26	
Married	14	53.8%
Relationship (Living Together)	6	23.1%
Single (Never Married)	***	7.7%
Relationship (Not Living Together)	***	3.8%
Separated	***	7.7%
Divorced	***	3.8%
Disability	n=26	
Child has No Disability	22	84.6%
Child has Disability	***	15.4%
Education	n=25	
Primary Education	***	8%
Lower Secondary Education	***	8%
Upper Secondary Education	5	20%
Technical or Vocational Qualifications	***	8%
Non-degree Qualifications	***	8%
Professional Qualifications	***	16%
Third Level Bachelor's Degree	***	8%
Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma	***	8%
Postgraduate Degree	***	16%

Demographic Category	Number*	Percentage**
Employment	n=25	
Unable to work to due disability/sickness	***	4%
Student	***	4%
Unemployed	***	8%
Looking after home/family	5	20%
Part–time Employment	***	16%
Full–time Employment	12	48%
Accommodation	n=24	
Renting from Voluntary/Cooperative Housing Body	***	4.2%
Renting from Local Authority	***	16.7%
Renting from Private Landlord	6	25%
Own a Home with a Mortgage	12	50%
Own a Home Outright	***	4.2%
Refugee Status	n=26	
Not Refugee	26	100%
Insurance	n=24	
Full Medical Card	10	41.7%
Private Health Insurance	6	25%
No Health Coverage	6	25%
Medical Card and Private Insurance	***	4.2%
Other Health Coverage	***	4.2%

Note.

* Although 26 participants submitted demographic information, some participants selected "I prefer not to say" to some questions.

** Percentage is calculated from those that chose to answer each demographic category.

*** Numbers less than 5 are censored to avoid revealing potential identity of participants.