Rainbows Ireland

Supporting Children and Young People with Bereavement and Parental Separation

ANNUAL REPORT

2024/2025



The Community Foundation for Ireland

TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Mental Health Ireland

Registered Charity No. 12507

"I am not the only one."
"We are not the only ones."





Rainbows Ireland

Supporting Children and Young People with
Bereavement and Parental Separation

TALK TO US

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Scan for more details:

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OUR VISION

Our vision is that the grief experienced by children and young people in Ireland, following a significant loss in their lives through bereavement, parental separation or divorce, is recognised and that they are offered the understanding and support necessary to foster emotional well-being.

OUR MISSION

Rainbows Ireland works to enable children and young people who have experienced a significant loss to access peer support. This support happens within their local communities as they seek to come to terms with their grief and loss.

OUR PLAN

Aim: To establish, maintain and support a national network of Registered Rainbows centres, where trained Facilitators support children and young people through the Rainbows peer group support.

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ABOUT RAINBOWS IRELAND

OUR BOARD

Ray Watson – Chair

Ray Watson currently serves as Chair of the Board, having previously held the position of Deputy Chair. He has played a pivotal role on the Management Sub-Committee, advising the CEO on strategic policy, development, and HR matters. Ray also contributed to the Review Group, supporting the redevelopment of Rainbows Programmes and Training. A former primary school teacher, Ray was instrumental in launching Rainbows in a large Dublin school and later became a Registered Director and Trainer.

Paul Kenny – Board Member

Paul Kenny has been a long-standing and deeply committed supporter of Rainbows Ireland. With a professional background and extensive experience, Paul has contributed significantly to the organisation's development over many years.

Having previously served as Chair of the Board, Paul continues to offer invaluable insights and leadership, which are greatly appreciated by the entire team.

Cian Gleeson – Board Member

Cian Gleeson joined the Board in 2019. At the time, he was a primary school principal in Dublin and is now Deputy Principal of a special school in Dublin 7. His interest in Rainbows was sparked during his studies in counselling and psychotherapy. Cian holds a diploma in Adult Counselling and Psychotherapy and a Master's in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapeutic Skills.

Joan Conlan – Board Member

Joan Conlan joined the Board in 2023. Her involvement with Rainbows began in 1992 as a trained facilitator in Kildare Town. She later became a local coordinator for Kildare Town and Newbridge and served as a Regional Director, supporting multiple centres. Joan has been a longstanding member of the training team, delivering facilitator training and continuing to support new facilitators across the country.

Clive Waldron – Treasurer
Clive Waldron joined Rainbows Ireland in November 2022 and currently serves as Treasurer. He brings over 38 years of experience from his career with Bank of Ireland and has previously served as Chair of Carlow District Credit Union. Clive plays a key role in overseeing the organisation's financial governance.

Dr. Paula Kennedy-Flynn – Board Member
Dr. Paula Kennedy-Flynn joined the Board in September 2023, initially as a staff member and later as a trustee appointee in early 2024. She provides expert guidance on qualitative research methodologies, with a focus on ethically and authentically including children's voices. Paula is a professor and academic researcher in inclusive education, with a background in teaching, school leadership, and pastoral care. Her work aligns closely with Rainbows' mission to support children experiencing loss and change.

Jade Fitzgerald – Board Member
Jade Fitzgerald joined the Board in December 2021. A former participant in the Rainbows programme, Jade brings a unique and personal perspective to her role. She holds a BA (Hons) in Social Care Practice and a Level 7 qualification in Addiction Studies. Jade has worked extensively in the disability, mental health, and child protection sectors and is currently an Apprentice Social Worker with Tusla's fostering team in Celbridge.

Gerard Keegan – Company Secretary
Gerard Keegan has served Rainbows Ireland for several years as Company Secretary and Accountant. He supports the organisation's financial planning and ensures the timely completion of audited accounts, playing a vital role in maintaining financial transparency and compliance.

Auditors:
Moore Ireland Audit Partners Limited,
Registered Auditors, Adelaide House, 90 Upper George's Street,
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Rainbows Ireland
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EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Chief Executive Officer – Geraldine Kelly

Geraldine Kelly brings over 30 years of experience in the family support sector. Prior to her current role, she dedicated more than two decades to One Family. A qualified Family Mediator and Parent Mentor, Geraldine began her career in Early Years education and developed a strong commitment to working with parents alongside young children. Throughout her career, she has remained focused on supporting families and advancing professional practice through the design and delivery of high-quality training programmes.

Implementation & Practice Manager – Anne Staunton

Anne Staunton joined the organisation following her tenure as Chief Executive Officer of Rainbows Ireland, a role she held for 17 years. With a background in primary education, Anne brings a wealth of leadership and programme development experience. In her current role, she is overseeing the implementation of key strategic projects, ensuring continuity and excellence in practice.

Training & Development Manager – Fiona Byrne

Fiona Byrne has been involved with Rainbows Ireland for over 20 years, initially as a volunteer facilitator on children's programmes. She formally joined the staff team four years ago and now supports the organisation's training and development initiatives. Fiona's extensive experience and deep understanding of programme delivery inform her work in enhancing facilitator training and supporting best practice.

Office Manager – Ilona Karsanova

Ilona Karsanova has been with Rainbows Ireland for eight years, beginning in a junior administrative capacity. Her dedication and organisational acumen led to her appointment as Office Manager, where she now oversees the organisation's administrative operations and supports the smooth functioning of internal systems.

Rainbows Ireland
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CORE VALUES

- **Grief is a Natural Response to Loss**

We recognise that grief and loss are natural parts of life. Every child and young person will experience them in their own time and way.

- **Every Child's Response is Unique**

Each child's response to grief is deeply personal. We honour and respect the individual ways they express and process their emotions.

- **Respect for Dignity**

We uphold the dignity of every child and young person, acknowledging that grief is an intimate and personal experience.

- **Gentle, Community-Based Support**

Rather than reaching out directly, we offer our support within local communities—creating safe, familiar spaces where children and families feel comfortable.

- **Family-Centered Care**

We believe children and young people are best supported within the love and care of their families. Rainbows is here to walk alongside families during times of loss.

- **Empowering Resilience**

We see the strength and resilience in every child and young person. They are active participants in their own natural response to loss.

- **Compassionate Understanding**

We understand the profound impact of grief and are here to offer compassionate support through the emotional challenges it brings.

- **Grief Needs to Be Acknowledged**

We believe grief should never be denied, buried, or ignored. It deserves to be seen, heard, and supported.

- **Emotional Well-being Matters**

Supporting the emotional health of children and young people is vital for their long-term mental well-being. We are committed to nurturing this foundation.

- **The Power of Peer Support**

We value the strength of group support. By connecting with peers who share similar experiences, children and young people find comfort, normalisation, and hope.

OUR STORY & IMPACT

126
Active Rainbows Centres in 2024

354
Rainbows Registered Centre across the country *(20% are made up of Family Resources Centres and Child & Family Projects, while 80% are based in schools)*

1400
Total number of children engaged in Rainbows across the country

336
Newly Trained Facilitators in 2024

70
New Rainbows Coordinators in 2024

26
Newly Registered Rainbows Centres

239
Total number of Rainbows providers who engaged in additional training (dashboard, refresher)

998
Total number of 'Ask's to our ask@rainbowsireland email line



OUR HISTORY

Founded in 1987 by Sister Cecilia Molloy and Sister Elizabeth Maxwell of the Presentation Order, Rainbows Ireland was born from a deep understanding of the emotional challenges children face following loss. Sister Cecilia's vision — to provide compassionate support for children experiencing bereavement or parental separation — has guided our mission for nearly four decades.

Since our inception, we have been privileged to operate from the Loreto Centre in Dublin 12, thanks to the enduring generosity of the Loreto Sisters. This nurturing and secure base has enabled Rainbows Ireland to grow into a national organisation, supporting children and young people across the country through a robust network of Registered Rainbows Centres.

Rainbows Ireland is rooted in supporting the voice of children impacted by grief and loss, ensuring best practice as we continue to provide high-quality, evidence-informed support.

Expanding Reach Through Partnerships

Over the years, we have built strong partnerships with primary and secondary schools, Family Resource Centres, and a wide range of child and family initiatives. These collaborations have been instrumental in making our group-based peer support programmes accessible to children in diverse communities, creating safe, supportive spaces where they can share their experiences and begin to heal.

Commitment to Excellence

We are dedicated to continuous improvement. Our comprehensive training programmes and biennial refresher courses ensure that all facilitators are equipped to provide our services with empathy, consistency, and professionalism. This commitment to quality underpins every aspect of our work. In times of school or community bereavement, Rainbows Ireland is often called upon to provide immediate, compassionate support. We also work to support parents navigating complex family changes, helping them access specialised services tailored to their needs.

Looking Ahead

As we reflect on our journey, we remain steadfast in our mission: to support children and young people with grief and loss with care, understanding, and hope. With the continued support of our partners, trained professionals /volunteers, and funders, we look forward to expanding our reach and deepening our impact in the years to come.

CHALLENGES IN THE SECTOR AND FUTURE GOALS

Rainbows Ireland: Empowering Children Through Grief and Change

Rainbows Ireland is at the forefront of addressing the growing need for emotional support among children and young people experiencing bereavement, loss, and grief. As mental health challenges become increasingly prevalent, we are responding with urgency and compassion—supporting not only young people but also the parents and professionals who care for them.

The impact of death and separation often runs deeper than what is visible. Issues such as domestic violence, homelessness, and addiction can severely disrupt a child's ability to process and adapt to change. In 2024 alone, we received nearly 1,000 emails through our ask@rainbows support line—clear evidence that families and professionals are actively seeking accessible, meaningful support for children during these critical times.

Our group-based peer support model, grounded in strong evidence, is designed to be both responsive and effective. We rely on the active involvement of parents and guardians to champion their children's participation, supporting them with difficult feelings and emotions and ensuring their voices are heard. This partnership is essential to the healing process.

Despite challenges in volunteer recruitment—particularly as fewer individuals are able to commit time beyond paid roles—we remain undeterred as we see increasing front line practitioners committing to Rainbows within their working role. These challenges fuel our innovation. We are committed to upholding the highest standards of child safeguarding and are eager to collaborate with agencies and services that share our mission. Together, we can deliver vital peer support in local communities, empowering children to embrace change and reminding them they are not alone.

Currently, 20% of our Registered Rainbows Centres are based in family resource centres and child and family projects, while 80% operate within schools. We are determined to expand these partnerships, ensuring that more children across Ireland can access the support they need to adapt and adjust to their changed worlds following grief and loss.

While our school-based network is extensive, schools can only support their own pupils and at times due to the increasing demands placed on schools,
It may not always be possible to offer Rainbows, which can be frustrating for schools and parents. We are however working with the NGO sector to find ways to support schools to have access to Rainbows in their local community. In Dublin 7 & 1 One Family have been working closely with the local schools and School Completion Programme to make Rainbows available. We are excited to see similar innovative solutions emerge in other communities in the year ahead.

In 2024, 336 frontline practitioners completed our comprehensive four-day Facilitators Training. Many of these professionals—especially teachers—are seeking continued professional development in bereavement and separation. They view our training as a vital tool to bridge the knowledge gap. Looking ahead to 2025, we are committed to launching a dedicated Rainbows Network to support professionals across sectors with accessible, practical resources.

Our mission is clear: to work alongside services and agencies that recognise the transformative power of peer group support. We will continue to ensure we offer sign posting and guidance to services, so parents and children who require information on additional supports can do so with as much ease as possible.





CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Reading our latest Annual Report, you will quickly sense that Rainbows Ireland is an organisation which is planning for the future while honouring the past. Along with exploring new and innovative ways of delivering the core service we have offered for 38 years, we are actively researching and developing ways to expand and strengthen our reach, as we remain as committed as ever to fulfilling our mission of providing support to children and young people and through them, to their families at a time of significant need in their lives.

As a result of the vision and energy of our original founders, Rainbows was an innovative and critical response to a very real need at the time. The approach adopted to the delivery of the service was based on core principles including empathy, respect and compassion for the children and young people grieving as a result of a significant loss or change in their lives. Today, as at all stages over the years, any development or initiative we engage with is continually benchmarked against these fundamental values – they are as relevant as ever, if not even more so, in our modern world.

You will encounter in the pages that follow a small selection of the people that have been and are currently at the heart of our service. They bring with them a variety of backgrounds, experiences and skills that significantly enhances the work they do as Rainbows facilitators. What they all have in common is a powerful and sincere desire to reach out and respond to the needs that they perceive in their local communities. You will read about the changing trends in where our facilitators are coming from, but what remains encouraging and heartening is the level of motivation that still exists, sending people into our training programmes, determined to respond and make a difference in young peoples' lives.

It is always an honour, in my role as Chairperson, to take the opportunity presented in this report to acknowledge and appreciate the dedication and commitment of everyone who has contributed to the work of Rainbows in the last year - our team of facilitators, new or experienced, whether volunteers or professionals taking the programmes into their work, are the solid foundation on which our history stands; the exceptionally generous and committed team of volunteer Trainers, keeping the flow of facilitators coming into the service; the small but highly skilled and motivated Staff team that pull all the strands together to keep the show on the road; the members of the Board of Directors,

giving of their time and expertise in this crucial governance role; all of our colleagues and collaborators in the wider community who support us and work with us in partnership to expand our reach ever further; our funders, from the smallest private donation to our primary statutory partner in TUSLA and others – it is a wide web of connections that go to make up the full story of Rainbows Ireland.

Rainbows is a real team effort. But occasionally, it is necessary to single out a particular individual for attention. Such is the case in respect of our recently retired CEO, Anne Staunton. From the very first moment that Anne stepped into the role, the first person to occupy this new position in 2008, she has given every ounce of her energy and vision to evolve the role and equally, the organisation to where it is today. Her passion, commitment and sincerity around her work has never flagged and burns as strongly today as ever. We are fortunate that she has not left us completely and continues to work on significant developments that started under her stewardship. But, for her leadership through those 17 years, we all say an immeasurable "Thank you".

We move on confidently with a new leader at the helm. I am delighted to welcome Geraldine Kelly as our new CEO, and we all look forward to this next phase of our story. Geraldine brings a wealth of relevant experience with her, along with a knowledge and understanding of Rainbows arising from previous collaborative projects. The future is in good hands as we move forward, keeping that keen eye on the past to inform and inspire our endeavours.



Ray Watson

Chairperson, Rainbows Ireland

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Reflecting on a Remarkable Year: Rainbows Ireland in 2024

I'm delighted to share that 2024 has been a truly transformative year for Rainbows Ireland. We've seen a record number of front-line practitioners engage in our 4-day Facilitators Training Programme—an inspiring shift from our original model of unpaid volunteer facilitators, who first joined us in 1987. This evolution reflects the growing commitment of professionals across Ireland to support children and young people through grief and loss with compassion and skill.

One of the most significant moments this year has been the announcement by our incredible CEO, Anne Staunton, of her plans to retire after 17 years of dedicated leadership. Anne's vision and passion have shaped Rainbows Ireland into the organisation it is today. In preparation for this transition, the Board and Anne have begun the process of recruiting a new CEO, ensuring a smooth and thoughtful handover in the latter part of 2024.

As the lead agency for the Separation Network—a collaborative initiative of over 13 front-line organisations established in 2020—we've continued to make meaningful strides. In November, we proudly launched our first resource, the Practitioners Toolkit for Frontline Work with Separated Families, with the support of Tusla | Parent Support Champions. We're also thrilled that the Network secured funding from the Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to support new research in 2025. Led by One Family, this research will explore the role of primary schools in supporting children post-separation.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our exceptional Trainers team, who generously volunteer their time each year to deliver our Train the Trainer programme. I also want to acknowledge our Rainbows Coordinators across the country, who have taken on additional responsibilities to ensure that Rainbows groups remain active and accessible in local communities. Our facilitators continue to go above and beyond to provide a safe, caring space for children during our 9-week peer support programme. And behind the scenes, our dedicated staff team works tirelessly to respond to the many requests from parents, professionals, and Registered Centres.

We are deeply grateful for the continued support of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, whose long-standing partnership has been vital to our ability to deliver high-quality training and services. We also appreciate the small grants and funding from our supporters (see Financial Statement), which enable us to grow and innovate.

As we look ahead, I'm excited to begin work on our Strategic Plan for 2026–2029, in collaboration with our Board, staff, and key stakeholders. Together, we will continue to build on the legacy of Rainbows Ireland and ensure that children and families across the country receive the support they need.

Thank you for your continued belief in our mission. I look forward to sharing more successes with you in 2025!

Warm regards,
Geraldine Kelly
CEO, Rainbows Ireland



2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCES

SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE

Rainbows Peer Support at One Family

(Smithfield Dublin 7 & 1)

In 2024, One Family proudly became a newly Registered Rainbows Centre. Lisa and Mandy, members of the Parenting Service Team, embraced their roles as facilitators under the guidance of Geraldine Kelly, who was then Director of Parenting & Professional Development. Together, they launched Rainbows Groups across the primary school cluster in Dublin 7 and 1. Thursdays quickly became known as “Rainbows Day,” establishing a structured and collaborative process involving schools, parents, and One Family.



Mandy Byrne & Lisa Nolan

From Autumn 2024 through to the end of the 2025 school year, One Family successfully delivered two Rainbows Groups per term, positively impacting numerous children. Lisa and Mandy found the experience deeply enriching, gaining valuable insights into how children perceive and process parental separation and bereavement. Within the groups, children formed strong bonds and engaged meaningfully with the materials each week. They laughed, expressed sadness, asked profound questions, and supported one another—discovering that many of their peers were navigating similar life challenges. These connections often extended beyond the group sessions, leaving a lasting impression.

Looking ahead to the 2025–2026 school year, One Family aims to continue expanding the Rainbows programme in local schools and hopes to offer groups at its own premises if the opportunity arises. Feedback from parents highlighted that sessions held during school hours were more manageable, given the demands of daily life. One Family is also well-positioned to provide additional support through one-on-one play therapy for children who need it, as well as individual and group-based support for parents.



SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE

Listowel Community & Family Resource Centre

Supporting Families, Building Resilient Communities

The Listowel Community & Family Resource Centre (CFRC), led by Jackie Landers and Toni Clarke, continues to play a vital role in supporting individuals and families across North Kerry. Serving a catchment area from Tarbert to Ballybunion, the Centre reaches approximately 19,000 people, offering a wide range of services grounded in principles of equality, participation, and human rights.

Listowel CFRC is committed to enhancing lives through therapeutic supports, community development, and family-focused services. The Centre envisions a society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and belong, free from poverty and marginalisation.

CORE SERVICES

- **Parenting Support:** The Centre provides parenting programmes, workshops, and one-to-one confidential support for parents, grandparents, foster and adoptive carers. Practical guidance is offered to help navigate everyday challenges.
- **Youth Support:** Children and young people receive individual support, particularly those awaiting services or facing personal difficulties.
- **Rainbows Programme:** Delivered twice annually across County Kerry, this programme supports children experiencing grief or loss. Participants often report feeling more confident and connected by the end of the sessions.

"I'm happy I did the programme.", "I'm glad I'm not the only one.", "Can I do it again?" - These testimonials reflect the programme's profound impact on children's emotional well-being.

Listowel CFRC's professional and approachable team remains dedicated to providing a safe, inclusive space where individuals and families can access the support they need. Through its work, the Centre continues to foster strong families, resilient communities, and a more equitable society.



SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE

Rainbows Galway City 'Stand Alone' Registered Rainbows Centre

A Decade of Community-Led Support

Rainbows Galway City is one of just five 'stand-alone' Rainbows Centres in Ireland, operating under the guidance of Rainbows Ireland while being entirely volunteer-led. For over a decade, this centre has provided a safe, nurturing space for children and young people coping with grief and loss.

The centre has been coordinated for the past 15 years by Fiona Byrne, whose leadership—alongside the foundational contributions of Sr. Margaret Curry (now retired) and Karen McGuire—has shaped a strong and compassionate team of facilitators. Each year, Rainbows Galway City delivers two programme cycles, typically supporting 25–30 children through peer-support groups during the autumn and spring terms.

In autumn 2025, the centre will relocate to two new community-based venues: the Westside Resource Centre and the Ard Family Resource Centre. These locations will continue to serve as welcoming environments where children can connect, share, and heal.



Galway City 'stand alone' Rainbows Facilitators Team

As Fiona Byrne transitions into her national role as Training and Development Manager with Rainbows Ireland, a new Coordinator will be appointed from within the existing team, ensuring continuity and the preservation of the centre's ethos.

Rainbows Galway City benefits from ongoing support from the national office, particularly through the Training and Development Manager, who provides mentoring, peer support, and administrative guidance. This collaborative model enables the centre to maintain high standards while remaining deeply rooted in the local community.

Rainbows Galway City exemplifies the power of volunteerism and the impact of community-driven care in supporting children through life's most difficult transitions.

SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE

Rainbows Ireland 'Stand Alone Centre' in Carlow

Honouring Ann Keating's Enduring Contribution

We would like in this annual report to pay tribute to an extraordinary volunteer whose unwavering commitment has touched the lives of countless children and families over more than three decades. For over 30 years, Ann Keating together with the Carlow Rainbows team has contributed greatly to the availability of the Rainbows service for children and young people in Co Carlow over the last three Askea Parish Centre, Carlow Town.

Her tireless dedication to supporting young people coping with grief and loss and family change following parental separation has created a lasting legacy of care, compassion, and community. We also acknowledge the powerful ripple effect of their work. the support they have given has not only helped individual children but has strengthened families and enriched an entire community. Since Rainbows Ireland began in 1987, Ann Keating has been a central figure in its availability and growth of the Rainbows service in Carlow, leaving an indelible mark on the lives of countless children and families. Her tireless dedication to supporting young people coping with grief and loss has created a lasting legacy of care, compassion, and community.



Askea Registered Rainbows Centre

Ann's journey began in the Graiguecullen area, where she faithfully facilitated Rainbows programmes for a decade. When that centre closed, Ann—supported by the Parish of Askea—seamlessly relocated the Rainbows service to the Pastoral Centre in Carlow. There, under her steadfast leadership, Rainbows has continued to flourish.

In 2015, Ann contributed to the redevelopment of the Rainbows service when we pressed a pause button towards a redevelopment. Ann's voice and experience contributed significantly to that process resulting in Ann becoming part of the Rainbows National Training team in 2017. Through the years, Ann has nurtured and led a team of six to seven trained Rainbows Facilitators, ensuring the Rainbows group support runs consistently during both the autumn and spring terms. Her reach has extended far beyond Carlow, with participants coming from neighbouring counties including Wicklow, Laois, Wexford, and Kildare.

In the 2024–2025 academic year alone, Ann and her team successfully delivered a nine-week group support tailored for second-level students. Their future goal—to run three groups per term for children aged seven and above—demonstrates Ann's forward-thinking approach and unwavering commitment to meeting community needs. We, in Rainbows salute and honour the contribution Ann and her Rainbows team have made to Rainbows Ireland and the work we seek to do.

SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE

Nurturing Emotional Wellbeing at Holy Family SNS

Miriam Kearney has been a dedicated Rainbows facilitator for over 21 years and has served as the Rainbows Coordinator at Holy Family Senior National School in Swords for the past 15 years. Under her leadership, the school has developed a compassionate and structured approach to supporting students through bereavement and parental separation.

Each year, the Rainbows support groups run from late November to mid-February. This timing is intentional, as the Christmas period can be particularly challenging for children experiencing loss. The programme typically includes three sessions before the holidays and six sessions afterward. All sessions are held during the school day, which helps to normalize the support and reduce any stigma associated with participation.

The school is fortunate to have a committed team of facilitators, each bringing unique strengths to the programme. These facilitators invest deeply in their groups, collaborating closely with co-facilitators to prepare for each session. They are proactive in seeking professional development, attending refresher courses and debriefing sessions with openness and empathy.

Feedback from students has been profoundly moving. Many have expressed that Rainbows has helped them feel less alone and more able to talk about their emotions. Comments such as *"I can talk about my feelings more and feel less sad"* and *"I know I'm not the only one going through this"* highlight the emotional safety and connection the programme fosters.



Parents and guardians have also shared heartfelt reflections, noting the positive changes in their children's emotional awareness and communication. One parent remarked, *"It was a great benefit to my daughter. She feels a lot less alone and understands her feelings better."* Another shared, *"It makes my son feel like he is not alone."*

The value of the Rainbows programme at Holy Family SNS cannot be overstated. It provides a vital space for support and a space to begin to adapt to life without a special person or to a family change. The trust placed in the team by families is a testament to the programme's impact. For Miriam Kearney, coordinating Rainbows remains one of the most meaningful and rewarding aspects of her work in education.

Navigating Loss for Teens: Pilot Project Weekend

Funded by: Community Foundation Ireland – The Toy Show Appeal
Delivered by: Healing Hearts Foyle Hospice, Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP), Donegal Rainbows Ireland

In February 2025, a collaborative pilot project titled Navigating Loss for Teens was delivered through a partnership between Healing Hearts Foyle Hospice, IDP, and Donegal Rainbows Ireland. This initiative was made possible through funding from the Community Foundation Ireland – The Toy Show Appeal, supporting a shared vision to address the complex needs of teenagers experiencing bereavement.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The weekend programme was designed for young people aged 13–17 who had recently experienced the death of a parent. It aimed to provide a safe, nurturing space where grief could be acknowledged and explored among peers. The programme was offered to schools with established pastoral care relationships, including:

- St Joseph's and St Cecilia's, Derry
- Carn Community School
- Moville Community School
- Scoil Mhuire Buncrana (Inishowen)

A total of 23 teens were invited, with 9 attending the weekend session.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



The group support created a unique therapeutic environment where teens could:

- Connect with peers experiencing similar loss, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing isolation.
- Explore the impact of grief on emotional, physical, social, academic, and spiritual well-being.
- Engage in memory-making activities, helping them process and integrate their loss.
- Receive support from trained facilitators, who guided discussions and activities with sensitivity and respect.

Feedback and observations from facilitators highlighted the deep emotional connections formed during the weekend. Teens expressed relief in knowing they were not alone, and many shared that the experience helped them begin to make sense of life after loss.

COLLABORATIVE STRENGTH

This project exemplifies the power of cross-border and cross-sector collaboration. The longstanding relationships between the partner organisations enabled a seamless integration of services and expertise. The success of this pilot lays a strong foundation for future initiatives aimed at supporting bereaved youth in our communities.

The Separation Network: Strengthening Impact Through Strategic Partnerships and National Collaboration

In 2024, **Rainbows Ireland** continued to lead with purpose and partnership, serving as the **Lead Agency** in a dynamic national network that includes **One Family** as Network Coordinator and over **10 Family Resource Centres and national organisations**. This collaborative model has proven instrumental in delivering on our shared action plan, with tangible outcomes that reflect the strength of our collective effort.

EMPOWERING PRACTITIONERS NATIONWIDE

With the steadfast support of **Tusla Parent Support Champions**, under the expert coordination of **Rebecca Moore**, we proudly launched the **Practitioners Toolkit** at the national symposium in November. This resource equips frontline practitioners with practical tools and evidence-informed strategies to support children and families navigating separation.

- 338 practitioners engaged across 13 tailored training events (full-day and half-day formats)
- Training delivered across multiple regions, ensuring accessibility and responsiveness to local needs
- Toolkit now embedded in practice across a growing number of services

DRIVING INNOVATION THROUGH RESEARCH

In partnership with One Family, the Separation Network secured a What Works research grant from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). This initiative is exploring how schools, parents, and children can better identify and respond to the needs of young children experiencing family separation.

- Research underway throughout 2025
- Focus areas include reducing parental conflict, promoting family diversity in classrooms, and strengthening child-parent communication
- Findings expected in Spring 2026, with the potential to inform national policy and practice

EXPANDING OUR NETWORK AND LEADERSHIP

We have taken deliberate steps to diversify and strengthen our Executive membership, welcoming new representatives from each province. This has enriched our strategic direction and deepened our understanding of regional challenges and opportunities.

SUSTAINED SUPPORT AND FUTURE COMMITMENT

We are proud to have secured continued funding from Tusla into 2025, enabling us to expand our training and support for practitioners. This investment reflects a shared commitment to ensuring that children and families across Ireland receive the compassionate, informed support they deserve during times of transition.

Scan for more details:



NEW INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT

Early Intervention Framework for Children with Intellectual Disabilities

(2022–2025)

Rainbows Ireland is proud to introduce a transformative initiative aimed at addressing a long-standing gap in support services for children and young people with Intellectual Disabilities who are experiencing bereavement or parental separation.

Historically, these children have been unintentionally excluded from our peer group support programmes. Research (Doody, 2014) has shown that children with Intellectual Disabilities are often denied a "socially sanctioned right to grieve." This Framework is our response—a commitment to inclusive, compassionate, and tailored support for every child.

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK OFFERS:

- Individualised Support: Recognising the unique needs of each child, regardless of diagnosis or disability.
- Inclusive Practice: Ensuring children with Intellectual Disabilities have equal access to grief and loss support.
- Training & Resources: Equipping educators, carers, and professionals with strategies and tools to support grieving children effectively.

PROGRESS TO DATE:

- In 2024, several Specialist Special Schools participated in pilot training.
- Training will continue throughout 2025 and early 2026, with feedback shaping the final version of the Framework.

LOOKING AHEAD:

To achieve national rollout by 2026, Rainbows Ireland is actively seeking targeted funding. This will enable us to:

- Expand training to more schools and professionals.
- Finalise and distribute the Framework nationwide.
- Ensure every child, regardless of ability, receives the support they deserve during times of loss.



COMMUNITY-LED SUPPORT FROM COUNTY DONEGAL

We are deeply grateful for the generous support received from the Donegal Church Group. Their locally driven fundraising efforts have made a meaningful contribution to our mission, directly supporting vital services for children and young people.

This grassroots initiative exemplifies the power of community engagement and the impact of collective goodwill. The dedication and compassion shown by our friends in County Donegal continue to inspire and strengthen our work.



FUNDRAISING IN ACTION

Honouring Lives, Supporting Futures

In Memory of Susan Gordon and Sean O'Donnell

Organised by ALFA Electrical (Ballymount)

Benefiting Rainbows Ireland & The Jack and Jill Children's Foundation

Rainbows Ireland extends its deepest gratitude to Brian, Ronan, and the ALFA Electrical team, especially Geraldine, for her detailed organisation and roll-out of the event. Their thoughtfully organised event, held in memory of Susan Gordon and Sean O'Donnell, exemplifies the profound impact that corporate and community-led fundraising can have on the lives of children and families across Ireland.

This event not only honoured two cherished individuals but also raised vital funds for Rainbows Ireland and The Jack and Jill Children's Foundation—two organisations dedicated to providing emotional and practical support to children experiencing bereavement, illness, and loss.

Thanks to the generosity of donors and the dedication of organisers, Rainbows Ireland continues to offer safe spaces for children and young people to process grief, build resilience, and find hope. Every euro raised helps us extend our reach and deepen our impact.

Fundraising is not just about raising money. It's about raising hope.

We are deeply thankful to all who contributed. Your support is helping to build a more compassionate and supportive Ireland for future generations.



CHAMPIONSHIP INCLUSION THROUGH THE LANGUAGE

The Irish Language Project

In 2024, Rainbows Ireland made significant strides in its groundbreaking Irish Language Project, a visionary initiative launched in 2023 in partnership with Seán Ó Domhnaill of Comharchumann Mhic Dara Teo, An Crompán. This project is a cornerstone of our commitment to cultural inclusion, linguistic accessibility, and diversity in service delivery.

At its heart, the project is translating all Rainbows children's programme materials into Gaeilge, ensuring that children in Irish-speaking communities can access vital peer-support in their first language. This work is not only about translation—it is about respecting identity, preserving heritage, and empowering children to heal and grow in a language that feels like home.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Translation Milestones:** A majority of the core programme materials were translated, with a strong emphasis on cultural nuance and child-friendly language.
- **Community Collaboration:** We engaged with Gaeltacht communities, particularly in Galway, to ensure authenticity and relevance in every resource.
- **Facilitator Preparation:** Planning began for the training of Irish-speaking facilitators, laying the groundwork for the first Irish-language Rainbows Groups in Spring 2026.
- **Expanding Our Vision:** Inspired by this progress, we are going to seek funding to translate our materials into other widely spoken languages across Ireland, including Polish, Arabic, and Ukrainian, reflecting the rich diversity of today's Ireland.

This project is more than a translation effort—it is a bold step toward equity, ensuring that every child, regardless of language or background, can access the compassionate support Rainbows offers. As we look ahead to 2025 and the launch of our pilot groups, we remain deeply committed to building a programme that speaks to the heart of every community we serve.

NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION

Irish Childhood Bereavement Network

Rainbows Ireland continues to play a vital role within the **Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN)**, a national organisation established in 2012 to address the complex and evolving needs of children and families experiencing loss. Our active engagement with the Network reflects our deep commitment to ensuring that bereaved families across Ireland receive compassionate, professional, and accessible support.

In a society where grief touches every community, the importance of structured bereavement supports cannot be overstated. Children and young people navigating loss require tailored interventions that honour their unique experiences and foster resilience. Through our collaboration with ICBN, Rainbows Ireland helps to amplify the visibility of these supports, ensuring that families are aware of the resources available and can access trained professionals who understand the emotional and developmental needs of bereaved children.

We believe that **networking and collaboration** are essential to building a robust and responsive bereavement support system. By working in partnership with other organisations, practitioners, and advocates, we contribute to a shared vision of healing and hope. This collective approach strengthens the sector, promotes best practices, and ensures that no child or family faces grief alone.

In 2025, we are proud to be actively supporting the development of the **Sherpa Network in Galway**, an initiative that exemplifies our commitment to regional collaboration and innovation in bereavement care. This work reflects our ongoing dedication to fostering community-based responses that are both compassionate and effective.

DEVELOPMENT OF

Monitoring and Assessment Tools

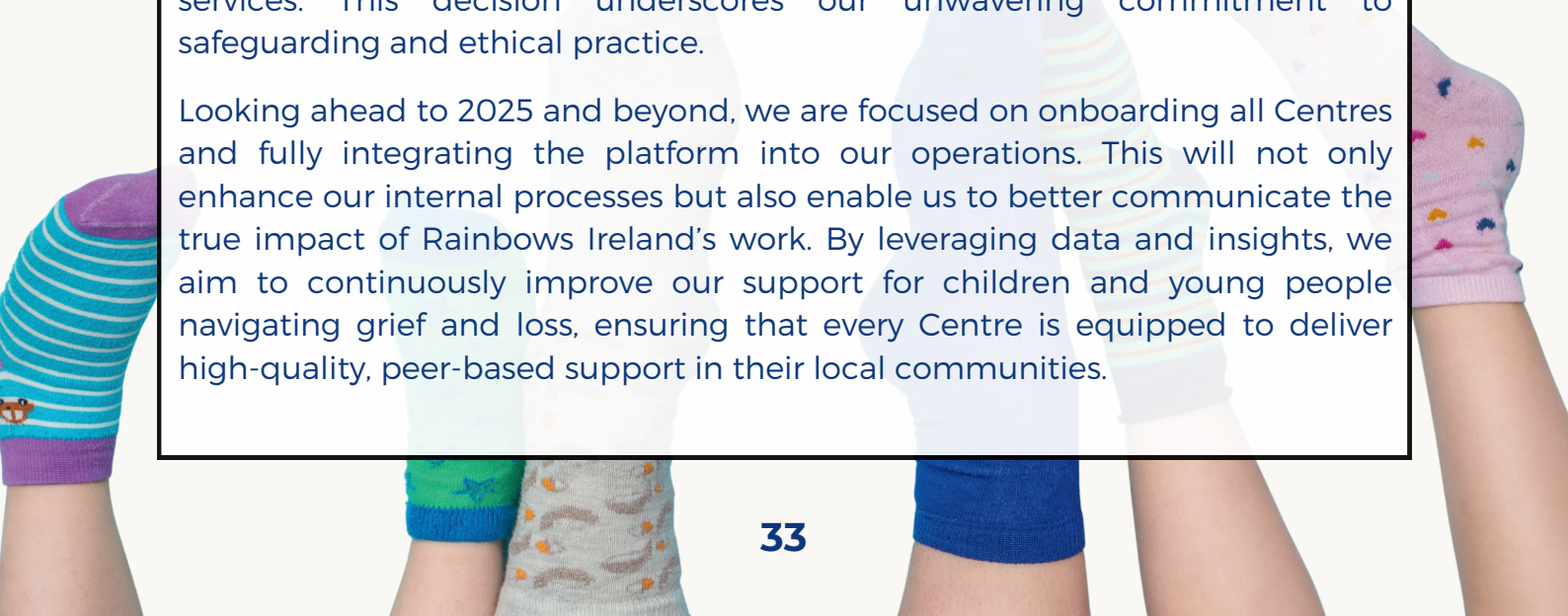
In 2024, Rainbows Ireland made a strategic investment in the development of a bespoke Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system, marking a significant milestone in our commitment to accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement. This custom-built database was designed to enhance the tracking and assessment of our group-based support and training initiatives delivered through our nationwide network of Registered Rainbows Centres.

The development process was a collaborative effort, requiring dedicated input from staff, Centre Coordinators, and key stakeholders. The result is a robust platform that empowers our Head Office to capture essential data and insights, while also enabling local Centres to actively participate in the monitoring process. This two-way engagement strengthens our ability to measure outcomes, identify trends, and respond more effectively to the evolving needs of children and families.

In the NGO sector, Monitoring and Evaluation is not just a technical function—it is a cornerstone of effective service delivery. It allows organisations like Rainbows Ireland to demonstrate impact, ensure resource efficiency, and build trust with funders, partners, and the communities we serve. Our new system reflects this ethos, providing a foundation for evidence-based decision-making and long-term sustainability.

Importantly, the platform was developed with a strong emphasis on GDPR compliance and the protection of sensitive data. While this meant forgoing certain features that could have streamlined administrative tasks, we prioritised the privacy rights of the children and parents who engage with our services. This decision underscores our unwavering commitment to safeguarding and ethical practice.

Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, we are focused on onboarding all Centres and fully integrating the platform into our operations. This will not only enhance our internal processes but also enable us to better communicate the true impact of Rainbows Ireland's work. By leveraging data and insights, we aim to continuously improve our support for children and young people navigating grief and loss, ensuring that every Centre is equipped to deliver high-quality, peer-based support in their local communities.



SAFEGUARDING PRIVACY

Our Commitment to GDPR

In 2024, Rainbows Ireland made a strategic and heartfelt investment in strengthening our General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) policies. This initiative reflects our unwavering commitment to safeguarding the privacy rights of every child, parent, volunteer, trainee and staff member who engages with our services.

We undertook a comprehensive review of our operations, examining every policy, procedure, and point of contact through the lens of GDPR principles. This work was not simply about compliance—it was about embedding a culture of respect, transparency, and accountability in how we collect, store, and manage personal data.

As we move into 2025, our team continues to receive ongoing training to deepen their understanding of data protection. We are actively integrating GDPR best practices into our daily operations, ensuring that all physical data is securely shredded in accordance with our retention policies. At the same time, we are exploring innovative and secure methods for long-term digital data preservation.

Protecting personal data is not just a legal obligation—it is a moral imperative. The privacy rights of our service users are fundamental to our mission. We believe that every individual has the right to understand how their data is used and to trust that it is handled with care and integrity.

To further this goal, we are enhancing our communications with Registered Rainbows Centres, as well as with the families we support. Looking ahead to 2025–2026, we aim to secure funding to produce an engaging and informative video that clearly explains our GDPR policies. This resource will be made available on our website, ensuring that our commitment to data protection is visible, accessible, and easily understood by all.



EVALUATING THE RAINBOWS IRELAND

Group Support Model: A Commitment to Learning and Impact

In 2025, Rainbows Ireland engaged with the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to evaluate the effectiveness of our group support model for children experiencing bereavement or parental separation. The study engaged 14 facilitators, 114 children aged 8–11, and 97 parents, offering valuable insights into the short-term impact of our work.

THE FINDINGS WERE ENCOURAGING:

- 63% of children reported that talking about their feelings became easier.
- Parents consistently observed positive behavioural changes in their children.

These outcomes affirm the value of Rainbows groups in reducing isolation, building emotional literacy, and strengthening coping skills during times of significant change. and loss.

However, the research also highlighted areas for growth. While the immediate benefits are clear, long-term outcomes remain difficult to assess due to limited follow-up after group completion. Additionally, variability in support across centres underscores the need for enhanced mentoring and supervision for facilitators.

EMBEDDING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

This evaluation is more than a snapshot—it is a catalyst for reflection and renewal. At Rainbows Ireland, we are committed to evidence-informed practice. The insights from this research are already shaping updates to our Rainbows Manuals and Training Programme, ensuring that our approach remains responsive, inclusive, and grounded in best practice.

ONGOING LEARNING FOR LASTING IMPACT

Supporting children and young people through grief and loss is complex, sensitive work. It demands not only empathy and compassion but also ongoing professional development, reflective practice, and a willingness to evolve.

THIS RESEARCH REINFORCES THE IMPORTANCE OF:

- Continuous learning within the sector
- Collaborative relationships between facilitators, parents, and children
- Consistent quality standards across all Rainbows registered centres.

As we look ahead to developing our Strategic Plan 2026–2029, this evaluation will serve as a foundation for deeper impact. We remain steadfast in our mission to ensure that every child who engages with Rainbows Ireland feels heard, supported, and empowered to begin to adapt and adjust to their changed lives.



TESTIMONIALS

FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS

(parents workshops on bereavement and parental separation)

> Absolutely amazing session. Empathy, professionalism from start to finish.

> I felt very alone and so drowning in it all. I'm feeling better and know I am not alone.

> Meeting others going through the same, accepting that my journey of emotions is 'normal'

> Facilitator was the kindest, most encouraging and helpful person. She is a well of knowledge and this session was so useful. She was also so good at seeing things from peoples' perspectives which really helped in dealing with the already difficult topic. Extremely happy with what I have gained from this session.

> I really enjoyed listening to the facilitator and how she described things made me feel like I wasn't alone and I am doing and making all the right decisions for my children.. Was great to get the reassurance.

> Practical and fact based session, wonderfully chaired and having people that care so enormously for the children, no matter whether in their current programme or not. Very knowledgeable, very experienced advice that is caring and gentle and respectful of one another feelings and circumstances.

> The parent who shared that 5 years down the track her life & kids are happy. Gives me hope as we haven't reached our 1st anniversary yet

> The session was very helpful & informative. It's great for children to see that they are not alone & there are lots of other children in the same position.

> Incredibly valuable and supportive

TESTIMONIALS

FEEDBACK FROM TRAINEES

(taking 4 day Facilitators Training)

> "Excellent, informative and practical sessions."

> "Great training, well supported and good resources provided."

> "I feel more confident to engage with the materials in order to facilitate a positive and supportive group for the children who will attend. Excellent training from 2 highly skilled and professional role models- thank you both!"

> "Excellent presentation, Im really looking forward to getting started with a group, I feel much more confident in approaching my roll as a new facilitator now and hope that soon I will be making a difference in the life of a child."

> "Liked the role play as it really helped put what we learned into practice. Lovely trainers, really put me at ease and it was very easy to ask questions or clarify things. This was very informative and empowering."

> "As a facilitator, we are modelling and nurturing and acting as a buffer to the child's experience. We enter the child's world and stay with them in the space for 9 weeks. Soul to soul work- I will show them I care and that they matter and are heard."

CHILDREN'S VOICES

following the 9-week Rainbows Groups (Galway and North Dublin)

"I got to talk about my dad's death and stuff; my emotions are like the tides (they come and go)."

child in a bereavement Rainbows Group

I liked the group and talking about feelings.

I try to think positively, listen to music, play football, and play with figures.

It's good to know I'm not the only one that is experiencing this.

I feel more confident.

Knowing we all have this in common, it's a safe space for me.

I liked the group and talking about feelings.

"That everyone has someone who is special who died so I know I am not alone." *boy, 9, bereavement*

"How friendly the teachers were, knowing this has not just happened to me, being in a group, talking." *girl, 12, bereavement*

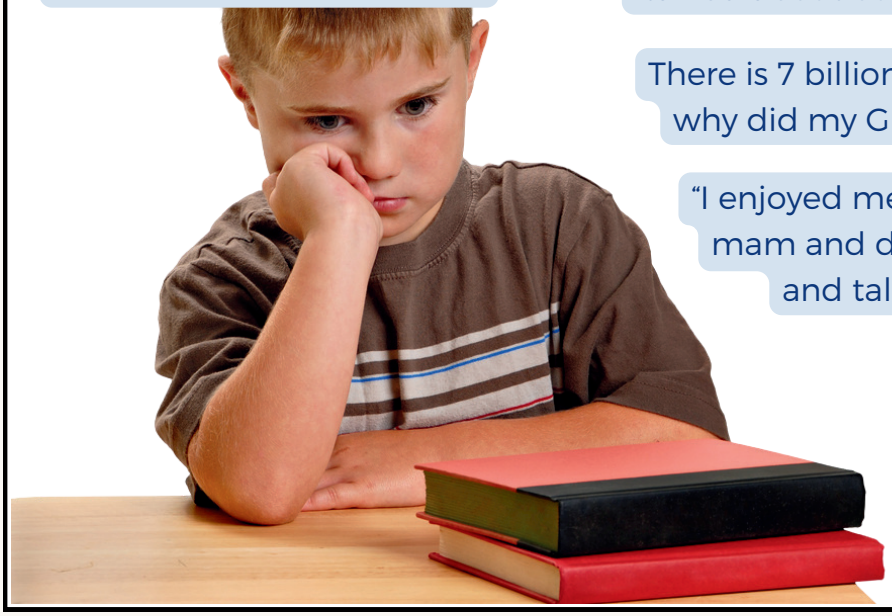
"I made new friends that I learned things like coping skills, talking about my feelings." *boy, 7, separation*

"I liked the people, new friends I made, that I am not the only one." *(girl, 9, separation)*

"I enjoyed meeting friends who's mam and dad aren't together and talking about it"

"I liked talking about my dad and others had family died too, I liked drawing in my book."

"I loved when we got to colour in the books about our feelings and when we talked about our loved one that died."



There is 7 billion people in the world, why did my Grandad have to die?

"I enjoyed meeting friends who's mam and dad aren't together and talking about it."

FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS

"My daughter loved the group session and most importantly the ladies who were there weekly. She got a really good bond with them."

"They were positive about the group and looked forward to going every week."

My child felt very comfortable within the group."

TEACHER FEEDBACK

"The children engaged well. They looked forward to it and had only positive comments."

"Thank you for all your work with the children for the past 9 weeks. We feel so lucky to have had this amazing support and I know the children have all really benefited from it."



3. LOOKING AHEAD WITH PURPOSE AND PASSION

As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with a deep sense of purpose and renewed energy. With our new CEO guiding the way, Rainbows Ireland is inspired more than ever to expand our impact across the sector—reaching more children, young people, and parents who are navigating the challenges of loss and change.

The journey ahead is ambitious, but our vision is clear. We are committed to building on our legacy while boldly embracing innovation, inclusivity, and collaboration. From the development of our Strategic Plan 2026–2029 to the rollout of transformative initiatives like the Intellectual Disability Framework and Irish-language materials, every step we take is grounded in our mission to ensure no child grieves alone.

This year, we are not just continuing our work—we are elevating it. We are investing in our people, strengthening our partnerships, and creating new pathways to support families with compassion and care. Our upcoming Parent Workshops, the relocation of our Head Office, and the enrichment of our Board are just a few of the ways we are positioning Rainbows Ireland for greater reach and resilience.

Together with our dedicated volunteers, practitioners, and supporters, we are inspired to make 2025–2026 a year of meaningful progress—one that brings us closer to a future where every child feels seen, supported, and empowered.



5. FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

RAINBOWS IRELAND CHILD & YOUTH GRIEF & LOSS SUPPORT COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (INCORPORATING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2024

	Note	Unrestricted funds 2024 €	Restricted funds 2024 €	Total funds 2024 €	*Total funds 2023 €*
Income from:					
Donations and legacies	4	**66,355**	**282,429**	**348,784**	*357,690*
Charitable activities	5	**4,027**	**-**	**4,027**	*6,932*
Total income		**70,382**	**282,429**	**352,811**	*364,622*
Expenditure on:					
Charitable activities		**57,350**	**343,361**	**400,711**	*416,039*
Total expenditure		**57,350**	**343,361**	**400,711**	*416,039*
Net movement in funds		**13,032**	**(60,932)**	**(47,900)**	*(51,417)*
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		**449,758**	**17,776**	**467,534**	*518,951*
Net movement in funds		**13,032**	**(60,932)**	**(47,900)**	*(51,417)*
Total funds carried forward		**462,790**	**(43,156)**	**419,634**	*467,534*



RAINBOWS IRELAND CHILD & YOUTH GRIEF & LOSS SUPPORT COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE
REGISTERED NUMBER: 262410

BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2024

	Note		2024 €		*2023 €*
Fixed assets					
Intangible assets	10		**35,425**		*43,450*
Tangible assets	11		**4,941**		*4,964*
			40,366		*48,414*
Current assets					
Stocks	12	**31,795**		*18,169*	
Debtors	13	**8,028**		*7,193*	
Cash at bank and in hand		**526,310**		*544,807*	
		566,133		*570,169*	
Current liabilities					
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	14	**(186,865)**		*(151,049)*	
Net current assets			**379,268**		*419,120*
Total assets less current liabilities			**419,634**		*467,534*
Net assets excluding pension asset			**419,634**		*467,534*
Total net assets			**419,634**		*467,534*
Charity funds					
Restricted funds	16		**(43,156)**		*17,776*
Unrestricted funds	16		**462,790**		*449,758*
Total funds			**419,634**		*467,534*



RAINBOWS IRELAND CHILD & YOUTH GRIEF & LOSS SUPPORT COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2024

	2024 €	*2023* *€*
Cash flows from operating activities		
Net cash used in operating activities	**(47,897)**	*(51,418)*
Cash flows from investing activities		
Depreciation charges	**23,797**	*17,186*
Increase/Decrease in stock	**(13,633)**	*12,149*
Increase/Decrease in debtors	**(835)**	*471*
Increase/Decrease in creditors	**35,820**	*11,160*
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	**(1,065)**	*(3,042)*
Purchase of intangible fixed assets	**(21,684)**	*(27,500)*
Disposal of assets	**7,000**	-
Net cash provided by investing activities	**29,400**	**10,424**
Cash flows from financing activities		
Net cash provided by financing activities	**-**	**-**
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year	**(18,497)**	**(40,994)**
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	**544,807**	*585,801*
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	**526,310**	*544,807*

REPORT: YEAR IN REVIEW

Rainbows Ireland

Supporting Children and Young People with Bereavement and Parental Separation

2024/5

Your thoughts:

REPORT: YEAR IN REVIEW

Rainbows Ireland

Supporting Children and Young People with Bereavement and Parental Separation

2024/5

OUR FUNDERS

TUSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

The Community Foundation for Ireland

Mental Health Ireland



Rainbows Ireland

Supporting Children and Young People with Bereavement and Parental Separation

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