Rainbows Ireland

Supporting Children and Young People with Bereavement and Parental Separation



STRATEGIC PLAN 2027 - 2031

www.rainbowsireland.ie



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Foreword

As I write this foreword, I do so with a deep sense of pride, hope and optimism for the future of Rainbows Ireland.

This Strategic Plan 2027-2031 comes at a particularly significant time in our journey. In 2028, Rainbows Ireland will celebrate 40 years of supporting children and young people through grief, loss and family change. Over the past four decades, thousands of children, young people and families have found understanding, connection and support through Rainbows. Our impact has been made possible through the dedication of volunteers, staff, trainers, boards, schools, community partners, supporters and funders who have shared our belief that no child should face grief and loss alone.
As the first strategic plan developed in several years, this process has provided a valuable opportunity for our Board, staff team, volunteers, registered centres and stakeholders to pause, reflect and look ahead together. We have celebrated what has been achieved, listened to the experiences of those we serve and considered how Rainbows can continue to respond to the changing needs of children, young people and families across Ireland.

Since joining Rainbows Ireland as CEO in May 2025, I have become increasingly aware of both the extraordinary work happening across our organisation and the significant opportunities that lie ahead. Much of what Rainbows does remains unseen by the wider public. Our focus has always been, and will always remain, on children and young people. Quietly and consistently, every week across Ireland, trained volunteers and professionals create safe spaces where children can feel seen, heard and supported at some of the most challenging times in their lives.

However, our experience over the last 40 years has taught us an important lesson: supporting children and young people cannot happen in isolation. Children thrive when the adults around them are equipped, informed and confident in responding to grief and loss. For this reason, this strategy places renewed emphasis not only on supporting children and young people, but also on supporting parents, caregivers, schools and frontline professionals. Through our work with families, educators and practitioners, we aim to strengthen the wider network of support that surrounds every child. This commitment is reflected throughout our strategic priorities for children, parents, partners and organisational development.

We know this is an ambitious plan. Over the next five years we will work to ensure that every child and young person who needs Rainbows can access support locally, free of charge, and delivered by trained and confident teams. We will strengthen and expand our national network of registered Rainbows centres, with a vision of ensuring accessible support in every county across Ireland. We will continue to invest in evidence-informed programmes, monitoring and evaluation, and opportunities to demonstrate the positive outcomes and long-term impact of our work.

To achieve these ambitions, we must also strengthen our organisation. A key priority for this strategy is the diversification of our funding base, ensuring that Rainbows remains sustainable, resilient and capable of meeting growing demand. We will work closely with existing and future funding partners to secure the core investment needed to develop, deliver and maintain high-quality services for children, young people and families throughout Ireland.

We are fortunate to be supported by a committed and engaged Board of Directors. In recent years, new members have joined the Board, bringing valuable expertise, insight and leadership. Together, we remain committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance while continuing to strengthen the Board's capacity to guide and support the organisation into the future.

This strategy also sets out a bold aspiration that has long been part of our vision for Rainbows Ireland: the establishment of a National Children's Grief and Loss Centre. We hope that, before this strategy concludes, Rainbows will have secured a permanent national home. A dedicated centre would provide a base for our staff and volunteers, create opportunities for training and professional development, welcome children, young people and families, and act as a national hub for collaboration, innovation, research and best practice in the area of childhood grief and loss.

Importantly, this strategy commits Rainbows to listening to and learning from the voices of children and young people themselves. Their experiences, insights and needs must continue to shape the services we provide and the decisions we make. We want an organisation that remains responsive, inclusive and relevant for future generations.

The next five years will undoubtedly bring challenges, but they will also bring opportunities. By working together with children, families, volunteers, schools, community organisations, funders, policymakers and partners, we can ensure that every child and young person experiencing grief, loss or family change receives the support they need, when they need it most.

On behalf of the Board, staff and volunteers of Rainbows Ireland, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this strategy and to the work of Rainbows over the past 40 years. We look forward to the next chapter with confidence, determination and hope.



Geraldine Kelly
CEO, Rainbows Ireland

Our Vision, Purpose and Values

Vision

Every child and young person who has experienced grief and loss receives the support they need when they need it most

Our Purpose

Rainbows ensures that every child and young person experiencing grief and loss feels seen, heard and supported. We do this by:

- delivering direct services to children, young people and parents

  and

- delivering evidence-based peer group support through partnering with schools and community organisations.

Values

Be Kind, Be Understanding, Be safe together

About us

Our History

Rainbows Ireland has been supporting children and young people affected by bereavement, parental separation, divorce, and other significant losses for almost four decades. Our work is rooted in the belief that no child or young person should have to navigate grief and major life changes alone.

The Rainbows programme was founded in Chicago in 1983 by Suzy Yehl Marta, who recognised the need for a structured peer support programme for children and young people experiencing bereavement and family change. Her vision was to create a safe and supportive environment where children could share their experiences with others facing similar challenges, helping them to better understand their feelings and develop positive coping strategies.

In 1988, Sr. Cecilia Molloy of the Presentation Order, a teacher and school principal, identified a significant gap in the supports available to children in Ireland affected by bereavement and parental separation. Through her work in schools, she witnessed first-hand the impact of grief and loss on children and young people and recognised the need for an accessible, early intervention response.

Together with a group of dedicated colleagues, Sr. Cecilia travelled to the United States to learn more about the Rainbows model. Inspired by its impact and potential to transform the lives of children in Ireland, they returned determined to establish the programme here. Soon afterwards, the first cohort of Rainbows Facilitators was trained, and Rainbows groups began supporting children in schools and communities across the country. Since then, Rainbows Ireland has grown into a nationally recognised organisation, supporting thousands of children, young people, parents, carers, schools, and communities. Through the dedication of our volunteers, facilitators, coordinators, trainers, staff, and partners, Rainbows continues to provide accessible, evidence-informed, early intervention support at a time when it can make the greatest difference.

Why Our Work Matters

Experiences of bereavement, parental separation, divorce, and family change can have a profound impact on a child or young person's emotional wellbeing, relationships, confidence, sense of belonging, and ability to engage fully in school, family, and community life. While grief and loss are natural parts of life, children and young people often need support to understand and navigate these experiences in ways that are appropriate

to their age and stage of development.

At Rainbows Ireland, we believe that timely support matters. Early intervention helps children and young people to make sense of their experiences, express their feelings safely, develop healthy coping strategies, and build resilience. It can reduce feelings of isolation and uncertainty, strengthen emotional wellbeing, and help prevent challenges from becoming more complex over time.

Our peer support programmes provide children and young people with a safe, structured environment where they can connect with others who have had similar experiences. Through guided peer support, participants learn that they are not alone in what they are experiencing. This sense of connection, understanding, and belonging is a powerful protective factor that supports recovery, resilience, and positive long-term outcomes.

Children and young people experience grief differently from adults and differently from one another. Their understanding of loss evolves as they grow and develop. By providing age-appropriate support when it is needed most, Rainbows helps children and young people process difficult emotions, develop emotional literacy, strengthen coping skills, and build confidence in their ability to manage future challenges.

Our work extends beyond the child or young person. We recognise that the adults closest to them play a vital role in supporting their wellbeing. Through our programmes, training, and resources, we help parents, carers, educators, volunteers, and professionals develop the knowledge, confidence, and skills needed to respond effectively to children experiencing grief and loss. Strengthening these support networks enhances outcomes for children while contributing to the wellbeing of the wider family.

Early intervention also benefits schools, communities, and services. By providing support in familiar environments and through trusted adults, children and young people can access help before difficulties escalate or require more intensive intervention. This preventative approach strengthens community resilience, promotes positive wellbeing, and supports a more integrated response to children's emotional needs.

At its heart, Rainbows Ireland's work is about creating opportunities for connection, understanding, and hope. By providing early intervention peer

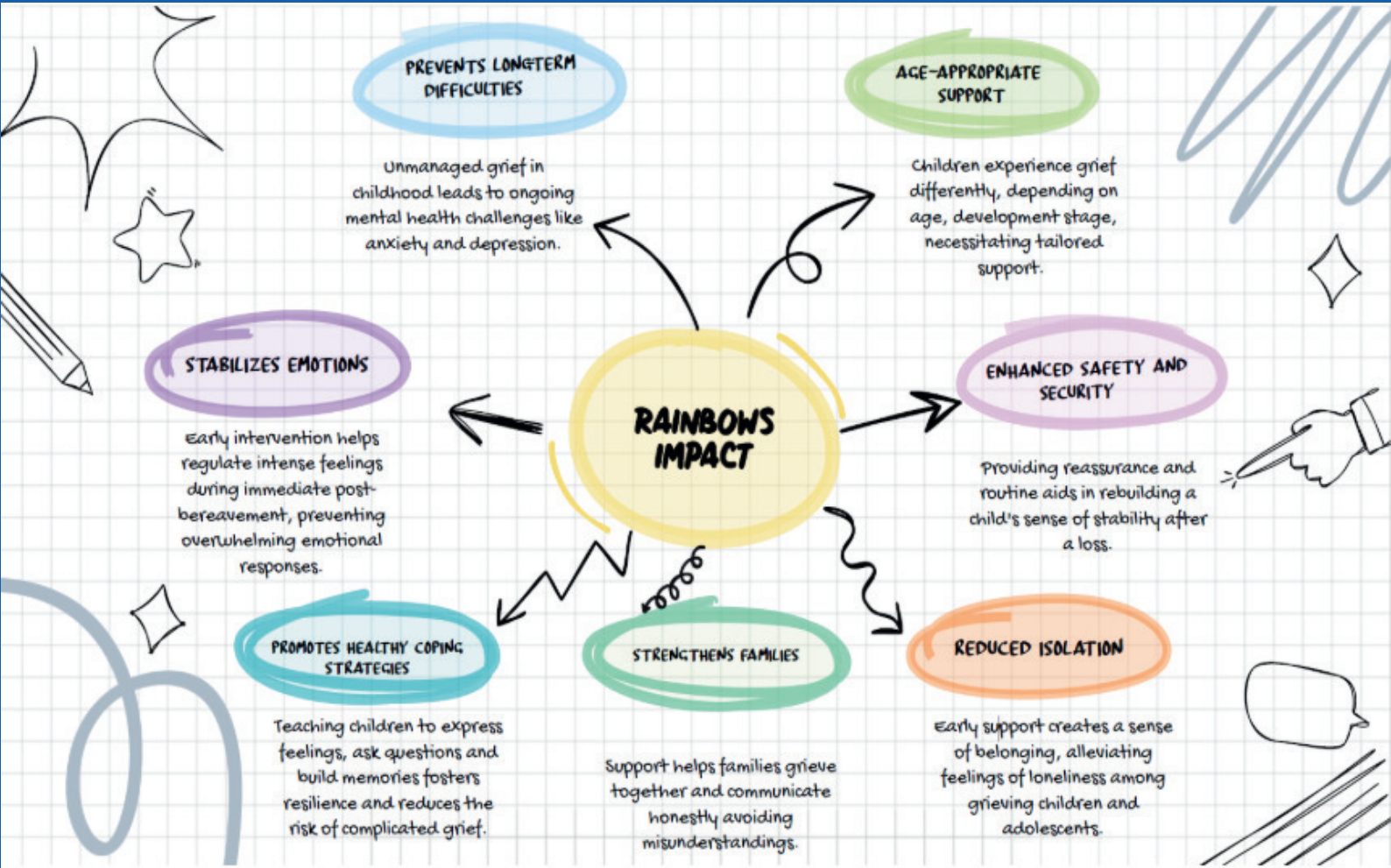
support, we help children and young people navigate grief and loss with confidence and resilience, ensuring they feel supported, understood, and empowered to move forward while honouring their experiences and relationships.

The Difference Early Intervention Makes

Early intervention:

- Promotes emotional wellbeing and healthy adjustment following bereavement and family change.
- Provides children and young people with a safe space to share experiences and feel understood.
- Reduces isolation by fostering connection and peer support.
- Strengthens resilience, coping skills, and emotional literacy.
- Supports a child's sense of safety, belonging, and stability during periods of significant change.
- Encourages healthy communication within families and support networks.
- Equips trusted adults with the skills and confidence to support children effectively.
- Contributes to positive long-term outcomes for children, young people, families, schools, and communities.

By intervening early and providing support when it is needed most, Rainbows Ireland helps children and young people build the resilience, confidence, and hope needed to navigate life's most challenging transitions and losses.


RAINBOWS IMPACT
PREVENTS LONGTERM DIFFICULTIES
Unmanaged grief in childhood leads to ongoing mental health challenges like anxiety and depression.
AGE-APPROPRIATE SUPPORT
Children experience grief differently, depending on age, development stage, necessitating tailored support.
STABILIZES EMOTIONS
Early intervention helps regulate intense feelings during immediate post-bereavement, preventing overwhelming emotional responses.
ENHANCED SAFETY AND SECURITY
Providing reassurance and routine aids in rebuilding a child's sense of stability after a loss.
PROMOTES HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES
Teaching children to express feelings, ask questions and build memories fosters resilience and reduces the risk of complicated grief.
STRENGTHENS FAMILIES
Support helps families grieve together and communicate honestly avoiding misunderstandings.
REDUCED ISOLATION
Early support creates a sense of belonging, alleviating feelings of loneliness among grieving children and adolescents.

What We Do

Rainbows Ireland provides accessible, early intervention supports for children and young people affected by bereavement, parental separation, divorce, and other significant family transitions. Through a nationally coordinated model of service delivery, training, partnership, and advocacy, we support children and young people to navigate grief and loss, strengthen resilience, and build the coping skills needed to manage life's most challenging experiences.

Working collaboratively with schools, community organisations, families, volunteers, and professionals, we ensure that children and young people can access timely, evidence-informed support within their local communities and through trusted relationships.

Peer Support Group Programmes

The Peer Support Group Programme is the cornerstone of Rainbows Ireland's work. Delivered over nine structured sessions, the programme provides children and young people with a safe, supportive environment where they can connect with peers who have experienced similar losses and life changes.

Through guided peer support, participants are supported to express their feelings, develop emotional understanding, build healthy coping strategies, and strengthen resilience. Most importantly, children and young people learn that they are not alone in their experiences.

Rainbows Trained Volunteer-Led Centres

Rainbows Ireland directly delivers Peer Support Group Programmes through a network of trained volunteer-led Centres located in communities across the country. These Centres play a vital role in ensuring access to support for children and young people who may not have the opportunity to participate in a school-based programme.

Supported by trained and dedicated volunteers, coordinators, and facilitators, the Centres provide a welcoming and safe space where children and young people can access early intervention support close to home.

The Rainbows Network

The Rainbows Network comprises hundreds of schools, community organisations, and service providers registered to deliver the Rainbows Peer Support Group Programme nationwide.

Through this network, Rainbows Ireland provides facilitator training, programme resources, safeguarding guidance, quality assurance, and ongoing professional support. This partnership model significantly extends our reach, enabling thousands of children and young people to access

high-quality, evidence-informed peer support within their own communities.

Parent Engagement and Family Support

Parents, caregivers, and families play a central role in supporting children and young people through grief, loss, and family change. Rainbows Ireland provides programmes, information, resources, and guidance that help families better understand the impact of these experiences and respond effectively to children's emotional needs.

By strengthening communication, understanding, and supportive relationships within families, we help create environments where children and young people can feel safe, connected, and supported beyond their participation in Rainbows programmes.

Early Intervention Intellectual Disability Support

Rainbows Ireland has developed and piloted an innovative Early Intervention Intellectual Disability Support Framework to address the needs of children and young people who may not benefit from or be able to access traditional peer support group models.

This approach recognises that some children and young people, particularly those with moderate to profound intellectual disabilities and some neurodivergent children, benefit most from individualised support delivered by trusted adults within the context of their everyday lives. The framework equips families, educators, and support staff with the knowledge, tools, and practical strategies required to help children and young people understand and respond to grief, loss, and family change in ways that are meaningful and accessible to them.

National Information and Advice Service

The Rainbows Ireland Ask Rainbows Information and Advice Service provides guidance, information, emotional support, and signposting for parents, caregivers, professionals, and anyone supporting a child or young person affected by grief, bereavement, parental separation, or family change.

The service acts as an important gateway to support, helping individuals access timely information, understand available options, and identify the most appropriate pathways to assistance.

Professional Learning and School Engagement

Rainbows Ireland supports teachers, school leaders, educational professionals, and community practitioners to respond confidently and effectively to children experiencing grief, bereavement, and family change within the classroom and school community.

Through professional learning opportunities, training programmes, practical resources, and evidence-informed guidance, we build the capacity of schools and services to create supportive environments where children and young people can be recognised, understood, and appropriately supported.

Separation Network

Since 2020, Rainbows Ireland has acted as Lead Agency for the Separation Network, a national collaborative network of practitioners working across Family Resource Centres, community organisations, and the not-for-profit sector.

The Network promotes child-centred, evidence-informed practice in supporting children and families experiencing parental separation. Through professional development, resource development, networking opportunities, collaborative learning, and policy engagement, the Network contributes to improved practice and better outcomes for children nationwide.

Influencing Policy and Practice

Rainbows Ireland is committed to influencing policy and practice to ensure that children and young people experiencing grief, bereavement, parental separation, and family change receive the support they need, when they need it.

Through active engagement with policymakers, statutory agencies, sector partners, and national forums, we advocate for accessible early intervention supports, share learning and insights from our work, and contribute to the development of policies and practices that place the needs and experiences of children and young people at their centre.

By combining direct service delivery with research, partnership, advocacy, and capacity building, Rainbows Ireland works to create a society in which every child and young person affected by loss can access understanding, connection, and support, enabling them to thrive despite life's challenges.

Providing the support children and young people need when they need it most

1 "It helps me talk about my feelings"

"I learnt how to express how I feel."

2 Understand bereavement

"Rainbows helped me understand my feelings. It changed everything."

3 Practical coping tools

"Instead of shouting... I can use what we learned to calm me down."

4 Reduce isolation

""The biggest thing is he felt less like the only child who had lost a parent."

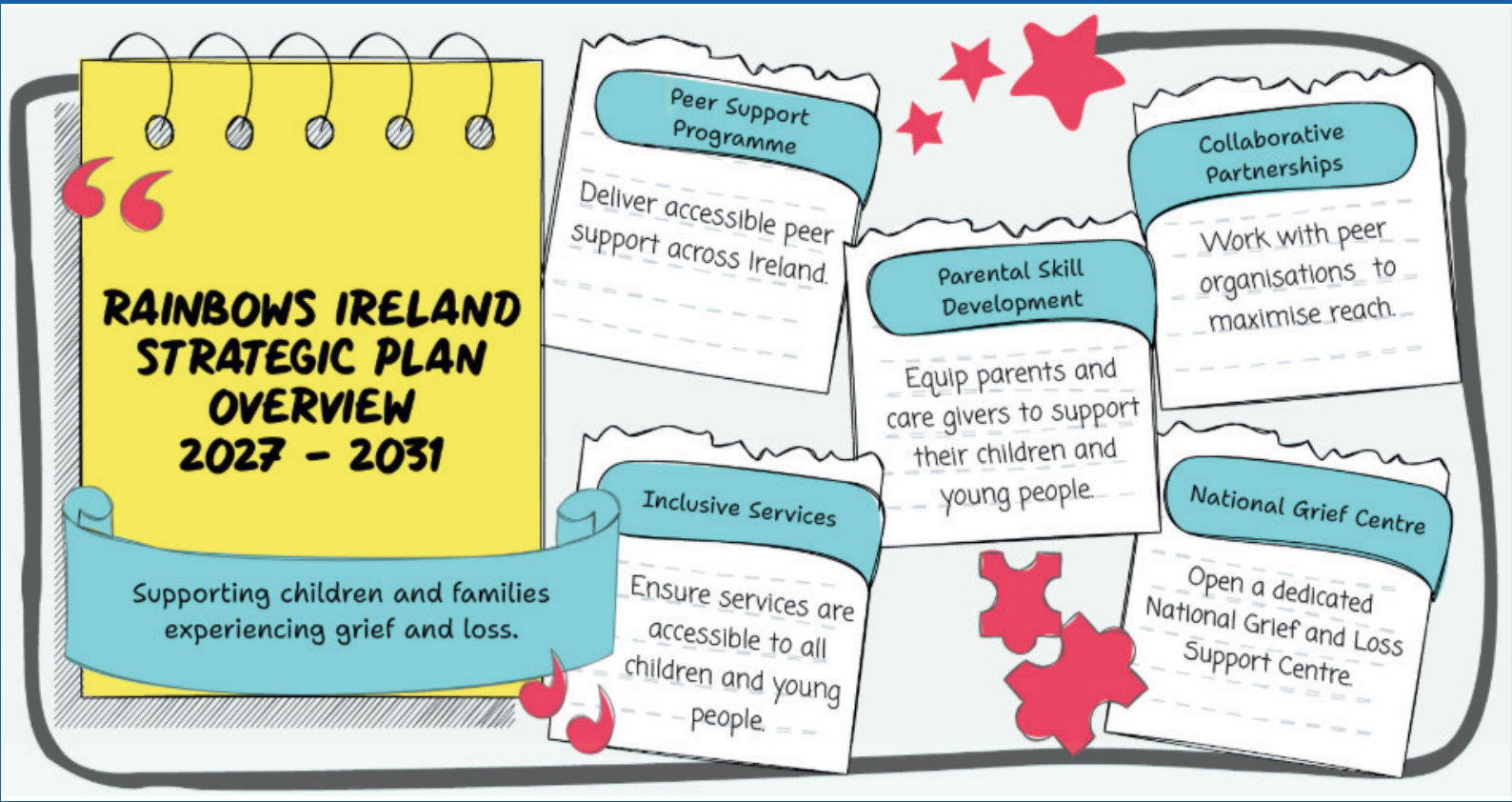
5 Build hope, comfort and emotional relief

" The group makes me feel better, helped me.... feel happier"




Scan for more details:

Our Strategy



Strategic Priority 1: Rainbows Children

Support children and young people when someone dies or families change

Objective	Over the next 5 years we will
Deliver and enable the delivery of our Peer Group Support across all counties in Ireland.	• Coordinate the delivery of a limited number of directly managed volunteer led centres. • Ensure our Peer Support Group (PSG) is inclusive of and accessible to children and young people who can engage in and benefit from peer group support. • Enable the delivery of PSG in registered centres in partnership with local organisations. • Review the Rainbows Peer Group Support model to reflect the diversity of children and young peoples who are in need of our service.
Develop a national framework for individualised grief and loss support for children and young people.	• Develop a new national 1-1 Framework for individualised grief and loss support. • Develop and implement programmes specifically targeting adolescents and young adults.
Demonstrate the outcomes and long-term impact of our work.	• Continue to invest in creating tools to support our Monitoring & Evaluation. • Explore opportunities to engage in research opportunities to identify the short-term outcomes and long-term impact of our work.
Ensure the voice of children and young people informs our supports and services.	• Explore a purposeful way to engage children and young people to co-design our supports and services. • Ensure continuous improvement driven by data and lived experience.

Scan for more details:

SUPPORTING CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN SOMEONE DIES OR FAMILIES CHANGE

Strategic Priority 1: Children & Young People

Peer Group Support

Deliver Peer Group Support across all counties in Ireland

Children and Young Person Led

Ensure the voice of children and young people informs our supports and services.

Reflect Diversity of Need

Ensure our support responds to the diverse needs of all children and young people.

Demonstrate Impact

Demonstrate the positive long term affect of our work for children and young people.



National individualised Framework

Create structured, individualized grief support systems across the country.

Strategic Priority 2: Rainbows Parents

Equip parents and caregivers with the skills to support children and young people with grief and loss.

Objective	Over the next 5 years we will
Develop and deliver programmes for parents and caregivers.	• Develop a suite of parents' workshops suitable for online or in person delivery. • Explore the development of a 4-week course for parents and care givers to support their child as they engage in the 9 week Rainbows Programme.
Deliver targeted early childhood programme for parents and caregivers.	• Develop a best practice framework for working with 0 – 6 year olds.
Develop online resources for parents and caregivers.	• Develop web based resources for parents and caregivers. • Develop a suite of Articles to support parents/carers to understand grief and loss, its impact on children and young people and ways in which they can support their child. • Seek opportunities to fund the development of a parents e course self taught 'Supporting Your Child Through Grief and Loss'
Provide a "dedicated listening ear" service.	• Explore a structured "listening ear" model to parents supporting a child through grief and loss and secure the resources required to deliver this.

EQUIP PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS WITH THE SKILLS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH GRIEF AND LOSS.

Strategic Priority 2: Parents & Caregivers

Parent Support Model

A comprehensive approach to engage parents in supporting their children's emotional wellbeing.

Monthly Workshops for Parents

A suite of parents workshops on a continuous basis.

Listening Ear Support

A supportive channel for parents needing advice, guidance or emotional reassurance.

Online Resources

Web-based resources to support parents to support their child.



Early Rainbows for Ages 0-6

New services tailored to support parents and caregivers with very young children.

Strategic Priority 3: Rainbows Partners

Collaborate with peer organisations to reach children and young people experiencing grief and loss

Objective	Over the next 5 years we will
Continue to develop and support our national network of registered Rainbow Centres.	• Deliver required training for Rainbows Registered Centres. • Review and explore our registered network model to ensure there is at least one year round active public/volunteer-led centre in every county.
Equip front-line practitioners with the language, tools, understanding and confidence needed to support children and young people navigating grief, loss and family change.	• Deliver a suite of professional workshops tailored to the frontline professionals. • Explore training and the development of resources for school leaders developing a whole school approach to grief, loss and change.
Continue to build cross-sector partnerships to enhance delivery, resourcing and influence policy.	• Contribute to the development of practice in the area of grief and loss by participating and collaborating in research partnerships. • Collaborate with peer organisations to influence national policy and service delivery in the area of grief and loss.

COLLABORATE WITH PEER ORGANISATIONS TO REACH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND LOSS

Strategic Priority 3: Partners

School Resilience

Develop resources to provide whole school approach to grief, loss and change.

Active Rainbows Centres

Ensure every county has at least one volunteer-led centre operational throughout the year.

Support Front-line Practitioners

Equip practitioners with skills and resources to confidently assist children experiencing grief and loss.

Train Registered Centres

Continue to provide essential training to ensure effective support for grieving families.

Professional Workshops

Deliver tailored workshops for professionals addressing the complexities of grief and providing support.

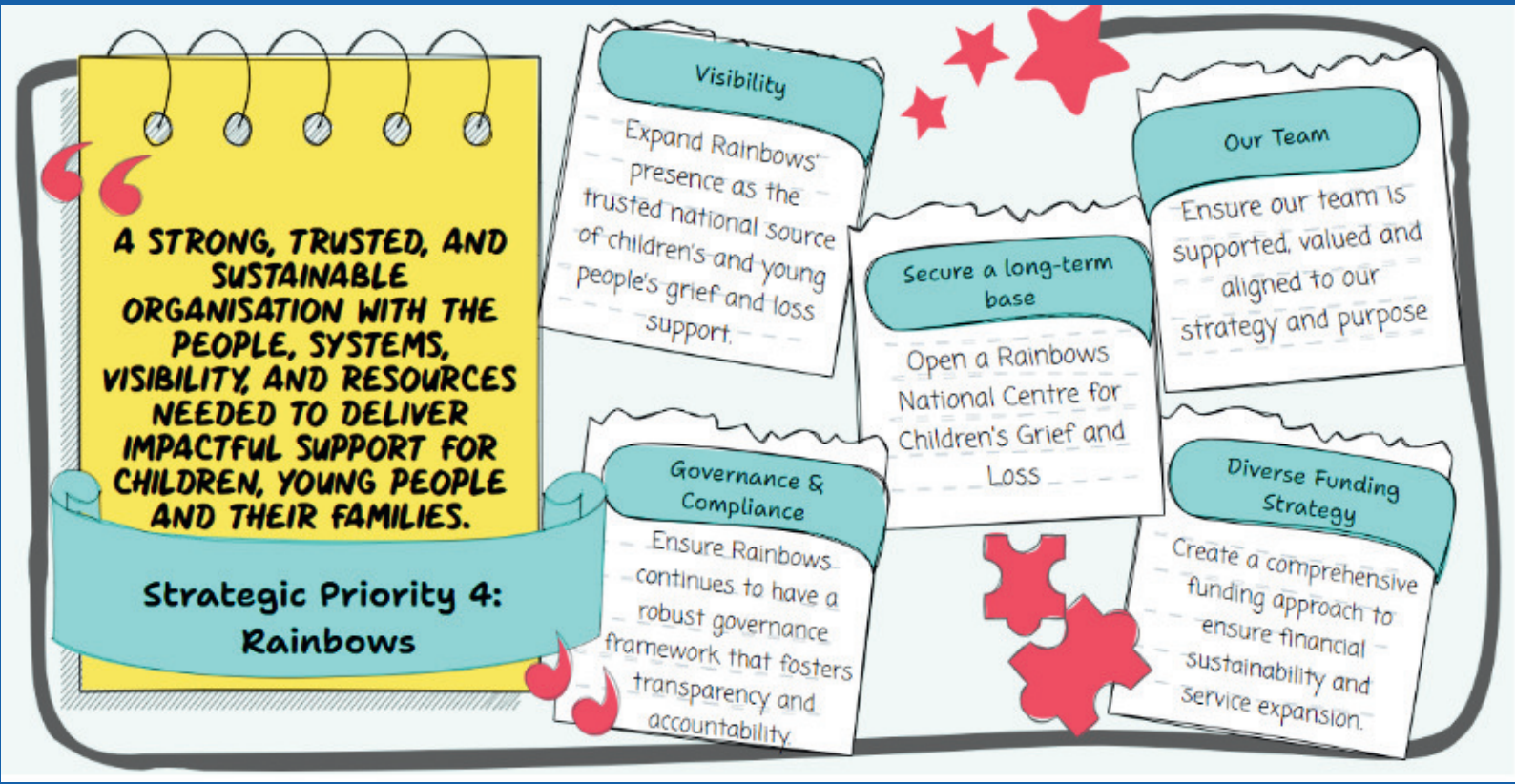


Strategic Priority 4: Rainbows Ireland

A strong, trusted, and sustainable organisation with the people, systems, visibility, and resources needed to deliver impactful support for children, young people and their families.

Objective	Over the next 5 years we will
Visibility **Expand Rainbows' presence as the trusted national source of children's and young people's grief and loss support.**	• Identify and secure a new long-term physical base for Rainbows Ireland- National Children's Grief Centre. • Implement a clear, cohesive plan for messaging, content, outreach and brand identity. • Develop our social media presence and online engagement.
Funding **We have a strong income base through diversified funding sources ensuring service accessibility and growth.**	• Develop a funding and fundraising strategy. • Create clear alignment with national child and young people's policies. • Develop a business model for the delivery of our suite of professional training modules.
People **Our team is supported, valued and aligned to our strategy and purpose.**	• Build organisational capacity through recruitment, CPD and supervision. • Have clear roles and responsibilities across programmes, operations and communications. • Ensure staff wellbeing supports and workload balance are in place. • Support leadership development and future planning. • Implement and review of volunteer and employee handbooks.
Governance and Compliance **Ensure Rainbows remains compliant, forward-looking and governed to the highest standard to enhance our reputation and trust.**	• Ensure ongoing compliance with Charities Governance Code and Companies Registrations Office. • Support our Board to oversee the strategic direction and implementation of this strategy. • Continue a structured approach to our policy renewal cycle.

Scan for more details:


A STRONG, TRUSTED, AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION WITH THE PEOPLE, SYSTEMS, VISIBILITY, AND RESOURCES NEEDED TO DELIVER IMPACTFUL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES.
Strategic Priority 4: Rainbows
Visibility
Expand Rainbows' presence as the trusted national source of children's and young people's grief and loss support.
Secure a long-term base
Open a Rainbows National Centre for Children's Grief and Loss
Our Team
Ensure our team is supported, valued and aligned to our strategy and purpose
Governance & Compliance
Ensure Rainbows continues to have a robust governance framework that fosters transparency and accountability
Diverse Funding Strategy
Create a comprehensive funding approach to ensure financial sustainability and service expansion.

Rainbows Ireland

Supporting Children and Young People with Bereavement and Parental Separation

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Company Number	262410



Rainbows Ireland

Supporting Children and Young People with Bereavement and Parental Separation

OUR FUNDERS

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

Mental Health Ireland

Comharchumann Mhic Dara
An Cheathrú Rua, Co. na Gaillimhe
091-869750 | www.ancheathrurua.ie

ciste na gcuntas díomhaoin
the dormant accounts fund

Forbairt Tuaithe na Gaillimhe
Galway Rural Development

POBAL RUA

CYPSC
Coiste na Seirbhísí do Leanaí & do Dhaoine Óga
Children & Young People's Services Committee
Gaillimh
Galway

Údarás na Gaeltachta



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