

**HILL STREET
FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE
NEEDS ANALYSIS
NOVEMBER 2021**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Review Method	4
3. Research Findings	6
3.1 Demographic Profile	6
3.2 Facts and Figures about Hill Street FRC	6
3.3 Programmes and activities during 2020 and 2021	7
3.4 Observations and experience of Hill Street FRC	9
3.5 Local needs and issues	12
3.6 Particular Needs of Migrant Families	15
3.7 The Impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on Hill Street FRC	17
3.8 Potential of New Building to Meet needs in Hill Street FRC catchment area	18
4. Summary of Needs, Response of Hill Street FRC and Gaps in Provision	20
4.1 Needs Identified	20
4.2 How Hill Street FRC responds to identified needs currently	22
4.3 Developments in NEIC since 2018 needs analysis	23
4.4 Gaps in response to needs in Hill Street FRC catchment area	23
5. Recommendations	25
5.1. Current building and resources	25
5.2 New building and additional resources	27
Appendix 1 Stakeholders consulted	28
Appendix 2 Proposal for key worker role in Hill Street FRC	30

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This needs analysis for the catchment area of Hill Street Family Resource Centre (FRC) was conducted in November 2021. It is intended to inform strategic planning for 2022 to 2027 by identifying the needs of families with children aged 0-6, with special reference to the needs of families of minority ethnic communities. The process also engaged stakeholders with plans for a proposed new building for the Centre.

Hill Street FRC is a not-for-profit intercultural organisation dedicated to supporting local families and children in Dublin's North-East Inner City (NEIC). Their work is rooted in community engagement and responding to the needs of local families. They work from a model of progressive universalism, which, simply put, is 'support for all, and more support for those who need it.'¹

As part of the needs analysis, groups of stakeholders were consulted through individual interviews and focus groups. These included parents, carers, family members and children currently engaging with Hill Street FRC programmes and activities, as well as staff and the Board of Hill Street FRC, and key staff of statutory, community and voluntary organisations and agencies who deliver their service through Hill Street FRC.

The consultation showed that the work of Hill Street FRC is greatly valued by each of the cohorts consulted. There is significant need for its services, programmes and activities for families of young children in the Hill Street catchment area. Hill Street FRC makes a particular contribution to meeting the needs of the many families of minority ethnic communities in the area, while being open to all families.

Parents and family members greatly value the support provided which is child-focused, as well as focused on developing the capacity of adults in the lives of young children. Parents and family members of young children are supported to grow in their knowledge and understanding of their children's development and how to be the best parents they can be to their growing children.

Some families in the Hill Street FRC catchment area have significant housing and other subsistence needs, which require response at the level of wider networks, including NEIC and YPAR. Hill Street FRC has a role in supporting families to access services, and in keeping their needs on the agendas of these wider networks. There is scope for expanding this support role within Hill Street FRC.

Hill Street FRC addresses needs to improve social networks and reduce social isolation. It supports families to improve their mental health where there are increased levels of anxiety.

Hill Street FRC responded quickly and effectively to the challenges of the pandemic and was a touchstone for many families as they navigated the crisis.

Needs highlighted by the consultation included more safe space to play, supports for children with additional needs, and childcare provision for older children. There is a clear need for more childcare, both programmed and flexible, respite care. The need for early childhood education was also highlighted.

¹ Hill Street FRC New Building Proposal, July 2021

As a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, there is now an increased demand for early intervention to address delays in child development.

Needs specific to families of minority ethnic communities include English language lessons and opportunities to practise speaking English, and more opportunities to engage with indigenous Irish families. Some have significant need for supports in accessing services and learning how things work in Ireland. There is a need for cultural identity to be valued and given space for expression and exploration. Children need support to become strong in their cultural identity, and parents need space to talk with other parents about the experience of raising children with mixed or different cultural identities. Some migrant families are far from their extended families and need readily accessible support as they learn to become parents.

Racism is an issue in the local area. The culture of Hill Street FRC means that everyone experiences a safe space while there. Some families feel unsafe in public spaces. There are initiatives to address these issues, including the Cultural Ambassador programme. The broader question of responding to racism in the local area remains a priority at the level of wider networks.

Concern was expressed about the unmet needs of Roma families who live or spend time in the city centre and close to Hill Street.

There was no shortage of ideas for what more could be offered through Hill Street FRC, both in the current context, and also in the context of a new purpose-built centre. These are gathered in the findings for each group of stakeholders and are reflected in the Recommendations section.

With a bigger, purpose-built centre, adequately staffed and resourced in line with the business plan, Hill Street FRC would have the capacity to respond to more of the existing need for childcare, early education, parenting education and integration. They could engage with more families, and provide much needed respite childcare and a high-quality pre-school service. This would build on the approach to younger children already developed by Hill Street FRC.

Access to afterschool for children aged 7 to 12 would contribute to their greater safety and physical, emotional, and social development.

Hill Street FRC could be a centre with multidisciplinary resources to support children with additional needs.

Hill Street FRC could grow as an accessible centre for the local community, where links within and between cultural groups could be further facilitated.

The report concludes with recommendations for Hill Street FRC in its present facility and for its future in the new building.

1. INTRODUCTION

In preparing for its strategic planning process for 2022 - 2027 Hill Street Family Resource Centre commissioned a needs analysis of its catchment area. It builds on the work of the 2018 needs analysis undertaken by Pat Tobin of CAN - Community Action Network.

This needs analysis relates to Hill Street Family Resource Centre (FRC) and the needs of families in the catchment area of the Centre, with particular emphasis on families with children in the 0-6 age range. Additionally, there is a focus on the needs of families from minority ethnic communities and their children aged 0-6 years.

Since the last needs analysis was undertaken, architectural plans and a business plan for a new building for Hill Street Resource Centre have been developed. This needs analysis is intended to inform the Centre's next strategic plan (2022 - 2027) and aimed to engage all stakeholders in plans for the future expansion and development of Hill Street FRC ensuring shared ownership of future plans.

A larger research project to assess current and emerging unmet needs of Early Years (Prenatal –5 Years) Services in NEIC is currently being conducted by Young People at Risk (YPAR) and the results, due out at the end of February 2022, will also inform the 2022 – 2027 Hill Street FRC Strategic Plan.

This needs analysis reviewed the

- Family support needs of families with children aged 0-6, with a particular emphasis on migrant families and families from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Gaps in services and interventions for young children and their families
- Potential for addressing needs of families arising from the planned new building for the Centre
- How the experience of the Covid pandemic has affected the work and the experience and needs of children and families
- Experience of families currently engaging with Hill Street Family Resource Centre.
- Experience of the Board and Staff of the Centre in the development and delivery of family supports
- Perspective of key staff from statutory and Community/Voluntary organisations in the catchment area whose brief includes family support

2. REVIEW METHOD

The review was conducted through semi-structured interviews with the following stakeholders:

- Families who currently engage with the Family Resource Centre. These included families in key target groups e.g., homeless families, migrant families as well as indigenous families and lone parents.
- Project manager and staff team, members of the Board, as well as a staff member who had recently left Hill Street, volunteer and relief staff.
- Key staff of statutory, community and voluntary organisations in the catchment area whose brief includes family support
- Agencies who avail of the Centre's facilities to provide their service

It was not possible to arrange meetings with parents not engaged with Hill Street FRC.

The researcher was in the Centre on four days in November, meeting with staff, parents and carers, children, board members and volunteers. A focus group with board members and interviews with members of other projects mostly took place over Zoom, with some over the telephone. This was to minimise in person contacts in a time of rising Covid cases nationally.

CONSULTATION ACTIONS

21 parents gave written responses relating to their experience of Hill Street and hopes for future development of Hill Street FRC.

39 parents and carers took part in six focus groups.

6 parents attending the Outdoor Parent and Child Group were interviewed.

These parents, carers and family members groups included mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, and paid carers. They included two-parent and lone parent families, as well as extended families. They also included families living in emergency accommodation. The mother of a child with additional needs, and a parent with additional needs were also included in the consultation. The researcher met parents and carers from Ireland, China, Northern Ireland, and other parts of UK, Poland, Brazil, Mongolia, Latvia, Germany, Nigeria, Israel, and Romania.

8 children attending the Afterschool Group talked about their experience of Hill Street FRC Afterschool Group.

14 Key staff members from 14 statutory and community and voluntary organisations in the area were interviewed, as follows:

Public Health Nurse from Summerhill HSE Primary Care Centre; Dublin City Council Intercultural co-ordinator, NEIC; Neighbourhood Youth Project 1; Ozanam House Resource Centre Childcare; Young People At Risk (YPAR) North Inner City; St. Brigid's Day Nursery; Lourdes Youth and Community Creche; Tusla, Family Support; Young Mothers Network; Foundations Project; Holy Child Preschool; City Connects; Central Model School; NEIC Programme Office.

The researcher heard from **10** staff members in a combination of focus group and individual interviews (including one intern, one volunteer / relief staff, and one who had recently left Hill Street FRC).

The play therapist and the coordinator of the adult counselling service working in the Centre were also interviewed.

8 board members engaged in the consultation.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section of the report outlines

- A demographic profile of area around Hill Street Resource Centre
- Facts and Figures about the service
- Services provided during 2020 and 2021
- Findings from key staff of statutory and community and voluntary organisations in the catchment area, findings from staff and board, findings from parents, carers, and family members, and findings from children using the service are organised in four sections:
 - The observations and experience of Hill Street FRC
 - Local needs and issues
 - Particular needs of migrant families
 - Impact of Covid 19 pandemic
 - Possibilities for meeting needs in a new building

3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

This relates to 2016 census data for the 4 main Electoral Divisions that families using Hill Street FRC live in: Mountjoy A, Mountjoy B, Rotunda A and Rotunda B.

- The population of this area was 17,775, a 16.9% increase on figures for 2011 census.
- The population aged 0-6 is 1,197, which is 6.7% of the total population of the area. This compares with the state figure of 7%.
- The population aged 0-2 is 573 which is 3.2% of population. This compares with the state figure 4%.
- Lone parent families make up 45.7% of families in the area. This compares with a national average of 24.6%
- In terms of nationality, in these four electoral divisions, 41.15% are Irish, and 59.1% are other. This compares to state figures of 87% and 13% respectively.

3.2 FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT HILL STREET FRC

In 2021 345 families have registered with Hill Street FRC. Of these, 112 noted that they are Irish (one third of all families). 22 nationalities are registered.

Of those who are Irish, some are indigenous Irish, some are in mixed nationality families, and some have become Irish citizens.

3.3 PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES DURING 2020 AND 2021

Hill Street Centre's programme consists of parenting programmes, parenting supports, adult, child and family counselling, parent and child groups, afterschool clubs, preparation for preschool, English language classes, community education, general support on a one-to-one basis and community celebrations.

2020 began as previous years, with the continuation of the Preparation for Pre-school group which had begun in September 2019, and all the other programmes and activities. In March 2020 the Covid pandemic brought things to an abrupt halt. The staff of Hill Street responded quickly to the changed situation and developed new ways of meeting the needs of families engaged with the Centre. These included:

- Online groups for children and for parents, with activity packs prepared and distributed from 'the railings', which became a new point of contact between families and the Centre.
- Phone calls to maintain contact and offer support to parents who were registered with different groups. 'Wraparound' support for families struggling with issues such as housing, immigration, food and clothing poverty, was provided during the lockdown period. This was a time when the difficulties in accessing support in these areas was particularly acute. This work revealed a previously hidden need for one-to-one support, particularly for migrant families and those whose level of spoken and written English posed an additional challenge in accessing services and resources. Families supported in this way during the early months of the pandemic went on to support other families, sharing what they had learned about how to access services.
- Outdoor sensory sessions: a series of four sessions outdoors, each focusing on a different sense
- Outdoor Parent and Child Group
- Responding to concerns about children's mental health after lockdown through children's yoga and mindfulness for children referred by play therapist whilst on their waiting list.

As soon as government guidelines allowed, groups resumed back in the Centre. There was some adaptation to keep all parties safe. For example, to begin with, 2 families at a time were in the Centre, where previously 16 families would be in together.

Summer camp was organised in summer 2020. Afterschool resumed when children returned to school.

The activities at the time of the needs analysis are as follows:

- Preparation for Pre-school with 36 families, in two groups. For each group this is organised as a group activity on two mornings per week over a year, prior to children starting preschool. Parents attend with their child for the first term, and then attend a parent's cafe from January to June. The sessions are designed to support the child and parent to get ready for preschool through developing independence, communication skills and ability to interact socially with other children and adults

- Parent and baby group (0-1 years) This is a group for parents/carers to deepen their understanding of their baby's development and to support them to discover their baby
- Outdoor parent and child group (0-3years)
- Parenting course.
- English language (classes provided by CDETb)
- Adult Yoga, facilitated by a volunteer. This group makes use of a space in Ozanam house, due to Covid.
- Play therapy
- Adult counselling
- Mindfulness for 9- to 12-year-olds
- School mindfulness programme in two local schools.
- Gardening event for families in playground
- Information and support with accessing other services
- Participating in *The Big Scream*
- Preparations for Chinese New Year.
- One to one parenting support.

In addition to these supports for parents, carers and families, Hill Street has developed and offered training and mentoring to practitioners and organisations on their Preparation for Preschool programme. A training manual is being developed in parallel with this.

Parenting courses are run three times a year.

Hill Street FRC's Facebook page is a rich source of information, regularly updated. Its posts include signposting and information about courses and activities from other organisations.

From September 2021 the parenting course engaged with by parents has been *Circle of Security*. Earlier in the pandemic the parenting course moved online, but from September it returned as an in-person course. Because of public health restrictions this course has been limited to a group of 6.

3.4 OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF HILL STREET FRC

A PLACE OF WELCOME

All groups spoke of the spirit of hospitality and welcome into the Centre. The Centre places an emphasis on building relationships with parents as well as children. They provide a safe space for families to share their experience and make connections with each other.

The diversity of the staff, and the languages spoken by the staff contribute to the welcome that people experience. As well as English, the staff between them speak Hungarian, Chinese and Portuguese. Languages are valued here: in the signs around the building, and in the children's play areas. There is an openness to hearing people speaking in their own languages, as well as support to develop confidence in English. Seeing the photos around the building adds to the sense of belonging.

The Hill Street Family Resource Centre welcomes all age groups, including grandparents. Some Chinese grandparents, in particular, have found a place to connect with others of a similar age, as well as an opportunity to learn and practise speaking English.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Organisation representatives interviewed recognised the community development approach taken by the Centre, basing its work on the real needs of local people and placing a value on their participation in the life of the Centre's work and development. Parents said that in Hill Street FRC they feel 'not a stranger any more'. They appreciate it as a place of belonging, with opportunities to become very involved, and as a trusted source of information. Some also spoke of the demands of being involved.

"Parents coming here are very involved, it's not a place where you just drop the kids off. You need to be home at least part of the time. Parents who work full-time need the support even more."

There are plans for a parents' forum, to involve parents more in the decision-making and the life of the Centre, and to grow their awareness of how the Centre works. This offers the possibility of developing leadership skills, and a deeper connection with staff.

There are plans too for community theatre programme, including acting classes and storytelling which will facilitate people to tell their own stories.

Several interviewees said that some families and parents have found it daunting to engage with the group approach in Hill Street Centre, because of a lack of personal confidence. For these people, it is valuable to have ways to make it easy for them to get to know people in the Centre.

In the past Public Health Nurses (PHNs) ran an outreach clinic in Hill Street. This provided an opportunity for young mothers to get to know the place and the people. This outreach clinic by PHNs discontinued following their move to the new Primary Health Care Centre in Summerhill.

FOCUS ON MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Some workers in other organisations still see Hill Street FRC as predominantly for minority ethnic families, and this can affect their referral practices. All recognise the particular contribution that Hill Street FRC makes to supporting families from minority ethnic communities, and to the work of integration in the area.

A third of all families attending Hill Street FRC identify as Irish. This includes indigenous Irish, families of mixed cultural heritage, and migrant families who have become Irish citizens.

A recurring question for Hill Street FRC is whether and how to work to increase the engagement with indigenous Irish families. This would take time and energy, and resources are already stretched. On the other hand, the engagement of more indigenous Irish families would increase the possibilities for intercultural integration. Some members of minority ethnic families said they would like more opportunities to get to know Irish people.

QUALITY OF COURSES, GROUPS AND PROGRAMMES

Parents appreciate the professionally run courses offered by Hill Street. They appreciate that a child therapist facilitated the Circle of Security course, and that it is not just run by volunteers. It is of a high standard, and subsidised. They also appreciated the “almost-for-free after school club”.

It is a safe place for children to meet other children. The staff make the children feel safe. Here there is a routine, and the children are comfortable. Each child and each family is recognised as unique.

There was appreciation of the continuum of programmes, from the baby groups, to the Preparation for Preschool, and then the afterschool.

Preparation for Preschool has been developed by the Hill Street FRC childcare team. Staff in preschools who have taken children from that programme recognise clear benefits to children and parents who have participated in it. Staff from neighbouring childcare providers have engaged with training in the programme and contributed to the development of a training manual for the programme.

VISIBILITY OF HILL STREET FRC

Parents find their way to Hill Street FRC through a variety of avenues: including Public Health Nurses, family members, friends, the Early Learning Initiative, a flyer in a GP surgery, or through other professionals. Many interviewed said finding Hill Street FRC was very significant in their lives.

Some reported that their first time to visit the Centre was to see the PHN. This first experience of the Centre gave them confidence to access programmes and activities in the Centre subsequently. While many were happy that they found Hill Street FRC when they needed it, a few had found it harder to know how to access programmes and activities. They were unaware that they could just call in and ask.

Staff of other organisations have a good level of knowledge and understanding of the work and approach of Hill Street FRC. Some have had difficulty in keeping up to date during and

since the lockdown days of the pandemic, and some were unaware of in person groups re-starting.

The Hill Street FRC Facebook page is frequently updated and sensitively curated to provide valuable information to parents, carers and families both about Hill Street activities and the initiatives of other organisations relevant to the families participating at Hill Street. As a source of up-to-date information, the website is however, a little confusing, perhaps because recently it has not been updated as regularly as the Facebook page. Funding has been received to update the website during 2022.

PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Since starting to come to Hill Street Centre, many people are happy, and see that their children are happy. They mention being relaxed, independent, learning something new, and spending quality time with their children, as well as their children having the chance to play with other children. They see big changes in their children's behaviour and social development.

One written response which captured the spirit of many of the other responses was:

"I totally love this place. Whenever I come here, just feel so relax, and this place raises my social awareness, brings me closer to the community where I live in. As an immigrant, I don't feel isolated. I'm grateful for this place."

FINDINGS FROM CHILDREN ATTENDING AFTER SCHOOL

All the children who engaged with the researcher said they were happy to be coming to the Centre after school. They said that they like to play with other children and named specific games and activities which they enjoy. When they come here they get ideas for what to play at home, they make friends, and they get to play with their friends. They like reading books, painting, and doing "messy stuff" that they don't get to do at home.

One said that she wished she could come every day, even Saturday and Sunday. Some said that they would like different toys and that they would like to take toys home with them sometimes. One said he would like blocks to play with. Several said they would like to go to the beach. They said that they get to go to afterschool at Hill Street Centre because 'my mummy lets me', and because 'I really like it here'.

3.5 LOCAL NEEDS AND ISSUES

THE NEED FOR MORE CHILDCARE PLACES

Every group spoke of the lack of, or difficulties in accessing, childcare for all ages in the area. There is unmet need for childcare and early childhood education for children aged from 0-6, but also for childcare for older children aged 7 to 11. Local creche and preschool providers say that they could fill their places more than twice over. Some maintain waiting lists, while others do not. There is good continuity for children who can access the services, which means that few children leave. Places are generally only available to those who start at an early age.

More creche and preschool places are needed in the Hill Street FRC catchment area.

In particular there is a lack of services for parents of children aged 0-3. The ratio of staff to children required make this expensive to operate and so also to access. There is a strong need for this on a respite or sessional basis. Providers face challenges with having adequate staffing to respond to the needs of all children, in particular those with additional needs. These challenges relate both to securing adequate funding, as well as to recruitment of staff.

A key point emphasised by many speakers was the need for affordable, flexible and accessible childcare.

HOUSING AND OTHER SUBSISTENCE NEEDS

The area around Hill Street includes a large number of families in emergency accommodation, some of whom attend activities and programmes in Hill Street Centre. Representatives of local organisations commented on the cramped conditions of private rented accommodation for some families. A particularly significant effect of this is the lack of space for children to play, or even to move around much.

During the pandemic lockdown staff made weekly calls to parents and families to offer support and maintain relationships and connection. These calls were greatly valued by many parents who mentioned them. During the calls some needs began to be voiced by some parents, including members of minority ethnic communities. Parents began to talk about food poverty, financial difficulties, housing issues and homelessness. Covid made the struggles around subsistence needs worse, and some people also lost their employment. Previously, the work of Hill Street FRC Child and Family team had been more parenting and child-focused. While this continues to be the case, during the early months of the pandemic wider subsistence needs came to the fore.

Arising out of this experience, an idea began to form of a way to respond to these ongoing needs. Appendix 2 details the experience and articulates the need for a key worker post which could provide wraparound support for families. This role could provide a single person point of contact to bridge between families and other services relating to social welfare, immigration issues, housing support, special support for children with additional needs. The role could also be a response to the need to support migrant families in the early stages of learning English.

CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS / EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

Many referred to a chronic need in the area for therapeutic support and early intervention, particularly for speech and language and occupational therapy, as well as for play therapy. Those interviewed reported that children with additional needs face long waiting lists for assessment and for therapeutic services, in particular speech and language, and occupational therapy. Some children who were identified as in need of assessment in pre-school, are waiting a year and a half or more for their initial assessment. In such cases, they go on then to begin primary school without a clear assessment of their needs. Some children are being diagnosed at 5 to 8 years, although their parents always knew “there was something amiss”.

These observations were made despite the new NEIC/HSE Multi Disciplinary Team initiative, which has reduced wait times by 46 weeks in 2021. This initiative relates to school age children, so will not necessarily benefit pre-school children.

The play therapy service operating in Hill Street FRC reported a waiting list of 6 to 8 months. They suggested that measures are needed to provide support to parents while their children are on the waiting list, e.g. through a weekly open clinic, by appointment, where parents could have a 15 minute consultation with a play therapist to get some support until they can access a full service. They suggested that a full-time play therapy position would be helpful in responding to demand.

The play therapist identified a particular need for social and emotional developmental support for children with autism, and suggested support might be provided through shared single interest groups, for example Lego, Minecraft, or Thomas the Tank Engine.

A research project has commenced to assess current and emerging unmet needs for 0- to 5-year-old children in the NEIC. The final report is expected to propose a sustainable wrap-around model of early years/childhood services and supports that can be flexible and tailored to address the needs of all children and families in the area, including those with additional or special needs.

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

Social isolation was significant in the 2018 needs analysis, and that is still the case. The experience of the pandemic appears to have exacerbated the issue. People stayed in small bubbles and had little opportunity to meet others outside their immediate family. Ways to develop new friendships and maintain existing friendships have been limited by public health restrictions. Many emphasised the importance of strong social networks for good mental health.

People can share with people when they develop trust, connection and a sense of belonging. Then they can also ask for help. An additional benefit of social networking is that people mix with people they wouldn't normally mix with, building relationships between people of different nationalities, cultures and religions.

There have been increased levels of anxiety and depression according to those interviewed.

Adults attending counselling are experiencing a number of issues, including: bereavement and loss; anxiety and depression; issues arising from differences in cultural values; domestic violence; and stress management, to name a few. The counsellors work with adults on a

short-term basis, but there is flexibility in the way the service is delivered in recognition of the complexity of cases in the local area.

Representatives of other organisations referenced significant trauma in the community, with many people they encounter having high ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) scores. In some cases, there is an issue with parenting capacity, with parents losing authority with their children. A connection was made between this and the high ACE scores.

SAFE SPACE TO PLAY AND OUTDOOR SPACE

Many children attending Hill Street live in accommodation that has inadequate space for young children to move around, and to play. Outside space to play is also not readily available in the local area. Nearby parks are often experienced as unsafe, in part because of intimidating antisocial behaviour by young people, some of whom are from outside the area.

The playground at Hill Street FRC is owned and managed by DCC. Sometimes groups of teenagers occupy the space, and at these times parents with small children feel less safe to use it. At times there has been broken glass in the playground. At times when the outdoor space at Hill Street is used for groups, the area is prepared, and the presence of staff and the whole group contributes to the feeling of safety.

Staff of Hill Street FRC identified a need for developmentally appropriate play for children of different age groups. They also cited a need for non-judgemental education for parents about child development, attachment, conflict and the benefit of different types of play. For them, it is an important support especially for people who don't have extended family nearby.

OLDER CHILDREN

Parents said they would like to see children up to age 12 being able to come to Hill Street. This included both afterschool activities for older children, as well as including older children in family trips and in summer camps.

Staff of Hill Street FRC see the need for support for children aged 7 to 12 years, including their need to be safe, to play, and for mental health support.

Concern was expressed that without sufficient affordable afterschool provision, some young children are at home without appropriate supervision for the time between school finishing and when their working parents can get home. Afterschool provision can address both the needs of children for developmentally appropriate play and support, and also the needs of low paid working parents for childcare outside of school hours.

While other organisations spoke of the need for work with older children, some expressed the opinion that Hill Street FRC should keep its current brief of working with 0- to 6- year-olds and their families.

ROMA FAMILIES

A number of interviewees referred to an increase in the number of Roma families in the city centre. Some such families are living locally. Many have been moved to accommodation in other parts of the city but return daily to the city centre to be near extended family.

Concern was expressed about the women and young children of Roma families seeming to spend their days outside, particularly as the weather was very cold.

A key worker for Roma families has been appointed in the Community Coop project. The intercultural co-ordinator in NEIC has developed a project working with Roma women, strengthening relationships and leadership capacity.

This is an issue to be addressed by the wider network of statutory, community and voluntary services in NEIC, and requires particular cultural resources

PROGRAMMES FOR ADULTS

Parents made suggestions for courses or activities for adults, which included:

- Computer courses, including beginning to use computers / digital technology, and also learning to use them more.
- Support with and a course on returning to the workplace, both after parental leave from employment, and after Covid-related loss of employment.
- There was a suggestion that a group or course to provide information and support for postpartum depression would be valuable to several mothers.
- Wellbeing workshops, to learn to deal with stress and anxiety
- Sewing, knitting, painting, cycling
- Cooking classes and sharing of recipes and food from the diverse community of families
- Learning and education programmes which could build on positive cultural diversity and explore the experience of racism. There was a suggestion of creating opportunities to explore cultural identity.

3.6 PARTICULAR NEEDS OF MIGRANT FAMILIES

As was observed by a number of interviewees, migrant families are not a homogenous group. Each family who engages with Hill Street is unique and is treated as such. However, there are some issues which are faced more often by migrant families and require particular responses. (This is not to suggest that some of these issues are not also faced by indigenous Irish families). These include:

- Fluency in written and spoken English, with the additional barriers this presents to engaging with services, programmes, activities, and community life. English classes are appreciated. It is helpful that the classes are tailored to people's knowledge of English, as well as being in the context of the safe space that is created for them. More people want more English lessons than the Centre can offer at the moment. Those attending English classes want them to happen more often than once a week. They appreciate that it is affordable for stay-at-home parents without income or with low income, and that there are staff in the Centre who can speak additional languages (including Chinese).
- Having childcare available with English classes is important for some attending this group. To have childcare available for children age range 0 to 3, and more flexible in terms of hours, has made a significant difference.

- Distance from members of extended family can result in increased need for childcare provision, as well as for readily accessible support for new parents learning about parenting and child development.
- Isolation because of more limited social networking opportunities, and the challenges to connecting with others and growing friendships, which were exacerbated in the context of the pandemic.
- Local cultural knowledge of 'how things work'. Some participants talked about the importance of help in navigating the benefit system. They appreciate support in accessing state resources and services, as well as information about preschools and schools, and how to access services for children with additional needs. Hill Street Centre is a trusted source of information. People also speak of Hill Street Centre as a place where they learn Irish culture, e.g. learning rhymes from circle time.
- In Hill Street they have found a supportive place to practise speaking English, as well as opportunities to connect with others who share the experience of not being white Irish. People value the opportunity to meet others, and to develop relationships outside their immediate family.
- Space to explore and value cultural identity, including encouragement to speak in first language of the home, and opportunities to integrate with others.
- The particular challenges of parenting children with different and mixed cultural heritage. Parents talked about raising children to be allies to each other, particularly children who are different in some way. Parents have questions about when and how to start talking to their children about racism, and about the worst of what they can expect to experience from others. Some parents spoke of the need for a space to talk about the experience of raising children with different and mixed cultural identity.
- The need for a space where cultural diversity and cultural identities are valued. People spoke warmly of cultural events such as celebrating Chinese New Year, and opportunities to mix with and learn from people with other cultural backgrounds. Through their involvement in these celebrations, and through the public celebration of Chinese New Year locally, children have developed pride in their Chinese identity.
- The importance of marking other cultural celebrations in the year. There was a specific request to celebrate Africa day, 25th May.
- Safety concerns specific to minority ethnic people. One spoke of a shared concern with other parents about how their child might be treated, in the local area, and in pre-school.

3.7 THE IMPACT OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON HILL STREET FRC

Just as for people across the whole country, staff and families of Hill Street Family Resource Centre experienced huge and abrupt interruption to their lives and work in March 2020. Challenges faced by families included financial, social emotional and psychological issues. Staff of the Centre moved quickly to maintain connection with families, and to offer continuity of programmes and support, in new ways. This was greatly appreciated by families, particularly during the most stringent lockdown periods.

Weekly activity packs were put together by staff of Hill Street Centre and left on the railings for collection. These were for adults as well as children and were then used in Zoom sessions. The thoughtfulness of these was much appreciated and helped support families through a very difficult time. "They put so much time and energy into them." Children were waiting for Zoom time each week, which was their time. In some cases, each member of family had their own Zoom meetings, and it mattered to children that they had their own too. Chinese New Year was the best pack, according to some, and they celebrated Chinese New Year for first time this year.

Parents spoke of getting phone calls once a week, "checking how we were, checking on our mental state. That supported us to be able to support other family members, and it felt good that someone was asking about me."

The restrictions led to increased challenges for families of small children: as there was limited space to move around, play, and little opportunity to interact with others outside of nuclear family. Some parents noticed that children seemed a bit slower to talk and to mix with other children. Childcare workers and teachers noted increased levels of developmental delay in children starting at preschool and school, in areas of gross and fine motor development, social skills, and speech and language.

Parents spoke of 'best support ever' from Hill Street Centre, especially in Covid times, when they were unsure about going to a playground, and spent most of the time inside the home. "The Centre provided loads of activities. Sometimes I was meeting staff here, outside, and they were like my psychologist. Even just ten or fifteen minutes talking to someone else, made a huge difference to how I was feeling."

Some parents spoke of the lockdowns as a time when they were able to spend more time with their children, and they valued that.

Some programmes and supports are inevitably lost due to Covid, including the parents' café (now returned for the parents attending preparation for pre-school, once a week). Counselling became harder to access (parents reported this and their observations were backed up by the adult counsellors who spoke of very long waiting lists), and for a time transferred to online. Some adult counselling has continued online, according to the preferences of the adult clients.

Since returning to working with groups in-person, the limitations of the physical space at Hill Street FRC have been accentuated. Rooms can only take smaller groups; some groups require staff to work with parents in a pod system; extra cleaning time is needed between groups.

3.8 POTENTIAL OF NEW BUILDING TO MEET NEEDS IN HILL STREET FRC CATCHMENT AREA

Significant work has been done on plans for a new building to resource the work of Hill Street FRC. There was a very positive response to the plans described and presented to groups and individuals during the consultation.

The most common words in response to possible changes, and potential of the new building, were 'more' and 'bigger'. More days, more activities, more families, more children, more space for children to play, more space for parents to meet, and more courses and programmes. More days in afterschool was a wish for a number of parents. Many people suggested that the new building could allow for more parenting courses for more parents. This could include some of the same courses but available to more people.

For staff, it is important that the new building keeps the same spirit of welcome and belonging and stays a safe place for families. They envisage that this will need attention as the size of the building and of the staff team increases.

It should be a bright building, with lots of windows and roof lights, and good ventilation in all areas. It should be a fully accessible building, including a lift for access to upper floors, easy to move around, and include space for buggies to be stored. It will be important that the Centre has its own outside space, which is accessible to all indoor spaces in the building.

Staff felt that, with the new building, the number of families who can access the Centre and get support will be much greater. People like what they experience at the Centre, and they ask to be able to come there more often and for more programmes.

Also, with more staff, there are possibilities for the Centre to be open later in the day and evening, further increasing its value as a resource to the local community, and bringing the possibility of timing sessions to meet the needs of more diverse groups, including parents who work during the day.

A larger premises, with more staff, would make a preschool possible in the Centre so as to continue the work with families participating in preparation for pre-school. This would give a strong foundation, building on existing relationships, in a familiar place and ethos, for parents and for children. Hill Street FRC supports parents to be fully engaged in children's learning. If this involvement were to continue into the children's school years, this would also benefit the schools which children go on to.

Hill Street FRC preschool service would be in addition to maintaining strong connections with local pre-schools.

Increased capacity would mean that parents who use other creches can also attend Hill Street FRC to access support with parenting and developing their social network.

The better resourced Centre could offer afterschool up to age 12, using the same model, with child-led activities, using indoor and outdoor space. This would support these older children to build their confidence, to build relationships and enhance social skills, and to know their voice is important. It would also address the need for parents who are working on low wages to have safe place for children to be after school while they are at work.

Hope was expressed that the new, bigger, purpose-built building with access to play therapy, speech and language therapy, public health nurses, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy

in one place might contribute significantly to an all-round approach to meeting a child's needs.

Co-locating professionals in the new Centre would allow for them to build connections and to develop co-working practices. One childcare professional described a previous experience of in-house speech and language therapy as a 'game-changer', with speech and language guidance provided in context for the child and for childcare professionals. It would also facilitate therapists to observe children in their familiar surroundings.

Another observed that Hill Street FRC would be ideally placed to house these services for the area, as it is seen as an independent Centre, not strongly identified with HSE or SVP, or other organisations.

A relaxing room, or a sensory room, would be particularly valuable for children with additional needs. Another welcome feature would be a play room which could be made available for family time. A drop-in space could be timetabled for parents for set times and days of the week, where parents could meet other parents, as well as workers in the Centre. The new Centre could also offer space for parents and families for supervised parental visits, or simply a safe place for families to spend time.

A small room might be made available at times to family members for online meetings, interviews and appointments.

The potential of the new building to offer rooms to other organisations to rent on a regular basis could be a source of income for the Centre, as well as a means of strengthening connections with other groups and organisations in the local community. For many groups, and as restrictions associated with the pandemic continue, this might require access to a sizeable room.

It was observed that there are many migrant-led organisations which might like to avail of the opportunity, and in doing so they would experience the welcome and spirit of hospitality that is core to the work of Hill Street FRC. In such a multicultural area, migrant populations can feel they have a base there. Space could be created for groups to maintain their own cultural identity as well as opportunities for integration of different cultures. An example of the use of such a space given was a Mongolian parents' group.

There were a number of suggestions made for additional activities and programmes. These included music programmes, including music through play, as well as the possibility of a space for practising music of different cultures, and opportunities to share music from their cultures. Other suggestions for more music in the Centre included a choir with parents and children. Opportunities to share even more play alternatives to technology and screen time, such as board games, ping-pong and card games were suggested.

There were suggestions for big indoor spaces for children to play and run around, as well as outside space with a covered area that can be used for play on rainy days. A key feature of the plans for the new building is the outside space which would include trees and nature in the safe space to play and learn. These plans were endorsed by many. Some suggested more outside play equipment.

More than one group took the opportunity to request that the new building include a swimming pool. One group suggested that it could be in a basement.

4. SUMMARY OF NEEDS, RESPONSE OF HILL STREET FRC AND GAPS IN PROVISION

4.1 NEEDS IDENTIFIED

4.1.1 CHILDCARE, EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AND AFTERSCHOOL

- There is a clear need for affordable, accessible childcare, flexible to individual family needs. Many parents spoke of having difficulty accessing places in a creche and other forms of childcare.
- In addition, support is needed for early childhood learning, both pre-school places, and working with parents to develop their skills and knowledge of early child development.
- Other childcare and preschool providers in the area are aware of more demand for places than they can respond to.
- As a result of Covid 19 pandemic, and effects on early child development, there is increased demand for early intervention.
- There is a need in some cases for one-to-one parenting support
- There is a need for more affordable afterschool for children aged 7 to 11 than is currently available
- There is a 6 to 8 month waiting list for play therapy for children aged from 3 to 11, and other such services locally have longer or closed waiting lists. The Hill Street FRC waiting list for play therapy is an improvement on November 2020, when the waiting list was a year long.

4.1.2 SOCIAL ISOLATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Some parents and carers described feeling that they had few friends and family who they could turn to.
- There is a need for opportunities to interact, to integrate, and to develop social networks.
- During the Covid 19 pandemic, parents and children have experienced increased anxiety, and mental health has been challenged.
- People who were already under pressure financially, including attending to their basic needs of subsistence, have found themselves under increased strain.
- Adult counselling is needed for parents and family members who have experienced bereavement and loss, and in some cases are affected by depression and addiction. ACE scores are reported to be high in the local area.
- Other measures are needed to support positive mental health, such as stress management and mindfulness programmes.

4.1.3 CULTURE, IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION

- There is a clear appetite for people to share their culture and to develop a deeper understanding of their own and others' cultures. This relates to all nationalities and cultures, including Irish.
- People are looking for more English classes, as well as opportunities to practice and improve spoken English.
- Outside of Hill Street FRC, a number of parents are concerned about their safety and the safety of their children. Many report having experienced racist abuse, and are concerned to know how best to support their children through this.
- There is a need for people from all cultural backgrounds to have a place to belong, to feel safe and accepted, and opportunity to make a contribution, to participate, to be significant.
- There is a need for exploration of and expression of cultural identity.

4.1.4 PLAY

- Many families have limited space to play, both in their small or overcrowded homes, and also in public spaces which feel unsafe at times.
- Older children's need to play is sometimes unrecognised.
- There is a need for opportunities for parents and family members to learn about the value of different types of play, and for developmentally appropriate play.
- Young children say they need support to expand their repertoire of play, to get ideas for what to play at home.
- Outdoor play opportunities need to be supported, and outdoor playgrounds need to be regularly maintained and cleared of dangerous waste.

4.1.5 HOUSING AND SUBSISTENCE NEEDS

- Some families struggle to have adequate housing, and with meeting their other subsistence needs.
- Some families need significant support in accessing services and resources designed to help people to meet their subsistence needs. In some cases this is related to lack of fluency in spoken and written English.

4.1.6 CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

- There is significant need for assessment and therapeutic services for children with additional needs, and long waiting lists.
- Children waiting for initial assessment of needs are significantly disadvantaged by going through pre-school and starting primary school without a clear understanding of their needs.
- There is need for more play therapy provision. The service offered in Hill Street FRC has a 6 to 8 month waiting list.

- Brief interim support is needed for parents of children on waiting lists.
- Children with autism would benefit from single interest groups to support their social and emotional development.

4.2 HOW HILL STREET FRC RESPONDS TO IDENTIFIED NEEDS CURRENTLY

- Parents, carers and others greatly value the quality of the childcare and learning programmes in Hill Street Centre.
- Many parents and carers attending the Hill Street FRC talked about feeling a strong sense of belonging. This chimes with what the staff say about their intention.
- Staff work to ensure that families attending Hill Street experience the Centre as their Centre, with opportunities to contribute and be a part of the life of the Centre.
- The Preparation for Preschool programme which has worked so successfully in Hill Street is now a focus of collaboration with neighbouring childcare and early learning centres.
- Hill Street FRC provides a continuum of programmes and activities from new parents with newborns to established families as they move into school age.
- Through their engagement with parenting courses, preparation for pre-school, and parent and child groups, parents are very involved in their child(ren)'s development and learning.
- One to one parenting support is provided as necessary.
- Children are supported to discover new ways to play, which they can then use at home.
- The Centre provide play therapy and adult counselling, as well as mindfulness, to address mental health needs
- The corona virus pandemic has affected the lives of every child in the country. The effects of lockdown and of (public health) restrictions were commented on by parents, carers and early years childcare professionals. Hill Street FRC responded quickly to emerging needs, and in adapting how they worked to continue to support families. The mindful parenting programme was mentioned by one mother as a great source of support.
- Hill Street FRC works to ensure that issues of racism and safety in public spaces continue to be addressed by NEIC and other local projects.
- Celebrations of Chinese New Year contribute to intercultural awareness and to strengthening of cultural identity.
- Intercultural work with eight schools, including intercultural awareness training with staff, parents and children, culminating in designing an intercultural flag.
- Hill Street Centre responds to requests for help and support, and works to support parents to access services relating to subsistence needs.
- Hill Street has a track record of collaboration on wider community initiatives. They work hard to communicate with other services and organisations.
- Collaboration with schools include afterschool, play therapy in schools when requested, and mindfulness programmes in two local schools.
- The project manager of Hill Street FRC chairs the YPAR 0-5 working group.

- The pandemic has placed increased demands on the staff of the Centre, not only in adapting their ways of working, but also in responding to increased needs. All at a time when they themselves are also experiencing the effects of the pandemic.

4.3 DEVELOPMENTS IN NEIC SINCE 2018 NEEDS ANALYSIS

The following developments in NEIC since 2018 directly relate to needs identified:

- Intercultural Ambassadors programme : 16 intercultural ambassadors of 12 nationalities, speaking 21 languages, graduated in November 2021. Of these 16, 7 found their way to the project through their involvement in Hill Street FRC.
- There has been an increase in community events within the local area, in particular The Big Scream successfully engaged the local community.
- Development of City Connects addressing needs of school age children in a co-ordinated way.
- NEIC/HSE Multi Disciplinary Team initiative has led to reduced waiting times in schools for these services.
- Research has been carried out into the needs for afterschool places for school age children.

4.4 GAPS IN RESPONSE TO NEEDS IN HILL STREET FRC CATCHMENT AREA

- There is a need for more accessible, affordable childcare places, for ages 0 - 6 both for regular provision, and for flexible, respite care to allow parents to attend appointments.
- There is a need for more affordable afterschool places for children aged 7 to 12.
- There is a need for more pre-school places in the local area.
- There is a need for more play therapy provision.
- There is a need for more adult counselling.
- There is a need for support for family members, parents and carers to strengthen their social networks
- There is need for more English language classes, and opportunities to practise spoken English
- There is a need for more spaces to explore, share and celebrate cultural diversity and identity, to support intercultural integration
- There are questions about feelings of safety in public spaces in the local area. This needs to be addressed at the level of wider networks, including statutory agencies with responsibility for public safety.
- Racism is experienced by some of the families in the local area. While Hill Street FRC work to create a positive welcoming atmosphere, and there are a number of initiatives such as the Intercultural ambassadors programme, further work is needed at the level of wider networks to strengthen intercultural integration in the local area.

- There were good outcomes from the presence of PHN clinic in the Centre in the past. Some of the benefits of that to some parents have been lost by the transfer to the Primary Health Care Centre.
- Other options for co-location were suggested, including speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Inquiring into the experience of families and other organisations, it is clear that the work of Hill Street FRC is highly valued by many people. In light of this, a primary recommendation would be to continue with existing initiatives, maintain affordability, and take time to notice, mark and celebrate achievements. There was no initiative which was reported to be unnecessary or unhelpful. The high quality of programmes for parents and children was talked about by each group of stakeholders.

Recommendations are given for two scenarios:

1. In the current building, with the current resources
2. In the new building, with additional staffing and resources necessary to get the best value from the building project.

5.1. CURRENT BUILDING AND RESOURCES

1. Engage with Public Health Nurses to explore return of PHN outreach clinic to Hill Street FRC
2. As resources allow, grow the counselling and play therapy service to provide more hours and reduce waiting time. If space and timetabling allow, consider the possibility for play therapy and adult counselling to be run at the same time, to allow a parent to access adult counselling while their child engages with play therapy.
3. Schedule regular meetings, perhaps every 3 or 4 months, between adult and child therapists working in Hill Street and the Child and Family team
4. Adult learning courses : parents and carers when asked, expressed an interest in a number of courses, including digital literacy, cultural identity, return to work, knitting, sewing, crafting. While it may be useful to explore which if any of these are possible to provide directly, other parallel actions may be helpful. Create space to support parents to become aware of and informed about other places and organisations where they can access other courses e.g. DALC, CDET, Ozanam House.
5. Hill Street FRC Facebook page is a rich resource of information, with relevant, regular and carefully curated posts. As well as continuing this, consider how to raise more parents' awareness of this as a source of information, and look at how to support parents to access it.
6. Hill Street Celebration of Chinese New Year has been hugely successful and popular, and serves to strengthen identity of Chinese families and children, as well as sharing a popular celebration with the wider community. This should continue to be supported by Hill Street FRC.
7. Explore possibility of adding other cultural celebrations, e.g. Africa Day.
8. Consider proposal of Family key worker role as articulated by Raluca Gaitan, former staff member at Hill Street FRC. See appendix 2. This role would further strengthen relationships with parents, and would facilitate migrant families in particular to access and engage with service providers, and to be aware of and avail of their entitlements.

9. Create opportunities for all families, parents and carers to engage with each other to learn more and reflect on their own and each other's cultures. This might be in the form of programmes, as well as one-off celebrations.
10. Create more opportunities for learners of English to practice speaking English with each other, and with fluent English-speaking families attending the Centre. This could be combined with recommendation 9.
11. Explore how to support parents to support their children through their experience of racism in wider society. Consult parents about the value of creating opportunity for parents to reflect on their experience of parenting children with different and mixed cultural heritage.
12. As part of involvement in local networks, keep the issues of intercultural integration, experience of racism, and public safety on the agendas. With others, look at which agencies have responsibility in these areas.
13. Consider parents / family members' suggestions for activities and programmes in the new building, and explore if any of these are possible in the current premises
14. As the Covid pandemic continues into a third year, review practices which have developed in response to emerging needs. Take space to step back and consider what if any policies would be helpful in supporting the work. Develop clear policies for maximising opportunities to participate in courses, groups and activities, in the context of Covid.
15. Staff development and well-being is attended to, but it would be useful to review and identify any further needs in this area. Consult with staff and put in place a plan for supporting staff development and wellbeing (including the project manager) as they continue to respond to the needs of families in the local area.
16. Continue with plans to develop a parents' forum when restrictions and resources allow.
17. Explore use by Hill Street FRC of amenities / outdoor public spaces in the local area, e.g. Mountjoy Square, The Basin. This might contribute to safer public spaces by occupying them with communal activities.
18. Staff are currently overstretched in responding to existing needs, and to maintain the current level of programme, additional core funding for staffing is required.

5.2 NEW BUILDING AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

19. Plan for a creche, for babies and young children, with opportunities for flexible childcare
20. Preschool: plan for a preschool which can continue and build on the work with young children and families
21. Include afterschool childcare for 7- to 12-year-olds.
22. Include dedicated rooms to facilitate speech and language, occupational therapy, and other therapeutic services.
23. Engage with Public Health Nurses to explore return of PHN outreach clinic to Hill Street FRC
24. Consult with parents / family members about building design, adult learning programmes and activities planned for new building as plans are progressed.
25. Plan for maximum use of outside space, to include play equipment, a covered area, and access to plants and nature
26. Provide community space for local cultural groups, mindfulness and mental health groups, space for music and dance
27. Dedicated adult counselling and play therapy rooms to facilitate working with parent / carer and child at the same time.
28. Allocate time for team building and consultation to maintain the current spirit of the Centre as the team grows.

APPENDIX 1 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE	METHOD
Foundations Project	Clare Schofield, Project Co-ordinator	Telephone Interview
Ozanam House	Debbie Keegan, Childcare Manager	Zoom 1-1 Interview
HSE PHN Service Summerhill Health Centre	Jillian Deady (Louise Pielow also member of the Board took part in face to face meeting along with one other board member)	Zoom 1-1 Interview
Holy Child Pre-School	Mark Shinnick, Director	Zoom 1-1 Interview
Lourdes Youth & Community Creche	Lesley Strahan , Nursery Manager	Zoom 1-1 Interview
St. Brigid's Day Nursery	Deirdre Lee	Zoom 1-1 Interview
Young People at Risk Network (YPAR)	Pat Gates, Project coordinator	Zoom 1-1 Interview
Neighbourhood Youth Project 1	John Peelo, Project Worker	Zoom 1-1 Interview
City Connects	Emma Nugent formerly HSL	Zoom 1-1 Interview
Tusla Family Support	Ramona Riley, PPFS Family Support Co-ordinator	Zoom 1-1 Interview
Central Model School	Deirdre Gartland	Zoom 1-1 Interview
NEIC Programme Office	Michael O'Riordan	Zoom 1-1 Interview
DCC Intercultural Coordinator	Joy Eniola	Zoom 1-1 Interview
Young Mothers Network	Marie Williams	Zoom 1-1 Interview
Former staff member of Hill Street FRC, recently left	Raluca Gaitan	Zoom 1-1 Interview

Hill St FRC Staff Team	Eileen Smith, Project Manager Alison McCormack Child and Family Team Leader Ana Claudia Moraes Financial Administrator Jennifer Pinson Child and Family Worker Jill Long Child and family worker Ying Ying Reception / administrator Rachel ?SN intern/ student placement	Group interview
Hill Street FRC community development	Kata Varynu	
Hill Street FRC Relief staff / Volunteer	Lisa ?SN	1-1 Interview
Hill Street FRC Board	Louise Pielow Secretary Vanee Renghen Director	Group interview
Hill Street FRC Board	Olivia Gorman Chairperson Lána Cummins Director Lucy Deegan Leiriao Director Marie Nyan Director Sinéad Jones Director Niamh Seery Director	Zoom group Interview
Play Therapist, Hill Street FRC	Billy Gibbons	1-1 phone Interview
Adult counsellor	Sharon Day	Zoom 1-1 Interview

APPENDIX 2 PROPOSAL FOR KEY WORKER ROLE IN HILL STREET FRC

To whom it may concern,

I am a Child and Family Support Worker with Hill Street Family Resource Centre in Dublin 1. Prior to the pandemic, the service provided support to over 160 families on a weekly basis. The vast majority of these families are ethnic minorities (from approximately 40 different countries) with little knowledge of the Irish welfare system and, in many cases, limited English language skills as well. Since March 2020, these families suddenly faced additional challenges and difficulties as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. During this time, the families have required a variety of supports ranging from food banks to housing, immigration, welfare and access to General Practitioners.

Throughout this time, several issues and challenges have been identified by the families:

1. Such families are not familiar with the Irish welfare system or community supports, therefore they do not know there are supports available to them. Even when they are aware of the different schemes that provide help, they do not know how to access them.
2. Some families have complex needs which require the support of two or three different organisations (e.g. housing, food supports and mental health). This often leads to scheduling conflicts and unnecessary delays in accessing the much needed supports.
3. Families have to make multiple phone calls in order to access these services and often spend long periods of time on hold. A lack of phone credit and financial difficulties oftentimes act as a barrier and prevent families from accessing the proper supports. While organisations offer the option of contacting them via email, this is a much slower process, it is limiting (lots of subsequent questions and explanations follow the initial question, leading to a marathon of back and forth emails that span over days or weeks at a time) and inaccessible to some (lack of English written skills).
4. As previously mentioned, the vast majority of these families are non-Irish nationals and some have reduced English language skills. This constitutes a major disadvantage. Conversation over the phone can be difficult both for expressing one's needs and circumstances, as well as understanding the information and requests made by service providers. Consequently, this often prevents individuals from accessing the supports or not qualifying as they do not fully understand the application process.
5. Despite a considerable increase in families requiring social welfare, or immigration-related supports, many organisations and services have dramatically reduced their working hours during the pandemic. Indeed, some organisations are available only 2-3 hours a day /three day a week. While the services operate mainly in the morning time, this often clashes with children attending school virtually. Hence, parents have

no access to their phones; or alternatively, children have to miss out on classes in order for parents to attempt to contact the services needed.

6. The majority of supports require filling in lengthy paperwork, which at times can be complex and ambiguous. That often means parents have to fill in the same application form several times before the submission is accepted. This common process can lead to unnecessary delays that places additional stress on families who are often already in a dire financial situation and who are sometimes unable to provide food for their children.

7. Having to engage with multiple organisations at a time can be exhausting for these families. Juggling childcare, home-schooling, work and daily chores make it extremely difficult for families to keep up with multiple appointments. Furthermore, the process implies a complete disregard for individual privacy and pride as parents have to discuss their delicate and often precarious situation with several support workers time and time again. This can increase adults' anxiety, sense of helplessness and frustration that they cannot provide for their children leading to poor mental health.

8. Given their vulnerable circumstances, undocumented migrants don't feel comfortable sharing their personal information with different organisations due to a fear of repercussions.

9. Some families for whom I represented and helped access supports were previously denied those same supports having sought them on their own. This highlights the importance of these families having a representative who has knowledge of the system.

10. Families have cited a lack of awareness regarding their rights as a reason for not accessing relevant supports. Additionally, if they are refused assistance on their first attempt, they generally do not feel confident to try again or to seek help from other agencies.

Having analysed the different issues brought forth by these families and witnessing first-hand the knock-on effects of flaws in the system, I have come to the conclusion that there is a critical need for an integrated service which provides wrap-around support to individuals and families facing hardship.

I believe this can be easily achieved by creating a key worker role within Hill Street Family Resource Centre to support such families located in the area. The key worker would work in an integrated manner, addressing the different issues that each individual/family raises. Consequently, clients would only have to engage with one organisation and one worker, thus eliminating the issues raised above.

The key worker, by working in partnership with the various different organisations, would develop a great understanding of how each organisation works, build networks and gain the ability to fast track each case they deal with. This would greatly improve the outcomes for many children and their families, while also relieving pressure on a variety of different organisations.

Additionally, I believe that Hill Street Family Resource Centre is in a privileged position to make this possible due to the nature of its work. Firstly, there is no stigma attached to attending Hill Street FRC as opposed to

the stigma that exists when accessing homeless services or food banks. Anecdotally, this is something I have witnessed.

Secondly, Hill Street FRC is known as the 'go-to' place when families need support. They trust the organisation and feel comfortable to share details about their difficult circumstances. Building a warm and supportive relationship encourages individuals to access support and empowers them to seek solutions for the variety of difficulties they encounter.

Last but not least, I possess an important skill that has proved to be crucial in supporting these families – languages. Having the ability to speak English, Romanian, Spanish and French has proven to be extremely beneficial, often breaking down communication barriers helping to improve the quality of service and support provided to families.

While there are several organisations that provide a key working system, they address only one particular issue such as homelessness or immigration. What I propose in this letter is the creation of a key worker role that addresses the various different issues a family or individual might face all at once.

Research has consistently proven that children's and families' wellbeing is paramount to the future of any given society. Early intervention and preventative measures can save the State and taxpayer a considerable amount in the long term. Therefore, I believe that creating a key worker role in a wrap-around style would be of great benefit to these families, the State and society as a whole.

I sincerely hope you consider the value of this role and that I can be given the opportunity to prove its worth to a number of families in the area. I look forward to hearing from you on the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Raluca Găitan