



# ANNUAL REPORT 2024



*Promoting and Supporting Community  
Health and Wellbeing*

*“He who has health, has hope; and he who has hope, has everything.”*

Thomas Carlyle



# Chairman's Address



On behalf of the Board of Trustees and my own behalf, I am delighted to welcome the 2024 Annual Report on the NICHE Health Project. NICHE is inspired by a clear and coherent vision of community health and its determinants. In our work we draw on a model of local community leadership, consultation and participation, working in partnership with other groups, agencies and organisations both within and beyond our local community.

We are supported by a dedicated and professional team of Community Health Workers, management, administrative and maintenance staff. We were extremely fortunate over the past year to have a full staff compliment of community health workers and this report presents an overview of an impressive and comprehensive range of activities, projects and services. In particular, I would like to highlight the moving and inspiring Christmas crochet Christmas tree based on a collaboration between the women's crochet group and the men's shed. It should also be noted that NICHE is now hosting several external agencies in our building, thereby extending and deepening inter-agency partnerships in the community. Over the past year, we have also supported a series of enjoyable and well subscribed outings for both the women's group and the Men's Shed, including the women's trip to Dáil Éireann and the men's trip to Cobh.

I am very grateful to the Health Service Executive (HSE), Cork North Community Work Department who provide core funding to NICHE. We are also grateful to receive funding support from the HSE Sláintecare Communities Programme, Cork City Council, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Pobal.

It is great privilege to serve a Chair of the Board of Trustees of NICHE. I would like to thank my fellow board members for their commitment and dedication to NICHE. On behalf of all board members, I would like to express our deep appreciation to the staff of NICHE for their outstanding work, their passion for the project and commitment to serving the needs of our local community. NICHE acts as the lead agency for the Hollyhill/Knocknaheeny Family Resource Centre which provides preschool and creche services for the community. This is a wonderful resource for the community and the board are deeply grateful to the staff of the Family Centre for their excellent work and care for the children attending the Centre and their families. We are also deeply grateful to the local community for their support and engagement with NICHE. Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank Ms Martina Ryan for the vision, energy and professionalism that she brings to her role as Executive Director of NICHE.

*Professor Ivan Perry*

**Chairman of NICHE Health Project (Cork) CLG**

Company number 617576 | Charity number 20204483 | CHY 22398

## Board of Trustees in 2024

Chairman: Professor Ivan Perry  
Treasurer: Eileen Collins  
Secretary: Angela Kalaitzake  
Director: Sandra Cogan Williamson  
Director: Robert Sheehan  
Member: Michelle O Sullivan  
Member: Edel Burke

## Staff Members in 2024

Martina Ryan	- Executive Director (joined 2024)
Carmel Murphy	- Administrator
Paula Casey	- Community Health Worker
Caroline Vasseur	- Community Health Worker
Maria Barry	- Community Health Worker
Yvonne Tsang	- Community Gardener/Community Health Worker
Paul Griffin	- Community Health Worker (joined 2024)
Vanessa Meseguer	- Social Prescribing Link Worker
Stephen Comerford	- Maintenance Worker

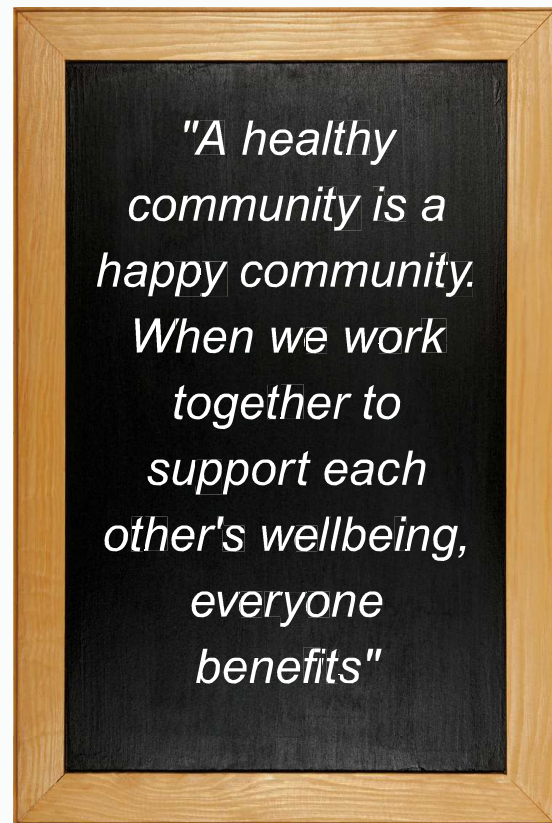
Solicitors:  
Fitzgerald Solicitors  
6 Lapps Quay  
Cork

Auditors:  
Wentworth  
1E North Valley Bus Centre,  
Mallow Rd, Cork.

Bank:  
Permanent TSB,  
Blackpool Shopping Centre,  
Cork

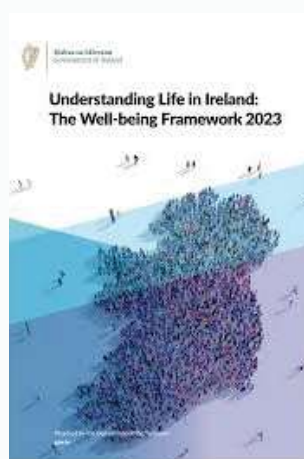
# Community Health

- ✓ The WHO defines community health as the environmental, social, and economic resources needed to sustain emotional and physical wellbeing among people.
- ✓ Community health emphasises role of individuals as determinants of their own and other people's health.
- ✓ Community health focuses on the maintenance, protection, and improvement of the health status of population groups, in particular those who are a part of disadvantaged communities.
- ✓ Informed by current findings and policy, community work responds to emerging local needs.



## Community Health Workers

- ✓ Community Health Workers are the backbone of NICHE. By understanding and integrating into the community, they create needs led initiatives, as well as providing informal support, information and guidance.
- ✓ By including and consulting the community regarding the design and delivery of initiatives they strive to enhance health outcomes, empowerment and capacity of the community.
- ✓ Connection and collaboration are at the core of our work, not only with members of the community but also with other organisations and agencies, for together we are stronger.



# About NICHE

## Our Vision:

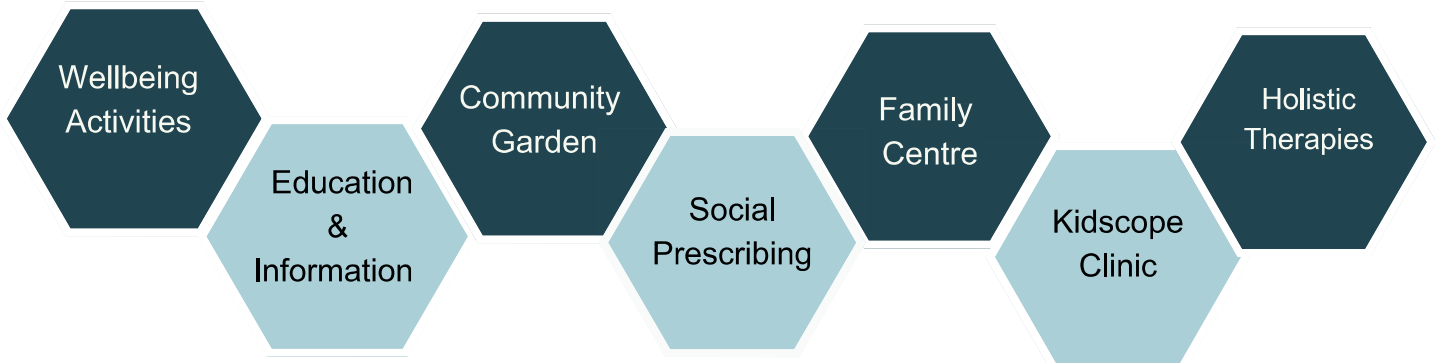
That all people in Knocknaheeny, Hollyhill and surrounding areas can live full and healthy lives.

## Our Mission:

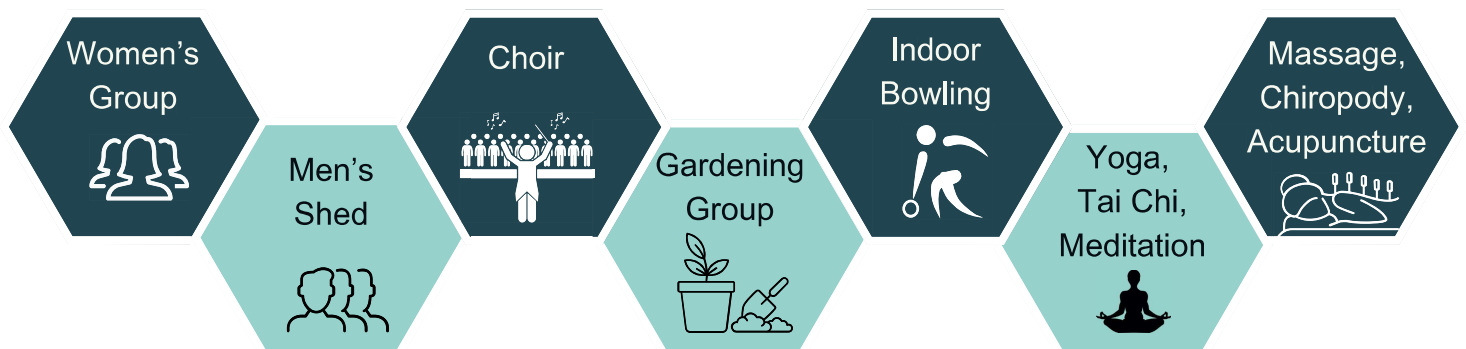
To involve the local community in meaningful partnerships with NICHE and others to develop actions which improve and sustain health and wellbeing outcomes.

## Our Model:

Adopting a capacity building model, NICHE Project aims to improve health and wellbeing by engaging and supporting communities through collaborative partnerships with individuals, groups and other agencies and organisations.



- ✓ NICHE is a community health project that aims to improve the health and well-being of community members primarily living in the Knocknaheeny and Hollyhill areas of Cork City.
- ✓ As a project, NICHE's work engages with the local community. NICHE also works in partnerships with community-based organisations, various stakeholders, local healthcare providers, and government agencies.
- ✓ NICHE is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. NICHE is core funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE), Cork North Community Work Department.
- ✓ NICHE is governed by a Board of Trustees with representation from the local community, Cork City Council, the HSE Community Work Department (in an advisory capacity when required), the School of Public Health in UCC and the National Suicide and Research Foundation. The role of the Board is to lead the strategic and policy development of the project.
- ✓ NICHE is core funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE), Cork North Community Work Department. NICHE also receives funding under the HSE Sláintecare Communities Programme. We also receive funding from Cork City Council and other adhoc sources. Funding sources for additional and supported programmes come from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), HSE, Cork City Council and Pobal for the Family Resource Centre.
- ✓ NICHE acts as the lead agency for the Hollyhill/Knocknaheeny Family Resource Centre.



# NICHE Schedule of Weekly Groups and Activities in 2024

## Monday

**Tai Chi**  
10am-11am in NICHE

**Women's Group**  
10.30am-12pm in NICHE

**Sing Your Heart Out Choir**  
1.30pm-3pm  
in St Mary's Hall

## Tuesday

**Get Gardening Group**  
11am-1pm  
in The Community Garden

**Chiropody**  
10am-1pm in NICHE  
*Appointment only*

**Yoga**  
6.30pm-8pm in St. Mary's Hall

**Memory Café**  
(2nd Tues of month) 11am - 1pm  
in The Community Garden

## Wednesday

**Massage**  
10am-1pm in NICHE  
*Appointment only*

**Wednesday Wonders**  
Crafting group 11am-1pm  
in The Community Garden

**Art Class - Various Media**  
10am-12pm  
in NICHE

**Activator Poles**  
1pm-2pm  
in Youth Centre Hollyhill

**Men's Indoor Bowling**  
2.30pm-4.30pm  
in St Marys Hall, Foyle Ave.

**Mon - Fri**  
by appointment

## Thursday

**Art Class**  
12pm-2pm  
in The Community Garden

**Men's Shed**  
11am-3pm  
in The Community Garden

**Acupuncture**  
2pm-5pm in NICHE  
*Appointment only*

**Social Prescribing** is about connecting people with community groups, organisations, and services for practical and emotional support to improve their health and wellbeing.

Examples of activities you may be referred to:

- Physical activities.
- Reading club.
- Stress prevention & management programmes.
- Adult education.
- Financial advice services.
- Men's sheds.
- Community gardening.
- Volunteering opportunities.
- Arts.
- Choir.
- And much more.

## Social Prescribing



W E L L B E I N G

NICHE Health Project (Cork) CLG is fortunate to operate from two facilities. Having two locations enables NICHE to provide opportunities for members of the community to engage in activities and programmes in both indoor and outdoor settings, ensuring we can meet a range of needs and interests.

### The HSE Building Knocknaheeny

**NICHE** is located in the HSE Building on Harbour View Rd, next to the Credit Union. **T23 XY16**



### Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill Community Garden

Our Community Garden is located behind Applegreen petrol station on Harbour View Rd. **T23 EY1F**





## Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Community Garden



The aim of NICHE Community Garden is to promote and enhance the health and wellbeing of the local community through access to and participation in gardening and the outdoors.



The service extends its arms to those outside of the Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill area; openly inviting participants outside of our catchment area, to take part in our activities.



### At NICHE Community Garden, we recognise:

- the guiding role that a community garden has to create better health outcomes for our participants. We recognise the importance of creating 'everyday meaningful experiences' for our participants, through various garden tasks and other activities on offer.
- the benefits of social & therapeutic horticulture, and adapt tasks according to abilities & capabilities of each individual. We use plants and the Garden to improve both physical & mental health. The benefits of gardening include spending time in nature and engaging in the 'restorative effects of being in nature', literacy & numeracy skills, physical impacts of fine and gross motor skills, problem solving, memory, object identification, communication skills etc.
- that the Garden must be a 'safe space' for participants. Through the Garden we create a communal space and enable the building of social bonds.
- how the garden can introduce 'bitesize' pieces of information to participants to learn about what small actions can help them actively participate in climate justice and social justice.
- how the Garden can help improve food choices and create better understanding of growing and harvesting food. Thus improving access to healthy local grown food.

- Throughout the year, NICHE Community Garden offers weekly 'Get Gardening Group' each Tuesday 11-3pm.
- Weekly Men's Shed group runs each Thursday 11-2pm.
- The Garden is open Monday to Thursday. Visitors are welcome during this time.
- Participants from Horizon and The National Learning Network avail of the garden on Tuesdays as part of the 'Get Gardening Group'.

# Activities in NICHE Community Garden during 2024

## Pollinator posts – Bee lodges installation

In May, we partnered with the Irish Bee Conservation Project (IBCP) to enhance our community garden's biodiversity and promote environmental education. This collaboration involved the installation of three solitary bee lodges and hosting an educational workshop.

Three bee lodges were strategically placed in the garden to provide habitats for native solitary bees. This initiative aimed to support the declining population of solitary bees and improve pollination in the area.

The IBCP hosted an information workshop in our garden, providing insights into the importance of bees and how to protect them. This event was part of the Cork Learning Festival, attracting participants interested in conservation and sustainability.

The introduction of bee lodges is expected to attract native solitary bees, contributing to the ecological health of the garden. This will enhance pollination, leading to a more robust garden ecosystem.

By supporting bee populations, we are taking steps towards climate justice and biodiversity conservation. This aligns with broader environmental goals, including reducing biodiversity loss and mitigating climate change impacts.

This project marks a successful collaboration with the IBCP, fostering a relationship that can lead to further conservation efforts. The partnership enhances community awareness and involvement in environmental initiatives.



The collaboration with the Irish Bee Conservation Project has proven to be a significant step towards creating a sustainable community garden and raising awareness about the importance of native bee species.

The involvement of the Cork Learning Festival amplified the reach and impact of our efforts, setting a foundation for future initiatives focused on conservation and climate action.

## Implementation of the 'Pollinator Pathmaker' in our Community Garden

Our community garden embarked on an innovative journey to integrate the 'Pollinator Pathmaker', an open-source artificial intelligence designed to enhance habitats for pollinators, into our sustainability initiatives.

This cutting-edge project aligns with our commitment to biodiversity and environmental education.

- **Integration of 'Pollinator Pathmaker':** We sought and received permission to implement the 'Pollinator Pathmaker' for public use during Biodiversity Week. Using this AI-driven software, we successfully demonstrated how it generates garden designs that prioritise pollinator needs over human aesthetics.
- **Educational Outreach:** Demonstrations on utilising the 'Pollinator Pathmaker' were held during Biodiversity Week, raising awareness about its potential. We educated the community on its application and benefits, fostering enthusiasm for AI-driven environmental solutions.
- **Implementation of Sustainable Practices:** To align with our sustainability goals, we trailed winter sowing jugs. This method utilised recycled plastic bottles, promoting recycling and sustainability. A pollinator education hub was constructed alongside a rainwater garden, which efficiently manages rain runoff through its rooftop design.



Transition Year students from St. Vincent's Secondary school actively participated by helping to mark out planting grids and assist with the planting day in October. This involvement not only facilitated the project but also provided an educational experience in ecological stewardship for the students.



The 'Pollinator Pathmaker' project was successful in selecting plant varieties that cater to a wide range of pollinators and foragers throughout the year. The species selected were curated by experts at the Eden Project in Cornwall, ensuring a robust and sustainable pollinator ecosystem.

By incorporating recycled materials and innovative water conservation systems, we advanced our garden's environmental sustainability. These efforts have fostered a community-wide culture of environmental responsibility and innovation.

The engagement of local students and the broader community has strengthened their interest and understanding of pollinator conservation. This project exemplifies how technology and community collaboration can lead to impactful environmental stewardship.



**Pollinator Pathway Info morning**

**Winter sowing jugs started in February**



The implementation of the 'Pollinator Pathmaker' in our community garden represents a significant advancement in our sustainability efforts, demonstrating the potential of artificial intelligence to contribute positively to ecological conservation. Through continued community involvement and education, we aim to expand our initiatives, paving the way for future successes in biodiversity and sustainability.

**Soil sample**



## Ongoing Developments in the 'Pollinator Pathmaker' Project.

As part of the ongoing commitment to enhance pollinator habitats through the 'Pollinator Pathmaker', there are plans to address the challenges posed by natural factors such as slug damage. Efforts include refining propagation and division skills by 2025 to ensure the project's completion and sustainability.



**Transplanting of seedlings with Memory Café**

Rainwater garden



## Ongoing Activities:

Efforts will be made to replace plants lost due to slugs and other natural causes, ensuring the longevity and resilience of the garden. This continuous process involves learning effective plant care techniques to maintain plant health and diversity.

In preparation for a robust garden by 2025, the community will focus on developing propagation and division skills. Workshops and hands-on training sessions will be implemented to build a strong foundation in these horticultural techniques.

The continued commitment to the 'Pollinator Pathmaker' project exemplifies a proactive approach to overcoming challenges and maximising educational opportunities. Through ongoing planting, skill development, and community collaboration, the project remains a vital component of our garden's sustainability and environmental justice goals.



## Memory Café

The Memory Café is held on 2nd Tuesday of the month. The group partakes in garden activities and/or other planned activities. This included a talk with the community nutritionist about food habits and food poverty.



## Cork Lifelong Learning Week 2024

We hosted events as part of Cork Lifelong learning week.

Herbal tea planters:

In collaboration with Debbie (aromatherapist) and our community gardener, a workshop demonstrating possible herbal tea combinations, planting requirements and health benefits of various herbs e.g. lemongrass, anise hyssop, mint, lemon verbena.

### Sample herbs for workshop



### Pot demonstration



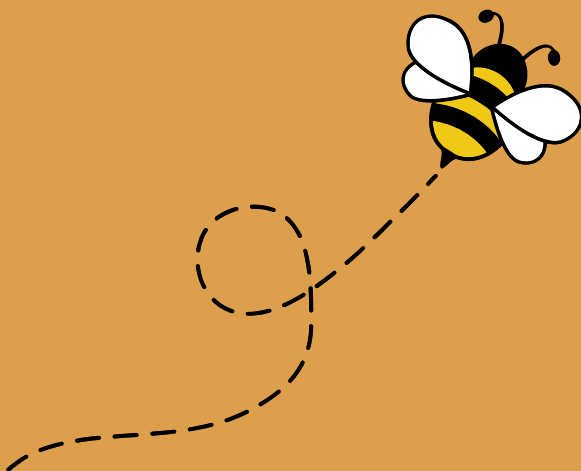
### Book selection on herbs



## Bee Conservation Workshop

Irish Bee Conservation Project gave an informative workshop about our native solitary bees. They highlighted steps for community groups and individuals on how to encourage native bees to our gardens.

17 participants took part, plus 4 volunteers from Irish Bee Conservation Project



## Community Crochet Christmas Tree Project

Preparation for our annual Christmas event began in April with the ambitious plan to create a 12-foot crochet granny square tree. This vibrant project was designed to foster community spirit, enhance intergenerational collaboration, and showcase the creative talents within our community.

Sylvia, our crochet facilitator, led four initial sessions to teach community members how to crochet, catering to both beginners and experienced crocheters. Monthly sessions with Sylvia and weekly gatherings hosted by the community gardener continued until December, boosting skill development and community bonding. Participants honed their fine motor skills, learning the intricacies of sewing and crocheting.

**Community Collaboration:** Our project engaged a diverse range of participants, including those crocheting from home, members of outside community projects, and the Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Men's Shed. Transition year students also participated, ensuring an intergenerational aspect that enriched the project experience. Contributions in the form of crochet squares came from groups such as The Lantern Project and Ballyphehane/Togher Community Development Project.

The Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Men's Shed built the impressive 12-foot framework that supported the crochet squares, showcasing excellent craftsmanship and collaboration.

### Sewing granny squares



### Some crocheters at weekly meets



The project significantly increased community engagement, bringing together individuals from all walks of life to collaborate on a monumental task. The story of our crochet Christmas tree was prominently featured in local newspaper 'The Echo', highlighting community achievements and collaborative spirit.

## Assembling the tree



The 12-foot framework built by the Men's Shed emphasised local craftsmanship, creating a sturdy and supportive structure for the crochet tree. This contribution demonstrated the importance of local skills and resources in community projects.

Our annual Christmas event included raffle prizes, face painting, homemade treats and hot chocolate. The 'sing your heart out' choir performed by the Lifesize Nativity Crib the Men's Shed created last year.



**NICHE Knocknaheeny  
Hollyhill Community Garden**  
invite you to the 'Switching on of the Lights'  
on our 12ft Crochet Christmas Tree

by Cllr Tony Fitzgerald

*A beautiful collaboration from  
Community Garden Volunteers  
and Participants of The Men's  
Shed and The Crochet Group*

Enjoy a hot chocolate and a performance from NICHE's  
Sing Your Heart Out Choir

We had over 200 people turn out for the official 'switching on of the lights', a wonderful evening of carols, hot chocolate, laughter and Christmas cheer!

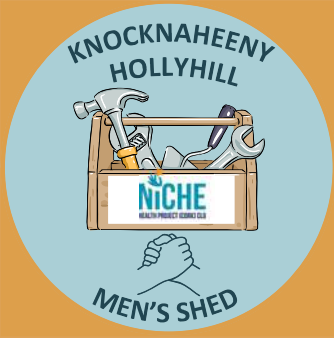
The creation of our 12-foot crochet granny square Christmas tree was a stunning display of community unity, creativity, and skill. This project not only beautified our annual Christmas celebration but also strengthened relationships within the community, facilitated skill development, and showcased the collective effort through media recognition.

With the collaborative spirit demonstrated throughout this endeavour, we look forward to continuing with similar initiatives that connect and empower our community.



**A Christmas wreathmaking workshop was held to thank our dedicated crafters for their 8 long months of hard work.**





## Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Men's Shed

The Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Men's Shed has made significant contributions to both our community and the larger region, with their efforts being recognized at the Sheds for Life Awards in January. Their participation in various activities showcases their commitment to enhancing community well-being and safety.

### Achievements 2024

**Most Hospitable Shed Award:** The Men's Shed received the award for the "Most Hospitable Shed" during the Sheds for Life Awards, stemming from their participation in the Munster Sheds for Life Programme held in Autumn 2023. This accolade reflects their welcoming environment and commitment to fostering community spirit.

**Men's Health Week Outing:** During Men's Health Week, the group organized a trip to Cobh to watch the cruise liners dock at the port. They also enjoyed a scenic walk to the Titanic Gardens, promoting physical activity and camaraderie.

**Educational Sessions:** The service ALONE provided a talk to the Men's Shed about their work and the assistance they offer to support older people living at home. This session enhanced awareness and knowledge of available support networks.



**Contributions to Community Garden:** The Men's Shed offered significant support to the community garden, including practical enhancements to ensure safety. One notable project was the installation of a safety rope around the garden's steep slope perimeter, which increased the garden's safety for all visitors.

The Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Men's Shed has truly excelled in creating a hospitable and dynamic community hub. Their award for hospitality underscores their dedication to a welcoming environment, while activities like the Men's Health Week outing demonstrate their commitment to promoting well-being. The group's proactive contributions to the community garden, particularly in safety enhancements, highlight their ongoing involvement and positive impact.

Looking ahead, the Men's Shed is poised to continue its valuable role in enhancing community life and supporting broader initiatives.





## Candle making workshop

Aromatherapist Debbie held a candle making workshop with 10 participants in July. The workshop included beneficial use of essential oils, benefits for wellbeing.



## Cork Community Gardens Network meetings

Cork Community Gardens Network was established and we attended some of the meetings. Meetings are quarterly with various topics of discussion.



Lord Mayors reception for Cork community gardens



Hosting a network meeting

## Annual Summer Party

As part of Cork on A Fork festival, we held our annual garden party in August. Lots of food preparations were made, with our newly renovated pizza cob oven being put to great use. Thanks to the Men's Shed for their work on renovating the cob oven.

Our menu also included lot's of homemade dishes using ingredients from our garden. Music was provided by local HAZ band catering to all tastes in music. The face painter and bouncy castle were are great hit with the local children.



The idea to build a cob oven originated from the Men's Shed, recognising the need for a communal cooking facility that could host gatherings and events, they decided to construct a cob oven using sustainable and locally sourced materials.

Building the cob oven was a collaborative endeavour that brought together men of various skills and backgrounds. The project encouraged learning and skill-sharing, as members of the Men's Shed worked side by side, mixing earthen materials, shaping bricks, and constructing the oven structure. Throughout the building process, lessons were taught in basic masonry, teamwork, and sustainable construction techniques.



## Japanese Garden

A Japanese Garden was installed in August. The Garden was designed using elements of Japanese style with simple planting to highlight these. Asymmetry, borrowed scenery, balance and symbolism were represented. The garden provides a tranquil space away from the bustle of day-to-day events. The work was carried out by Knocknaheeny Mens shed.

**Before**



**After**



Creation of tranquil space in the garden for restorativeness and reflection.



The 'Get Gardening Group' is actively engaged in year-round gardening activities that promote sustainability, biodiversity, and environmental education. This report highlights the group's weekly activities and contributions to community gardening and pollinator support.

### Weekly Activities:

- 1. Seed Sowing and Potting:** Members participate in seed sowing, a fundamental skill that lays the groundwork for successful plant growth. Following germination, the group engages in the process of potting on, ensuring plants have space to grow and develop strong root systems.
- 2. Planting and Seed Saving:** Regular planting sessions are held to maintain the garden's productivity and diversity. The group emphasizes seed saving, teaching members how to harvest and store seeds for future planting seasons, promoting self-sufficiency and sustainability.
- 3. Re-using Water Bottles for Gardening:** A creative aspect of the group's activities involves re-using water bottles to create cloches and winter sowing jugs. This practice not only recycles materials but also extends the growing season for certain crops, showcasing an innovative approach to sustainable gardening.
- 4. Cultivating Vegetables and Interplanting with Flowers:** The group grows a variety of vegetables, contributing to local food production and healthy eating. Flowers are interplanted with vegetables to attract pollinators, enhancing biodiversity and creating a balanced ecosystem within the garden.

The 'Get Gardening Group' exemplifies a hands-on approach to sustainable gardening and community engagement. Through consistent activities such as seed sowing, planting, and innovative recycling, the group nurtures both the garden and a community spirit focused on environmental stewardship. These efforts not only produce food and beauty but also contribute to the health of local pollinator populations, affirming the group's role as a vital part of the community's environmental initiatives.

### Our forced rhubarb



creating mini cloches

### Seed saving



### potting on tomatoes



### a tomatos view



## Men's Indoor Bowling

Every Wednesday, a group of ten dedicated individuals gathers at the local bowling alley, forming a tight-knit community through the sport of bowling. This weekly ritual, while centered on competition and camaraderie, also provides substantial health benefits that enhance the well-being of its participants. In May 2024 the men had a competition against the ladies in St Mary's. It was a hard fight to the end with the men winning by 1 leg. There was 60 supporters on the day fun was had by all.



The weekly men's bowling group is more than just a sports gathering; it is a pillar of health and well-being for its ten members. By combining physical exercise, mental stimulation, and social interaction, these sessions contribute to the holistic health of those involved. The camaraderie, routine, and joy derived from this humble sport illustrate the profound impact regular physical activity and community involvement can have on one's life.

## Fire Safety Awareness Talk Hosted by Mark from Cork City Fire Brigade

To enhance local awareness and preparedness, Mark from Cork City Fire Brigade recently hosted a fire safety talk. The event attracted a wonderful turnout of 17 community members eager to learn about fire prevention and safety measures.

The safety talk was held at the community centre, providing an accessible location for residents. Mark, an experienced firefighter, delivered a comprehensive presentation that covered essential fire safety topics, offering practical advice and answering questions from attendees.

The safety talk fostered a strong sense of community engagement. Participants interacted with Mark, shared personal experiences, and discussed proactive measures to enhance fire safety in their own homes. The discussion facilitated a supportive environment where residents felt comfortable asking questions and seeking advice.



Karen O Sullivan, support coordinator from ALONE gave a talk in the Community Garden. Karen gave a presentation on supporting older people in the community. There was a turnout of 14 people.

## A Fun Day Out in Cobh Bringing Together the Men's Shed and Gardening Group

Members of the Men's Shed and some dedicated ladies from the Garden Group embarked on a fun-filled outing in Cobh. This event was a perfect blend of relaxation, exploration, and community bonding, ensuring memories that would last a lifetime. Bright and early, the group set off to Cobh, eager to escape the bustle of everyday life and immerse themselves in the tranquil surroundings. The journey itself was filled with cheerful chatter and anticipation, setting the tone for a day of joy and togetherness.

Upon arrival, the group was greeted by Cobh's lush landscapes and picturesque views. The Men's Shed members, along with their green-thumbed companions from the Garden Group, strolled through scenic walking trails, admiring the vibrant autumn foliage and the serene beauty of the local flora. Their shared passion for nature fostered engaging conversations about plants and garden projects. The day's informal atmosphere allowed the Men's Shed members and Garden Group participants to forge deeper connections, celebrating a shared sense of community and friendship. The exchange of skills, ideas, and laughter enriched the sense of unity among all participants.



## Art classes in the Garden

The art group continues to meet every Thursday, providing a consistent platform for members to engage in creative activities and share their artistic ideas. The group has a welcoming atmosphere, with regular attendance ranging from 8 to 10 members each week.

The group has been focusing on exploring different art mediums, including painting, still life and landscapes. Members have shown enthusiasm in collaborative projects, enhancing team spirit and creativity.



## NICHE Women's Group

NICHE Women's Group are one of our longest established groups in NICHE. A group of vibrant, enthusiastic, caring and compassionate ladies, they fill the building with chat and joy every Monday. Always keen to experience new things, learn about various topics and keen to participate in activities, this group of women encompass everything that is positive and good about a community.

### Some of the highlights from the Women's Group in 2024:

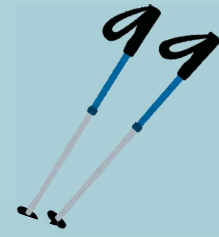
- Referendum information morning and debates
- Safe TALK training
- Gut Health Microbiome talk with researchers UCC
- A Gut Feeling
- Presentation by APC Microbiome team in celebration of Science Week
- Road Safety Talk with Frank Fitzgerald (Cork City Council)
- World Suicide Prevention Day: reflections
- Chiropody awareness talk With Margaret, NICHE chiropodist
- Trip to Dublin's National Museum: Ib Jorgensen dress designer exhibition
- Summer trip: Heritage guided tour of Kinsale and lunch
- Visit of Leinster House
- Visit of the Cork Nano Nagle Centre
- Christmas lunch in Blarney Castle Hotel Easter sun hats crafts
- St Brigid's crosses craft workshop
- Drum fitness & relaxation
- Traditional fruit cake confection



## Activator Poles class

From September to December 2024, 10 participants have learned to use activator poles for fitness and balance with accredited fitness instructor Sandra O'Gorman. The use of activator poles has become popular in therapy, rehab and care settings. Poles can help improve key components of functional fitness including strength, mobility, flexibility, and balance.

We would like to thank the Hollyhill Youth centre for continued support with room hire and access to facilities.



The feedback from participants has been incredibly positive, one lady commented the following:

***'The class has taught me to move again. I can do so much more at home, I am more relaxed and I feel so much better. The exercises are easy and the coach talks us through and gives us great confidence.'***

## Sing Your Heart Out Choir



The Sing Your Heart Out choir has grown from strength to strength through 2024 and we now have 25 regular members of the choir. The choir is led by Noreen Sexton, and with her acoustic guitar Noreen uses a variety of well-loved and popular songs from the 60s to 90s to bring everyone together in unison.

Through 2024, the choir performed at Tce McSweeney College for the Northside Interagency Network fair, and performed Christmas songs at the Hollyhill and Blackpool libraries, the Hollyhill youth centre as well as at the NICHE garden for the turning on of the Christmas Tress Lights.

*'They're a great bunch of people, very supportive and discreet, especially when someone might be a bit vulnerable. It's a safe space. Something doesn't need to be said, it's like we all just know without saying. It comes down to music I think, music is great for connecting people that way. I always come out of Choir feeling better, I just love the interaction.'*



## Yoga and meditation class



This is a very popular class within the community and NICHE is never short of queries for places on the class, thus we operate a waiting list. Currently there are 35 yogis attending the class.

In the second part of 2024, yoga instructor Kelly Buckley joined our community to cover for Jeanie while she was travelling. We are delighted to have both Kelly and Jeanie as our most respected and cherished yoga instructors with NICHE. For many participants, the class which is comprised of one hour yoga and 20mn meditation is the only personal time in the week where people can have a chance to slow down, breathe, strengthen body and mind, rest and recharge their batteries.

## Kidscope Clinic



Coordinated by Let's Grow Together, NICHE hosts Kidscope clinic on Thursdays. Kidscope is a community-based clinic that offers free health and developmental assessments and referral for children aged 0-6 who live in the Northwest area of Cork City. It is led by Consultant Paediatrician Dr Louise Gibson and is delivered in partnership with an inter-disciplinary team of paediatricians, 4th yr medical students from UCC, community medical doctors and practitioners from local agencies including Let's Grow Together, NICHE and Tusla Springboard Child & Family Support Service.



NICHE is fortunate to be a host to Social Prescribing for the Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill area. This is funded under Sláintecare.

In 2021, Sláintecare Healthy Ireland in the Department of Health, working with the HSE and local authorities and community agencies, launched the Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme to provide increased health and wellbeing services in 19 community areas across Ireland. An evidenced based process identified local areas in which health and wellbeing risk factors are particularly concentrated and where particular initiatives will be delivered to help promote and improve the overall health and wellbeing of people in those communities. One of these initiative's is Social Prescribing.

Social prescribing recognises that health is heavily determined by social factors such as poverty, isolation, and loneliness. Social prescribing offers GPs and other health professionals a means of referring people to a range of non-clinical community supports to meet their social needs.

Social Prescribing is a free service funded by the HSE that aims to link people to community groups, organisations, and statutory services for practical and emotional support to promote people's health and wellbeing.

One of the key roles of the social prescribing link worker is to establish and develop strong relationships with a range of community groups and health services locally including primary care, mental health, community dieticians, self-management support programmes etc.

Health inequalities are faced by those living in the community served by NICHE so access to health services is vital to address the health needs of the community.

The social prescribing link worker supports the service user to access local voluntary community and social enterprise organisations or services through discussion and joint decision.

- ✓ Up to eight sessions.
- ✓ Fosters person-centeredness.
- ✓ Flexible and community focused.
- ✓ Relationship-based approach.
- ✓ Generic service, not specialised - not counselling.

### **Who is our Social Prescriber?**

Vanessa Meseguer is the Social Prescriber based in NICHE Health Project, Knocknaheeny. Vanesa also has an office space in Teach Mhuire, Day Care Centre, Mayfield.

The catchment area covers part of the Community Healthcare Network 8 & 9: Hollyhill, Knocknaheeny, Gurrabraher, Churchfield, Blackpool, Farranree, Ballyvolane, The Glen and Mayfield.

## Who can make a referral?

Any primary care health professional (such as a G.P. community nurse, or occupational therapist) may refer a patient who is over the age of eighteen. In addition, self-referrals are welcomed as well as referrals from community-based organisations.



Referral forms are available at the Wellbeing Network under the Sláintecare Healthy Communities tab.

## Who is social prescribing suitable for?

Social Prescribing is a short-term service, suitable for adults over the age of 18 years who want to improve their quality of life. In particular, those:

- who are lonely
- socially isolated
- living with one or more long-term conditions
- living with mild or long-term mental health challenges such as anxiety or depression.
- who are in a state of readiness, who have arrived at a point where they are ready to make a step forward with support. Those referred to the service must be willing participants
- who are frequent GP/ED attendees and may benefit from other social supports outside of clinical services

## How does it work?

Once I get the referral, I will make contact with the person through a phone call, I will explain about the service and if it is agreed upon, arrange a time to meet in person.

The first meeting is more like a brief consultation where we will have a chat that will help me to get to know the person a bit more and understand their context, needs, and interests.

In the following meeting, I will provide some options available in the community, and we will co-produce a plan to achieve the goal set.

Typically, that plan entails a phone call or follow-up meeting to see how the person is doing and to identify any potential roadblocks. If someone needs it, I can go to a class or group activity for the first or second time.

The programme is considered completed when the referred have either: engaged in a meaningful activity, have had their needs met or have been referred on.

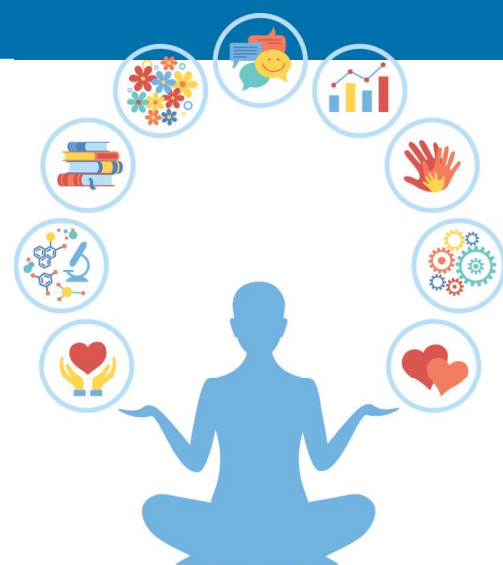
## What are the benefits to the individual?

Improved health and wellbeing, more social connections, support with information to make informed decisions, support to cope with a long-term health conditions, lifelong learning opportunities, developing personal skills, improving self-confidence and developing healthier habits to incorporate into daily life.

This is a free service and the community resources discussed would be free or low-cost.

## What are the benefits to the GP or other Health Care Professional?

Improved patient outcomes, physically and mentally and a potential reduction in medical appointments in a case where the person's real needs are social or community related.



Having a Social Prescriber based in NICHE contributes to the identification of health needs and inequities, and it can help reduce health inequalities by providing access to resources and support for marginalized or vulnerable groups who may not otherwise seek help through traditional healthcare routes.

Another positive aspect of being based in Niche is that I can directly link the referred person to NICHE activities and groups so that the person who came to meet me for an initial consultation can get a better sense of NICHE's activity and get a taste of its liveliness and committed staff.

Social prescribers play an important role in facilitating access to services for the local community. NICHE puts in structures that allow people within communities to identify their own health needs and to participate in addressing those health needs. This is something in common with the Social Prescribing approach, which aims to empower people to take control over their health. Stronger communities are built by fostering connections between individuals and community groups, social prescribing strengthens community bonds. This can lead to more resilient and supportive communities, where people look out for each other, thus enhancing the overall quality of life in the area.

Overall, social prescribing improves the quality of life by promoting social inclusion, physical and mental health, and community participation, leading to happier and healthier communities.

These benefits demonstrate that social prescribing, when based within a community setting, has the potential to transform individual lives and strengthen the fabric of the community as a whole.



## Delivery

In 2021, Sláintecare Healthy Ireland in the Department of Health, working with the HSE and local authorities and community agencies, launched the Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme to provide increased health and wellbeing services in 19 community areas across Ireland. An evidenced based process identified local areas in which health and wellbeing risk factors are particularly concentrated and where particular initiatives will be delivered to help promote and improve the overall health and wellbeing of people in those communities.

I am the only Social Prescriber in County Cork who is under Slaintecare Healthy Communities programme. To ensure the local communities selected have access to the full enhanced health and wellbeing programme, a core group of services will be established in each area to support people's wellbeing within that community, providing better access to the range of services needed to help improve and promote healthier lifestyle behaviours. These initiatives include:

- Parents plus programme
- Healthy food made easy
- We can quit
- Stop Smoking advisor
- Making every contact count
- Social Prescribing

# Social Prescribing - Events in 2024

## Promotion of social Prescribing

As part of my role as a Social Prescriber, I have actively built and strengthened networks with local organisations, healthcare providers, and community groups to enhance support for our clients. This has included organizing several events aimed at promoting health, well-being, and social connection. These events have provided valuable opportunities for service users to engage with local resources, reducing isolation and improving access to community support. By fostering these connections, my work has contributed to a more integrated and accessible support system, aligning with our organisation's mission to enhance holistic well-being.

## Community Engagement & Networking

At Cork Prison in May 2024 as part of the Hello campaign launched by Mental Health Ireland, aiming to achieve the following:

- Normalise talking about our mental health and recovery
- Reduce loneliness and improve community connection
- Encourage earlier help-seeking and finding support
- Develop capacity and confidence within the community to support each other
- The Slaintecare Healthy Communities steering group
- Meeting with the GPs in the Community Healthcare Network 8, which includes Mayfield, the Glen, and Blackpool, among other areas outside of the Slaintecare Healthy Communities.
- Local Mayfield group (Chit chat based in Mayfield Community Development project)
- Interagency promotion event in Gurrabraher
- Health Promotion event in Teach Mhuire HSE Day Care Centre

Health promotion event at Teach Mhuire organised by Health Promotion in CHN 8

Mayfield Interagency meeting at Newbury House, Mayfield



I organised an event to raise awareness regarding mental health and support available in the community as part of the Green Ribbon Campaign for Mental Health on the 25th of September 2024, and a workshop on Mindset coaching techniques from the 6th of November to the 11th of December.

### Green Ribbon Campaign for Mental Health



### Mindset coaching techniques workshop at NICHE Community Garden



## 2024 in numbers:

**119** referrals in 2024 (47 males, 72 females)

**3** not interested when contact was made

**8** were unreachable

**14** could not engage for different reasons: being housebound, not having access to transport, health issues or mobility issues.

**7** were not ready to engage (mental health issues, active addiction, complex social needs, not having their basic needs met.)

**87** engaged and linked to services

The main reasons for referral are isolation, loneliness and having a chronic health condition. Other predominant reasons are mental health difficulties and stress/life events.

I set up and launched the national case study peer support group for Social Prescribers nationwide in August 2024, which is still ongoing. We meet once a month online, taking turns to discuss a few cases each time and provide feedback and support to each other.

### Waiting list

There is currently no waiting list - referrals are met within a week.

### Challenges:

Some clients referred into the services have higher needs, beyond the scope of social prescribing. Examples of inappropriate referrals include people who are housebound, people with advanced dementia or people with long term and enduring mental health challenges who are not yet at the stage of their recovery journey where they are ready to engage with community groups and services.

- Transport to and from activities was identified as a barrier particularly older people and those experiencing mobility issues/chronic pain.
- Lack of social groups for people aged 30-50 who are not interested in seeking employment/education/volunteer.
- The waiting list to avail of public mental health services and the financial struggle to avail of private options.
- Shifting from a dependent model of support to a more proactive one, where people learn to take control over their wellbeing and to co-produce a care plan where they need to take action to move forward.
- The lack of activities/groups over the summer months.



## What is working well:

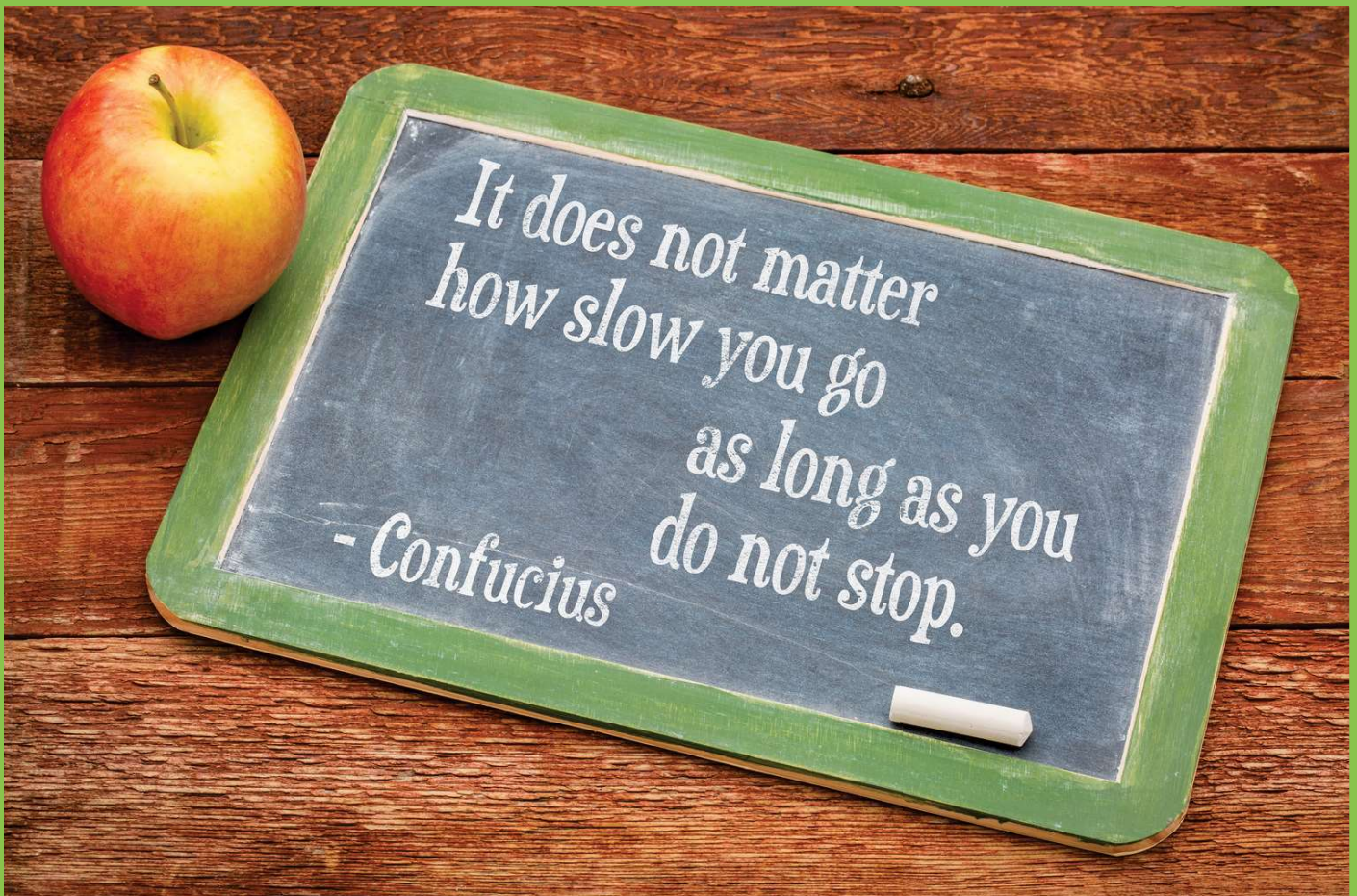
- Referrals that were sent by GP were mostly people who wouldn't have or hadn't connected to community resources without social prescribing.
- Referrals who can identify their needs and are motivated to make changes.
- Placing myself in two locations to meet people in person.
- Building relationships: "It's not enough to read about services. You need to see them, meet the people involved, and know what the client can expect so that you can easily facilitate a connection."
- Having a network to support our work (external supervision, informal meetings with colleagues, National Peer support group, ECHO, Sláintecare Coordinator).

*I look forward to meeting with and working with members of the community in 2025.*

*Vanesa Meseguer*

Vanesa Meseguer

NICHE Social Prescriber

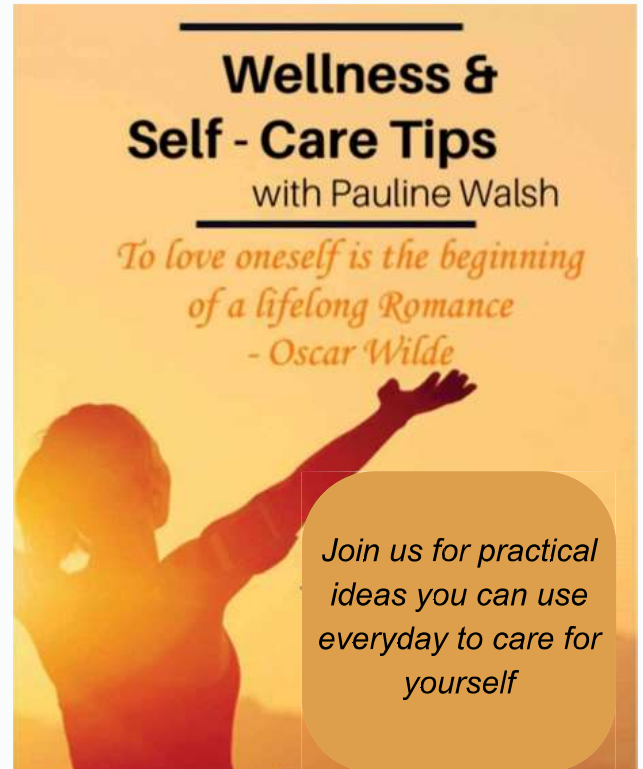


## Time for me

The 'Time for me' programme brought people together in a nice calm space to encourage positive mental health and to enable them to use the tips they learn from this programme on a daily basis to reduce stress and help them feel calm. The group also learn how to use aromatherapy oils and are given a bottle to take home.

This programme ran over 4 Wednesday mornings in September with 8 participants.

We plan to do more sessions in 2025.



## Art Classes in NICHE

A new art workshop started in NICHE on Wednesday 2nd September. The art group started as 4 existing participants from the 'Before 5' group. It was then advertised and people from the local community started to attend. There is now a total of 9 people attending the art workshop. It went very well and all the participants have painted beautiful works of art and will begin a mural on the wall in the group room next year.



## Massage

There are great health benefits from Holistic Massage. Massage can relieve tension in your muscles, and most people use it for relaxation, relief of stress and anxiety, or to reduce muscle soreness. Massage can also cause your body to release natural painkillers, and it boosts your immune system.

Participants find it very beneficial, providing them a space to switch off and relax during the therapy session. It also gives the client a chance to talk to the Community Health Workers and some have been referred to counselling and have availed of other programmes NICHE offer.

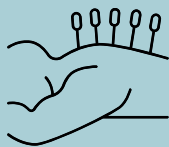
**63 people seen in 2024 - 12 new clients**

## Acupuncture

NICHE facilitates participants to access Acupuncture at low cost. It is used by clients experiencing chronic physical pain while waiting on procedures or who have long term damage to their bodies.

It helps relieve pain, which in turn helps with increased mobility and improved mood. It's an affordable local accessible service.

**44 people seen in 2024 - 8 new clients**



## Tai Chi

Tai Chi is one of NICHE's core programmes and has been running for many years. It promotes physical activity, improves flexibility and promotes positive mental health. There are an average of 18 people who attend on a regular basis. There were 5 new people who started last year and are now involved in the women's group.



## Chiropody



NICHE facilitates low cost Chiropody. Our Chiropodist runs a clinic once a month.

Those experiencing painful feet often report reduced mood and limitations in their mobility, which in turns affects their ability to attend appointments, groups and therefore limits their social interactions. By providing this low cost service, clients of chiropody can also hear about and avail of NICHE'S other groups and activities.

**85 people seen in 2024**

**MAKE  
YOURSELF A  
PRIORITY**



## Our Profile

The Family Centre currently operates 3 Preschool sessions. We have two morning sessions and one in the afternoon. We also provide a part time session for the ECCE which is proving to be very successful. We have a part time Creche service in the morning which provides lovely learning opportunities and experiences for children aged 2-3 years.

Our preschool children are aged between 2 years and 8 months to 6 years and are entitled to 2 free preschool years. We operate under the National Guidelines Framework. Our curriculum is Highscope which encourages children to become active learners in their own environment and help them to problem solve through conflict resolution techniques which are demonstrated at a young age and supported and modelled by the staff. The Preschool hours are from 8:45am – 11:45am. The part time extra hours are from 11:45am – 1:15pm but are limited to 15 children due to space restrictions.



The Creche service helps provide parents in the Hollyhill Knocknaheeny community with quality childcare in a stimulating environment. The part time service offered to children aged 2-3 years is done on split days. The younger children who are just 2 normally get a Monday & Tuesday morning and the older toddlers get a Wednesday to Friday offer. The Creche times are from 8:45am – 12:30pm. Children who do the part time Creche service receive breakfast and a meal also. The creche service offers a very welcoming environment where children can interact with their peers, and it promotes socialization and emotional development.

Our Parents who take up the part time hours can avail of financial subsidies from the National Childcare Scheme which makes our early years more accessible and affordable to all.

Here at the Family Centre, we are committed to providing a safe, nurturing and encouraging environment where the developmental needs of each child are met in a holistic way to the best of our ability.

While promoting the values of respect, equality, inclusion and diversity, we strive to respond to the childcare needs of the community through an affordable, accessible and high-quality service.



### Celebrating cultural diversity



The Early Years of a child's life are crucial for setting the foundations for lifelong attitudes and beliefs. Engaging in cultural diversity activities and learning experiences introduces children to the concept of 'difference' in a positive light.

Here at the Family Centre, we respect all cultures and differences. This is demonstrated positively throughout our facility. We recently celebrated Chinese New Year where the children learnt about what Chinese New Year is all about. They learned about the year of the snake, used chopsticks (I mean attempted to use chopsticks!), drank Chinese tea and listened to Chinese music.

Our service offers a range of resources that represent all children in books, toys, dress up and pictures.

It allows for open conversations about differences, as well as helping to gain insight into children's own thoughts and views about people who do not look like them.



## New Changes

The Hollyhill Knocknaheeny Family Centre is adapting and changing to suit the needs of the children and the service at all times. Some new additions and changes that we have implemented include the painting of our outside wall as you enter our building. Adding a touch of colour instantly makes the entrance more child friendly and inviting.



This will be added to again this summer as soon as we get a bit of good weather! It really does make a difference.



We also got a lovely new decking for the children, and it is a covered space, so the children are only delighted with this new update.

We have a very creative caretaker who has worked really hard and has closed in some of our outdoor pergolas. This not only helps protect our outdoor equipment from the elements of our weather, but the children can engage in outdoor play without being wet which is a bonus!!

We added some items to our sensory room, which changes and adapts according to each child's individual needs. It is a wonderful resource to have and is used on a daily basis.



### Community Trips



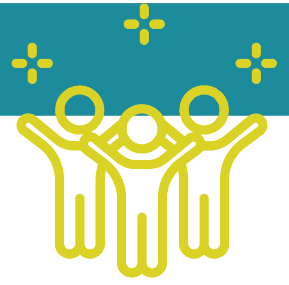
The Family Centre is really lucky to be situated in the heart of the community. We are blessed to have the library nearby and this is used on a weekly basis by our preschool groups. Our community garden is a nice option during spring and the children did visit the garden at Christmas time and were in awe of the huge, crocheted Christmas tree!! Well done to all!!

The children also visited the youth centre to see the main man on Christmas week and really enjoyed this experience. Parents of the Family Centre avail of the many courses that are on offer in NICHE, Let's Grow Together, the Library or NICHE Community Garden, there are a multitude of choice for all ages.



Although the Family Centre is a Charity organisation, we like to give back to others in need throughout the year.

## Supporting Others



We engage with the Early Childhood Ireland National Pyjama Day every year. The children and staff love to dress up in their PJ's and everyone brings in a few bob and this year's charity was for Laura Lynn. This charity provides palliative care and support for children with life-limiting conditions and their families.



Another charity that we engaged in was 'As I Am'. This charity is Autistic led and are dedicated to transforming society, working for Autistic people and their families. All the staff and children wore something Blue on World Autism Day. It was lovely to see everyone unified and promote the realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for people with autism on an equal basis with others.



## The Adult Groups

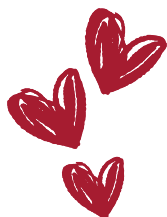
In addition to the Creche & Preschool the Family Centre provides a number of activity programmes such as Line Dancing, Yoga, Salsa & Ballroom dancing and Arts & Crafts. Adults can come to any of these activities and it's a lovely opportunity to interact with others in the community as well as learning a new skill. A lot of these programmes are funded by the Cork Education Training Board.

## Students

The Family Centre believes in supporting young students as they begin their journey in early years. Throughout the year we facilitate a number of Cork colleges and schools so students can gain experience in our settings. All students adhere to the regulations and guidelines and are Garda Vetted prior to their work experience; however, it is a wonderful opportunity to put their knowledge into practice and build new experiences.

## Farewell to our Administrator

It was with a sad heart that we said farewell to our Administrator Rosemary O Sullivan. Rose has been at the Family Centre for nearly 23 years. She has been an asset to the Family Centre and was the first face to greet anyone that entered our service. She was always so helpful and supportive, and we wish her all the best on her retirement. May she have many years of health and happiness and enjoy and embrace her love of travelling!!



I would like to take this opportunity to thank the hardworking dedicated staff of the Family Centre and the Board of Management for their on-going continued support.

*Lisa O'Brien*

Manager of the Hollyhill/Knocknaheeny Family Centre



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of Children  
and Youth Affairs



# NICHE Health Project & Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Community Garden



NICHE Health Project (Cork) CLG,  
HSE Building, Harbour View Road, Knocknaheeny, Cork. T23 XY16

Hollyhill/Knocknaheeny Community Garden. Hollyville Estate, Hollyhill/Knocknaheeny,  
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# Stronger Together



*"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."*  
– Coretta Scott King

