



ONE FAMILY Ireland
ANNUAL REPORT 2023

One Family is a provider of specialist services to one-parent families and those experiencing unplanned pregnancy. We focus on capturing their lived experiences to inform decision-making and drive national policy and social improvements for lone parents and their children. Our main aim is to work with Government, policy makers, the media and society at large to effect positive change in policies, laws and attitudes when it comes to the recognition of and support for diverse families in general, and one-parent families especially.

Since its foundation as **Cherish** in 1972, **One Family** has been an organisation of determination, passion and courage, working with integrity towards achieving recognition and equality for all types of families in contemporary Ireland.

Our Vision | One Family believes in an Ireland where every family is cherished equally, and is enabled to enjoy the social, financial and legal equality to create their own positive futures.

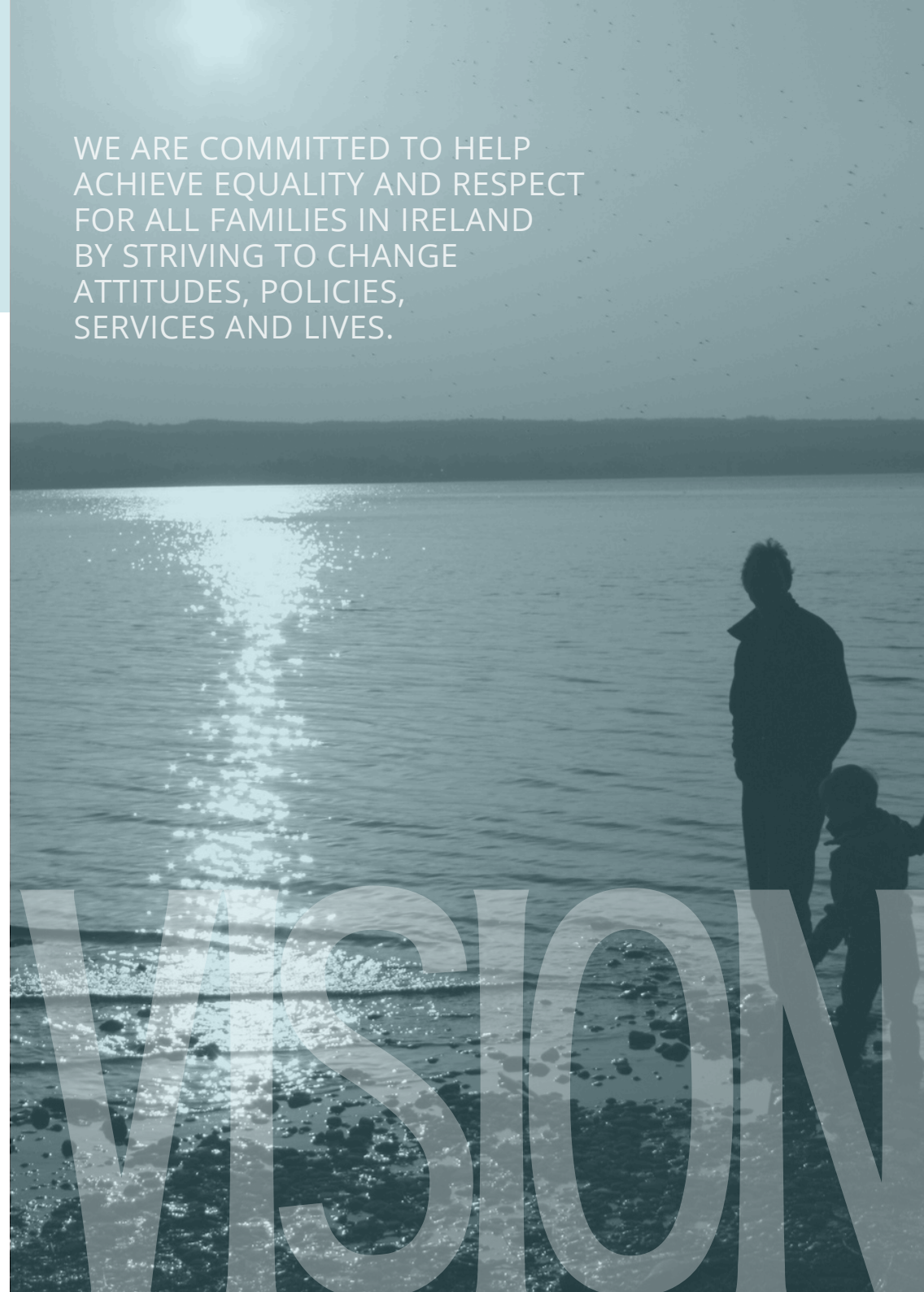
Our Mission | One Family is working to ensure a positive and equal future for people parenting alone, sharing parenting and parenting around separation – changing attitudes, policies, services and lives. We are committed to achieving equality and respect for all families.

While acknowledging that every family is unique, we will endeavour to bring about better lives for these parents and children. In addition to striving for fundamental attitudinal and structural change in our society, our services offer support in a family-centred way to individual families through times of change and difficulty, as well as supporting those experiencing an unplanned pregnancy.

While acknowledging that every family is unique, we endeavour to bring about better outcomes in the lives of lone parents and their children. In addition to our advocacy in bringing about fundamental attitudinal and structural change in Irish society, our services offer family-centric supports to individuals experiencing times of change and difficulty, whether it is family breakdown, couple separation, unplanned pregnancy and the consequences of these on parents and children.

Our Values | Respect, compassion for and acceptance of the parents, children and organisations that we come in contact with, are at the heart of what we do. We connect with others in a relationship of equals and are completely non-judgmental. We believe that we can hold the hope for the families we work with, especially when they are unable to. We achieve this through innovation, excellence, accountability and our family-centred approach.

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Using a child-focused, trauma-informed, human rights-based approach we set our strategic goals and objectives to focus on delivering high-quality family support and therapeutic services to one-parent families as well as educational and support programmes to empower lone parents in exercising their entitlements and pursue the right opportunities for their families. 2023 marked the second year of our three-year strategic plan, which is based on three fundamental pillars on which we devise our programmes, policy and advocacy outputs through to 2030.

1

Recognition of diverse families in policy and law, with the stated aim to bring about necessary and overdue access to the appropriate, evidence-based levels of statutory services, entitlements and supports.

2

Resourcing of service and support models for one-parent families through educational and direct-support interventions focused on people parenting alone, sharing parenting and separating, as well as for their children.

3

Reduction of child poverty rates through a range of targeted interventions in State-supported services, tax and income threshold changes, employment and educational opportunities, all of which enable poor families to achieve a decent standard of living.

Life did not get better for one-parent families in 2023 in terms of financial or employment supports from Government, but we welcomed the Department of Social Protection's commitment to removing the assessment of child maintenance from several social welfare schemes – an issue we have campaigned on for a long time.

2023 also marked a deterioration of living standards across the board in Ireland and particularly for lone parents and poor families according to the national Survey on Income and Living Conditions. We learned that deprivation levels of lone parents in Ireland remain persistently high, at 41.4%, which is almost two and half times higher than those of two-parent households. Like every year, One Family continued advocating for targeted supports for the children most in need in the Government's relevant budget.

We welcomed the establishment of a new Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit in the Department of *An Taoiseach*. The Unit published their Initial Programme Plan, and we lobbied for measures to reduce child poverty in one-parent families amidst the cost-of-living and housing crises. We also advocated for child-centred, out-of-court supports for families with legal disputes, meeting with the Minister for Justice and participating in the Family Justice Development Forum.

We were concerned by the Family Justice Strategy and proposed Family Courts Bill as these did not reflect the increasing demand for out-of-court mediation services and supports for families in conflict, which invariably ends up in the adversarial system of the family law courts.

Another depressing reality of 2023 was the unprecedented increase in homelessness levels across the country and we helped shed light on the alarming rates of family homelessness faced by lone parents and their children, in conjunction with other organisations in the National One Parent Family Alliance. Between April and November 2023, most families seeking emergency accommodation were headed by one parent (usually a mother) with one or two children, as a result of household break-up and particularly in the aftermath of lifting the ban on evictions.

It was another disappointing Budget 2024 in the end, as opportunities to target children and families most in need were unfortunately squandered in favour of universal increases for all families. One Family did however welcome the reintroduction of child benefit for children in full-time secondary school education.

Throughout the year, by maintaining a strong and consistent presence in policy discussions, consultative and advisory settings, One Family sought to influence decisions that would improve outcomes for lone parents and their children.

We shared the lived experiences of parents through storytelling on social media, conducted focus groups, and collaborated with media sources to raise awareness about the struggles of one-parent families.

Throughout the year, we worked with civil society organisations for a referendum on the definition of family in the Constitution, and important changes in how we in Ireland should view family, care and women's role.

Over the year, we submitted seven policy submissions, issued 78 lobbying communications, and advocated for Constitutional change of Article 41.3. We also chaired the National One Parent Family Alliance, an umbrella group of civil society organisations concerned with the high levels of poverty experienced by lone parents and their children.



POLICY

2023 Activities

At the start of the year we transitioned to a hybrid-delivery approach to all parenting and employability programmes within our portfolio in order to enhance accessibility and nationwide availability. As a result, One Family delivered courses and services to 3,441 family members, a 15% overall increase from 2022.

76

Employability

289

Parenting

282

Counselling

141

E-Learning

68

Early Years Support

2,577

Helpline

3,441

Total Clients

Employability Programmes

We understand the experience of parenting alone and sharing parenting and how challenging it can be to move back into education or find sustainable employment. Our employability programmes are unique because everyone who participates in our programmes has access to regular one-to-one support and other wraparound family supports.

We ran three employability programmes over 2023, supporting a total of 76 clients and continued our laptop loan scheme to ensure that course participants without their own devices could access and fully engage in the online training.

	New Steps	New Futures
Iterations	1	2
Course Sessions	112	1,003
Participants	16	50
Sessions	59	391

Our **New Steps** Personal Development and New Futures Employability Programmes are free and provide lone parents with the skills and support they need to progress to education and employment.

New Steps is the 8-week, part-time personal-development introduction to New Futures covering modules such as Personal Development & Self-Esteem, Assertiveness Skills, Stress Management, Positive Parenting and Family Communications.

The **New Futures** Employability Programme is a part-time personal and career development programme that explores two key modules in Personal and Interpersonal Development and Career Planning. The overall aim of the programme is to empower individuals in one-parent families to overcome personal and situational barriers, improve their career and employability prospects, and achieve their educational and employment goals.

2023 Achievements

Special Recognition Award For The New Futures Employability Programme

One Family's New Futures Employability Programme received the Special Recognition Award at the Aontas Star Awards in a ceremony at Croke Park in March 2023. The STAR Awards are an initiative by Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation and celebrates the fantastic work undertaken by adult learning initiatives throughout Ireland.

This is the second time our employability programme has been honoured, having previously won in 2019. The award recognised the programme's outstanding contribution to adult learning, which boasted an impressive 75% progression rate in 2023.

This is more than just an award for a programme of learning. The award highlighted the hard work of the New Futures team and the positive experience of the parents who have participated in the programme. Our Programmes staff are deeply involved with and striving to produce the best experience for our participants. Our Employability Manager, Niamh Wynne, in particular, is a strong advocate for lone parents having a voice and is actively involved in supporting current and previous participants of our programmes to provide testimonials and engage in focus groups and public speaking events to tell their story to policy makers and other sectoral stakeholders.

‘Our New Futures employability programme is such a success because we understand the unique challenges that lone parents can face when considering a return to education and employment. As a trusted and specialised service, this bridging programme has been designed by us to take account of the parenting responsibilities lone parents have, to support them in learning new skills and build the confidence they need to progress towards secure, well-paid employment opportunities.’

— Valerie Maher
Programmes Manager
One Family

The programme itself is but one of the ways in which we empower parents to progress personally and professionally. Parents often tell us that they don't feel the challenges they face are understood in society – until they come to One Family. We are passionate about empowering and supporting lone parents to reach their education and employment goals.

In 2023 we continued our pilot project partnering with the Department of Social Protection and European partners in Greece and Finland to support lone parents towards employability and social inclusion, delivering both our New Futures and New Steps Programmes. On average, 75% of participants progressed to education and employment after course completion.



From left: Deirdre Mortell – CEO, Rethink Ireland; Valerie Maher – Programmes & Information Manager, One Family; Ursula Mapley – Chief Operating Officer, Bank of America Europe DAC

Our project partnering with the Department of Social Protection in Ireland and European partners in Greece and Finland explored employability and social inclusion of lone parents. Funded by the EU's ESF+ Employment and Social Innovation Fund, it helped us deliver our New Futures Employability Programme in 2023. In October 2023 we co-hosted a dissemination event with the Department of Social Protection to highlight our work with parents and the need to mainstream our employability programmes throughout Ireland.

In October 2023 we secured funding from the Rethink Ireland *Mná na hÉireann* Women of Ireland Empowerment Fund to support delivery of our New Futures Employability Programme until 2026. Bank of America co-fund the project and provided our staff with ongoing mentorship and resources.

'One Family recognises that being a single parent or sharing parenting responsibilities can come with unique challenges, and they offer assistance and guidance in areas such as childcare, financial planning, and accessing community resources.'

2023 Testimonials



Our Programmes service Employability Manager, Niamh Wynne alongside New Futures participant, Michelle, accepting an AONTAS STAR Award at the ceremony in March, 2023.

'As a single parent, I have always struggled to balance the demands of parenting and pursuing my own personal and professional growth. However, this programme has truly been a game-changer for me and has opened a world of opportunities that I never thought possible.

What sets this apart is its approach, addressing both personal and interpersonal development as well as career planning. This unique combination ensured that I received a well-rounded education that caters to my individual needs and aspirations.

One of the most valuable aspects of the programme is the group training delivered two mornings per week online. The sessions are engaging, informative, and empowering. Through interactive workshops, group discussions, and practical exercises, I have gained valuable insights into various aspects of personal growth, such as self-confidence, communication skills, and resilience. The trainer was highly knowledgeable and skilled at creating a supportive environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their experiences and learning from one another and, on a week-to-week basis, friendships developed.

Another highlight of the New Futures Programme is the individual 1:1 key-work sessions. These sessions provided personalised help, support and guidance tailored to my specific needs and goals. The keyworker I was assigned was incredibly supportive, offering valuable insights, helping me identify my strengths and interests, who championed me every step of the way and assisted me in creating a clear career plan. The individual attention I received made me feel valued and motivated to pursue my aspirations.

Since completing the New Futures Programme, I have experienced a tremendous transformation in my personal and professional life. Not only have I acquired new skills and knowledge, but I have also gained a renewed sense of confidence and self-belief in myself.

Without this programme, I don't think I would have the confidence to really reach the personal accomplishments that this course has given me. The programme has helped me realize my full potential and given me the tools to navigate the job market with a clear vision of my career goals. I cannot recommend the New Futures Programme enough. It is a truly life-changing opportunity for single parents and those sharing parenting

— Caroline
Participant
New Futures
2023