

13<sup>th</sup> April, 2023

Mr. Thomas Gould, T.D.,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Dublin 2

**“PQ 15707/23: To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth if he will provide an update on the children's disability services in Cork.”**

**“PQ 15708/23: To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the actions being taken to resolve the staffing crisis in children's disability services in Cork.”**

Dear Deputy Gould,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for response.

Children's Disability Services covers a wide area of service provision – Progressing Disability Services covering Children's Disability Network Teams, Special Schools and Assessment of Need. We have services delivered on behalf of Cork Kerry Disability Services, by service agreements, through a range of service providers to include Children's Respite Services, Home Supports, Outreach Services, Children's Residential Placements. Service providers include lead agencies such as Enable Ireland, COPE Foundation, Brothers of Charity, St. Josephs Foundation, St. John of Gods, CoAction and in addition by PRAXIS care, RehabCare and Doorway to Life Limited. Each area is challenged to maintain staffing levels and each service provider is working to recruit adequate staffing for their respective services.

**Children's Disability Network Teams:** Established during 2021 in Cork and throughout the country to provide services and supports for all children with complex needs within a defined geographic area in line with the Progressing Disability Services (PDS) model. CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work and others. The team work closely together in a family centred model, focusing on the child's and family's own priorities. Every child with complex needs arising from a disability will have access to a team, regardless of the nature of their disability, where they live, or the school they attend.

There are 11 CDNT's for Cork City & County within Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, the location of each aligning with the Community Healthcare Networks. Each CDNT is managed by a Lead Agency namely COPE Foundation, Brothers of Charity (BOC), Enable Ireland, CoAction and St Josephs Foundation (SJF).

One of the primary objectives in the development of CDNT's is to have equity of access to services for all children and their families based on need and not diagnosis. Access must be based on the child having a complex functional disability and not on diagnosis or category of disability or the school he/she attends. All recruitment for staff is carried out by the lead agencies and is ongoing, with the same challenges as experienced nationally.

**Special Schools:** Cork Kerry Community Healthcare is aware that the reinstatement of health and social care supports in special schools has been identified as a priority. An additional 26.0 posts were allocated to CHO4 in 2022 based on the numbers of schools and the whole time equivalents (WTE) in situ prior to reconfiguration and commencement of two new special schools in Carrigaline and Rochestown. The lead agencies have commenced the recruitment process for these posts. In the meantime, the teams have provided supports to children as the Children’s Disability Network Team (CDNT) model of service based on a child’s needs and resource availability.

**Assessment of Need** for children is provided for under the Disability Act, 2005. Significant challenges are experienced with delivery timelines due to the large number of referrals. Initiatives are in place to assist, in particular with outsourcing ASD assessments for children.

**Childrens Respite Services Cork:** A Regional Children’s Respite Forum was established in 2022. The Forum Committee manages referrals and respite service provision in the Cork area. The overall purpose of the Committee is that children up to the age of 18 years with a disability, who are in receipt of services from a Children’s Disability Network Team (CDNT) in Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (CKCH) would be eligible to apply for respite and/or home support services. The Forum is still in its infancy however applications are in process and reviewed, assessed and approved based on agreed access criteria; appropriate referral pathway to the committee; assessment based on level of need and the most appropriate provision for each child and thereafter on the basis of capacity and availability of service.

In Cork overnight respite services for children under 18 years of age with an intellectual disability, physical disability or autism is delivered by a range of organisations namely, Cope Foundation, Enable Ireland, St. Josephs Foundation, CoAction and the Brothers of Charity. There are a total of 27 beds however, 10 of the beds are suppressed or suspended due to staffing shortages. There is also a number of sessions of day respite provided to children which consists of a centre based day and outreach services for children.

We recognise that respite service provide valuable supports to families within Cork Kerry Community Healthcare who benefit from these resources. Details of services available in CHO 4 (Cork) are below, (updated July 2022). As outlined above all referrals are processed via the newly established Children’s Respite Forum.

Registration_Provider	Title	County	Service Type	Adult/ Child	Full/Part Time	Maximum Occupancy of Designated Centre	No of Respite Beds in Designated Centre
Enable Ireland Disability Services Limited	Lavanagh House	Cork	Respite	Child	Part-time	3	3
COPE Foundation	Cork City North 9, Le Cheile	Cork	Respite	Child	Full-time	9	8
CoAction West Cork CLG	Dunmanway Residential	Cork	Respite	Child	Part-time	3	3
Brothers of Charity Services Ireland CLG	Ban Laoi, No.1 Heather Park	Cork	Respite	Child	Full-time	2 to 3	6



St Joseph's Foundation	Cooleens House	Cork	Respite	Child	Part-time	0	6
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**Children's Residential Services Cork:** Cork Kerry Community Healthcare Disability Service has established a Residential Forum whereby existing and emerging residential vacancies are identified throughout Cork and Kerry and appropriate cases are referred to agencies for assessment of suitability.

All requests for a residential placement are recorded and managed through the Cork Kerry Residential Forum. A system called the Disability Support Application Management Tool (DSAMT) is used which serves to ensure that the application process is equitable and transparent.

It is an unfortunate reality within this area of service that the number of applicants for residential placements exceeds available capacity - and in this context decision making on allocations is informed by the prioritisation of assessed clinical needs. There are approximately 500 clients awaiting/requiring residential services in Cork Kerry Community Healthcare at present.

Unfortunately Disability Services within Cork and Kerry continue to operate in the context of very challenging circumstances – including availability of resources such as personnel, therapists, facilities and available accommodation for residential placements in appropriate settings.

**Home Supports:** Disability Service continues to strive to meet the needs of children and in certain instances and where indicated may provide home supports to allows service users to receive extra care in their own home environment and/ or to provide an additional support to families caring for children in challenging situations.

**Developments:**

National Service Plan funding 2022 has been used to fund an approved proposal from Enable Ireland for an increase in Children's respite in the Lavanagh Centre, Curaheen, Cork. Lavanagh House currently offers 138 bednights. The new development will increase this provision by 690 bednights giving a total of 828 bednights. A total of 48 children (referrals through the childrens' respite forum) will benefit in a full year from this development. It will provide an overnight respite service at 6 nights per week (Mon-Sun) over 46 weeks. This will commence on a phased basis in May of this year, staff are being recruited currently.

National Service Plan funding 2023: HSE Cork Kerry Community Healthcare Disability Services has since received its letter of allocation of new development funding under NSP 2023 and the funding for expansion of respite services to CHO 4 is less than 50% of the usual annual development funding allocated to CHO 4 for respite services and no funding for residential respite. Undoubtedly this will impact on what can realistically be achieved within budget and in consideration of competing priorities for respite funding in both Cork and Kerry.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to me.

Yours sincerely,

*Majella Daly*

**Ms. Majella Daly,  
Head of Disability Services,  
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare**

