

# Healing the wounds of isolation: letting children be children

Extra-curricular activities for children  
living in Direct Provision centres and  
the need for sustained support



## Impact Report

Grant Programme for Children Living  
in Direct Provision Centres in Ireland

July 2019

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# foreword

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St Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT) has a goal to support vulnerable migrants to become full members of our society. The SSGT Strategic Plan 2018–2022 considers people living in Direct Provision centres (DP) to be one of the most vulnerable groups in Irish society. Consequently SSGT trustees will continue to provide funds to improve supports available to people living in the Direct Provision system until 2022.

SSGT believes that dismantling barriers to integration for children living in DP will effect change. The activities for children living in DP grant programme is SSGT's contribution to that change.

SSGT trustees are pleased with the outcomes of the grant programme insofar as they have made a small difference in the lives of some of the most vulnerable children living in Ireland today. However, we are conscious of the context in which the grant programme is operating. It is clear that the practice of keeping children in institutions for years is not in their interests and does not contribute to their well-being. We are mindful of the concerns expressed by those interviewed for the evaluation report that private funding may divert attention away from the State's failure to meet its obligations to asylum-seeker children.

SSGT's grant programmes are designed to demonstrate what works, to document learning and to support pathways to effecting long-term change. The report includes recommendations for SSGT as it exits this grant programme and we will endeavour to implement them over the next 18 months. There are recommendations for the wider community which also has an important role to play in welcoming asylum seekers into our communities.

The Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs have a particular responsibility to support children living in Direct Provision. We ask those bodies to consider the report's evidence about the clear need for and benefits of extra-curricular activities for children living in Direct Provision and to find a mechanism to ensure universal access to activities.

Our thanks to the report author for a comprehensive and considered review of the grant programme. We are very appreciative of the groups and the beneficiaries who were resourceful and creative in their use of the grant and accepted the fund's limitations. We thank the donors without whom the grant programme would not be possible – the Sisters of Mercy, the Discalced Carmelites and the Daughters of the Cross of Liege.

SSGT trustees support those seeking better ways to meet the needs of asylum seekers living in very difficult circumstances as they await determination of their international protection status. While those alternatives are being developed we believe we have an obligation to help children live the best lives they can. It is their only childhood.

Orla O'Neill  
Executive Director  
July 2019



# executive summary



Since 2014 a SSGT grant programme has provided almost

**€320,000**

to 20 organisations enabling

**2,500**

children living in Direct Provision centres to access activities

As with all children, those living in Direct Provision centres across Ireland want opportunities to play, learn and spend time with their friends and family. Over the last five years St. Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT) has been helping children in Ireland's Direct Provision system to do just that.

Since its inception in late 2014 a SSGT grant programme has provided almost €320,000 to 20 local organisations in communities across Ireland. This has enabled approximately 2,500 children living in Direct Provision centres to participate in a collective total of many hundreds of sporting, cultural and leisure activities in the areas where they reside.

The children of families living in Direct Provision centres are particularly vulnerable members of Irish society due to their uncertain status; the indefinite length of time that they and their families must wait to obtain an answer on their protection status; the realities of living within institutional settings, often for long periods of time; and the economic insecurity their parents often endure.

These children and young people often spend crucial periods of their lives within the confines of a Direct Provision centre surrounded by strangers, unable to invite friends back or join them at outside activities. To address this, SSGT established a small, flexible grant to create linkages with sporting, cultural and community activities already available in local areas. Supported by additional funds from the four Sisters of Mercy Provinces, the programme strives to ensure that children can leave a centre for at least a few hours each week. SSGT prioritises collaboration with grassroots organisations that partner with geographically isolated centres in areas with limited available activities in their surroundings.

In 2019 alone, SSGT's support to the community and voluntary sector has enabled 16 committed organisations to link with children living in 18 Direct Provision centres and to connect them into local area activities with peers. Without the grant's support, those children would otherwise spend countless hours inside centres, whiling away their time, wishing away evenings, weekends and holidays.

## Positive impacts of access to extra-curricular activities for children

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Designed as a learning programme, in early 2019 SSGT commissioned its second impact review since the grant commenced. This report details the findings of that evaluation, which was carried out across 17 days between February to May 2019.

Drawing on qualitative and quantitative findings from questionnaires and interviews, the review reveals that children's engagement in extracurricular activities through the SSGT programme has had multiple, significantly positive impacts on their lives. Children, parents, community organisations and centre management surveyed were united in their view that access to activities beyond the centres and within communities had helped children to, essentially, be children.

They explained that the grant helped "heal the wound of isolation" and address some of the serious policy and practice gaps in the state's provision of access to integration opportunities. They revealed that grant-supported activities help to increase children's confidence and skills; normalise their lives and routines; reduce stigma; create meaningful opportunities for connection with other children their age; and foster resilience by supporting positive mental health.

The SSGT grant also led to several indirect positive outcomes. This included marked improvements to crucial relationships, primarily between residents in the centres. Deeper bonds formed between parents and their children, particularly when they could participate together as a family. Grant-supported activities also resulted in an increased level of connection between residents and the wider community, creating further prospects for integration and a stronger sense of belonging.

In addition, the programme often acted as a catalyst for increasing offers of support from the community. Once the grant commenced in an area, grantee organisations regularly witnessed a multiplication of efforts from the locality. Sporting and cultural organisations often began initiatives to enable more children to participate and benefit from local resources once they understood the extent of the needs and witnessed the benefits of involving children from the Direct Provision centres.

Furthermore, the grant's operation often contributed towards an increased sense of empowerment among centre residents. Parents explained that they greatly appreciated the opportunity for deeper involvement in decision-making about their own children's lives. Finally, grantees reported positive changes to their organisational cultures and staff capacities due to running the programme.

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They revealed grant-supported activities help to increase children's confidence and skills; normalise their lives and routines; reduce stigma; create meaningful opportunities for connection with other children their age; and foster resilience by supporting positive mental health.

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## Barriers to access to play and learning

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The evaluation revealed that a number of barriers consistently impacted how effectively the grant could assist children. While multiple factors frequently limited children's participation in extra-curricular activities, the key barrier for all grantees was the lack of regular, affordable transportation for people living in Direct Provision centres and the prohibitive costs of organising alternatives.

Direct Provision centres are often in isolated locations that are poorly served by public transport. However, those groups working with centres based in or very close to a town also reported being impacted by a lack of transportation options. If activities were taking place in the evenings, weekends or school holidays, residents without access to regular, affordable public transport were dependent on centre management operating a flexible system. This is simply not the reality in most cases.

Additional costs beyond the price of a class or activity membership also limited or blocked some children's participation. This included expenses associated with an activity such as the purchase of sports gear, lesson books, or access to pocket money for an evening or day trip. These costs either stretched beyond the allocated grant budget or were frequently beyond the financial means of a child's parents.

Grantee organisations also reported that the length of stay in a centre had a marked adverse impact on children's participation rates in activities. The longer a child remained in the system, the more demotivated they and their parents became. This not only impacted the child's mental health, but also affected the interest of their parent to push for a child's involvement and inclusion in extra-curricular activities.

Several grantee groups expressed concern that certain children were routinely less able or completely unable to benefit from the activities they organised. This included those with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, or special support needs such as autism. Furthermore, there were fewer options available to cater for the interests of teenagers and young people aged above 16 years. In some instances, cultural and gender issues also had an impact on children's participation.

## Crucial role for community and voluntary sector

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Despite the obstacles they faced, community and voluntary groups embedded in the local community clearly played a vital role in improving the lives of children living in Ireland's Direct Provision system. The programme's success can largely be attributed to the strong local knowledge and networks of these organisations, in addition to their social care ethos, community development and rights-based approaches. However, the review also exposed how heavily reliant the programme is on the stretched capacities of often small, sometimes struggling, voluntary organisations.

The generosity and commitment of individuals working or volunteering in these organisations meant they often, if willingly, went beyond their remit to try to assist as many children as possible. However, these grantee groups expressed concern that children's opportunities are too dependent on their organisation's capacity to apply for and administer the SSGT grant, as well as on the location lottery of a particular Direct Provision centre. They worried that the essential support they were providing was too adhoc and needed to be more sustainable to have meaningful benefits for a child. They were concerned that their involvement in running activities might serve to hide the serious gaps in the state's response to these children. They feared that operating through a collection of grants from different sources fails to adequately reinforce a child's right to a dignified life or access to play and social connection.

Several grantee organisations expressed unease about the extent to which the programme was so reliant on good working relationships with centre management, rather than on any right to play or formal policy to ensure that children have access to extra-curricular activities. Beyond the current personality-dependent approach, they called for a much-improved statutory response, and an official obligation to be placed upon centre management to better facilitate consistent access to activities.

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They feared that operating through a collection of grants from different sources fails to adequately reinforce a child's right to a dignified life or access to play and social connection.

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## Increased and sustainable support is needed to support children

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Despite almost two decades of the Direct Provision system in Ireland, children's access to extra-curricular activities remains severely limited and is ill adapted to meet their needs. The Irish state's response to these children is less than adequate.

Urgent attention is needed to stop children living in Direct Provision from falling through wide cracks in policy and practice at both national and community levels. Their needs are rendered invisible and are too often unmet. Ensuring access to extracurricular activities outside of centres must be considered an elemental part of child protection. It helps safeguard children's psychosocial wellbeing, strengthens their resilience to cope with stress, and increases their opportunities for connection and integration.

As SSGT enters the final stage of this grant programme, which draws to a close at end 2020, it has proven that targeted interventions that do not cost significant amounts have important impacts. SSGT estimates that a minimum of €300 per child per year would help guarantee modest levels of access to activities, with final costs depending on transport options and services available in the local area.

Increased support for children living in the Direct Provision system is urgently needed. As a priority the State must ensure the future allocation of funds at the national level to ensure grassroots support to meet children's needs in a sustained and structured manner. Leadership from the Department of Justice and Equality and from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is essential. Building upon good-practice learnings from the SSGT model, the creation of a universal, flexible, responsive grant accessible to community and voluntary groups and to resident-led organisations will be a critical first step.

We should not accept that even one child emerges feeling isolated, alone or psychologically scarred from their time inside a Direct Provision centre. As a society this is the minimum we want to ensure for any child. We must strive to create the best conditions for these children. The SSGT grant has shown that a better response is possible and positively impacts not only the children but also whole communities. The time to act is now. This is the only childhood they have.



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Could they please organise more things for us children?  
Because people have to stay in the room all the time here.

They stay all the time in the room, and then have to listen to children from outside saying what activities they get up to. But we don't have any activities. The children outside don't understand what 'here' really is. So they ask us why we don't have activities like another child does. When this happens, the kids feel not good. And the Mums feel not good.

Yes there are things children do during school hours, but not afterwards. Here in the evenings, in the summer, what can we do? I know that children are now able to go to a swimming camp, or to the museum sometimes, or in the summer there is a camp for the younger ones. And that's great, but it only happens every few months.

All the rest of the time there are no real activities. In the winter we come home and there is nothing to do any evening, just stay in the same small room.

If there were a fund for each child, I would do music. I would learn drawing. You would ask the rest of the children what they wanted to do. I think children love painting, music, running and sports. There should be an option for each child to do what they need.

I'm 19 now so it's too late for me.  
I'm in secondary school now. And in the evenings I just stay here. I would like, we all would like, to be going to sports outside.  
**Get me outside. Please. I don't like it here. I don't like it here because it is here all the time. I'd like options, like anyone. Outside of here."**

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19-year old girl,  
Focus Group, Direct Provision Centre,  
February 2019.

## SECTION 1

# introduction

### 1.1 St. Stephen's Green Trust

St. Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT) is a charitable grant-making foundation, which respects human dignity and is committed to helping create a society where the dignity of all can be realised through social justice and inclusive, nurturing communities.

Across the last five years in particular, a core issue of concern for SSGT has been the persistent gaps in structural supports available to facilitate the integration of people seeking asylum and of refugees within local communities across Ireland. This includes the lack of sufficient integration support provided both before and immediately after international protection applicants obtain their official status to remain in Ireland.

As one of its strategic priorities, SSGT strives to address some of the key barriers to integration. It does so primarily to safeguard the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees and to increase their potential to live a dignified life. It aims to support people to become full and proud members of Irish society, from a place of belonging and connection, for the benefit of all communities across the country.

### 1.2 Grant for activities for children living in Direct Provision

In the summer of 2014, SSGT entered an information gathering and research phase. It actively sought out the views of organisations working across Ireland about some of the most pressing social support needs they saw in their areas of work. It also sought the perspectives of other funders and foundations and of people living in the Direct Provision system.

From this enquiry it emerged that families living in Direct Provision centres had little or no funds to put towards activities for their children. This included being able to pay for activities that other children in the local community would usually engage in, such as sports club fees, swimming classes or a camp during school holidays.

It also became clear that voluntary organisations working on the ground with families in the Direct Provision system did not have sufficient funds or access to grants that could enable them to assist parents and children to participate in local activities.

Many of these organisations had experienced severe cuts to their funding streams during the economic recession, and had still not recovered those resources.

Voluntary sector representatives also explained that most funding sources available at the community level were not targeted towards children living in the Direct Provision system. Additionally, existing grants that could potentially be used to assist children living in these centres often had administrative burdens that acted as a disincentive or significant barrier for smaller organisations to comply with.

In response to these findings, SSGT established a targeted grant programme towards the end of 2014. It was designed to facilitate better access to an array of learning and play opportunities for children, ideally outside of the Direct Provision centres in which they lived.

In early 2019, SSGT commissioned an impact review of the programme, the second since the grant commenced. The outcomes of this review would help inform one of the Trust’s overarching strategic goals until 2022: addressing the needs of vulnerable groups of migrants in Irish society. Additionally, with this particular programme envisaged to finish at end 2020, the review’s findings would guide SSGT considerations about its exit strategy approach for the final year and a half.

This report outlines the findings of that evaluation, conducted between February and early May 2019. During this time the SSGT programme was providing grants to 16 community and voluntary organisations working with children in 18 Direct Provision centres, which covers almost half (45%) of all 39 centres in the country, and close to three-quarters (72%) of the 25 centres<sup>1</sup> designated to include families.

Detailing the programme’s rationale and strategic approach, this report reveals the various ways in which grants awarded have impacted the lives of children and their families. Highlighting the challenges that grantee organisations encountered when operating the grant, the report also outlines key barriers that must be overcome to ensure that children living within the Direct Provision system can have meaningful access to extra-curricular activities. The report concludes by outlining a number of possible steps that could be taken to guarantee increased and meaningful access to activities for all children within the Direct Provision system.

SSGT hopes that this report provides a timely snapshot into the realities facing children and their parents in the Direct Provision system. It also hopes this review enriches conversations that need to take place at both the national policy and community levels about how best to meet these children’s needs to learn, play and participate in local life along with others.



**2019 Impact Review:**  
**16 organisations**  
 working with  
 children in **18 Direct**  
 Provision centres,  
**45%**  
 of all DP centres,  
**Almost  $\frac{3}{4}$**   
**(72%)**  
 of all DP centres  
 with families



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Children and parents deal with many challenges living in the Direct Provision system. Their lives are unpredictable, their future is uncertain, they are isolated and lack support systems that would free them up to participate in activities.

There is a lack of crèches in the centres or trusted reliable babysitters that could free parents up to bring their child to an activity. Or parents don't have money, so they often can't buy the items required for an activity. Then, even, if they do manage to get a babysitter and buy the equipment, there is often no transport.

So they are trapped.”

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Grantee A,  
Volunteer Community Organisation, Questionnaire Response,  
April 2019.

SECTION 2

# context: direct provision system

## 2.1 Ireland's reception system

The Irish State has a statutory obligation to offer reception conditions to persons in the protection process, as defined in the Reception Conditions Directive (Recast)<sup>2</sup> transposed into Irish law since 2018. This Directive places obligations on the State as a whole for the delivery of a suite of services, many of which are delivered by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) within the Department of Justice and Equality. Others, including medical and education services, are delivered by the Department of Health's Health Services Executive (HSE) and by the Department of Education and Skills, respectively.

In Ireland, people seeking international protection are accommodated in congregated settings in a system of residential institutions known as Direct Provision centres. The location of centres has been driven by a short-term market-dependent approach, focused on property availability rather than proximity to essential services such as health and education, or to local amenities and transport links.<sup>3</sup> Seven of the buildings are State-owned,<sup>4</sup> but current provision in all centres is a 100% for-profit management model by private contractors, including catering companies and hotel owners.

Calls for the transformation of this system began when it was first established in 2000. Designed as a short-term measure, intended to enable an asylum seeker to stay for six months as their application for protection was being processed, it has instead resulted in lengthy stays of many years for people.<sup>5,6</sup>

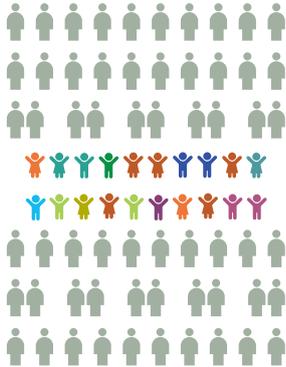
Conditions vary widely across centres. Often sharing rooms with strangers, with few facilities for families, the system entails a serious lack of privacy in general for protection applicants, severely limiting their autonomy and personal agency. Many children are born within Direct Provision centres, often spending formative years growing up there. While awaiting a decision on their status, other residents have passed away from health problems<sup>7,8</sup> or from taking their own lives.<sup>9,10</sup>

In recent years the number of new applications has been moderately rising, with an average of 319 new applications per month in 2018, or 360 per month in the first half of 2019.<sup>11</sup> In June 2019, there were 6,083 people living in 39 Direct Provision centres, with a contracted capacity of 6,281 bed spaces.<sup>12</sup> Children make up approximately one third of all those accommodated within the system.<sup>13</sup>



**2020 =  
20 years**  
of Direct Provision  
system.

**100% =**  
For-profit  
management model  
by private contractors



**6,083** people  
in **39** centres,  
**1/3**  
children approx.

June 2019:



in hotel rooms as  
**not enough beds**  
in Direct Provision  
centres

At the start of 2019, five of the centres were oversubscribed.<sup>14</sup> The bed shortage meant that people seeking international protection were not offered a space in a Direct Provision centre. By June 2019 this had resulted in 760 asylum seekers being accommodated in hotel rooms as an emergency short-term measure.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, approximately 730 people (12 per cent of all residents) living within the centres have received positive decisions on their protection applications.<sup>16</sup> Yet they have been unable to move out of Direct Provision, as they cannot source alternative accommodation due to the shortage of housing affecting wider Irish society.

## 2.2 Recent improvements to the Direct Provision system

A number of important reforms have been introduced in recent years, particularly since the 2015 publication of the McMahon report.<sup>17</sup> In line with the report's 173 recommendations, key improvements include: asylum-seekers who have not received a first instance decision within nine months on their protection application may now access the labour market, though with a number of restrictions; the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children can now investigate complaints made by asylum-seekers living in DP centres; an increase in the weekly allowance from the end of March 2019, up to €38.80 per adult and to €29.80 per child living in Direct Provision. Improvements to living conditions have also been introduced, including the provision of communal kitchens and self-catering accommodation in a number of centres.

The August 2018 launch of draft national standards for accommodation for people in the protection process is another significant development.<sup>18</sup> These new national standards were with the Government for final approval in mid 2019. Once approved they will provide the commercial entities that operate and manage centres as service providers on behalf of RIA with a set of objective benchmarks to be progressively implemented from early 2020. Future tendering competitions will insist that all providers demonstrate their ability to conform to these statutory obligations, which should be fully operational by 2021.

Their introduction should improve living conditions, supports and services provided to residents in Direct Provision centres, and ensure consistency of service delivery across all centres. There are also calls for the establishment of an independent inspectorate to be given the authority to inspect and monitor all centres across the country to ensure the effectiveness and accountability of the National Standards.<sup>19,20,21</sup>

## SECTION 3

# context: ssgt's grant programme

## 3.1 SSGT programme for activities for children living in Direct Provision centres

Children of families living in Direct Provision centres are particularly vulnerable due to their uncertain status in society; indefinite length of time that they and their family must wait to obtain an answer on this status; life within institutional settings, often for long periods of time; and the economic insecurity their parents endure.

With the State's official decision on a family's protection status often taking several years, children and young people can spend crucial periods of their lives within the confines of a Direct Provision centre surrounded by strangers. In addition, once essentials such as clothing and schoolbooks have been paid for, the daily stipends afforded parents and children by the State rarely stretch to pay for extracurricular activities or trips outside the centre.

New National Standards for Direct Provision centres, if long overdue, are welcomed. Yet, while they should make a difference to the quality of life of centre residents across Ireland, they will not address several significant issues that continue to adversely impact the lives and wellbeing of children within the Direct Provision system. Crucially, standards will not impact the long waiting times that protection applicants must endure to obtain a final answer on their status. Nor do they address the problem of living with strangers in congregated settings for lengthy periods.

SSGT has raised concerns that the Standards focus almost exclusively on what happens inside Direct Provision centres.<sup>22</sup> They do not contain specific guidelines to Centre Managers that would ensure that each centre creates structures and dedicates budgets and human resources to guarantee that children are given opportunities to leave Direct Provision centres at least once a week outside of school hours. Nor do they consider how best to sustainably further the integration of these children with others in the community by ensuring that they can access opportunities to learn new skills or spend time with their peers after school.

The Children's Rights Alliance recognises that "taking part in cultural activities like singing, painting, dance and theatre benefits children academically and in

developing better social skills and positive relationships.”<sup>23</sup> However, children in Direct Provision fall outside many of the established policy structures and financial supports available to other young people living in communities. As a result, they not only lack opportunities to take part in community-based arts, sports and cultural activities, but can easily become isolated from their peers. Once the school day, week or term ends, children living in Direct Provision centres often spend the majority of their time waiting around in small, shared rooms inside that centre. This can adversely impact their wellbeing, sense of belonging and emotional resilience.

Consequently, the SSGT approach focuses on ensuring that children can, essentially, be children<sup>24</sup> by offering a small, flexible grant to support community and voluntary organisations. The grant’s criteria focused on creating linkages with sporting, cultural and community activities already available locally that would enable children to leave a Direct Provision centre for a few hours each week.

Grassroots organisations working with geographically isolated centres in areas with limited available activities in their surroundings are prioritised. The activities planned should enable interaction and connection with other children living in the community. On occasion, exceptions can be made if this is not always possible, with limited numbers of activities organised just for the children of the centre.

Since its inception this grant programme has provided almost €320,000 to 20 local organisations in communities across Ireland. In almost five years the grant programme has enabled at least 2,500 children<sup>25</sup> to attend many hundreds of community, sporting and cultural activities in the areas where they reside – while living in a Direct Provision centre, or just after leaving the Direct Provision centre.

Successful SSGT grantees co-create options with residents in the Direct Provision centre and the community. They ensure there is active consultation with parents, children and community members in the decision-making process. This helps uncover what activities children would prefer to engage in. This is then matched with what is already present or possible in the local area.

Created as a learning programme to address a clear need, the current SSGT grant is envisaged to continue until the end of 2020, the year the Direct Provision system marks its 20th year in existence. Aware that many people within this diverse group continue to be extremely vulnerable, and with a handover phase approaching, SSGT commissioned an impact review of its grant programme in early 2019. This is the second evaluation since the grant commenced and follows a 2016 Impact Report.<sup>26</sup>

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Once the school day, week or term ends, children living in Direct Provision centres often spend the majority of their time waiting around in small, shared rooms inside that centre. This can adversely impact their wellbeing, sense of belonging and emotional resilience.

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**See Appendix 1 for details of the SSGT grant’s evolution from 2014–2019**

## SECTION 4

# impact report: methodology

## 4.1 Impact report rationale

SSGT is committed to accountability and transparency in all its programmes. As an organisation it consistently strives to demonstrate what works, and to share the learnings around the challenges it faces and its grantee organisations have raised.

This 2019 Impact Report is part of SSGT's ongoing commitment to continuously reflect on its programming, listen to its stakeholders and remain accountable to the people who participate in and benefit from its programmes as well as to its funders. It is shared with the goal of enhancing its performance as a grant-making charity, contributing to the knowledge of other interested agencies and individuals, with the ultimate goal of making the greatest positive difference in the lives of children and families living in the Direct Provision system.

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..., with the ultimate goal of making the greatest positive difference in the lives of children and families living in the Direct Provision system.

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## 4.2 Evaluation methodology

### OBJECTIVES:

The main objective of this research was to generate insight into the potential benefits of and barriers to providing access to extracurricular activities for children living in Direct Provision centres across Ireland to:

- Deepen SSGT's understanding of the realities faced by its grantee organisations and children living in Direct Provision centres.
- Ensure that SSGT's grant programme remains oriented to best respond to children's needs.
- Share research findings with grant beneficiaries, grantee organisations, civil society, and key government departments to increase knowledge and learning.

### METHODS:

The methods of information collection included:

- Survey: a quantitative, pre-tested questionnaire sent to current SSGT grantees.

- Semi-structured focus group discussions.
- Semi-structured individual interviews.

Additional information was collected from:

- Data and indicators from national and international public reports.
- Brief literature review on reception and protection system in Ireland.

### **DATA COLLECTION:**

SSGT hired an external consultant to evaluate the programme's impact. The Consultant conducted a mixed-methods evaluation across 17 days between February to May 2019 gathering input from:

- 12 completed questionnaires from current grantees, a 75% response rate.
- Three focus group discussions with a total of 24 people, who were either parents or children living in two Direct Provision centres.
- Nine in-depth interviews with child rights and refugee rights advocates, Direct Provision Centre Managers and the Executive Director of the St. Stephen's Green Trust.

### **LOCATIONS:**

Data collection was exclusively conducted in locations where SSGT grantees operate. This includes focus groups with grant beneficiaries and parents within a Direct Provision centre in the north, and in the central south of the country.

### **ETHICS AND CONSENT:**

All interviewees gave informed oral consent to participate. Individual responses were treated in such a way as to assure confidentiality and non-traceability. Agreement to conduct the research in Direct Provision Centres was received from Centre Management and all participating residents or their guardians.

### **LIMITATIONS AND POTENTIAL BIAS:**

The impact review examined the situation for grantees in the SSGT programme in 2019. Twelve out of 16 current grantee organisations responded to the survey. The twelve respondents work with children living in 14 different Direct Provision centres.

Completed surveys illustrate the impact of a programme targeting over a third (36%; 14/39) of all Direct Provision centres in Ireland, or close to two-thirds (64%; 14/25) of all 25 centres accommodating children. The results of the evaluation cannot be extrapolated as countrywide results. However, the insights from these 14 centres provides a reasonable indication of some of the main benefits of facilitating access to extra-curricular activities for children, and points towards some of the key barriers to integration that must be overcome.

The sample of people interviewed through the questionnaire or focus groups included grant recipients or grant beneficiaries. This likely resulted in selection bias as people surveyed already had access to funding or to extra-curricular activities. Thus, the evaluation likely underestimates the extent and type of barriers facing those who do not benefit from the SSGT programme.

In addition, people surveyed knew this research was being done on behalf of SSGT, which could introduce possible social desirability bias into the findings. Furthermore, data were not always complete for all the variables collected, which potentially resulted in non-respondent bias.

Nevertheless, the information collected provides valuable insights into the impacts of this SSGT grant, including positive outcomes, areas for development, and potential future direction until end 2020. This learning will inform the grant programme's final 18 months, helping to shape SSGT's exit strategy at end 2020.

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## SECTION 5

# outcomes and impacts on children's lives

“Going back to school after summer holidays was always a minefield for the children living here. Especially for those in junior school – where teachers ask them to say what they did during the summer. Before, they hadn't much to say.

Also, sometimes Freddy the Teddy comes home for the weekend with first- and second-class children. They have to write a story about what he did with them – like ‘Freddy went to the restaurant. Freddy went swimming. Freddy went away with Mummy and Daddy.’ Before, children here didn't have those stories. Now they go back after summer and say they achieved something. They can say what Freddy got up to at the weekend.”

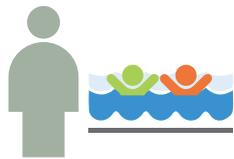
Activities organised through the grant programme enable children living in Direct Provision centres to get into the community to engage in activities that they enjoy, with the goal that every child supported should benefit from access to at least one extra-curricular activity per year, ideally on a weekly basis.

The 12 survey respondents had collectively facilitated access to activities for 1,894 children in 14 centres since they had first began working with the SSGT programme. With their most recent SSGT grant, these organisations were currently working with 720 children, the majority of whom (69%) were aged 13 and under.

The types of activities organised for children varied across respondents. They ranged from swimming classes to summer camps, city visits to adventure centre weekends, GAA camps to soccer, dancing, singing lessons and more. The most common activity that grantees organised was access to swimming

Direct Provision  
Centre Manager,  
Interview,  
February 2019.

**12**  
Survey respondent  
organisations have  
assisted  
**1,894**  
children



**3/4** of grantees organise **swimming lessons for children** using the SSGT grant

pools or lessons. Three quarters (8/12) of respondents were using part of their latest grant to provide swimming opportunities for one in six (114/720) of the children currently supported by SSGT funds.

The number and frequency of activities organised depended on the capacity of the grantee organisations, which impacted the size of the grant they received, and the availability of services and clubs in a particular area. Children's and parent's wishes and interests then informed the activities selected. Several other demographic factors also affected how the grant operated, including the numbers and ages of children living in a particular Direct Provision centre at a given time.

## 5.1 Programme benefits and impact

Children, parents, community organisations and centre management were united in their view that providing opportunities for children to access extra-curricular activities beyond Direct Provision centres and within the community was invaluable.

They explained that the activities organised through the SSGT grant:

- 5.1.1 Address the serious gap in the provision of access to activities for children.
- 5.1.2 Increase children's confidence and skills.
- 5.1.3 Help normalise children's lives and reduce stigma.
- 5.1.4 Create opportunities for connection and integration.
- 5.1.5 Foster resilience and support mental health.



### Direct benefits:

Address gap +  
increase confidence +  
normalise lives  
+ reduce stigma  
+ connection  
+ integration  
+ resilience

### 5.1.1 Addresses serious gap in the provision of access to activities for children

The SSGT grant plays a crucial role in addressing a worrying support gap for this vulnerable group. In many of the Direct Provision centres across Ireland, children have severely limited access to opportunities or spaces to play within centre buildings or grounds, and even less opportunity to leave centres to engage in activities with their friends after school hours and during holidays.

“Here in the centre they closed the sports hall and the football area. We don't know why. Before, adults and children were using both. Now the hall is a storage area. Now there is nothing here, and this is very bad for my son. He is a young boy, so has a lot of energy. He likes football, but there is nowhere to kick balls or do sports in here. So now, instead of playing when he gets back from school, he just goes to sleep. He does his homework and goes to sleep in the room. Before he would do homework and go to play. Now he can't.”

A\*, 32-year old woman, mother of four children. Focus Group, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

### 5.1.2 Increases skills and confidence levels

A marked increase in children’s self-esteem and happiness was one of the greatest impacts of the grant. Children, their parents and grantee organisations reported visible improvements to a child’s confidence and sense of pride in themselves whenever they learned new skills through the grant-funded activities.

“My first ever camp was at Easter last year. It was so fun. We could go into the swimming pool. I didn’t know how to swim before, but now I do. I learned so much swimming there. They also hid Easter eggs for us. I didn’t like the chocolate, but I liked hunting for the eggs.”

E\*, 10-year old girl, Focus Group, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

“I learned jumping into the water, and then I jumped. It felt good to be able to jump into the deep end and then get to the shallow end. I felt disappointed when I got out, because I love swimming now and didn’t want to leave the pool.”

K\*, 8-year old girl, Focus Group, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

### 5.1.3 Creates opportunities for connection with community peers

It is widely accepted that prolonged periods of stay in collective centres can lead to marginalisation and dependency.<sup>27</sup> Access to extracurricular activities can help counter this by providing important opportunities for children to mix and play with other children of their own age. This exposure outside school hours enables them to forge new friendships and strengthen existing bonds. By increasing their sense of connection and belonging, the risk of isolation decreases and wellbeing increases.

“My favourite camp was the swimming one in the summer. There was loads to do and lots of kids, so we could make friends. My new friend’s name was Ciara and she was my best friend in the camp. She had twin sisters and it was great.”

E\*, 10-year old girl, Focus Group, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

“The grant helps children’s integration possibilities. Activities helped build their sense of community involvement. It gives them something to talk about too, and increases their confidence levels. Some of the young people here met their classmates at one of the activities. When they went back to school they were able to talk about that shared experience. After events some kids say things like “now I can tell my friend I saw him at the movies” or “at least I will have a nice story for our ‘news’ at school this week”. The activities also gave their parents a break and some free headspace for a while, in what are very crowded accommodation conditions in the centre.”

Grantee A, Volunteer Group. Questionnaire Response. April 2019

#### 5.1.4 Helps normalise children's lives and combat stigma

Access to extracurricular activities with peers provides a much-needed break in the after-school routine of children living in Direct Provision centres. Leaving the centre for learning or play opportunities breaks the monotony of spending long periods of time inside the centre, reducing levels of boredom and frustration.

Grantee A,  
Volunteer Group,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019.

“Children get out of the hostel once a week and go for swimming lessons in the local pool where they mix and learn with their peers on an equal basis. They enjoy the swimming and making new friends. It's an activity outside the centre, where they can mix together with other Irish children but also get the physical benefits of swimming. They love achieving different certificate levels. It also breaks the monotony of being in the DP centre evening after evening, having nothing to do and nowhere to go.”

Access to activities also plays a role in reducing the stigma that children living in the Direct Provision system can face, or fear they will face, if other children discover that they are living in the local centre.

Grantee A,  
Volunteer Group,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019.

“The stigma associated with living in Direct Provision is very real for the young people we work with. They kept bringing up the issue of wanting to do “what normal kids do”. They want to do what their peers are doing. There is a big gap in services for young people living in Direct Provision, so bringing them to activities that their peers already access improves their well being and increases their confidence.”

Centre Manager,  
Direct Provision  
Centre, In-depth  
Interview,  
Feb 2019.

“The children here really enjoy going to the camps. They love the challenges. Afterwards they upload photos online showing others what they were doing. Sometimes they meet friends from their school in the camp. This helps them fit in. Because the older they get, there's the stigma to face from other children when they find out that they're an asylum seeker. So, if they're in the same camp, the other children see them and think, ‘oh, you can afford this too, like us.’ It doesn't separate them out from others as much then, and that's good for them.”

#### 5.1.5 Fosters resilience and supports positive mental health

Individual children living in the Direct Provision system have varying levels of resilience. However, following their participation in extra-curricular activities grantee organisations reported visible impacts on many children's mental health, including increased positivity, feeling more at ease, and even sleeping better.

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“When they go to the activity they make new friends, they learn a new skill, and have a sense of achievement. We can see that they are more relaxed. We even hear from them and from their parents that they are sleeping better.”

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Grantee A,  
Volunteer Group,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019.

## 5.2 Unexpected programme impacts

Beyond the positive impacts from facilitating children’s participation in activities, the SSGT programme also had a number of additional positive outcomes, including:

- 5.2.1 Strengthening multiple relationships inside centres and with the local community.
- 5.2.2 Encouraging others in the community to provide additional funds or supports.
- 5.2.3 Empowering parents and other centre residents.
- 5.2.4 Increasing grantee organisational knowledge and staff motivation.



### Indirect outcomes:

Strengthens relationships; encourages community to step up; empowers parents and residents; bolsters community and voluntary sector

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### 5.2.1 Strengthens relationships across multiple levels

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“Before this programme of activities we had existing working relationships with all partner organisations in the local community development groups and with centre management. All of these relationships were considerably strengthened as a direct result of commencing this SSGT programme and they have continued to strengthen throughout each of the years of programme delivery. In addition, we strengthened relationships with a number of families living in the Direct Provision centre, who became increasingly active and engaged with activities and support services since the programme was implemented.”

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Grantee F,  
Migrant Rights  
Non Governmental  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire,  
March 2019.

#### Between families and wider residents in the Direct Provision centre:

In the Direct Provision system important elements of a child’s life are taken away from the control of their parent. In many centres this still includes not being able to cook<sup>28</sup> or make independent decisions about what their children will eat.<sup>29,30</sup> It also includes not having the means to organise the basic socialising routines of a child’s evenings or days beyond school hours. For many parents, particularly those unable to access transport or the right to work, this includes not being able to afford to bring their child to or from activities or to organise outings as a family.

Once extra-curricular activities and trips commenced, grantee organisations reported marked improvements in relationships between parents and their children.

Grantee G,  
Community  
Organisation with  
large volunteer corps,  
Questionnaire,  
February 2019.

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“The existing relationship between children and parents improved following their engagement with grant activities. It meant they had something positive in common that they could talk about together and remember together.”

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Grantee organisations also observed increased collaborations between centre residents, particularly noticing deeper parent-to-parent relations.

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Grantee A,  
Volunteer  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire,  
April 2019.

“Parents see the benefits of their children engaging in swimming. They support it. Some residents help each other out bringing children to and from the activity as not all parents have the means to get their children there.”

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“Having activities for the children was also an opportunity for some parents to have some time to themselves on weekends. So they really supported the idea of having their children head out of the centre on weekends. Some even volunteered to come along to support activities. In this way the activities began to bring the parents together. A new sense of community spirit could be felt when parents were dropping and picking their children up from our events.”

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Grantee L,  
Community  
Development  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire,  
April 2019.

**Between centre residents and local communities:**

Many communities were keen to collaborate with grantee organisations to open up access to activities. In several locations key local organisations such as the GAA, Foroige or summer camp organisers gladly seized opportunities to widen membership and increase support to and connection with children living in a Direct Provision centre in their area.

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Grantee A,  
Volunteer  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire,  
April 2019.

“Our work with children organising activities outside the Direct Provision centre led to the increased involvement of some of the Foroige Youth Leaders who had already been volunteering in the centre. They saw what we were doing, and then began to volunteer with us to accompany children on the cinema trips we organised.”

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### 5.2.2 Catalyst effect: grant existence encourages others to provide further support

The grant often stretched further than its original amount, with additional funds frequently provided by the community and local businesses.

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“The local clubs had a lot of goodwill towards the children. They provided reduced costs and were keen to facilitate in a lot of areas. The fact that our Direct Provision centre is located inside the city was certainly an advantage.”

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Grantee G,  
Community  
Organisation with  
large volunteer corps,  
Questionnaire,  
February 2019.

Upon learning of the extent of the needs and the reality that Direct Provision contracts do not guarantee that children can participate in community activities, local groups began to provide discounted prices or give free places to children living in their local Direct Provision centre to ensure that they could participate. In other instances, centre managers would supplement costs from the centre’s budget when an event or activity took place within centre grounds. Grantees reported that some centres also increased transport flexibility for activities outside the centre, once the grantee had done the organisational work. This was particularly likely if a large group of residents was attending a one-off activity outside. However, this was not the case in all centres, where transport was consistently a major barrier.

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“The grant has meant that people in the area have become more aware of and sensitive to the issues facing asylum seekers and refugees. From organising the swimming lessons we established good relationships with the local leisure centre staff. As a result, the centre gave us a number of free places on their summer camps. In addition, some teenagers were offered work experience there, which they took up! When a new sports centre opened in the area, some staff transferred there, and they offered us free camps for the children. We couldn’t avail of that offer though, as we would have needed transport to get the children there. The SSGT grant doesn’t cover that level of transport and neither did the DP centre.”

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Grantee A,  
Volunteer  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire,  
April 2019.

While community generosity was always warmly welcomed and is an indication of the potential resources and goodwill available at the local level it was wholly dependent on the area context, and largely due to the proactivity, networking skills and visibility of grantee organisations. Consequently, in some areas children benefitted more than in others, leaving many with persistently limited access to outside supports and activities.

### 5.2.3 Empowers parents and centre residents more widely

Residents in Direct Provision centres are keen to increase their self-reliance and networks when provided with opportunities. This includes having opportunities for meaningful input and choice about which activities their children participate in. Consequently, ensuring consultation with parents and children is a core principle of the SSGT approach with this programme.

Many residents not only want to advance their lives and that of their children, but also wish to improve the experience of fellow residents in Direct Provision centres. In one centre this resulted in a resident-led organisation administering the SSGT grant.

This grantee could ensure that the unmediated voices and lived realities of residents were at the core of all its decision-making about which children's activities would be supported. Through running the SSGT grant, this resident-led organisation also increased its exposure to key networks, including clubs, businesses and local authorities. This helped develop valuable social entrepreneurship skills and strengthen opportunities for deeper community integration.

#### 5.2.4 Increases expertise and commitment of grantee organisations

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Grantee L,  
Community  
Development  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire,  
April 2019.

“Through running the SSGT grant new opportunities emerged for our own community development organisation to help increase integration. People in our organisation became even more invested in what is happening with people living in Direct Provision centres and began wanting to do even more to help.”

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Grantees reported organisational benefits from operating the grant, including increased staff commitment to work with residents due to greater understanding of the reality of life for residents of the Direct Provision system. New partnerships were often created at the community level as a result of the grant, benefitting wider areas of an organisation's work. Grantees also described a sense of increased pride among staff members who felt they were addressing a clear need by enabling children to play and learn who would otherwise not have had that possibility.

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Grantee F,  
Migrant Rights  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire,  
March 2019.

“Our organisation engaged with mainstream local community development organisations through this SSGT grant programme. As a result those partners have increased their intercultural awareness and capacity for working with residents of Direct Provision. This has led to ongoing engagement of those partners with the local centre and the development of new and ongoing supports to residents since 2015.”

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### 5.3 Barriers to operating the grant programme

“Here, children are stuck. Everyone is stuck here.

If you want to go into the town you need a bus or a cab that costs seven euros. That amount is impossible for us.

There should be something more. The children are not happy when their friends outside say that they went places for holidays. And their friends then ask our kids what they did, and they say they didn't go anywhere.

Sometimes my younger son asks me why are we living here. He says he wants to go out. But I can't, because if he wants to join any basketball or football club we can't afford to get there. This is another hurdle. Or on weekends there is no bus. So all the time they stay inside: school and inside, inside and school.”

#### 5.3.1 Lack of access to transport as main barrier

Direct Provision centres are often in isolated locations that are poorly served by public transport. However, almost three quarters (8/11; 72%) of the survey respondents were working with a Direct Provision centre located inside a town or at a distance of less than 5km away. Yet the lack of access to affordable, regular transportation and the prohibitive cost of organising alternative transport was still the key barrier for nearly every grantee organisation, with (11/12) respondents citing transport as the main (7) or second biggest (4) barrier to enabling access to extra curricular activities for children.

“When our children make friends outside it doesn't make sense, because they can't keep them. Because those friends can never come to the centre, and because, without transport, we cannot take our children outside to visit those friends.”

While centre management provide transport, residents and grantees reported that in the majority of centres this was run on rigid and limited timetables, which hindered or blocked access to activities during evenings, weekends or holidays.

X\*, 33 year old woman, mother of two children. Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.



**92%** transport as barrier

**11/12** grantees said **lack of affordable or dependable transport remains the key barrier** to access activities outside of the Direct Provision centres

B\*, 36 year old woman, mother of three children. Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

Grantee A,  
Community  
organisation run  
by volunteers,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019.

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“Many activities require transport to attend. For swimming classes, it is compulsory that the parents of the smallest children attend with them. Yet the grant doesn’t cover transport. So if the parents don’t have transport, then they can’t bring their children. This means those children can’t go to swim and they miss out.”

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Manager,  
Direct Provision  
Centre, In-depth  
Interview,  
Feb 2019

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“As a Centre Manager I don’t have a flexible transport fund, so I don’t have the authority to increase the existing budget if a local organisation has managed to get some places in classes in town for children after school or at the weekends. I would have to ring head office (centre owner). They will likely say that we haven’t got the budget for that. At my level I could more easily do things for the betterment of the children living here if it was written into the centre contracts with the government that transport had to be made available for children to go to activities in the evenings or during holidays.”

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Grantee A,  
Volunteer  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019

### 5.3.2 Additional costs beyond original price of activity

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“Even if our organisation can cover the cost of an activity through SSGT grant money, the parents of the children living in the centre don’t have the money to buy the gear and the clothes required for their children to participate in the sports activities.”

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Even if the grant enables an organisation to link children in with activities that they would like to participate in, covering the costs so those children don’t have to pay to attend, additional expenses beyond class prices or membership fees regularly prohibit participation, including costs such as purchasing sports gear, football boots, team jerseys, swimsuits, swimming goggles, lesson books or day-trip pocket-money. While SSGT allows a part of a grant to be allocated towards meeting these costs, for many grantees they remain a barrier to guaranteeing access to activities for children.

Grantee H,  
Community  
Development  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019

### 5.3.3 Length of stay adversely impacts motivation and mental health

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“The length of stay leads to what we call ‘participation fatigue’, where children say “we have done most of these things already. All we want is to get our papers and leave the centre.”

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One of the primary concerns raised around excessive waiting times for protection applicants in the Direct Provision system is the impact it has on their mental health, particularly in relation to minors and other vulnerable applicants.<sup>31</sup>

All SSGT grantees expressed concern about the length of stay and the adverse impact they could see it having on people’s mental health, motivation and resilience. They reported that the longer a child remained living in the Direct Provision system, the more demotivated they and their parents often became. They explained that this visibly affected both the mental health of the child and the interest of the parent to push for the child’s involvement and inclusion in extra-curricular activities.

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“Currently we have one teenage boy who is badly affected by the living conditions and restrictions of living in Direct Provision. He has no teenager his own age to be friends with in the centre or to do activities with. The rest of the children are younger than him, or are teenage girls. He also doesn’t want any of his peers outside of the centre to find out that he lives in there. It is very difficult to get him involved in anything we organise as he has no one to do things with. This also affects his school attendance, which causes ongoing conflict with his parents.”

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Grantee A,  
Volunteer  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire,  
April 2019.

#### 5.3.4 Certain groups of children have less access to grant activities

The grant aims to facilitate access to extra-curricular activities for as many children as possible in the Direct Provision centres it supports. Beyond the relatively small size of the grant funds available, the limited capacity of a number of the grantees and restricted transport options, additional factors also influence children’s participation and how universal the grant’s approach is in practice.

Several grantees expressed concern that certain children were routinely less able or completely unable to benefit from the activities they organised. This includes some of the more vulnerable children in a centre, such as those with physical disabilities or special support needs, including autism. Targeted interventions, beyond the SSGT’s grant, would be required to ensure the full inclusion of these children.

Grantees also noted that the activities they were more easily able to organise were frequently more suitable for younger age groups. There were often fewer options for older teenagers, particularly those aged 16 years and more, or for the youngest children. What possibilities were available were frequently prohibitively expensive.

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“As a teenager I would prefer not to have to go on activities like swimming camps or summer camps. I would like to be able to go to places, to see places. I’m a bit old for camps at this stage.”

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E\*, 19 year old  
girl, Focus Group  
Discussion, Direct  
Provision Centre,  
Feb 2019

Grantee H,  
Community  
Development  
Organisation,  
In-depth Interview,  
Feb 2019.

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“There is nothing for the young infants. The children of crèche-going age are too young to go to the camps we organise. We can’t do special activities for older teenagers so they would have to come with the children. Vulnerable children, like those with learning difficulties, often can’t go to the camps.”

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While the SSGT programme and its grantee organisations aim to ensure that all children can access at least one activity, some children end up sidelined if they don’t feel comfortable with or interested in the wider group choice of activity.

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T\*, 9-year old boy,  
Focus Group  
Discussion, Direct  
Provision Centre,  
Feb 2019.

“Instead of going to a camp, I would like to join a club and do it every week and get good at something, rather than going to a camp during the school holidays. We get to run in school, cross-country, so I would prefer to do running classes in the evenings. This would help upgrade my running skills. I would prefer if we could go run or do GAA, or football, or sports, instead of going to camps.”

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On some occasions cultural and gender issues impacted a child’s capacity to participate. Two grantees reported that young girls faced additional barriers to attendance. Increased consultation with parents was needed to address these barriers, along with a wider set of options for children and parents to choose from. However, this wasn’t always possible, particularly in more rural areas with lower availability of activities locally.

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Grantee H,  
Community  
Development  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019.

“Cultural upbringing affected participation for a lot of young females who felt they were neglecting their weekend chores if they were attending weekend activities. Religion also had an impact. In particular the parents of some young Muslim girls were not comfortable allowing them to attend group activities outside school settings if the groups were mixed with boys and girls.”

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While a universal approach that strives to ensure access to extracurricular activities for all children is necessary, it needs to be accompanied by a deep level of targeting to meet the specific needs of individual children. Grantees were clear this would require increased investment in both funding and human resources to ensure that in-depth assessments of children’s individual needs could be conducted and then matched with what activities were available and possible in the community.

### 5.3.5 Lack of dedicated structures at centre or community level for children

The pace of arrivals and departures into and out of Direct Provision centres means grantee organisations can struggle to maintain a clear view of who is in a centre at a given time. Groups try to overcome this through strong collaboration and information exchange with centre management and, whenever possible, residents. However, smaller grantee organisations often lack the capacity required to regularly visit centres and consult directly with children and parents.

Centre management has no contractual obligation to ensure that children have access to minimum levels of extra-curricular activities outside of Direct Provision centres. They support SSGT-grant initiatives at their discretion. In the absence of a formal onus on centre management to facilitate activities or liaise with grantee organisations, programme success depends largely on an individual centre manager's degree of motivation.

The majority of grantees reported that centre management were helpful and happy to collaborate with them, yet were often extremely busy. They expressed concern about how relationship-dependent programme outcomes were, explaining that the dynamic creates uncertainty and places them in a vulnerable position in the face of staff management changes in a Direct Provision centre.

The new national standards to be introduced in late 2019 will require a position with a social care background to be placed in each reception centre.<sup>32</sup> This role will ensure that vulnerability assessments are up to date, detailing the specific reception needs for individuals in terms of access to medical services or counselling services, for example. Facilitating access to extra-curricular activities is not explicitly part of their responsibility. Nor is there another role at the county or community level that grantee organisations can consistently rely on in this regard.

Consequently, grantees would like children's rights to access minimum levels of activities outside of centres to be formalised within RIA policy at the national level, written into centre management contracts and included as a priority within other department strategies, such as the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

### 5.3.6 Level of consultation with residents impacted by grantee time and capacity

Time and workload constraints meant smaller grantee organisations could only visit their local Direct Provision centre a few times a year. This was particularly true for volunteer-led groups, those with only one or two part-time staff, or those for which the SSGT grant was one small element of wider work. These organisations were dependent on centre management to ensure consultation with parents and children around activity preferences and provide feedback around areas for improvement.

Groups believed that more direct and systematic consultations with parents and children would positively impact their ability to offer better-targeted programmes. However, this would require that stretched organisations invest more financial and human resources or access larger grant sums than was currently available.

In the meantime, one group was considering placing dedicated suggestion boxes in the local centre to be collected and reviewed each quarter. Another considered providing stamped-addressed envelopes for parents listing options for potential future activities and asking for feedback. However, they felt these were adhoc measures, and that a centralised role was required within the centre or local authority structure to ensure individualised approaches to meeting children's needs.

## 5.4 Unexpected challenges when administering the grant

### 5.4.1 Grantee disconnection from each other and national policy developments

The disparity in grantee size and capacity impacts programme delivery in multiple ways, including how connected staff may be to other similar organisations or to broader developments or networks that shape the Direct Provision system.

Organisations were not aware of what other SSGT grantees were doing, the types of activities they organised or collaborations they may have created with local communities or centre management. Operating in isolation, they felt they lost time seeking solutions or solving problems that could benefit from quick exchanges with other organisations working with people in the Direct Provision system.

Larger organisations with paid staff often have long histories of working in their area of expertise and strong connections to national policy platforms. Others work on several issues beyond the grant, or are very small. They may know their local community well, but often have limited knowledge of developments relevant to the Direct Provision system. They often lack information about which government agencies or organisations with responsibility for different elements of children's lives could assist in their work, or which structures have been established at the county and community level that they could potentially link in with.

### 5.4.2 Weak attendance for some grant-organised activities

Grantee organisations reported that parents were not always invested in ensuring their child participated in the activities they organised. While a child's attendance was influenced by factors such as length of stay and its impact on motivation, sometimes it was simply the case that details about an event or activity had not spread sufficiently among residents. At other times, parents didn't realise that a grantee organisation had organised the event or activity, and that there may have been a significant cost to do so.

To overcome this, grantees try different approaches to increase parental ownership and accountability. In some centres they ask parents for a nominal, refundable contribution, to increase the value connected to a day out or camp.

If a particular child doesn't appear when the bus is leaving for the activity, the grantee either absorbs the nominal amount to cover costs, or it is returned to the grant fund.

### 5.4.3 Higher levels of pressure for resident-led initiatives

All grantees face the challenge of managing parental hopes and matching these with the availability of services, in addition to navigating relationships with centre managers. However, this can be a greater challenge for resident-led grantees.

With a committee that includes residents, non-residents and former residents, the one resident-led SSGT grantee's impressive work is to be encouraged and further facilitated. While they have a good working relationship with centre management, this may not always be the case. As grantees consistently advocate for additional transport, funds and support from centre management, a contractual obligation upon centre owners to facilitate integration and extra-curricular activities would mitigate risks of placing resident grantees in difficult situations with centre owners.

Responsibility for juggling the requests and preferences of fellow residents also includes listening to stories of frustration or fear from parents about their own lives and that of their children. With no separation between their work and living situation, the risk that resident-led grantees face would be exposed to increased stress than other grantees is clear. So, while it will be vital to encourage the creation of further resident-led initiatives, it will be equally important to provide additional supports to such grantees, including increased contact with the funder, 'care day' breaks, and the creation of mentoring linkages with other grantees, for example.



## SECTION 6

# ssgt grant format: positives and challenges

## 6.1 Positive elements

Grantee feedback revealed that SSGT's grant format and administration play a fundamental role in successful outcomes for children.

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We found working with SSGT great. There was strong communication and they provided clear guidelines. The grant application and maintenance involved simple form filling that was not lengthy. The funder was accommodating in terms of the reality on the ground. They reacted to feedback and took positive action.

For instance, we explained that while the grant covered swimming lessons, this wasn't sufficient to enable a child to get to the pool, as some parents couldn't afford to pay for swimsuits. In response SSGT allowed the grant to cover swimsuit purchase in certain cases. It's a small example to show that they came up with solutions to issues we raised, which was really important.”

Grantee G,  
Larger Community  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
March 2019.

### 6.1.1 Flexible grant with manageable reporting mechanisms

Community groups found the flexible nature of the SSGT funding essential. It meant they could be highly responsive to children's needs, albeit within the limitations of what was available in their area and other barriers beyond the cost of an activity. Grantees greatly appreciated the responsive nature of the grant and the funder to the local reality, which enabled them to trial and adapt different approaches.

Grantees also valued the grant's light reporting and administrative burdens. This enabled small or all-volunteer community groups to get involved, including those unable to apply for existing statutory grants that had accounting burdens and reporting mechanisms that made them unfeasible for smaller groups to comply with.

### 6.1.2 Provides essential funding to a committed and squeezed voluntary sector

The community and voluntary sector sees that it has an important role to play in the overall national response to people in the Irish reception system. SSGT's strategic decision to channel its funds through this sector provided organisations with the opportunity to show that they could step up to the challenge of addressing an important gap in the overall response to children in the Direct Provision system.

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“Support for children must continue in some way if SSGT finishes this grant. This could be in many ways. First, increasing funds to parents, so they have a stronger role in deciding about their own children's extracurricular activities. Second, ensuring that the voluntary sector can continue to support these parents and children. Their involvement would ensure sustainability, which is important. Voluntary organisations have carried out needs assessments and they use tried and tested approaches to deliver their work to ensure that all young people are included in service delivery. We have personnel that are trained to understand the needs, challenges and issues that arise in Direct Provision. This is often not the case for centre management staff. However, centres still have a clear role to play – providing logistics support, especially transport; sharing information on the ages and number of children at key moments; and facilitating consultation with residents. They must also be responsible for organising increased activities inside the centres as well as outside.”

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Grantee L,  
Community  
Development  
Organisation,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019.

The outstanding level of commitment by grantee organisations was evident from the programme's overall outcomes. Survey responses and interviews also revealed how individuals had gone beyond their expected roles, recruiting more volunteers to assist with grant delivery or giving up personal evenings and weekends to get children to activities. While individual efforts were impressive, the overall approach of this sector appears to have been a key strength of the SSGT grant.

## 6.2 Challenges

### 6.2.1 Grant can hide the gaps in the state response

Some respondents worried that SSGT was substituting for the role of the state. In the absence of a sufficient statutory response, they feared their work might hide the true extent of service provision gaps. They worried their involvement would prolong the State's continued failure to adequately address children's integration needs.

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“If SSGT fills a gap it is wonderful. But in some ways it also hides a gap - the reality that Ireland does not support children living in Direct Provision through its own state infrastructure. So while the SSGT model may assist integration, it risks giving an inaccurate representation of the reality of integration efforts on the ground.

This is a philanthropic charity model rather than a truly community-embedded approach. As a result, youth structures or others in the area may not notice that sustainable supports are not actually there for the children. The community doesn't know that they need to step up as groups using the SSGT funds have stepped in to fill the gap. In this way the grant could be acting as a disincentive for youth structures, the community, and the state to take greater responsibility to intervene.”



Children Rights Organisation, Indepth Interview, Feb 2019.

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### 6.2.2 Limited short-term outcomes that are insufficiently sustainable

“We can see that what we do for women and their children with this grant is important. But we also see that there isn't a lasting effect with this approach. What we are doing is more of a band aid solution, rather than really treating the wound of isolation.”



Grantee H, Small Volunteer Organisation, Individual Interview, Feb 2019.

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Grantees reported a sense of frustration at the limits of what they were able to achieve. While they could see multiple positive impacts, they expressed concern about the adhoc nature of what they could provide and fears about the sustainability of the grant's approach in terms of longer-term impacts upon children's integration.

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“There needs to be much more integration than an activity here and there for children. People living in these centres need better support from the beginning – from their arrival into the Direct Provision system. They need far better support throughout the process of waiting for their official status. If that happened,

Grantee H,  
Small Volunteer  
Organisation,  
Indepth Interview,  
Feb 2019.

then when they would get their status they would have established more connections in the community and feel more part of Irish society. It would start to heal the wounds that being isolated in centres can cause.”

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Several organisations could provide children with only a limited range of extra-curricular activities outside the centre with the grant funds they accessed – perhaps just one swimming lesson a week. Considering the lack of transport options, on-site supports for parents and amenities for children, they believed their support was insufficient to make lasting differences to children’s quality of life in Direct Provision.

Organisations repeated that the programme’s dependence on their networking skills, community goodwill, and smooth relations with centre managers was unsustainable, and that a formal obligation upon centre management and local authority structures to guarantee access to opportunities for children was necessary.

Grantee H,  
Small Volunteer  
Organisation,  
Individual  
Interview,  
Feb 2019.

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“Taking care of these children does not seem to be a structured priority from our government, so the response is all adhoc. There is no formal person at the community or county level taking care of ensuring that these children can get out of the centres to play and to integrate. In this area there is absolutely no social worker assigned with responsibility for the children living in our local Direct Provision centre. In some places the HSE have a designated role, but we don’t have that anymore here. So we fill gaps where we can, but this means many children still don’t benefit.”

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### 6.2.3 Grant restrictions on salary supports can increase pressures on sector

Several grantee organisations explained that operating the grant placed already stretched, often small, teams under increased pressure. They wished the grant could be expanded to incorporate costs that cover either all or a portion of the staff time and administrative costs required to administer, organise and execute the fund.

Grantee G,  
Community  
Organisation with  
large volunteer  
corps,  
Questionnaire,  
Feb 2019.

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“The grant doesn’t provide funds to cover the costs of the staff time required to manage and coordinate the project, which is difficult. In addition, our Project Worker assigned to this grant works only two days a week. So it’s a challenge to do more with the resources we have.”

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SECTION 7

# further support gaps to address

## 7.1 Needs requiring additional or improved responses

Interviews with parents, children and grantee organisations highlighted additional gaps they believed require urgent attention, funding and support to:

- 7.1.1 Increase activities and amenities available inside Direct Provision centres.
- 7.1.2 Ensure access to activities for parents, particularly lone parents.
- 7.1.3 Increase opportunities for family activities.
- 7.1.4 Increase access to education and training opportunities for adults.
- 7.1.5 Increase support for children once they move out of Direct Provision centres.

### 7.1.1 Increase activities and amenities available within Direct Provision centres

“There should be something for the children so they can spend their life in a better way. In the summer there are only a few things they can do. The activities that are organised outside the centre are just for four or five days, so for the rest of the summer they must stay here all the time. This is not good. If they go for swimming or to a camp for a few days in the summer it is nice but not enough. There should be something more outside the centre for young children. For the smallest children inside the centre there needs to be a playroom where they go and play.”

Children in Direct Provision have insufficient to no access to onsite play areas or activities. In some centres, volunteer youth workers help address this, while in others the centre management organise a number of activities. However, the level of supports available for children varies greatly from centre to centre.

The new National Standards<sup>33</sup> will contain specific indicators to ensure adequate and accessible facilities, including dedicated child-friendly, play and recreation facilities. Yet this could take up to two years to be fully implemented across all centres.

### Further needs:



X\*, 33 year old woman, mother of two children. Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

Only  **2 of 12** respondents said there was a play area in the centres grounds.

There is an urgent need to rapidly address this gap. Eleven of the 12 grantees rated the current availability of onsite activities in their local Direct Provision centre as very limited. A quarter (3/12) of these respondents rated it as severely limited, with nothing but a homework club available for children in the evenings. Only a quarter of respondents said there was a crèche facility for young children, with just two out of 12 grantees noting that children had access to a play area on the centre grounds.

A\*, 12-year old boy. Focus Group. Direct Provision Centre. Feb 2019.

“It is so hard to exercise here because there isn’t any equipment or anywhere to run. It would be so good to have bean-bags, to be able to go running, to pass things, to play catch. I wish we had a relay track or anything to help with running. I wish there was some kind of exercise camp we could go to with equipment to train.”

### 7.1.2 Ensure access to activities for parents, particularly lone parents

B\*, 36 year old woman, mother to three children. Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

“My son is seven years old, so he started going to camp. I see a difference in him from attending and that’s great. But if you also have a baby who is three years old, he can’t go to camp. So you must stay in the centre to mind him, even if your other children are out. In the end there is no break and you stay in the centre every day.”

Adults, particularly lone parents, explained that they continue to face multiple barriers to leave centres to access training or work opportunities. The lack of on-site crèches, child-minding options, or sufficient access to affordable, regular transport meant they often felt trapped.

L\*, 30-year-old woman, mother of a 5-year-old girl and 8-month-old baby. Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

“I can have two classes of English a week, but I can only get to one because I have a baby and there is no-one to mind him. I need a crèche in the morning so I can keep going to class in town. My five-year-old is learning more English than me in her school. I need to get better because when I have an appointment with the doctor I can’t explain, and they can’t always find a translator. So I try to learn English from YouTube as much as I can. It’s hard.”

Discussions with sixteen mothers revealed that opportunities for time alone were rare. In settings where entire families live in one shared room with children, often for years, with dozens to hundreds of other residents in a centre, parents find little time for themselves, which increases stress and decreases resilience.

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“We need a crèche, even just for two hours a week to be able to leave our children with someone. Just two hours to take some time to do things - study, have some mental space, think, breathe. There is a free programme in town where they will mind small kids of two to three years in the afternoon. But that means getting into town, which means relying on transport. But the bus here goes into town very early in the morning. I can't wait around for hours in town with a small baby until the afternoon programme starts.”

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B\*, 36-year old woman. Mother of three children. Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

### 7.1.3 Increase opportunities for family activities

Many parents expressed the hope that greater provision could be made to ensure that a certain number of activities organised outside of Direct Provision centres would involve not only children, but also parents together with them.

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“Each one of us would like to do things with our children, but we can't afford to bring them out. Can you ask the organisation (SSGT) for this? Can you tell them that we are very happy, when we see our kids getting out, doing things, but that we would love to do some things with them too, as other families do.

**All:** Yes!”

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All eight participants in agreement, Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

While the SSGT grant was targeted towards children, on occasion parents were involved. If small children were going to swimming classes, their parents often attended with them. In another centre with severely limited transport options, the grantee used SSGT funds to organise an event inside the centre rather than outside, that included karaoke, dancing and a fashion event for all the family.

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“Parents with young children considered the swimming lessons a success because the place we used had a parent and toddler pool and another area for older children. This meant that parents with several children could take part in this activity as a family. The day trips to Water World that we organised were also very popular as they allowed families to engage with each other together, regardless of the children's different ages. It also allowed people to commit on a once-off basis, when committing to a full programme for the entire family may have been difficult.”

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Grantee F. Migrant Rights Organisation, Questionnaire Response, March 2019.

## Over half: 7/12

**grantees not aware of centre management organising any activities for children outside of centres.**

There is a clear need to increase the opportunities for parents and children to bond outside of Direct Provision centres, to create happy, shared memories together, at the same time as providing opportunities for integration with other families in the locality. Yet more than half (7/12) of the grantees were not aware of any activities for children that had been organised in the community by centre management staff, though a third (4/12) reported that they were aware of centre-management organised events outside of the Direct Provision centre.

Nearly all (11/12) grantees were unaware of dedicated centre budgets to facilitate access to activities outside of centres, which they attributed to the fact that it had not been a requirement in contract negotiations with RIA. All grantees were insistent that centre management needed to play a much stronger role in this regard, providing a sufficient level of budgeted funding towards this each year.

### 7.1.4 Increase access to education and training opportunities for adults

X\*, 36 year old woman, mother of two children. Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

“If people felt safe in their countries they wouldn’t be here. Yet now we are sitting here idle in these centres. They are making people lazy this way, making them sad. The new right to work is good, but only allows some to work. If you don’t have permission to work and you have stress or depression, then while you wait in here you are building that up and up. But if you are busy with something like learning or work, then the stress can go down.”

Though beyond the scope of this SSGT grant a consistent theme in discussions with parents emerged in both Direct Provision centres: the need for greater support to ensure that adults can access better educational opportunities and skills trainings.

X\*, 36 year old woman, mother of two children. Focus Group Discussion, Direct Provision Centre, Feb 2019.

“We need to be able to go to better courses that are longer or harder than the ones they allow us to go to. Just a few days is no good. With only one class or a one-week course you can’t learn enough. They give us the same Level 3 courses again and again: beautician or computers. This is nice, but not effective. I can’t go up to Level 4 or 5 because I am an asylum seeker. So I must do the same thing again and again. We need proper trainings. Please, we want to contribute.”

However, barriers related to the lack of transport options, crèche and child-minding facilities in many centres also prevent adults from accessing what training opportunities are available.

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“Many adults living in the centres try to do short courses. Access to these courses would provide opportunities to integrate with others in the local community, to spend their time in a worthwhile way, and lay down foundations for their future prospects once they receive their status. But if they get a place on one, there are still costs beyond the fees that they can’t afford, such as transport or books.”

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Grantee A,  
Community  
Organisation run  
by volunteers,  
Questionnaire  
Response,  
April 2019.

### 7.1.5 Increase support for children once they move out of Direct Provision centres

In 2016, SSGT introduced new grant criteria to enable children to still receive support for access to activities once they left a Direct Provision centre. This was in response to grantee concerns about children losing access to weekly swimming classes once they went to live in the community, cutting them off from activities that provided connection and stability during a period of significant transition.

The new funding flexibility allows an organisation to dedicate up to 15-20% of their total grant to the continuation of activities for a maximum period of up to one year after the child leaves a centre. Grantee organisations warmly welcomed this. However, their concerns about these children remain. They see a need for the provision of wider supports during the transition period into living in the community.

A dedicated grant stream for ensuring access to activities would help combat the isolation and depression they see affecting children when they first leave the centres. In addition to funds, a counterpoint at the county level is needed to link voluntary organisations with children once they are dispersed into the community.

## SECTION 8

# ensuring future support for children in direct provision

Grantee G,  
Community  
Organisation  
with large  
volunteer corps,  
Questionnaire,  
Feb 2019.

“It will be terrible for children if support for activities stops. They have so few outlets already that ending an activity they have been enjoying would create a major gap in their week. They would lose access to learning a life skill like swimming that leads to a healthy way of life and increases well-being. We must not underestimate the fun element of these activities either, nor forget what it means for them to meet other children outside of their hostel, as they cannot invite friends ‘home’. This would all come to an end without a grant or some fund continuing into the future.”

### 8.1 The need for a structured response at the state and community levels

This impact review reveals that almost two decades since the introduction of the Direct Provision system that children’s access to life-enhancing cultural, social and integration opportunities remains wholly insufficient. Rather than a systematic and resourced approach to meeting the needs of this vulnerable group, the response is reliant on an adhoc collection of statutory and voluntary initiatives, and temporary funds such as the SSGT grant programme.

Without SSGT support many hundreds of children would have spent countless hours in the evenings, weekends and summers inside centre walls, whiling away young lives, imaginations and abilities, missing out on opportunities to build confidence and forge or deepen crucial relationships. Groups embedded in the local community play an essential role in assisting these children. However, the SSGT programme’s reliance on the networks, commitment and capacities of a stretched voluntary and community sector demonstrates an urgent need for the sustained provision of increased funds and resources from additional sources.

There is no dedicated statutory fund allocated per child that smaller community and voluntary organisations could access to continue to support children living in Direct Provision centres. What statutory grant programmes exist are highly competitive with heavy reporting and administrative burdens, and their competitive basis fails to guarantee universal access to extra curricular activities for all children. Better mechanisms at the national and community levels are necessary to ensure the inclusion of children and young people in local area activities.

## 8.2 Stakeholder feedback on potential mechanisms to support children

There was a lack of clarity among many grantee organisations about which statutory bodies they could hold to account or work in partnership with to guarantee children's access to extra-curricular activities. This reflects the reality that no state agency has taken a clear lead to ensure that children can consistently leave Direct Provision centres to avail of integration opportunities.

Grantee uncertainty about which mechanisms, if any, currently exist at the community, local authority, or national policy levels, meant there was also limited consensus about which body will be best placed to step in as the SSGT programme concludes, or which mechanism would best guarantee children's access to extra-curricular activities. However, there was absolute clarity that such access must not only continue but also expand to all centres, providing assistance to every child in Direct Provision in a more coherent, consistent and universal manner.

Respondents were united in the call for a flexible, inclusive, participatory fund that would take the form of a dedicated budget per child per year. It should cover the duration of a child's stay in a Direct Provision centre, continuing for up to a minimum of six months once the child is living in the community. While united in the need for national level leadership to ensure integration at the local level, respondents had different perspectives and preferences about how any potential future fund should be best organised and administered.

### 8.2.1 Establish a dedicated national fund

More than half (7/12) of the grantees said the establishment of a structured national fund spearheaded by the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) would be their first preference to try to guarantee sustained support for children in Direct Provision.

Within the DCYA, grantees mentioned a coordinating body within its Tusla agency – the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC).<sup>34</sup> As an inter-agency group with a national remit, CYPSC committees meet regularly at the county level. While CYPSC might not administer the grant, respondents thought it could potentially coordinate through its existing structure, which already provides a strong basis for collaborative working at the county and community levels.

Within the DOJE, both RIA and the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) were mentioned. While RIA has responsibility for the Direct Provision



Almost three quarters  
**72%**

of grantees:

Want parents to be better resourced to decide activities for children.

system, they saw potential for OPMI to take on a stronger role. Through its *Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future*<sup>35</sup> OPMI already runs a Communities Integration Fund that supports local bodies such as sport or faith organisations to undertake actions to promote the integration of migrants into their communities. While respondents believed that OPMI grants were sometimes awarded to groups working within Direct Provision centres, they were unclear whether OPMI's mandate officially includes people still awaiting a final decision on their protection status, or was principally targeting those with official refugee status or leave to remain. Even with greater clarity and a widening of its remit, the onerous reporting required for OPMI's current grant stream would prohibit smaller voluntary or resident-run organisations from applying. In addition, the competitive structure of the grants awarded would fail to guarantee universal access for all children in all centres.

### 8.2.2 Empower and better resource parents

The majority of respondents (8/11) wanted parents to be given greater capacity to make decisions about the type and timing of activities their children engage in. Of these, three suggested an increase in the overall financial allowance provided to parents each month; while five called for the provision of additional funds earmarked specifically for activities that would take into account the many competing priorities for parent's limited resources.



Over half  
**58%**

of grantees:

Believe State must establish a structured fund for each child.

### 8.2.3 Better structure and resource the voluntary sector's involvement

All grantee respondents were united in the view that no matter how future supports were designed, that voluntary sector involvement, with its community development ethos and rights-based approaches, would remain crucial for connecting children in Direct Provision to existing community networks. Increasing the funds available to the voluntary sector was the preferred way forward, for a third (4/12) of the grantees, above every other approach.

### 8.2.4 Increase obligations on centre management to facilitate outside activities

All 12 grantees were convinced that centre owners and management teams must do more to ensure access to activities for children. Yet none chose centre management teams as their preferred structure to guarantee access to activities for children. However, almost a half (5/11) of the respondents called for increased efforts and resourcing from centre management as their second or third preference.

All respondents thought giving sole responsibility to centre owners carried too much risk. Citing the power imbalance between parents and centre management, cost-cutting dangers inherent in a profit-driven approach, and the lack of qualified community development professionals within centres, grantees instead envisioned a partnership model between empowered parents, the voluntary sector and centre management.

### 8.2.5 Assign additional positions within the community or Direct Provision centres

Introducing new positions within Direct Provision centres and the community was the preferred way forward for some (2/11) respondents. Such roles would be in addition to the proposed Reception Officer<sup>36</sup> profile that centres need to hire once the new national standards are introduced.

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“Most of the work carried out for the children in the Direct Provision centre is currently supported by volunteers. For the work to be sustainable there is a need to have a dedicated community worker or a sessional youth worker to support the volunteers who are always changing due to the transient nature of the system.”

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Grantee L, Community Development Organisation, Questionnaire Response, April 2019.

All grantees also saw the need for additional roles to act as focal-point liaisons for the voluntary sector. This could be in the form of family support workers, community workers or youth workers. There was a suggestion that Social Inclusion Officers in the Health Services Executive could be given formal responsibility to ensure that children in the local Direct Provision centre have better overall support, including access to integration opportunities. Others felt a role within the local development committees (LCDCs) under the Department of Rural and Community Development could also begin to take on increased responsibility.

### 8.2.6 Ensure targeted support within new national culture voucher or subsidy

Echoing the calls of the Children’s Rights Alliance in their ‘No Child 2020’ campaign<sup>37</sup> for the provision of a subsidy or cultural card to all children in Ireland to ensure every child can access at least one community arts or cultural opportunity a year, one grantee’s preferred option was to expand this idea further for vulnerable groups, such as those in poverty and children in Direct Provision, in a way that would guarantee those children weekly access to extra-curricular activities.

### 8.2.7 Increase awareness training for key roles within the community

Finally, there were several calls to ensure that wider training and awareness work is carried out with people in key positions within the community, including doctors, social workers, county councils and health workers.

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“To ensure better levels of care are given to the most vulnerable people living in Direct Provision, which includes children and young people, there is a need to organise increased training for GP doctors, social workers and nurses, so they have a stronger understanding of the issues and traumas people face, not only prior to arriving but also as a direct result of living within the Direct Provision system.”

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Grantee G, Community organisation with large volunteer corps, Questionnaire, Feb 2019.



## SECTION 9

# recommendations

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## 9.1 St. Stephen's Green Trust

### 9.1.1 Investigate handover options for provision of activities post-2020

SSGT hopes to share the findings of this report with relevant government stakeholders, including the Department of Justice and Equality and Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and key migrant and child rights non-government organisations. These groups are best placed to decide the future mechanisms and structures that will provide and administer the funds required to continue and expand the provision of extra-curricular activities and integration support for children living in the Direct Provision system.

### 9.1.2 Create a grantee network to share knowledge, learning and experiences

There is a lot of rich learning that grantee organisations can share with each other, residents and management in Direct Provision centres, youth structures, local authorities and the wider community. Of varying sizes and capacities, they are all highly innovative and creative, leveraging resources and goodwill wherever possible in their local areas. The creation of a learning and exchange forum by SSGT, and the documentation of a number of best-practice case studies, could increase the sustainability and impact of this grant programme in its final years.

### 9.1.3 Continue to monitor and evaluate the SSGT grant approach in final year

Information from people working on the ground must continue to inform any intervention to assist those living in Direct Provision. To ensure that SSGT can continue to learn from this evolving grant in its final years, it must continue to consistently solicit feedback from children, their parents and grantee organisations. As the introduction of the new standards and the impact of the right to work begin to affect life within Direct Provision centres, it will also remain important to actively seek out the view of Centre Managers, and the perspectives of statutory and local authority bodies.

## 9.2 Community and youth organisation

### 9.2.1 Broaden inclusion measures of the existing supports for children

Existing traditional supports already provided to other children in Ireland need to be encouraged to broaden their services to formally include children living in Direct Provision. While bodies such as the GAA, the Scouts, or other youth-oriented programmes are not obliged by law to include children living in Direct Provision in their remit, they should do so through policies of inclusion and equality and in the best interests of children living in the Irish State.

While in some locations activities like GAA summer camps already actively include children living in the local Direct Provision centre, it is not the case everywhere. To guarantee that a child's prospects for integration no longer depend on the luck of which centre they are sent to live in, all youth-oriented organisations should urgently adopt a standardised policy of inclusion as a matter of national policy.

## 9.3 Irish government

Children and young people in Direct Provision live within a system that often works against their best interests. The policy response to this reality is less than adequate. The Irish State must do more to ensure effective community-led approaches can meet the integration and development needs of these vulnerable children. This requires committing resources that will support children's inclusion in extra-curricular activities, including sports clubs, youth services, dance, drama and music, in the areas where their Direct Provision centre is located.

### 9.3.1 Prioritise Integration from Day 1

Ireland needs to ensure early onset, local integration for people. Extending the Department of Justice and Equality's migrant integration strategy to include people seeking asylum from their arrival could assist in that regard. Scotland has successfully implemented this model under the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (2018–22).<sup>38</sup> A cornerstone of this strategy includes ongoing consultation with both asylum seekers and local communities, which helps build social connections, encourages protection applicants to contribute to their community and fosters a positive sense of belonging for all involved.<sup>39</sup> Addressing integration needs from the beginning would enable children to receive targeted and holistic support from their arrival.

### 9.3.2 Establish and resource a grant programme to assist all children in Direct Provision

Children living in a Direct Provision centre or emergency hotel accommodation, need increased access to opportunities to leave these properties during evenings, weekends and school breaks to engage in sporting, art and cultural activities. This requires the allocation of sufficient funds at the state level to ensure that every child has access to a minimum level of extra-curricular activities.

There are many ways this could operate. However, building upon the SSGT model it is clear that any funding mechanism will need to be responsive to changing demographics in centres and to the local context specificities; appropriate in terms of reporting and governance requirements to ensure accessibility for smaller community and voluntary groups; and in line with best-practice principles of inclusion, participation and empowerment to provide children and their parents with the ability to direct their own lives.

It is difficult for SSGT to provide an estimate of the annual average budget required to provide a reasonable level of access to activities for children. This is in part because there are no clear guidelines or formal national standards outlining what a minimum level of access should entail. In addition, variations in the type and frequency of activities organised in each centre, combined with the multiple barriers that prevent many children from accessing their preferred activity impact the accuracy of SSGT's cost estimations.

Nevertheless, the SSGT programme can still provide valuable insight into potential budgetary implications for any future funding mechanism. An examination of total SSGT programme costs and total number of children assisted can help arrive at the minimum cost per child, while an analysis of the costs of the more popular activities children chose to engage in each year provides another important budgetary indication. As a result, SSGT estimates that a minimum allocation of €300 per child per annum would be required for a fund to provide modest levels of access to extracurricular activities for each child living in a Direct Provision centre.<sup>40</sup>

This estimate attempts to consider the reality that costs are required to overcome multiple access barriers, in addition to economies of scale if the fund was allocated to all children living within the system. However, it does not incorporate costs required for administration or salaries if sustainable access was to be ensured. Nor does it factor in the higher expenses required to coordinate the

inclusion of children who may be housed in emergency accommodation rather than in Direct Provision centres. Further cost-analysis research by RIA and the DCYA will be essential to move towards fully-costed action plans that detail financing sources and indicate the funding required to implement a new programme and its activities.

### 9.3.3 Ensure a coordinated interagency response

Every government department has a level of remit and responsibility for children living in Direct Provision centres. However, RIA in collaboration with the DCYA are best placed to take a leadership role for ensuring the provision of resources to guarantee sustained access to extracurricular and integration supports for children. An interdepartmental effort is required to establish a systematic response with a lead agency that can be held to account for making this happen.

### 9.3.4 Ensure Direct Provision contracts facilitate meaningful access to extracurricular activities

While facilities within centres, including access to crèches, playrooms, and child-friendly spaces, should improve with the introduction of the new standards, centre management should also be compelled to provide budgets and proof of efforts to support children's access to extra-curricular activities. As a matter of urgency, this would include dramatically improving access to transport provision during evenings, weekends and holidays for children to attend activities.

## SECTION 10

# conclusion

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Life for children and young people in the Direct Provision system is tough. They are among the most vulnerable groups in Irish society today. While the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children,<sup>41</sup> the realities of life within Ireland's reception system too often operate against their interests and wellbeing.

While important improvements have been made to the Direct Provision system in recent years, with further on the way, the pressing integration and support needs of children within it remain largely neglected. The policy response is less than adequate, despite close to two decades of the Direct Provision system in Ireland.

Practical responses to children's needs are either absent or uncoordinated at the county and community levels. This affects their ability to leave Direct Provision centres at evenings, weekends or during school holidays and their options for meaningful engagement in cultural, sporting and community activities. Their access to extra-curricular activities remains severely limited and is ill adapted to meet the realities of their lives.

SSGT's grant programme to community and voluntary groups has demonstrated that targeted, community-level interventions supporting children's access to activities outside of Direct Provision centres can lead to important, positive outcomes. As the programme nears the end of its fifth year, this impact review highlights the powerful differences that SSGT funds have made to children's lives, including increasing their sense of belonging, skills and confidence levels. It also shows the programme's constructive influence on their parents, other centre residents and in local communities across Ireland.

However, these children are falling through wide cracks in the Irish State's response. This report has exposed the lack of structural supports available to guarantee sustainable access to modest levels of extra-curricular activities for children living in Direct Provision. They require and deserve improved support. Urgent attention is needed to better address children's needs at national and community levels.

SSGT is now working towards a final phase, with plans to conclude six years of this grant programme by end 2020. In its view, ensuring access to extracurricular activities outside of Direct Provision centres should be considered an elemental part of child protection, by safeguarding children's psychosocial wellbeing, seeking to strengthen their own resilience to cope with stress, and increasing their opportunities for connection and integration.

The establishment of an accessible, flexible and well-funded structure is now required, to guarantee sustained and targeted support for children in a participative, accountable and child-focused manner. It will be essential for relevant government departments, youth organisations, community groups and Direct Provision centre owners to collaborate to make this a reality. Key departments must take a clearer leadership role to guarantee access to extra-curricular activities for children, namely the Department of Justice and Equality, through its Reception and Integration Agency and Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration, in addition to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The end goal must be to ensure that all children in Ireland feel secure and that they belong, no matter where in the country they are born or grow up. As a society, this is the minimum that we want to ensure for any child. We should not accept that even one child emerges psychologically scarred from their time inside the Direct Provision system, feeling isolated and alone. We must protect all young people from such violations of their dignity and create the best conditions to enable children to thrive, and be children.



## SECTION 11

# appendices

## Appendix 1

### **GRANT EVOLUTION: 2014 - 2019**

**Round 1 September 2014:** Initially planned to run for two years, the programme commenced in September 2014 with an initial fund of €50,000 per annum. Donors were the Discalced Carmelites and the Daughters of the Cross of Liege Investment Fund. Organisations that applied for the grant ranged from small, volunteer-led groups without offices or paid staff, to small or medium sized voluntary organisations, or to local development companies. Due to the grant's relatively small size only direct activities could be funded. Administrative costs, including salaries were not included.

After the first grant round, the extent of the need was clearer. More funds would be required to provide grants to local groups on a more universal basis, ie SSGT did not want to reject applications on the basis of not having sufficient funds. A proposal was made and was accepted by the Mercy (Southern Province) Solidarity Trust which had a similar grants focus and approach. They contributed €24,000 to fund activities in the 10 Direct Provision Centres in their geographical area. Grants totaling €56,000 were made in 2014.

**Round 2 and 3: February /September 2015:** Following the initial grant round it was clear funds would cover activities for children for approximately six months only. With grantee organisations sending feedback that both parents and children were anxious to continue with the activities they had started, maintaining a level of continuity was important. SSGT approached the three other Irish provinces of the Mercy Congregation to request a partnership to fund activities for children in Direct Provision centres in their areas. All three agreed to the proposal.

A second round opened in February 2015 and a third in September 2015. With transport costs proving to be a major element of grants, SSGT encouraged grantees to try to find local solutions to the transport issue where possible,<sup>42</sup> but retained flexibility to allow for transport costs where there were no alternatives. Grants totaling €88,300 were made in 2015. At this stage funded groups were spending grants at different paces with the rate depending on what was available in their area, the stage at which they started their programme, and the rhythm in which new children moved into a centre, while others moved out once they obtained their status or leave to remain.

**A rolling fund commenced** in December 2015. SSGT removed its six monthly grant round system, and moved to a rolling monthly deadline, to increase the grant's flexibility to match the spending timelines of different grantee organisations. An internal impact report was compiled gathering feedback from grantees around the operation of the grant programme.

Total amounts allocated on an annual basis by organisation are detailed in Appendix 2. Following discussions with the Sisters of Mercy Provinces and SSGT trustees, the fund was extended for a four year period to run until the end of 2020. By June 2019 the grant programme had allocated €320,000 since it first commenced, enabling 20 different organisations to assist at least 2,500 children living in Direct Provision centres to access extra-curricular activities.

### Criteria for the SSGT grant programme to Direct Provision centres (from SSGT website).

**The SSGT Direct Provision Centre Grant Programme is focused on supporting the children of families dependent on the small personal allowances available to residents in Direct Provision Centres.** It aims to give an opportunity to parents/carers of children living in these Centres to decide, ideally with their children, on activities that will benefit their children.

The four Sisters of Mercy Provinces partnered with St Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT) to fund this grant programme. This includes the Mercy Southern Province, Mercy Northern Province, Mercy South Central Province and the Mercy Western Province, each of which has provided funds to support Direct Provision Centres in their area.

Any activities that are funded should increase the children's opportunities to integrate with their community and improve their quality of life. It is envisaged these activities should avail of existing community, cultural and sporting activities in the community.

Only one application to run a series of activities will be accepted for each centre. An application may include the organisation of several activities, depending on the interests of the children, age groups and what is available in the community. However, funding is available to fund only one activity per child for a period of time.

Only grassroots voluntary groups with a track record of supporting people living in Direct Provision are eligible to apply for this grant programme.

Priority is given to centres which are geographically isolated and/or don't have many organisations supporting residents to access activities that would further integration into their community.

SSGT is flexible about preferred activities but expects that they will utilise available community, cultural and sporting facilities in a cost-effective manner.

In general transport costs are not eligible for funding as the Reception and Integration Agency has communicated that it expects Centre Management to fund transport for extracurricular activities. (Exceptions may be made in some circumstances.)

From 2017 SSGT extended the grant programme to include children who have recently moved out of a Direct Provision Centre who had been engaged in activities. This is to ensure that, upon moving out of the Centre and into the community, children who had commenced activities while living in the Centre are not suddenly stopped from participating in them. However, to retain the grant's core focus and sustainability, there is limited flexibility for this extension. No more than 15% to 20% of the total cost of activities for children will go towards those living in the community. It can continue to be provided to a child for up to a year after they have moved out of the Direct Provision Centre.

**The rolling deadline for applications is the 25th of each month.** Assessments and the decision-making process to award a grant take a number of weeks after the application.

For more information, visit: <https://www.ssgt.ie/direct-provision-centres-activities-for-children/>

## Appendix 2

### Grants allocated: by organisation and Direct Provision centre

Source: SSGT Annual Reports

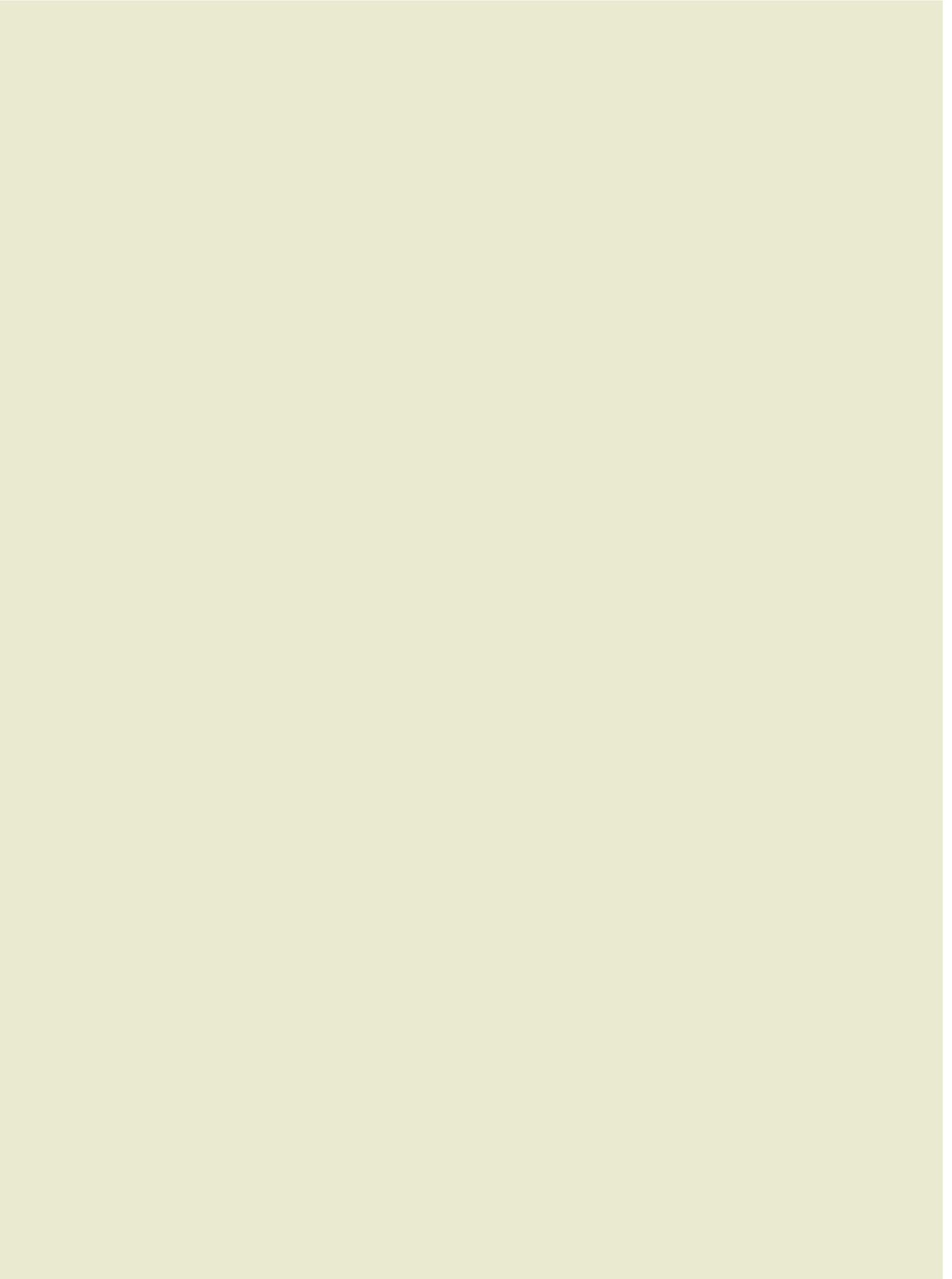
St Stephen's Green Trust Direct Provision Centre Grant Programme Grants made by organisation and Direct Provision Centre - including number of children benefitting over the year															
		TOTAL €	TOTAL NR	2014	Nr	2015	Nr	2016	Nr	2017	Nr	2018	Nr	2019	Nr
1	Clonakilty Friends of Asylum Seekers: Clonakilty Lodge	€12,270	177	€2,600	49	€2,600	30			€1,500	25	€2,880	32	€2,690	41
2	Cork City Partnership: Kinsale Road Centre (KRAC)	€10,840	61	€3,400	30	€7,440	31								
3	Croi Na Gaillmhe/ NUIG Rugby: Eglinton Salthill	€40,775	300	€5,200	58	€8,685	57	€11,550	50	€4,280	38	€6,060	54	€5,000	43
4	Cultúr: Mosney Accommodation Centre	€26,000	307	€6,500	76	€4,500	15			€10,000	60	€5,000	156		
5	Diversity Sligo: Globe House	€8,983	130	€2,200	29	€2,320	35			€2,170	42	€2,293	24		
6	Doras Luimni: Knockalisheen Centre	€6,256	61			€6,256	61								
7	Integrate Carrick: Bridgewater House	€6,022	86	€1,400	19	€3,380	27	€1,242	40						
8	Integration and Support Unit: Atlantic House	€3,430	40	€900	26	€2,530	14								
9	Integration and Support Unit: Ocean View House	€5,228	85	€1,400	27	€1,328	10			€2,500	48				
10	Killarney Asylum Seekers Initiative: Atlas House	€2,400	24	€960	12	€1,440	12								
11	Killarney Asylum Seekers Initiative: Drishane Castle	€8,850	164	€2,650	79			€2,100	46	€2,000	19			€2,100	20
12	Monaghan Immigrant Support Group: St Patricks Centre	€37,990	297	€5,500	75	€10,500	30	€3,950	28	€6,300	35	€7,770	74	€3,970	55
13	Newbridge Asylum Seekers Support Group: Eyre Powell Centre	€4,800	99	€1,600	33					€2,725	23	€475	43		
14	South Dublin County Partnership: Tower Accommodation Centre	€20,280	306	€2,800	55	€5,916	60	€2,700	57	€5,264	71			€3,600	63
15	Sth West Mayo Development Co: The Old Convent Ballyhaunis	€29,000	409	€2,300	68	€2,500	65	€5,630	48	€3,400	64	€15,170	164		
16	Tralee International Resource Centre: Johnston Marina Hotel	€8,424	74	€3,000	24	€4,876	35			€548	15				
17	Voice of Migrants Ireland: Montague Centre	€2,100	47									€2,100	47		
18	Wallaroo Playschool Project: Ashbourne House, Glounthane / KRAC	€11,345	81	€3,300	20	€4,390	37							€3,655	24
19	Waterford Immigration Network: Birchwood House	€27,650	137	€4,000	31	€7,178	26			€5,440	35	€5,332	20	€5,700	25
20	Westmeath Community Development: Lissywollen Centre	€46,102	426	€6,250	70	€12,450	57			€10,790	104	€10,612	130	€6,000	65
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3311</b>	<b>€55,960</b>	<b>781</b>	<b>€88,289</b>	<b>602</b>	<b>€27,172</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>€56,917</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>€57,692</b>	<b>744</b>	<b>€32,715</b>	<b>336</b>

## endnotes

- 1 Reception and Integration Agency/RIA, October 2018, RIA Monthly Report October 2018, RIA Website, Available at: [http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/October 2018 monthly report updated .pdf/Files/October 2018 monthly report updated .pdf](http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/October%202018%20monthly%20report%20updated.pdf/Files/October%202018%20monthly%20report%20updated.pdf)
- 2 On 6 July 2018, Ireland adopted the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 018 (S.I. 230 of 2018) through which it transposed the recast Reception Conditions Directive into domestic law. The Regulations place reception conditions on statutory footing for the first time in Ireland, thereby bringing about an overhaul to its Direct Provision system. The Reception Conditions Directive sets out legislative standards for reception of asylum seekers, including an obligation on States to incorporate a vulnerability assessment into their national procedure in order to identify special reception needs. Article 21 of the recast Reception Conditions Directive reads: *Member States shall take into account the specific situation of vulnerable persons such as minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, such as victims of female genital mutilation, in the national law implementing this Directive.*
- 3 20.5% of Direct Provision Centres are located in Cork and Dublin, with the remaining 79.5% in towns and rural locations.
- 4 The government has built three accommodation centres in 18 years.
- 5 Data from end 2018 reveals that more than 40% of asylum seekers living in direct provision have spent two or more years in accommodation centres. One in six people in the system (17%; more than 1,000 people) have spent between two and three years in direct provision accommodation. Around 750 people have spent up to four years, while almost 3% have been living in direct provision accommodation centres for seven years or more.
- 6 Nearly 5 per cent of people in direct provision (309 people) have been in the system for seven years or longer, according to the Department of Justice. Source: Pollack, S., 25 March 2019, *Asylum seeker weekly allowance rises for adults and children*, The Irish Times Newspaper Online, Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/asylum-seeker-weekly-allowance-rises-for-adults-and-children-1.3837061>
- 7 English, E., 18 April 2019, *Death of asylum seeker with heart condition should be 'clarion call' for reforms*, Irish Examiner Newspaper Online, Available at: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/death-of-asylum-seeker-with-heart-condition-should-be-clarion-call-for-reforms-918619.html>
- 8 Pollack, S., 26 March 2019, *Asylum seekers offered support after Kildare centre resident found dead* Irish Times Newspaper Online, Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/asylum-seekers-offered-support-after-kildare-centre-resident-found-dead-1.3839631>
- 9 Gargan, M., 27 July 2017, *Cause of one in three deaths in direct provision system is unknown*, The Irish Catholic Website, Available at: <https://www.irishcatholic.com/cause-one-three-deaths-direct-provision-system-unknown/>
- 10 The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice and Equality states that it has no official role in the collation of statistics on deaths of asylum seekers living in State Provided Accommodation and does not release public records of how many people have died while within the Direct Provision System. It refers people to look for all records of deaths in Ireland in the General Register Office, the central civil repository for records related to Births, Marriages and Deaths in Ireland. Source: Tithe an Oireachtais/Houses of the Oireachtas, 5 March 2019, Direct Provision Data: Dail Eireaan Debate, Tithe an Oireachtais/Houses of the Oireachtas Website, Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-03-05/246/>
- 11 UNHCR Ireland, 22 May 2018, Speaking Notes for the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality on Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process, Tithe an Oireachtais/Houses of the Oireachtas Website, Available at: [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_justice\\_and\\_equality/submissions/2019/2019-05-22\\_opening-statement-enda-o-neill-head-of-office-unhcr-ireland\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/submissions/2019/2019-05-22_opening-statement-enda-o-neill-head-of-office-unhcr-ireland_en.pdf)
- 12 1st July 2019: Email correspondence between SSGT and the Reception and Integration Agency
- 13 December 2018: There was a total of 5,928 people, including almost 2,000 children. Source: Ciara Ni Bhroin, 3 December 2018, *More than 40% of asylum seekers spend at least two years in direct provision*, The Irish Times, Online, Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2018/12/03/1014748-direct-provision/>
- 14 Pollak, Sorcha, 18 February 2019, *Life for refugees in Ireland: 'We have lost hope of getting a house*, The Irish Times, Online, Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/life-for-refugees-in-ireland-we-have-lost-hope-of-getting-a-house-1.3797230>
- 15 Joint Committee on Justice and Equality debate, 22 May 2019, Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process: Discussion, Houses of the Oireachtas Website, Available at: [https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_justice\\_and\\_equality/2019-05-22/3/](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/2019-05-22/3/)
- 16 *ibid*
- 17 Government of Ireland, *Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the*

- Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers*, Final Report, June 2015, Available at: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Report%20to%20Government%20on%20Improvements%20to%20the%20Protection%20Process,%20including%20Direct%20Provision%20and%20Supports%20to%20Asylum%20Seekers.pdf/Files/Report%20to%20Government%20on%20Improvements%20to%20the%20Protection%20Process,%20including%20Direct%20Provision%20and%20Supports%20to%20Asylum%20Seekers.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Report%20to%20Government%20on%20Improvements%20to%20the%20Protection%20Process,%20including%20Direct%20Provision%20and%20Supports%20to%20Asylum%20Seekers.pdf/Files/Report%20to%20Government%20on%20Improvements%20to%20the%20Protection%20Process,%20including%20Direct%20Provision%20and%20Supports%20to%20Asylum%20Seekers.pdf).
- 18 Government of Ireland, Draft national standards for accommodation offered to people in the protection process, August 2018, Available at: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Draft\\_National\\_Standards\\_for\\_accommodation\\_centres.pdf/Files/Draft\\_National\\_Standards\\_for\\_accommodation\\_centres.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Draft_National_Standards_for_accommodation_centres.pdf/Files/Draft_National_Standards_for_accommodation_centres.pdf).
  - 19 Irish Refugee Council (IRC), 3 October 2018, Submission on the Draft National Standards for Direct Provision Centres, IRC Website, Available at: <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Irish-Refugee-Council-submission-on-national-standards-03.10.18.pdf>
  - 20 Irish Legal News, 13 June 2018, *Children's rights group welcomes call for independent inspectorate for direct provision*, Irish Legal News Website, Available at: <https://www.irishlegal.com/article/childrens-rights-group-welcomes-call-for-independent-inspectorate-for-direct-provision>
  - 21 NASC, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre, June 2019, *Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality on Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process*, NASC Website, Available at: <https://nascireland.org/sites/default/files/Submission%20on%20direct%20provision%20and%20the%20international%20protection%20process.pdf>
  - 22 On 21 September 2018, SSGT made an email submission to the Reception and Integration Agency highlighting the lack of references within the Draft National Standards to specific details about ensuring that children could regularly leave Direct Provision centres to engage in outside activities. SSGT also raised concerns about the lack of specifics in relation to which government body would guarantee provision of financial resources to ensure access to extra-curricular opportunities.
  - 23 No Child 2020 Campaign Website: <https://nochild2020.com/culture>
  - 24 SSGT defines children as people aged up to 18 years of age for the purposes of this grant programme.
  - 25 It is difficult to determine the precise number of children who have benefitted but SSGT suggests at least 2,500 and a possible maximum of 3,300. A proportionate reporting framework for funded groups was used by SSGT and because of movements of people in and out of the Centres, groups were often reliant on centre management to give details of numbers participating. Thus, grantee organisations did not use a unique identifier for each child participant. However, they all had a clear idea of how many children were participating in each of the activities organised. SSGT suggests a figure of 2,500, based on the following sources:
    - a) Twelve grantee respondents to the survey for this 2019 Impact Review reported that they had provided access to activities for 1,894 children in total since 2014 through grants received from this SSGT programme. As 20 groups were funded over the past five years the total figure would be greater than 1,894 if data from the further eight organisations was included.
    - b) SSGT's annual reports, based on grant reports from funded groups, estimate that over 3,300 children took part in activities (see Appendix 2). However, it is possible that a child living in Direct Provision for two years or more may have taken part in activities during a second or third year, leading to double counting of individual beneficiaries. SSGT therefore estimates a figure of 2,500 children benefitting from the programme over the past five years.
  - 26 O'Neill, O., 2016, *St. Stephen's Green Trust Direct Provision Centre Grant Programme: Impact Report 2016*, St. Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT), SSGT Website, Available at: <https://www.ssgt.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/DPGP-Impact-Report-2016.pdf>
  - 27 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *A guide to international refugee protection and building state asylum systems*, 2017, Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 27, p.98, available at: [www.refworld.org/docid/5a9d57554.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/5a9d57554.html).
  - 28 The Journal.ie; 13 March 2019, *Direct provision: Complaints about lack of cooking facilities, accommodation and refusal of transfers*, The Journal Website, Available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/direct-provision-complaints-about-lack-of-cooking-facilities-accommodation-and-refusals-of-transfer-requests-4536553-Mar2019/>
  - 29 Note: By June 2019, approximately 38% of centres had set up a shop where residents could purchase their food and facilities to cook it themselves. Another approximately 1,400 residents had the right to cook, but did not have a shop and needed to shop elsewhere. Source: Joint Committee on Justice and Equality debate, 22 May 2019, Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process: Discussion, Houses of the Oireachtas Website, Available at: [https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_justice\\_and\\_equality/2019-05-22/3/](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/2019-05-22/3/)
  - 30 Note: The State owns seven centres and none of them has provided independent cooking facilities. Source: Joint Committee on Justice and Equality debate, 22 May 2019, Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process: Discussion, Houses of the Oireachtas Website, Available at: [https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_justice\\_and\\_equality/2019-05-22/3/](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/2019-05-22/3/)

- 31 NASC and CCJHR, June 2018, *Conference Summary: 'Beyond McMahon – the future of asylum reception in Ireland'*, Nasc Website, Available at: <https://nascireland.org/sites/default/files/ConferenceSummaryBMM.pdf>
- 32 Government of Ireland, Draft national standards for National Standards for accommodation offered to people in the protection process, August 2018, Available at: [www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Draft\\_National\\_Standards\\_for\\_accommodation\\_centres.pdf/Files/Draft\\_National\\_Standards\\_for\\_accommodation\\_centres.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Draft_National_Standards_for_accommodation_centres.pdf/Files/Draft_National_Standards_for_accommodation_centres.pdf)
- 33 Department of Justice and Equality, August 2018, *Draft National Standards for Direct Provision Centres: Public Consultation*, Available at: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Draft\\_National\\_Standards\\_for\\_accommodation\\_centres.pdf/Files/Draft\\_National\\_Standards\\_for\\_accommodation\\_centres.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Draft_National_Standards_for_accommodation_centres.pdf/Files/Draft_National_Standards_for_accommodation_centres.pdf)
- 34 Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and coordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. The overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency working.
- 35 Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, *The Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future*, DOJE, Available at: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Migrant\\_Integration\\_Strategy\\_English.pdf/Files/Migrant\\_Integration\\_Strategy\\_English.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf/Files/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf)
- 36 Reception Officer: A suitably qualified and trained member of staff in each accommodation centre, whose main duties and responsibilities are to receive information arising from vulnerability assessments for each resident; to liaise with relevant services regarding the needs of the residents and to report to the appropriate authorities (RIA/HSE/An Garda Síochána) when a concern for a resident's health, wellbeing or safety arises within the centre. Source: Department of Justice and Equality, August 2018, *Draft National Standards for Direct Provision Centres: Public Consultation*, Available at: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Draft\\_National\\_Standards\\_for\\_accommodation\\_centres.pdf/Files/Draft\\_National\\_Standards\\_for\\_accommodation\\_centres.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Draft_National_Standards_for_accommodation_centres.pdf/Files/Draft_National_Standards_for_accommodation_centres.pdf)
- 37 Children's Rights Alliance, No Child 2020 Campaign Website: <http://www.nochild2020.com>
- 38 Henderson, N., 12 Feb 2019, *What are the alternatives to our broken direct provision system*, The Irish Times Online, Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/what-are-the-alternatives-to-our-broken-direct-provision-system-1.3790078>
- 39 NASC and CCJHR, June 2018, *Conference Summary: 'Beyond McMahon – the future of asylum reception in Ireland'*, Nasc Website, Available at: <https://nascireland.org/sites/default/files/ConferenceSummaryBMM.pdf>
- 40 Some insight around potential budgetary implications for a dedicated fund to provide children with access to activities can be gained through analysing the SSGT programme in two ways: a) Total SSGT grants provided, divided by number of children assisted: €320,000/2,500 = €128 minimum cost per child. This does not factor in the high number of free places that service providers in local areas frequently offer for children, once grantees connect with them. Thus, the true cost is likely higher. It also fails to factor in price range differences between the least expensive and most expensive activities that children engage in. b) Calculating the costs of the most popular activities that children select during a one-year period in order to estimate an average cost per child. For example, a typical grant for one child might include three terms of swimming lessons (€80 x 3) and one summer camp (€60), a cost of €300 per child per annum. However, some children engage in activities that have lower costs. The average annual GAA membership is approximately €50, and GAA Cúl camps have similar costs, so a child only interested in these activities would likely need a minimum of €150 per year. Thus, using this perspective it would be between €150 to €300 per child per year. Yet some children engage in activities that require slightly more funding. Conclusion: Looking at both A and B, SSGT believes ensuring a meaningful minimum level of access to activities would require at least €300 per child per year, in an attempt to factor in funds required to overcome key barriers such as transport; costs for equipment or clothing; better guarantee age-, gender-, and ability-appropriate activities; and consider administration and salary costs. Thus, if there are 2,000 children living in the Direct Provision system, this would cost the state €600,000 per year. However, further research and discussion is needed with children's rights organisations and relevant state bodies to determine optimum levels of access to activities for children's health and wellbeing, and how and where any funding mechanism will sit.
- 41 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, OHCHR Website, Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx> Article 3.1: In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
- 42 The SSGT position is that the responsibility for ensuring adequate transport provision and meaningful access to transport for residents is the dual responsibility of the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) and the owners of the Direct Provision centres to whom RIA awards the contracts for ensuring accommodation and services for people seeking international protection.





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