



# Strategic Context 2022- 2025



# Foreword from Chairperson & CEO

It is our pleasure to welcome you to our latest strategic plan, which outlines some of the exciting plans for Parenting NI for the next three years. Parenting NI has a long and successful history in responding to emerging needs of families and developing, maintaining and delivering services to support parents across Northern Ireland, helping them to thrive and improve the outcomes for their children and young people.

Parenting NI has evolved over the years; continuing to provide high quality and innovative ways in which to support parents and their children. Those in a parenting role are at the very centre of everything we do, and it is only by listening to parents and families, and responding to their needs, that we are able to develop our 2022-2025 strategic direction. By really engaging and involving parents in our development it gives us the knowledge and encouragement to continue to offer needs-based parent-led services. Our services will therefore continue to grow and diversify in response to the feedback from parents, increased demand and input from the many professionals and organisations with whom we work.

Parenting NI offers a wide range of services, which gives support to parents at different stages of family life by using different methods to meet the varied and individual needs of families. Our team of staff and volunteers work tirelessly to retain the knowledge and experiences to be able to authoritatively support parents and be able to provide services and solutions to support the wide range of circumstances presented to us.

This plan comes as we emerge from the dramatic effects of the pandemic, which has been a challenging time for everyone, not least of which the parents we support. It has however highlighted that the demand for our services remains undiminished as we respond to the changing needs of families, a trend likely to continue. This would not have been possible without our dedicated and motivated staff team who have adapted so quickly to changing circumstances and professionally finding innovative ways to continue the many services we provide for parents. We have made sure that what we have learned as a result of these challenging times has helped inform the development of this plan.

The themes and objectives outlined are what parents have told us would help them. We also have outlined how we will support and enable our staff team to continue to provide the high-quality professional services we have come to expect. There are however challenging financial times ahead and the plan also outlines how we intend to develop and safeguard the important services needed by parents based on the issues they are currently experiencing, and which have and will continue to be provided by Parenting NI.

This strategy signals our passion and commitment to making a positive difference to parents and families, and improving the quality of life of the people we serve. We look forward to working in partnership with you to achieve these benefits.



Charlene Brooks  
CEO



Suzanne Dunne  
Chairperson

# Strategic Context 2022- 2025

Parenting NI, initially called Parents Advice Centre, identified a need in 1979 to provide support to parents as there were little to no services available to them and pioneered a Regional Parents Helpline. The helpline went on to be delivered by hundreds of dedicated volunteers, supported by Parenting NI for almost 4 decades, supporting parents and families with a myriad of concerns and issues such as bedtime routines, toddler tantrums and parenting children's challenging behaviour. Now, 43 years later Parenting NI continues to be the lead charity focussed on parents across Northern Ireland, having diversified in response to parental need and the challenging external economic climate. Parenting NI has supported tens of thousands of parents, grandparents and others in a parenting role over the years.

**Parenting NI firmly believes that the best and most effective way to support children is by supporting those who parent them, and place great emphasis on engaging parents and listening to their needs so that they can adapt and tailor services that are appropriate and are delivered at a time and in a way that suits parents and their changing circumstances. The multi-skilled and agile Parenting NI team are experts in the field of parenting and family support and are trained to deliver a wide and diverse range of services and programmes to the highest standard.**

We know that in general parents think there is not enough support for parents and families, with 87% of parents<sup>1</sup> telling us this in a 2021 study of parents' experiences of parenting in Northern Ireland. If parents were aware of and able to access support services, they have said they wish in the main to have a combination of online and face-to-face<sup>2</sup> supports available. Parenting NI endeavours to be needs-led and adapts to suit the changing needs of parents and families. Parenting NI introduced the first local based webchat service for parents in January 2016 and went on to develop an innovative parent support App in June 2018, and subsequently developed the first Northern Ireland based Parenting Charity Podcast series, launched in January 2019. The Charity will remain committed to further development during the next strategic phase to further meet the changing needs of families.

When the COVID pandemic began in Northern Ireland in March 2020, parents faced an extremely challenging time with many support services being cut or reduced and schools being closed, leaving many parents responsible for juggling home learning as well as working themselves. In particular, parent mental health has suffered with 1 in 5 parents now telling us that they have a low level of emotional and mental health<sup>3</sup>, 32% of parents also indicated that the COVID pandemic has had a lot of negative impact on their emotional and mental health<sup>4</sup>. Arguably, poor mental health was already significant in Northern Ireland pre-COVID, as the region has the highest prevalence of mental health problems in the UK, with a 25% higher overall prevalence of mental health problems than England<sup>5</sup>. The legacy of the Troubles has exacerbated this with 39% of the population in Northern Ireland having reported experiencing a traumatic event relating to the Troubles<sup>6</sup>. It is evident therefore that mental health and wellbeing of parents needs to be prioritised.

<sup>1</sup> Big Parenting Survey

<sup>2</sup> Big Parenting Survey

<sup>3</sup> Big Parenting Survey

<sup>4</sup> Big Parenting Survey

<sup>5</sup> Mental Health Strategy

<sup>6</sup> Mental Health Strategy



Parenting NI recognises that having a father involved in their child's life is good for their mental health beyond providing potential coverage for any maternal mental ill-health affects<sup>7</sup>. There was a link between fathers who felt confident in their parenthood and lower levels of anti-social or disruptive behaviour in their teenage children<sup>8</sup>. Despite this, in one out of eight divorces a father will have no contact with his children after they separate from their partner<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, separated and divorced fathers are in need of specific support. This is further exemplified by the fact that divorce has been identified as a key risk factor for suicide with separated men being nearly 10 times more likely to take their own lives than separated women<sup>10</sup>. Parenting NI developed the 'Dads Project' in 2017 in response to the unmet need of separated fathers in Northern Ireland who are often marginalised, the Dads Talk model has proved to be instrumental in reducing isolation and improving the mental and emotional wellbeing of fathers.

Parenting NI also recognises that teenagers and their parents need specific support. Parents have told us that the COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on their teenager's wellbeing from an average of 8 out of 10 pre-COVID to an average of 5 out of 10.<sup>11</sup> This is an area of support we have identified where the need is growing.

**Parenting NI are the first Northern Ireland based charity to have developed a home-grown, evidence-based programme for parents of teenagers – Odyssey Parenting Your Teen. This programme continues to, over 10 years since its inception, have a long and marked positive impact on parents, their teenagers and the wider family circle.**

We understand that parenting can be challenging at times for all parents, but in many recent studies more and more parents have highlighted the additional challenges that are experienced when parenting children with additional needs. Further information from the NI Audit Office report and a report from the Irish News about statistics given to the Health Committee indicate that 85% of Statutory Assessments (Statements) were issued outside the 26-week statutory timeframe in 2019-20<sup>12</sup> meaning that many parents are left in the abyss of not knowing what to do whilst they await the outcome of an assessment.

Further statistics regarding waiting lists are stark, with 5,000 children with suspected autism on waiting lists to be assessed in Northern Ireland. A total of 180 children in the Southern Trust will wait less than 13 weeks to be seen by a specialist, while there is a 10-week wait for a first appointment in the South Eastern Trust, where 63 patients face delays. The Northern Trust has the biggest backlog, with 1,883 children on waiting lists – which Trust officials partly attributed to it having the highest school age population. The longest delay is 490 days. In Belfast, there are 1,714 children waiting for autism assessments, with the longest wait at 846 days. The Western Trust confirmed it has 1,099 children waiting on appointments, with the longest wait at 720 days<sup>13</sup>.

Parenting NI, informed by Parents and the challenges that have been highlighted, plans to spearhead a number of key interventions and supports over the next 3-year period, 2022- 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Opndo et al. 2016 in Role of Fathers Report PNI. <sup>8</sup>(Sarkadi et al. 2007) in Role of Fathers Report PNI.  
<sup>9</sup> Separated fathers: Fathers, Separation and Co-Parenting – Man Matters project – Page 9  
<sup>10</sup> Kposowa, A. J. (2003). Divorce and suicide risk. Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 57 (12): 993.  
<sup>11</sup> Emotional and Wellbeing Survey 2020  
<sup>12</sup> [https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/sites/niao/files/media-files/242135%20NIAO%20Special%20Education%20Needs\\_Fnl%20Lw%20Rs%20%28complete%29.pdf](https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/sites/niao/files/media-files/242135%20NIAO%20Special%20Education%20Needs_Fnl%20Lw%20Rs%20%28complete%29.pdf)  
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.irishnews.com/news/healthcarenews/2021/04/19/news/-desperate-parents-opting-to-pay-up-to-1-400-for-private-autism-assessments-2293075/>



Northern Ireland has a 25% higher overall prevalence of mental health problems than England

5,000+ children with suspected autism currently on waiting lists in Northern Ireland

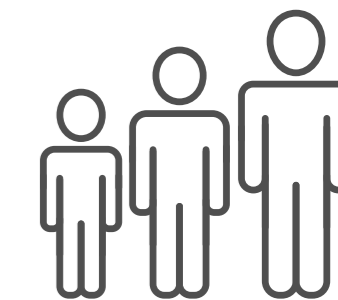


**87%**

of parents in Northern Ireland think there is not enough support for parents

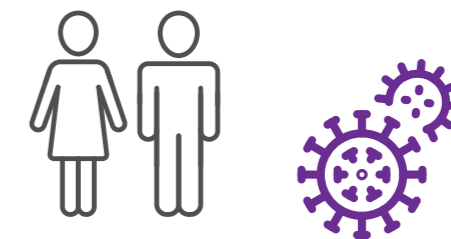


Divorce / Separation has been identified as a key risk factor for suicide with separated men being nearly 10 times more likely to take their own lives than separated women.



**32%**

of parents indicated that the COVID pandemic has had a lot of negative impact on their emotional and mental health



The COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on teenagers' wellbeing from an average of 8 out of 10 pre-COVID to an average of 5 out of 10



1 in 5 parents tell us that they had a low level of emotional and mental health

In at least 1 in 8 divorces, fathers will have no contact with their children after they separate from their partner



## Headline Statistics



# Vision, Mission & Values of Parenting NI

**Vision** – Our vision is of a society where parenting is valued, parents’ voices are heard and where every family is given the support they need.

**Mission** – Parenting NI work with and for parents and families. Our mission is to ensure parents have access to timely support and information to guide them through their parenting journey.

**Professional**

We will work together as a team to apply principles of excellence, compassion, communication and accountability, and by working together with other professionals aim to achieve optimal support for all parents.

**Accessible**

We will strive to deliver responsive and accessible parenting support and services across the region.

**Respectful**

We will show consideration for one another and recognise and respect each other’s differences.

**Equality**

We will ensure all parents have an equal right to access our support and services.

**Needs led**

Every parent has the right to a voice. We will listen to what parents need and develop services to meet those needs.

**Trustworthy**

We will be open and honest in everything we do.



# Strategic Priorities



Priority 1:  
**PARENTS & FAMILIES**

**1.1**  
Provide a range of information and support via a range of proven projects and services to meet the individual needs of parents and families.

**1.2**  
Provide access to parent support services across a range of settings including schools and community groups.

Priority 2:  
**EMPLOYERS**

**2.1**  
Employers from a range of sectors (including corporate, private, public and third) are encouraged to support wellbeing of employees via access to a 24/7 parenting portal.

**2.2**  
Parent employees are supported in their parenting roles with ongoing access to high quality and evidence-informed resources and seminars.

Priority 3:  
**PRACTITIONERS/ PROFESSIONALS**

**3.1**  
Practitioners (or those) who work with families have increased knowledge and skills to support those in a parenting role.

**3.2**  
Practitioners and organisations have access to a range of quality-assured accredited and non-accredited training to ensure their workforce have the necessary skills and information to engage parents.

Priority 3:  
**POLICY MAKERS/ COMMISSIONERS**

**4.1**  
Parenting NI will work to ensure parents are engaged and parents’ voices are heard; to influence government policy, planning and service delivery.

**4.2**  
Carry out research to understand more about the realities of parenting in Northern Ireland and ensure parents and families’ needs are reflected in all levels of policy making.

Priority 5:  
**OUR PEOPLE**

**5.1**  
Parenting NI is an effective, resilient and sustainable organisation that will focus on employee wellbeing, invest in continuous improvement and progress innovation across all levels of the organisation.

# How we will achieve our Goals



## PARENTS & FAMILIES

### EMPOWERING PARENTS

Provide information, support and guidance for parents and families, focusing on 6 main areas:

#### Positive Parenting / Children's Behaviour

Information and Support Line and Webchat; Families Together Project; Home Visiting; Online Resources; Parenting Children's Challenging Behaviour Programme; Walking on Eggshells Programme; Keeping Your Cool Programme; New to Parenting Programme; Workshops including STOP.

#### Engaging and supporting Separated /Parents Parenting Alone/Single Parents

Information and Support Line and Webchat; Solus Project – Peer support- 'ParentTalk' and Top Tips sessions; Online Resources, Parenting Apart Programme; New to Parenting Programme; Workshops, opportunity to engage in ground-breaking research and shape future support for separated/ single parents in Northern Ireland

#### Valuing Dads

Information and Support Line and Webchat; Dads Talk; Fathers and Families Programme; Keeping Your Cool Programme; Parenting Apart Programme; Workshops; New to Parenting Programme.

#### Parenting Teens

Information and Support Line and Webchat; Evidence-based Odyssey Parenting Your Teen Programme; Online Resources; Workshops. Stand Alone Research Developed; Workshops on Teenage Brain Development and Sleep

#### Supporting Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

Information and Support Line and Webchat; Positive Minds for Premature Parents; Families Together Project; Home visiting; Sink or Swim Programme; STAR Programme, Workshops.

#### Children with additional needs

Information and Support line and Webchat; Supportive Parenting Children's Challenging Behaviour Programme; STAR Programme.

## EMPLOYERS

### INVESTING IN PARENT/CARER EMPLOYEES

Parenting Family 24/7 access via a dedicated online portal to a range of evidence-informed resources (Videos, Podcasts, Articles, Blogs, Top Tips, Webinars) on key areas affecting parents such as:

1. Behaviour
2. Emotions
3. Online Safety
4. Bullying
5. Separation
6. School

#### Workplace Wellbeing

Working with employers to offer direct support for parent / carer employees on a range of issue-based and relevant topics, enabling them to thrive at home and therefore also at work

#### Training for employers

Help employers support parent employees, accelerate a culture change or equip managers with the right mind set Parenting NI's future plans include the provision of bespoke training for People Managers, to support challenging conversations and provide practical and impactful solutions to support working parents.

#### Corporate Fundraising

Seek charity partnerships which will allow employers to meet their key performance indicators and achieve corporate and social responsibility goals. We'll work with employers to devise an extensive programme of fundraising events and involvement opportunities that will boost their staff morale, encourage team building, create positive PR opportunities and show an employer's commitment to supporting parents across Northern Ireland.

#### Partnerships

Seek partnerships with employers to engage employees and customers in a unique way or strengthen brand awareness and purpose, Parenting NI will work with employers to ensure their partnership with us achieves shared value and impact and is mutually beneficial.

## PRACTITIONERS/ PROFESSIONALS

### EXPERT LED – TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS

#### Building Capacity, Knowledge and Skills

Supporting practitioners (or those) who work with families in engaging parents to encourage more effective parenting through:

#### Accredited training including

- OCN Level 4 award in Working with Parents
- OCN Level 2 award in Awareness of Mental Health and Wellbeing
- OCN Level 2 Certificate in Healthy Living
- OCN Level 1 award in Parenting Skills

#### DadStart Training

Training for practitioners that will enable their ongoing work with dads to be enhanced or support the implementation of this vital work in organisations

#### Workshops

Including Engaging Parents, Motivating Parents, Handling Difficult Conversations, Engaging Dads, Impact of Loss, Promoting Resilience, Supporting Children's Emotional and Social Wellbeing; Promoting Children's Positive Behaviour, Trauma Training.

#### Train the Trainer

Including Odyssey Parenting Your Teen (outside Northern Ireland only); Building Children's Resilience, Digital Parenting, The Power of the Parent Child Relationship, Stepping into School.

#### Seminars with expert speakers/ panellists.

Information and Support Line and Webchat provides practitioners with information on services available for parents and families and enables them to signpost to support services accordingly.

## POLICY MAKERS

### ENGAGING AND LISTENING TO PARENTS AND CARERS

#### Parental Engagement and Consultation

Effectively engaging parents and carers to fully understand the issues affecting them in their parenting role and ensuring these voices are heard at all levels.

#### Research

Developing an informed evidence base on parenting issues through effective engagement with parents and partners in academia.

#### Parenting Week

Parenting NI, supported by a Parents Reference Group consider it important to promote Parenting Week to recognise the important role parents have to play in children's lives and highlight the amazing job they do every day.

#### Putting Parents in the Picture

Parenting NI calls upon local councillors and council candidates to commit to "Putting Parents in the Picture" to demonstrate their commitment to supporting parents in their area.

#### Policy Development

Ensuring parents' voices and needs are represented and reflected in key policy areas which impact on them and their families.



# Impacts of our Work



## PARENTS & FAMILIES

Parents feel supported, empowered and less stressed in their parenting role, ultimately improving outcomes for them and their children.

## EMPLOYERS

**Employees** - Parent employees feel supported and less stressed in their parenting role

Working Fathers feel enabled to access support, advice and guidance in their ongoing relationship with their children which will include how they support, guide and be available for their children if they are not actively involved in their lives.

**Employers** could benefit from

- Improved and maintained employee morale, motivation and productivity.
- A strong employee value proposition.
- Improved employee loyalty
- Reduced turnover
- Ability to attract and retain top talent

Working parents feel invested in and better able to manage a positive work-life balance.

## PRACTITIONERS/ PROFESSIONALS

More skilled and trained practitioners across all sectors with greater understanding of the importance of engaging fathers/ mothers / anyone in a caring role and have increased capacity to support parents and thus improve outcomes for children.

## POLICY MAKERS

The needs and issues facing parents is fully understood and evidenced.

The voice of parents helps shape better policy leading to better long-term outcomes for parents and families.





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