

Quality Report

2024



AshdaleCare
Ireland

A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a green sweater, is seen from behind, looking out over a field of tall, dry grass. The sky is blue with a pattern of white dots in the upper left corner.

Rebuilding Lives - **Transforming Residential Care**



Contents

Foreword from our Chairman	04
A Message from our CEO	06
A Year in Review	10
The Leadership Team	13
Map of Services	17
Our Values	20
Operations	22
The Therapeutic Support Team	38
Quality & Safety Improvements	44
Leadership Academy	50
Human Resources	54
Environment, Social & Governance	62





Foreword from our Chairman

I am pleased to present the Ashdale Care Annual Quality Report, a reflection of our commitment to delivering exceptional care and support to the children and young people we serve. This report highlights our dedication to maintaining the highest standards of quality, safety, and well-being across all our services.

The past year has been marked by both challenges and achievements. Through the dedication of our compassionate staff and the support of our partners, we have continued to grow and improve, ensuring that every individual receives person-centered care tailored to their unique needs. Our focus remains on empowering those we support, promoting independence, and enhancing quality of life. I'm delighted to welcome Jim Breslin as a non executive director to the board. Jim brings over three decades of public experience to the role and brings invaluable experience to the Board of Ashdale Care.

Throughout this report, you will find insights into our quality initiatives, including improvements in service delivery, staff development programs, and our ongoing efforts to listen and respond to feedback. We are proud of the progress made and are committed to furthering our mission of providing outstanding care and reaching as many children and young people in Ireland.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated employees, whose unwavering commitment and resilience have been instrumental in achieving our goals. I would also like to thank the individuals and families who trust us with the care of their children and young people and who continuously inspire us to do better.

As we look ahead, we remain steadfast in our pursuit of excellence, striving to innovate and adapt in an ever-evolving landscape. We are confident that with the collective efforts of our team and partners, Ashdale Care will continue to make a positive difference in the lives of those we serve.

Thank you for taking the time to read our Annual Quality Report. We value your feedback and look forward to continuing our journey toward excellence together.

Paul Reid - Chairman





A Message from our CEO

As we reflect on the past year, it is with great pride that I present the achievements and milestones of Ashdale Care in this, our third Annual Quality Report. Our continued commitment to providing exceptional care, expanding our offering of regulated services across the country, and enhancing organisational cohesion has been unwavering. Despite the challenges faced, we have continued to evolve, ensuring that we invest in quality initiatives and processes across all our services, and our mission of supporting more children in Ireland remains central to our strategy.

Exceptional Regulatory Performance

One of our most significant achievements this year has been our exceptional regulatory performance. We successfully registered all homes without conditions, reaffirming our dedication to maintaining the highest standards in care. Our homes received excellent feedback from inspections, many of which were unannounced, reflecting the consistency and quality of care we provide. The robust internal compliance audits and self-assessments conducted across all our homes have further ensured that the quality of care is accurately reflected in our records, allowing for complete transparency and accountability. These efforts are vital as we continue to prioritise the safety and well-being of all the children and young people in our care.

Meeting Increased Demand

As demand for regulated, high-quality placements continues to grow, we have taken significant

steps to expand our capacity. In response to the increasing need for placements from Tusla, we opened seven new homes. This expansion included reaching new geographical areas to meet the evolving needs of the communities we serve. Looking ahead, we are already developing additional property pipelines for 2025 to further increase our capacity. In October 2024, we completed a new Tusla Tender application for Enhanced Services, positioning ourselves to continue offering exceptional care to the most vulnerable children into the future.

New Services for Vulnerable Populations

Our work with vulnerable populations has remained a cornerstone of our mission. This year, we held extensive discussions with Tusla and ACIMS to develop specialised services for unaccompanied minors, aged 16 and 17, who are fleeing war and seeking refuge in Ireland. In response to these urgent needs, we have designed



In response to the increasing need for placements from Tusla, we opened seven new homes...

placements that not only address their immediate care and protection requirements but also ensure their integration into essential state services such as health and education. Each of these homes accommodates young people of varying nationalities providing a safe and supportive environment while also offering unique staffing opportunities, tapping into a broader labour market to meet the growing needs for regulated residential services for this vulnerable group.

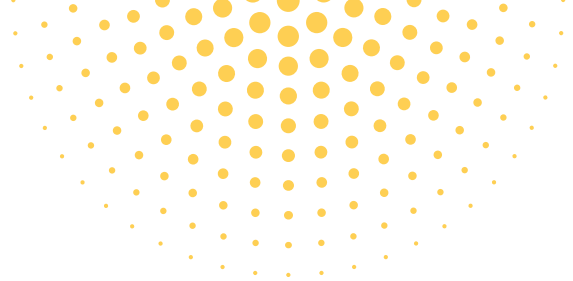
Welcoming New Staff

A key factor in our continued success has been the addition of many talented and dedicated individuals across our homes and support departments. This year, we welcomed a significant number of new staff members who have brought a wealth of experience and fresh perspectives to our organisation. Their commitment to our mission and values has already made a positive impact, enhancing the care we provide and supporting our

expansion efforts. We are excited to see how our new team members will help us continue to grow, innovate, and deliver exceptional services to the individuals and communities we serve.

Challenging Labour Market

As we continue to expand and meet the increasing demand for our services, we have also faced challenges within the labour market. The regulatory requirements in our sector necessitate specific qualifications, particularly in social care and social work, both of which are in high demand. The scarcity of qualified professionals in these fields has made recruitment increasingly competitive. We believe that to deliver significant increased regulated capacity, the sector requires equivalent interpretation of Regulations regarding staffing with children's disability services. We also need more certainty around a sustainable funding model into the future. We are currently in active discussions with Tusla on both these issues.



By bringing our teams together in one centralised location, we've fostered an environment where creativity and teamwork flourish, enabling us to continually improve and adapt to the needs of those we serve.

Despite these challenges, we have worked tirelessly to attract, retain, and develop a skilled workforce. Our commitment to supporting and training our staff has allowed us to meet regulatory standards while providing high-quality care. We continue to prioritise the recruitment of qualified professionals and are exploring innovative ways to address staffing challenges, ensuring that our services remain at the highest standards.

Winning the Best Managed Company Award

A significant highlight of the past year was winning the prestigious internationally recognised Best Managed Company Award from Deloitte. This achievement recognises the strength of our organisation across four key strategic pillars: leadership, strategy, capability, and financial performance. The award is a testament to the exceptional work of our entire team and the unwavering dedication to excellence in every aspect of our operations. It is a reflection of the successful execution of our strategic vision and our continued commitment to improving the quality of care and services we provide. We are incredibly proud of this achievement and view it as an endorsement of our collective efforts to create lasting, positive change in the lives of those we serve.

Exciting Development of Our Leadership Academy

This year also marked the creation of Ashdale Care's Leadership Academy, where we have designed a bespoke leadership programme aimed at nurturing both current and future leaders within our organisation. The programme focuses on building the skills and capabilities required to drive innovation, excellence, and sustainable growth across all areas of our operations. By investing in our leadership development, we are not only empowering individuals within the organisation, we are also ensuring that we continue to meet the evolving needs of the people and communities we serve. This initiative is a crucial part of our long-term strategy and commitment to fostering a high-performance culture, capable of meeting future challenges with confidence and adaptability.

Enhancing Organisational Cohesion

Behind every success story and milestone achieved is the dedication and collaboration of our incredible team. To further enhance our organisational cohesion, we consolidated all support departments and training facilities at The Ridge. This strategic move has fostered greater collaboration and innovation across the organisation, allowing us to streamline our operations and provide even more effective services. By bringing our teams together



in one centralised location, we've fostered an environment where creativity and teamwork flourish, enabling us to continually improve and adapt to the needs of those we serve.

Quality & Safety Improvements

A key challenge in our sector is the impact of violence and aggression, often resulting in staff injury and injury leave, and can destabilise the team and ultimately the child's placement.

In 2019, we at Ashdale Care took a decision to put significant investment into the implementation of the CARE (Children and Residential Experiences) Model devised by Cornell University which empirically evidenced the reduction of violence and aggression in children's residential care settings over time across its Community of Practice worldwide.

We believe that CARE equips staff working with children in residential care with the understanding and skills necessary to achieve positive outcomes for children. It is now the cornerstone of our model of care, with every member of staff undertaking this comprehensive training from our in-house Training and Development Team. CARE is now fully embedded in Ashdale, and we hope to get CARE Fidelity in 2025 with Cornell representatives travelling over to assess us later this year.

We have gathered rich data over the past 5 years since the rollout of CARE began and our team has analysed this data which demonstrates some outstanding results.

Looking Ahead

As we move into the next year, we remain committed to driving excellence in everything we do. Our growth, both in capacity and service offerings, reflects our ongoing dedication to providing the highest quality of care to vulnerable individuals. We are confident that our continued investments in people, infrastructure and services will position us to meet the challenges of the future while maintaining the values that have guided us to this point.

In closing, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated staff, partners, and stakeholders for their ongoing support and commitment. Together, we will continue to make a lasting, positive impact on the lives of those we serve.

Caroline Gray - CEO



A Year in Review

Our Accomplishments



Exceptional Regulatory Performance



All homes successfully registered without conditions, reflecting our unwavering commitment to maintaining the highest standards in care. Excellent feedback from inspections, many of which were unannounced.



Robust Internal Compliance Audits and Self-Audits across all homes ensures that the quality of care is accurately reflected in our records.



Meeting Increased Demand



We expanded capacity across several homes to address the growing need for regulated, high-quality placements from Tusla.



Opened 7 new homes. Expanded into new geographical areas to meet growing demands; developing further property pipelines for 2025.



Completed new Tusla Tender application for Enhanced Services in October 2024.



New Services for Vulnerable Populations



Held extensive discussions with Tusla and ACIMS to develop services for unaccompanied minors, aged 16 and 17, fleeing war and seeking refuge in Ireland.



Designed placements to address immediate care and protection needs, integrating these young people into state services such as health and education. These homes, each accommodating up to six young people, present unique staffing opportunities by tapping into a broader labour market.



Enhancing Organisational Cohesion



Consolidated all support departments and training facilities at The Ridge, fostering collaboration and innovation.



Therapeutic Support Team Achievements



Expansion to the team with 2 additional occupational therapists and 2 behaviour therapists



Presented at the Unity Conference



Fostered relationships with International providers



Quality & Training Initiatives



Published our second annual Quality Report in March, highlighting our enhanced and high-quality services.



Launched the Ashdale Leadership Academy, for our leaders and future leaders.



Operational Enhancements



In March, we celebrated the official opening of our headquarters and National Training Centre at The Ridge, marking a new chapter in our growth.



We transitioned to the TMS system data for payroll, a significant step forward in efficiency and accuracy.



Engaging Our Team



Introduced our first Employee Engagement Survey using Culture Amp, gaining valuable insights to further improve our workplace culture.



We reached 72% participation. The feedback will help us understand how we can make Ashdale Care a stronger company and a great place to work.



Best Managed Company



In September 2024 we were honoured to achieve an award as one of Ireland's Best Managed Companies in 2024. This prestigious global recognition, sponsored by Deloitte, highlights Ashdale's dedication to excellence across four critical categories: Strategy, Culture and Commitment, Capabilities and Innovation, and Governance and Financials.

When Ashdale Care began, we were a small organisation with a tight-knit, family-like culture. Over recent years, we have evolved into a community of care with strong organisational values which guides our culture to ensure the best possible outcomes for the children we care for. Today, we successfully integrate these values with a systems-driven approach that emphasises quality and consistency of care across all our homes and various service types. Our journey has not only shaped our operations but also reinforced our mission: to reach as many children in Ireland who need our services.

This achievement is not merely a recognition of our past efforts but a motivation for our future. It's a reminder that we are on the right path and that our collective hard work and dedication truly make a difference. As we look ahead, we will harness this momentum to further enhance our services and strengthen our impact as Ireland's leading provider of trauma informed residential care for young people. Thanks to all the staff within our organisation, we are making Ashdale Care a beacon of excellence, now recognised on the global stage!





The Leadership Team

The Leadership Team serves as an exemplary model within our industry, setting the standard for responsible leadership through ethical practices and transparency in operations.



Caroline Gray
CEO



Kerry Gildernew
Director of Governance,
Quality & Training



Tara O'Byrne
Director of Operations



Dr Ronan Gibney
Director of Psychology &
Therapeutic Services



Phil Scott
Chief Financial Officer

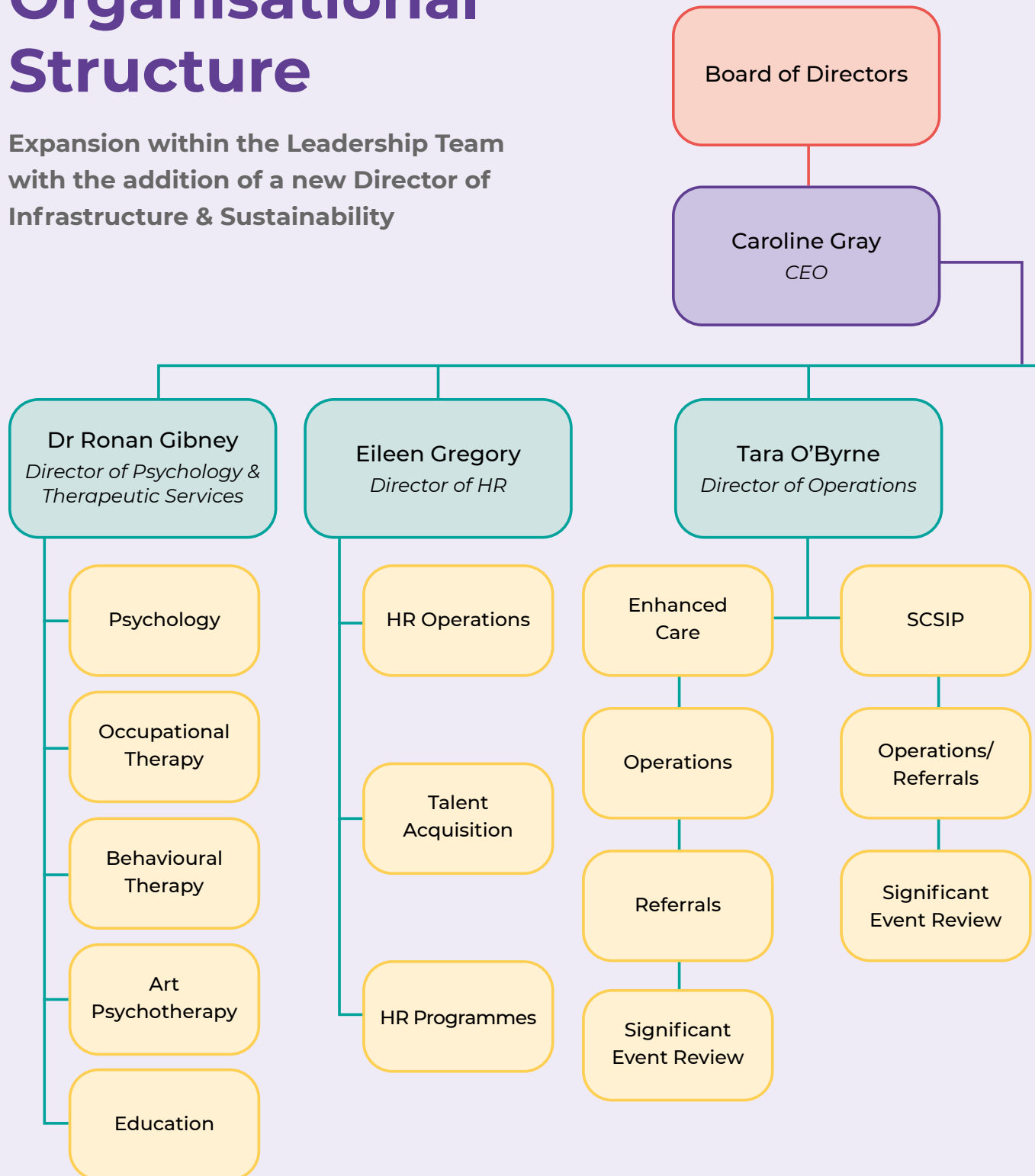


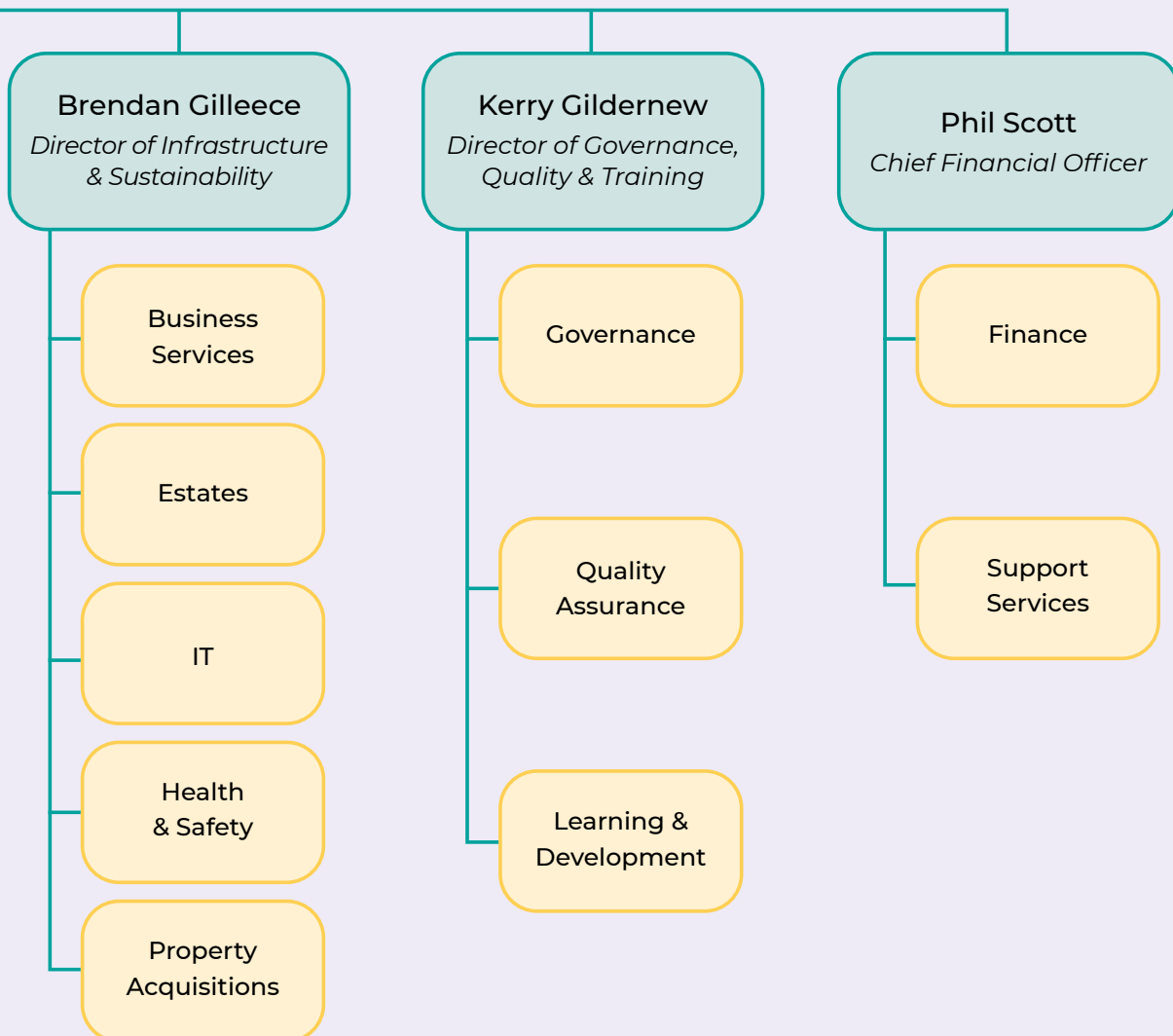
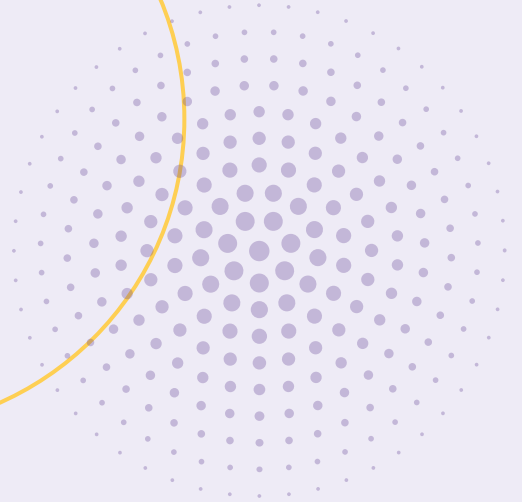
Eileen Gregory
HR Director



Organisational Structure

Expansion within the Leadership Team with the addition of a new Director of Infrastructure & Sustainability







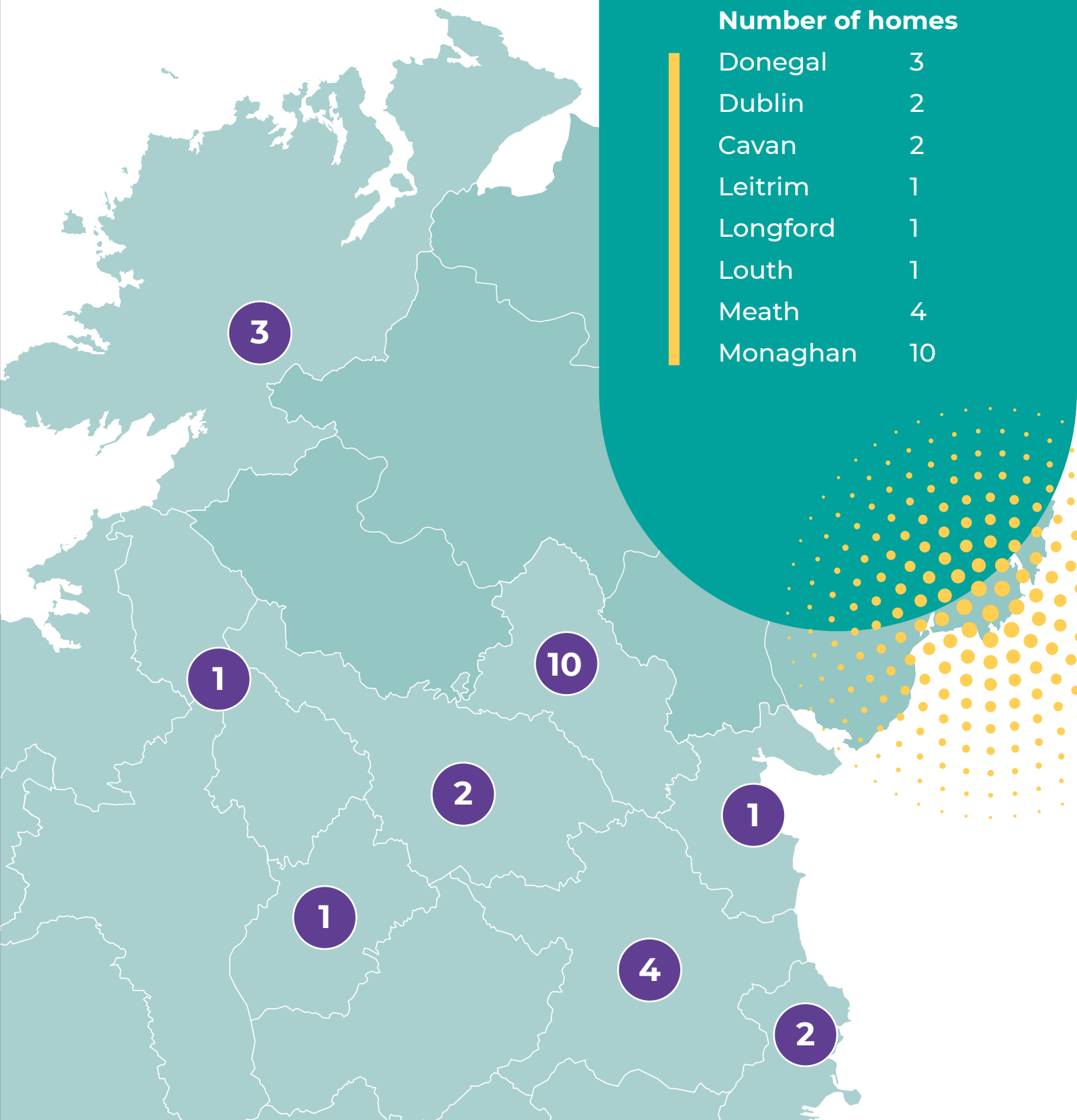
The quality of care was 'exemplary' and wished all their young people were afforded the care this young person was provided.

SOCIAL WORKER





Map of Services



Official Opening of The Ridge

On Friday 22nd of March 2024, Ashdale Care reached a significant milestone in its journey towards extending the provision of enhanced therapeutic residential care for children and young people in Ireland. The occasion was marked with an official opening ceremony, performed by Minister for Social Protection, Community and Rural Development, Heather Humphreys.

Minister Heather Humphreys spoke at the opening ceremony, saying "I am delighted to be here today to officially launch such a wonderful facility here in Monaghan which is doing such important work. The opening of this new centre by Ashdale Care shows their commitment to constantly developing skills and supports to offer best practice care to those they are supporting. Our young people deserve every chance to live their most fulfilled lives and facilities such as this ensure that those taking care of them are operating to the highest standards and providing best in class care."

At its core, the new centre stands for more than just a physical space. It embodies the culture of learning, growth and compassion that we have worked so hard to cultivate and maintain at Ashdale.

Led by our experienced professionals, the National Training Centre will be a centre of excellence in learning and development, providing our team with access to fantastic resources and educational



Mark Yalloway, National Director Children's Residential Services (Interim), with members of the Leadership Team

opportunities. It serves as a place to bring together all of our support services, to ensure consistency and efficiency in the support we provide to our dedicated teams across all of our homes. By investing in the development of our team, we are able to continue to deliver compassionate, child-centric care that makes a positive impact on the lives of those who need it the most.



Caroline Gray, CEO with Minister Heather Humphreys, TD



The Leadership team with political representatives



Operations Team



Staff from Oghill House



Members of the Leadership team with Dr Edwina Dunne

*Paula Kane, Founder &
Non Executive Director,
Councillor Aidan Campbell,
Minister Heather Humphreys, TD,
Caroline Gray, CEO,
Mark Yalloway, Tusla,
Minister Niamh Smyth, TD*





Our Values





Child Friendly Values



RESPECT

We promise to make a place where everyone feels like friends and treats each other with kindness and respect.

HONESTY

We promise to make a safe and friendly space where we always support each other and talk openly and honestly.



TEAMWORK

We promise to always help each other, do our best and work together as a team.

GETTING BETTER

We promise we will keep trying to make things better all the time.





Operations



Complaints

At Ashdale Care, we are dedicated to continuous improvement and ensuring the highest standards of care for those we serve. Our comprehensive complaints policy is designed to address any concerns promptly and effectively. We centrally monitor all complaints to ensure they are handled in accordance with our policy, and we actively seek feedback from individuals to ensure their satisfaction with the resolution.



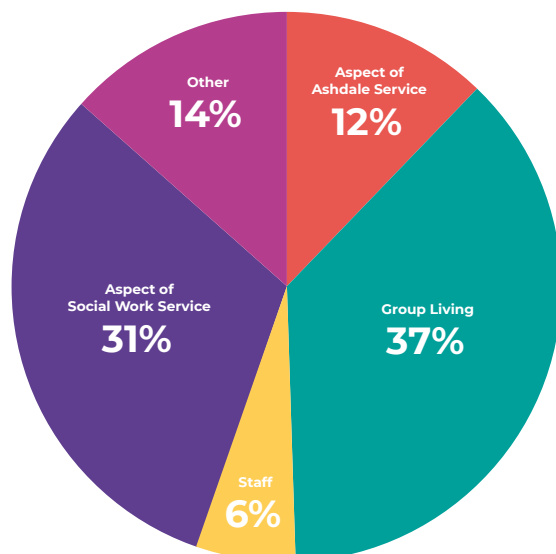
Our commitment to transparency and accountability is reflected in our appeals process, which is available to those who may not be fully satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. We categorise complaints into specific areas, including Aspect of Ashdale Service, Group living, Staff, Aspect of Social Work Service, and Other, to ensure a thorough and targeted response.



To ensure a collaborative and transparent approach, findings from all categories are shared with Home Management and Regional Teams. Weekly oversight findings are reported to the Leadership Team through weekly governance reports. This process ensures that all complaints are systematically managed and monitored, promoting timely resolution and continuous improvement through collaborative efforts and sound governance practices.



We are proud to announce that our efforts have been recognised, as we have achieved full compliance in this area under regulation during inspections by ACIMS. We continue to strive and prioritise the well-being and satisfaction of those in our care, and we remain dedicated to providing a safe and supportive environment for all.



Compliments

In 2023, we introduced a system to process and maintain a log of compliments received. We acknowledge that keeping a log of compliments is beneficial for many reasons.

What we have identified is that positive feedback helps boost morale and motivation among our employees as it acknowledges their efforts and positive impact on young people's lives.

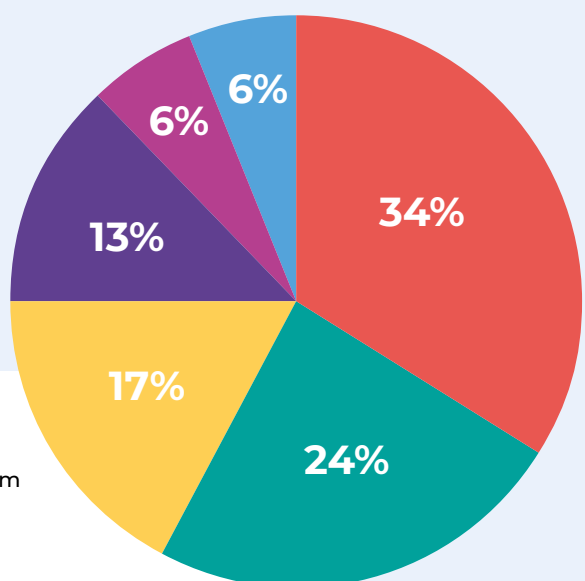
Tracking compliments helps us assess the quality of service provided and identify areas of strength and improvement for individual homes or the overall service.

Compliments often contain valuable insights into what our stakeholders appreciate about the service, which can be used to enhance stakeholder satisfaction and allows us to tailor service delivery to meet their needs.

Reviewing compliments allows us to learn and understand what behaviours or actions lead to positive feedback and allow us to replicate them in future interactions throughout the organisation.

We continue to strive to foster a culture of excellence, improve young people's experience and drive continuous improvement in service delivery.

The graph shows a breakdown of compliments received in 2024:





The compliments we have received consistently highlight the high level of care provided within Ashdale Care, and they serve as a testament to the hard work and dedication of our teams.

An external specialist service with whom we work in partnership with stated that the young person “... **sounds like she feels safe and secure in her current placement**”.

Recently, one of the social workers commented that the work completed in one of the homes was “**evidence he (young person) is in a safe place to disclose. The work with him is phenomenal**”.

These compliments not only recognise the dedication of our staff but also emphasise the significant impact they have on the lives of the young people we care for. They serve as a valuable reminder of the importance of our mission and inspire us to maintain our commitment to delivering outstanding care and support.

The total integration of the Ashdale MDT clinical team/ framework. The Ashdale MDT are very present and integrated into the care team.

- Guardian Ad Litem

The home is always tidy and child friendly there are toys about the place for the younger children and all young people observed to be very comfortable.

- Social Worker

The staff are doing a fantastic job with my child, and I am extremely happy with the care he is receiving.

- Guardian Ad Litem





Annual Feedback from Surveys 2024

Ashdale Care distributed survey feedback forms to all young people residing within the organisation, as well as to social workers, Guardian Ad Litems, parents and carers (where it was appropriate to do so). Young people were supported by their keyworkers to complete their forms and were able to follow up immediately on any issues raised.

The data and feedback collected will be utilised to inform and enhance service delivery by incorporating the perspectives of the young individuals who engage with Ashdale Care services. This methodology enables the organisation to become more people-centred, responsive, and effective.





Young People's Voice

Given the differences in ages, two separate surveys were sent out to our young people: 11 years and under and 12-18 years.

SURVEY FINDINGS

11 Years & Under

100% of responses were returned

- 100% of young people agreed that their views and worries were taken seriously and that the staff knew how to support and help them.
- All 10 young people agreed they were helped by staff to understand what was expected of them while they are at the home.
- 90% of young people felt they had someone to talk to if they were having problems and felt they were well looked after.
- They also felt that the people who looked after them listened to them and were well treated by staff.
- In fact, all ten young people would like their friend to come live in Ashdale if they needed residential support even if one declared that they did not want any of their friends in care!
- Of the things that needed improvement, our younger people listed the 'removal of rules', a 'new trampoline', and 'Nothing'.
- 30% of young people would like to make changes within their bedrooms.

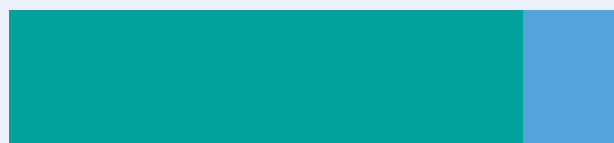
"You guys are my favourite things."

"The support I get is the best help. They care about me."

"That I am always loved and I get loads of love from every staff."

Do you have someone to talk to if you have any problems?

☒ YES
 ☐ NO
 ☐ DON'T KNOW



SURVEY FINDINGS

12-18 Years

100% of young people between the ages of 12 and 18 responded

95%

of the young people agreed that they were well looked after and 90% felt they were treated well by the people who look after them.

84%

felt they have someone to talk to if they are having problems.

71%

agreed it is easy to talk to the people who look after them and that their views and worries are taken seriously.

73%

of the young people would like their friends to come to Ashdale Care if they required this type of support.

79%

felt that the home was nurturing and welcoming and 82% were happy with their bedroom and were able to personalise it.

88%

of young people had a good understanding of the supports available to them.

65%

felt involved in decisions about their life and felt that they were listened to.



30% of the young people asked did not know if they felt listened to whilst
14% did not feel listened to at all.

20% of young people did not feel as though they were involved in decisions around their life.

This is an area which needs to be explored in order to ensure that the young person's voice is heard and valued, and that management of risk does not prevent the young person being able to fully exercise their rights.

What is good about your care? What do you like about being here?

"The people are nice. Pocket money and quality of life."

"I appreciate the effort and care I received here. Everyone is so wonderful and loving."

"Bedroom, phone, staff. As I get older I am getting more freedom. Its good fun and good craic in the house."

"I love everything about this care and my home. To cut a long story short Clancy House is the best."

"I chose my goals and I receive help with them, and we have a big house, that's also good."

"Everyone is so supportive and listen to what I say without judgement."

SURVEY FINDINGS

12-18 Years

Is there anything you didn't like or that needs improving? What would you change?

"My social worker - I don't feel listened to. More stuff to do - more activities."

"At first I didn't like where this house was located but there's nothing I can do about it so I'm grand."

"Staff miscommunicate with each other and sometimes with young people also."

"The kids living here, home too far from town."

INFORMATION
FOR YOUNG
PEOPLE.

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Social Work Feedback

We received feedback from 22 Social Workers and 5 Guardian Ad Litem

In terms of meeting the needs of the young person as per most recent Care Plan, 50% of the professionals stated that Ashdale Care met expectations.

50% believed that Ashdale care exceeded expectations. Similarly, it was felt that Ashdale Care met or exceeded expectations in terms of meeting all statutory duties including reports, attendance at and contribution to reviews, etc.

In terms of areas of improvements, Social Workers were overall happy with the service and noted that there was good communication and one suggestion of opening aftercare services. One theme involved the input from the Therapeutic team and a request of more direct input from earlier on in the placement and/or increase in therapeutic interventions.

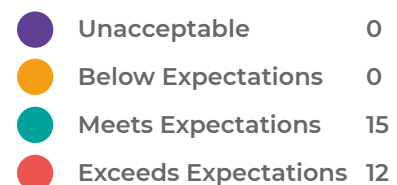
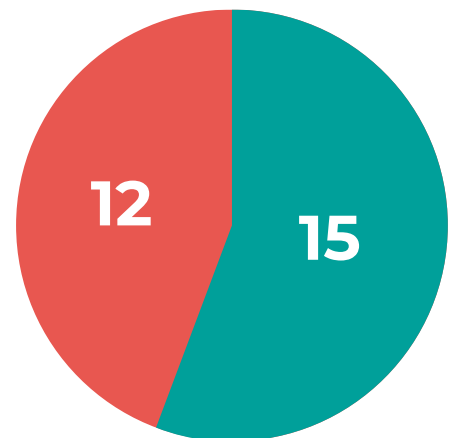
"It would be of great benefit to the Social Work Department if the MDT within Ashdale could progress with all 3 children. The Social Work Department is aware that the kids have needed a period of stability however, the need for the MDT to progress has been identified within their care plans."

"Prioritising therapeutic interventions from therapeutic team based on child's needs."

"I would love to see more outdoor pursuits activities being offered, and therapeutic interventions."

"If possible, increase in availability of direct input from Ashdale TST from earlier on in the placement for children."

This suggests there may be some miscommunication or lack of understanding in terms of the Care Model and the role of the Therapeutic Team. This could also be indicative of the need to increase the level of direct work with young people within the homes with TST. Could the ongoing turnover of staff or low staffing numbers in some of our homes directly impact on the ability of staff teams to provide the therapeutic support, given the stresses of everyday duties, lack of support staff and fully trained staff in Trauma Informed Care.



Social Work Feedback continued

However, in other homes, the feedback in terms of the therapeutic support is very positive from external professionals:

"I am constantly impressed by how therapeutic Lisdrum are, the level of investment from management, the care and support they give to young person and staff team. Ensuring staff are minded in the complexities of some kids needs is brilliant. Bringing cases to their therapeutic support team for discussion if necessary. Advocating for all supports for young persons needs.

- *Social Worker*

"Ashdale and staff in Glack House have shown such dedication and commitment to the kids even through very challenging periods and it is important for the kids to know that there are adults in their lives who are committed and who care about their well-being." - *Social Worker*

"The total integration of the Ashdale MDT clinical team/ framework. The Ashdale MDT are very present and integrated into the care team. From the outside - the MDT feel accessible and influential in the day-to-day care. This elevates the units from care homes to therapeutic units in the true sense and I think should continue to be prioritised. The MDT specialist influence is very much woven into the day to care of the children ensuring deliberate, pre-emptive intervention as opposed to responsive." - *Guardian Ad Litem*

Following your statutory visits since the young person's placement commenced could you give feedback on the living environment and general upkeep of the home.

"House is clean, inviting and incredibly comforting and welcoming."

"The kitchen is always the heart of the home, staff have created an authentic homely environment where meals are being prepared, and this creates a natural space for young people to sit and be with staff."

"The house is very clean. The communal dining and living area are cosy and it is apparent the young people are comfortable and feel safe in the home. This is extremely important, and the staff are to be thanked for this as they are solid and settled which echoes to the children's experience. "





Would you use and recommend
Ashdale Care in the future?

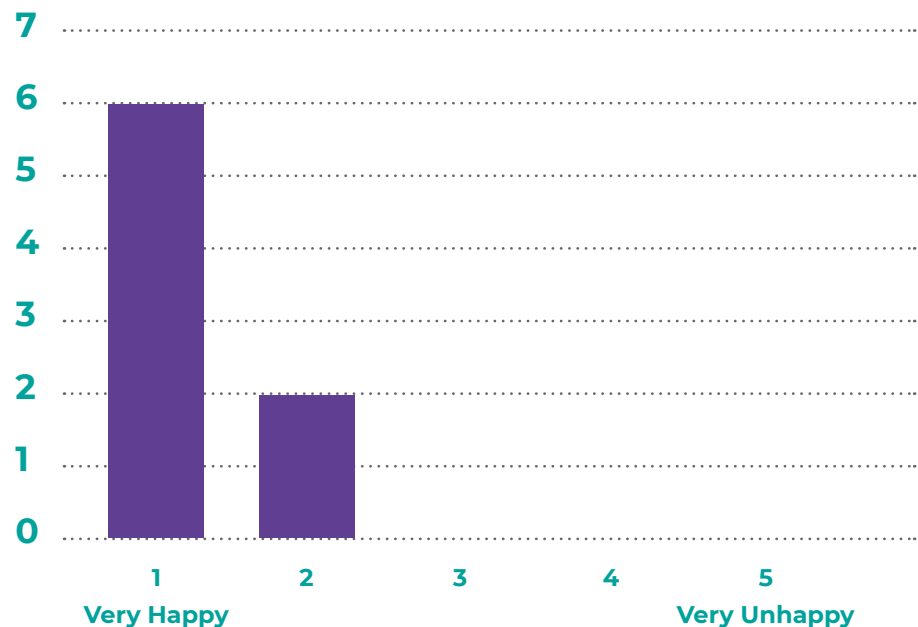
● YES ● NO ● DON'T KNOW

100%



"The staff are doing fantastic
with my child, and I am
extremely happy with the
care he is receiving."

Do you feel
listened to, and
have you had an
opportunity to
provide feedback
to the staff and
managers?



"Just to say I have
great respect for all
the staff in Glyde
House. You are all
fantastic people."

How do you rate the level of
consultation around the day-to-day
care given to your child?

● VERY HAPPY ● HAPPY ● NOT HAPPY

75%

25%

Tusla Inspections Feedback



Inspectors found too that there was a strong culture of learning and development guided by the centre manager who role modelled child centred care.



Inspectors attended the handover meeting and found that it was a space for meaningful discussion and reflection to support all aspects of the care of the young person.



Records were maintained to a high standard.



It was evident there was a team-based approach to caring for the young person and that team morale was good.



The centre was led by an experienced centre manager who had a clear commitment to and understanding of the model and its implementation within a residential setting.

Testimonial from a young person

"I was 2 ½ when I was first brought into care, I moved from foster home to foster home until I was 9 but they were never able to meet my needs. I moved back with my father when I was 9, unfortunately at the age of 11 this broke down leading me into my first residential. In my previous residentials I began to have anger issues which led me to being moved to different residentials, they were also unable to meet my needs leading me to end up homeless living in hotels/ holiday homes for two years. This had a detrimental effect on my mental health, my relationship with food and struggles with my mood. I ended up going into special arrangements, which provided no routine and provided no care. Then I found myself moving to Ashdale at 16, at the start I didn't get on with staff because of being within a broken system for years, this led me to blame everyone around me for my circumstances. Due to this I caused destruction in other placements leading to 97 incidents in one year. In my current home, Ashdale staff have helped me to manage my behaviour through strong connections and relationships. As much as I've had ups and downs within Ashdale over the last two years, staff are easy to get on with and humour is a big factor that has made living here feel normal."

What is the difference between Ashdale compared to previous placements?

"Ashdale is more about the kids and not money and greed, the staff are easy to get on with, they don't control, and they listen. Also, in Ivy Hill restraint is a last resort."

What's different about the staff?

"Their personalities, we have been lucky to have a great handful of people. The staff are fun and down-to-earth."

What makes you feel safe here?

"I've got my own privacy; my own space and I have got trustworthy people to speak to."

What do you think helped you to progress so much in your time here?

"The staff have helped me to understand that discussing my problems can help resolve them rather than escalating a situation."

If you had one positive that really stands out in your time in Ashdale so far, what is it?

"I couldn't pick just one there have been so many but the memories I have created with staff, such as doing activities are definitely my favourite."

What advice would you give other kids to coming into Ashdale?

"Be calm. Be patient and use your words. Staff aren't against you they are on your side working for what's best for you. As much as that's something you have probably heard before it is true, you need to look at things more positively and life is life you aren't always going to get what you want."

What advice would you give staff in Ashdale to help them support other young people?

"Don't act like superman, use can't solve everything for everyone, but you can change things. Listen and don't speak when a child is trying to explain something that is difficult for them. Every kid has baggage, some aren't open to sharing, give them space and time. Focus on your 1:1 relationship and maybe someday they will be comfortable enough to share it with you. Be easy going and don't act stuck up. Privacy is key."

Anything else you would like to add?

"Be patient, kids are still kids. I am so sad to be leaving soon because me and the staff in Ashdale have formed really good relationships."

New Service

Separated children seeking international protection

The service's first two homes opened in July 2024, and both had the privilege of welcoming six young people from Ukraine. At the time, there was limited information available about the young people, as they had only recently arrived in Ireland, just a few days prior, and had been temporarily housed in hotel-like accommodation. There was much to learn regarding the legislation and application processes for young people who were Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection, as well as the various procedures that would enable them to access and benefit from relevant services. Ultimately, this process would support their integration into the local community and help them establish important networks.

In September 2024, our third SCSIP home opened its doors to four young males and two females. These young individuals represented a diverse range of nationalities, including Somalia, Burundi, Jordan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. It quickly became apparent that the international protection application process was significantly more complex than the process for Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection. As a result, the needs of the young people in this home were also more intricate. Much effort was dedicated to educating staff about the application processes and raising awareness of the potential impact of the young people's lived experiences. This awareness has been crucial in helping the teams understand how to best support them.

Our fourth home opened in October 2024, currently hosting two young females and two young males. The home is a wonderful mix of nationalities, including Albanian, Afghan, and Somali. Our fifth House opened on December 2024, followed closely by our sixth SCSIP home, which opened high-quality in the month. Both homes provide care for young people from various parts

of the world, with Gallid House being the first to welcome three young people from Vietnam!

We are proud to see all the resident young people actively engaging in education placements that are tailored to meet their individual needs and future aspirations. These placements vary widely, from mainstream schools following the Irish curriculum to continued online study with institutions in Ukraine, English language classes, apprenticeships, and even attendance at third level education institutions in their chosen fields of interest.

The staff teams are dedicated to providing ongoing support and encouragement, ensuring each young person has the resources they need to thrive in their educational journey. We recognise the importance of these placements in shaping their futures, and we strive to create an environment where they can succeed.

Each young person, regardless of their interests or abilities, is supported in pursuing a career pathway of their choice. Each young person is surrounded by a dedicated team that is committed to nurturing their potential, providing guidance, and advocating for the best opportunities available to them. We believe in empowering our young people to follow their aspirations and strive for success in whichever field they chose.

Since the service opened its doors in July 2024, it has welcomed 37 young people and supported eight young people to transition into independent living. The current focus is on further developing the service's skills and understanding of the sector and playing a crucial role in future service provision for those most in need of high quality residential care.





The Therapeutic Support Team





The Therapeutic Support Team

Providing an enhanced service offering for children and young people

Throughout 2024 the Therapeutic Support Team (TST) has continued to provide assessment and intervention in accordance with Ashdale Care's Stepped-Care Model of Therapeutic Support. Our model has as its foundation the CARE / TCI programmatic approaches devised by Cornell University. The Therapeutic Support Team (TST) augment these service-wide programmes with a comprehensive range of additional indirect and direct therapeutic inputs, organised around four tiers of therapeutic support delivery.

Currently the TST consists of psychologists, occupational therapists, trauma-informed teachers,

behaviour therapists and art therapists. This in-house expertise enables us to assess and implement comprehensive, evidence-based, trauma-informed, child-centred supports and inputs that are aligned to each young person's needs.

It has been a very busy year for the TST in Ashdale Care. We welcomed four new members of the team over the past 12 months. These included two new Occupational Therapists and two new Behavioural Therapists. These additional team members will enable us to continue to deliver high quality therapeutic support to all of Ashdale Care's homes.





The Goal of the TST

To ensure that every young person and every staff team within Ashdale Care receives the support they need. This is done through the provision of therapeutic consultations, training, assessments and a variety of other therapeutic interventions. Some of the key focus areas for the TST over the past year have included:

The rolling out of Developmental Trauma training for all staff across the service

The TST have developed a comprehensive training programme for all staff designed to support a trauma-informed understanding of the young people in the service. Inspired and supported by the approach devised by Beacon House, Ashdale's Developmental Trauma training programme enables the service to understand and make sense of each young person in the service in terms of their presenting behaviours, emotions, strengths & difficulties, and to view these through a trauma-informed lens.

The development of the Therapeutic Care Pathway

During 2024, the TST further clarified the Therapeutic Care Pathway for young people in Ashdale. The 3-Stage 'ABC' Therapeutic Care Pathway at Ashdale includes:

- **Stage A:** Admission and assessment through a structured five-step process to develop a range of therapeutic support documents.
- **Stage B:** Ongoing support, monitoring, and provision of assessments and interventions to foster positive development and good therapeutic outcomes.
- **Stage C:** Preparation for discharge, ensuring a smooth transition to life beyond Ashdale.

Having a clear Therapeutic Care Pathway helps the service to organise our inputs and supports in line with the stage of each young person's journey through the service and helps ensure that young people get the right kinds of supports at the right time.

Ashdale Learning Hub – continuing our groupwork & 1:1 work

Our Ashdale Learning Hub (ALH) continues to provide a forum where we provide a structured, supportive, and trauma-informed space for young people in Ashdale Care. It supplements therapeutic support with educational and social activities, helping children develop intellectual, emotional, and social skills in a safe environment.

While not a replacement for mainstream school, the Hub offers a school-like and therapeutic setting, supporting those who struggle in traditional educational and social environments. It provides both 1:1 and group learning opportunities, fostering personal growth, resilience, and recovery. These therapeutic interventions and learning opportunities are provided by our multidisciplinary Therapeutic Support Team, consisting of Occupational Therapists, Psychologists, Teachers, Behaviour Therapists, and Art Therapists.



A key focus in ALH is building social competence, helping young people manage emotions, interpret social cues, adapt to interactions, and develop confidence in peer relationships. Through structured activities, and therapeutic and educational inputs, they gain essential life skills to navigate future challenges and integrate successfully into wider society.

Revision and update of our key TST documents, including the Therapeutic & Educational Summary of Progress (TESP), the Formulation, and the Individual Therapeutic Plan (ITP).

During the second half of 2024, **the TST undertook a complete review of the therapeutic documentation** being used to understand how and why our young people present the way that they do, and how we monitor change and progress in our young people's functioning over time.

The TST documents are all devised and completed through collaborative working between the TST and each home team. The information in the TST documents is drawn from the knowledge and expertise developed by our social care practitioners in the homes in the course of their daily, therapeutic interactions with our young people. The underlying premise of all our guiding documents is that the key means for effecting change for our young people is through the relationships formed with them by staff teams in the homes, who live and work with them every day.

Following the success of the pilot programme, the revised suite of TST documents will be implemented systematically across the service in 2025 for all of our young people.



Forest School

Ashdale's Forest School is an educational approach focused on engaging children with nature over time, rather than being tied to a specific location.

In 2024, our trauma-Informed teachers continued their training in this approach and are due to pilot the scheme in 2025. The programme entails children visiting the same natural area regularly, typically for 2-3 hours weekly, guided by Ashdale's Forest School Leaders, both of whom are qualified teachers.

Programme's are long-term, ideally spanning a full school year, to foster a community of learners who co-create group agreements, build trust, and learn through play and nature. They develop skills in risk assessment, problem-solving, cooperation, tool use, creativity, confidence, self-esteem, and critical thinking.

Forest School operates year-round in all weather conditions except high winds. Leaders are trained in outdoor first aid, vetted for working with children, and committed to positive environmental impact, including litter picking and woodland management. Programme's can be tailored for various groups, such as schools, home-school networks, at-risk groups, and funded projects.



Six principles underpin Ashdale's Forest School:

- 1. Regular sessions:**
Long-term, regular visits with continuous planning and review.
- 2. Woodland setting:**
Conducted in natural environments to build a connection with nature.
- 3. Community:**
Uses learner-centered processes to create a community for development and learning.
- 4. Holistic development:**
Aims to develop resilient, confident, independent, and creative learners.
- 5. Opportunity to take risks:**
Supports learners in taking appropriate risks.
- 6. Qualified practitioners:**
Run by qualified leaders who maintain and develop their practice.



International Visits

Benchmarking and looking to best practices across the sector

Ashdale Care is committed to ensuring that our practices are informed by the best practices possible in therapeutic care settings for children. To ensure that the care we are providing is always up to date and informed by innovative, creative and evidence-based practice in the sector, we have fostered relationships with other providers both nationally and internationally. Last year, the TST and other members of the service visited Curo Salus in Scotland and were able to use the learning from the trip to significantly inform a revision of how we were providing therapeutic support, in particular, in relation to the development of the Ashdale Learning Hub.

This year, a group of TST and Social Care professionals from Ashdale visited a service in Denmark called Godhavn, a residential care and educational facility for young people, to see what we could learn and to look for ideas about how to improve our own service. The trip was highly informative and gave us a fresh perspective on engaging successfully with young people, using vocational approaches, and was very inspiring in terms of how we might develop our current supports within Ashdale.

Unity Conference 2024

Ashdale was well represented at this year's Unity conference in Dublin where the theme was "Resetting the Foundation Stones of Relational Practice". Unity has been running an international conference for the past decade for anyone working or living with children and youth experiencing difficulties, with a particular focus on trauma and children in care.

Members of the TST and Lisdrum's Management Team delivered a presentation that described some aspects of how Ashdale works with young people. The title of our presentation was "Developing and Implementing a Relational Model of Therapeutic Support in a Residential Care Setting: Successes

and Challenges". The presentation was very well received and was a great opportunity to showcase the excellent therapeutic support and work being provided to young people by all staff in our homes.

The Management Team in Lisdrum produced an excellent video describing the work of the Lisdrum team that formed the centrepiece of the presentation. In it, they described the importance of supportive, caring relationships within the home and how these relationships are at the core of the therapeutic work that all Ashdale Care staff do on an everyday basis.



Quality & Safety Improvements



Measuring improvements in quality and safety over time:

A retrospective pilot study

Quality & Safety - Introduction

One of Ashdale Care's most important goals is to ensure there is a constant drive towards improving the quality and safety of our service, to support both the staff who work here and the young people who live with us. Over the years, as the organisation has grown, this goal of quality and safety improvement has been pursued in many different ways, including:

- adopting, developing and implementing innovative, evidence-based training programmes and models of care
- standardising and improving our practices, procedures, policies, processes and auditing
- ensuring a commitment to professional staffing and child-centred practices
- providing supportive, responsive, values-based leadership across all levels of the organisation

Tracking Quality & Safety Improvement

An important element of any quality and safety improvement programme in an organisation is the measurement and tracking of the extent of the improvement in quality and safety using specific metrics. This depends on a variety of factors, including:

- Determining what aspects of quality and safety are to be measured and how they may have improved/changed.
- Finding out what has been responsible for producing these changes in quality and safety.
- Deciding which metrics, quantitative and/or qualitative, should be used to help us measure improvements in quality and safety.
- Gathering data for these metrics in a reliable and valid way.
- Ensuring that the data we are measuring is representative of change in the whole organisation.

Addressing these issues is a complex task for any organisation and depends on an array of interrelated and interacting factors. For Ashdale Care, meaningfully assessing and understanding organisational change and quality improvement is made even more challenging as we are working in a complex, multi-faceted system, with young people who have extremely complex needs that change significantly over time as a result of many interwoven internal and external influences.





Measuring Change - Choosing a Metric

Despite the complexity, this year, we decided to look back at some of our data we have gathered over the past few years and develop a useful quantitative metric that would represent a straightforward, meaningful change in organisational quality and safety over that period. The metric chosen for this pilot was the average annual number of incidents per home across the organisation. This metric captures all incidents in any of the homes that involve a staff member and a young person and that are required to be recorded under the regulations. Examples of such incidents might, for example, include an episode of aggressive behaviour from a young person that impacted on or involved a staff member. This measure was chosen for several reasons:

- It is a simple measure and is a reasonable proxy measure for capturing some important aspects of the level of quality and safety within the home.
- It allows comparisons to be developed that are representative of the whole organisation over time.
- It enables data from different years to be compared despite the organisation growing in size each year, as it is based on an 'average per home' index.
- It has reasonable face-validity as a measure of safety and quality, is reasonably reliable across different practitioners and homes, and is sensitive to change.

Data Analysis - Rationale

We looked at data across a 5-year period (2020 to 2024) as we considered this to be a long enough period to see noticeable change over time. We also thought it would be helpful to start examining data from 2020, as that was the first year after we introduced the CARE programme devised by Cornell University.

During this 5-year period the organisation has also grown significantly and, in addition to the CARE programme, there have been many other quality improvement developments within the organisation during that time including:

- Additional training team initiatives (e.g. TCI, Developmental Trauma).
- Young Person and external stakeholder feedback questionnaires.
- Quality Assurance audits process.
- ACIMS oversight via inspections published on Tusla website.
- Increasing the standardisation of processes and operational activities.
- Implementing detailed admissions procedures and protocols.
- Ongoing development of the Therapeutic Support Team.
- Introduction of regular Reflective Practice sessions for all staff with external facilitators.



Data Analysis - Results

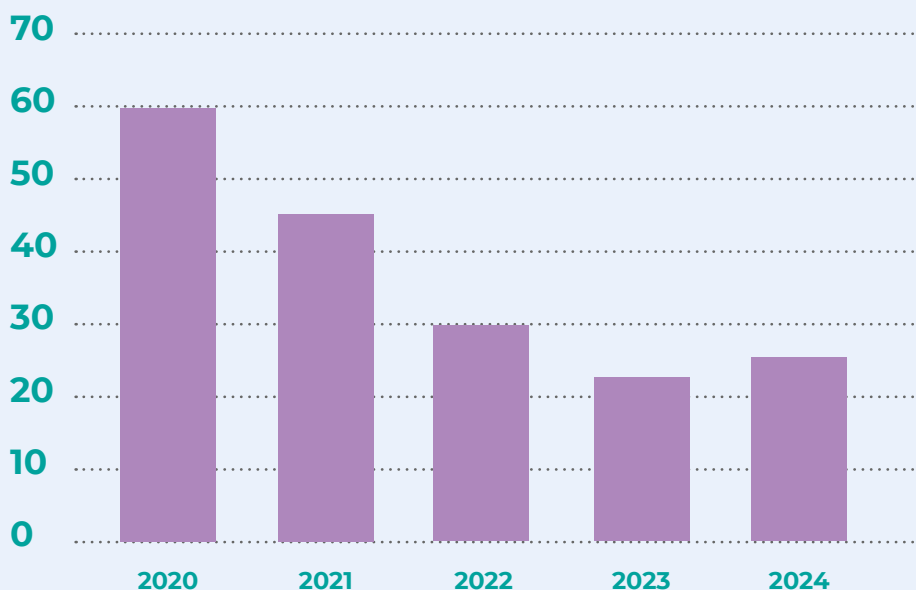
As seen below in Figure 1 the number of incidents within Ashdale in 2020 was almost 60 incidents per home on an annual basis. During each following year the number of incidents per home steadily declined. By 2023, the number of annual incidents per home had decreased by over 60% from 2020 levels, down to 23 incidents per home per year. This steady, consistent improvement over time reflects a remarkable change across an entire service.

Of note is that, while still low, the number of incidents per home increased slightly in 2024, to 26 incidents per home. This increase can be mostly accounted for as a result of a significant number of incidents occurring in some of our STEP homes that were opened in 2023. STEP homes were a new initiative that were designed to be a short-

term emergency placement for young people who required urgent placement due to a crisis presentation. When the STEP homes incident data is included in the overall data on an annual basis, they have an upward influence on the overall average for the service.

However, it is also worth noting that even in the STEP homes, there was significant improvement over time and the number of incidents in these homes reduced as the months went on in 2024. This is a powerful reflection of how, despite the challenges of emergency admissions, staff in these homes found creative and effective ways of engaging with young people even when they were in crisis and were highly dysregulated, resulting in a gradual reduction in the frequency of incidents in these homes over time as the months went on.

Figure 1: Average No. of Incidents per Home 2020 - 2024







While opening a number of STEP homes was a very worthwhile pilot project, developed in partnership with Tusla, ultimately these specific placements have been challenging to sustain in their original format, for a variety of reasons and, as can be seen in Figure 1, a significant number of incidents occurred in these homes. Ashdale has changed its service provision focus over the last six months and is transitioning away from the STEP home approach to more sustainable, longer-term approaches.

Summary and Conclusion

In general, the data reflects a very strong, consistent downward trend in the number of incidents per home over a 5-year period. In that period, Ashdale have opened a significant number of new homes and are caring for a significantly larger number of young people. While this growth has presented significant challenges at times, the consistent reduction in incidents per home each year is very heartening. There have been many quality improvement initiatives implemented over this 5-year period, so it is difficult to say with any certainty which initiatives have been most effective, but it is likely the introduction of CARE, with its organisational focus and service-wide principles for good practice, has played a very significant part in ensuring the service has significantly fewer incidents per home on average and is continuing to move in the right direction.

The nature of residential care means that there are always going to be some situations and homes where things can be challenging for periods of time. However, during the past few years within Ashdale Care, there has been a sense across the service that many of our homes are becoming more 'settled' and are less frequently involved in crisis situations. Ashdale's maintenance staff, for

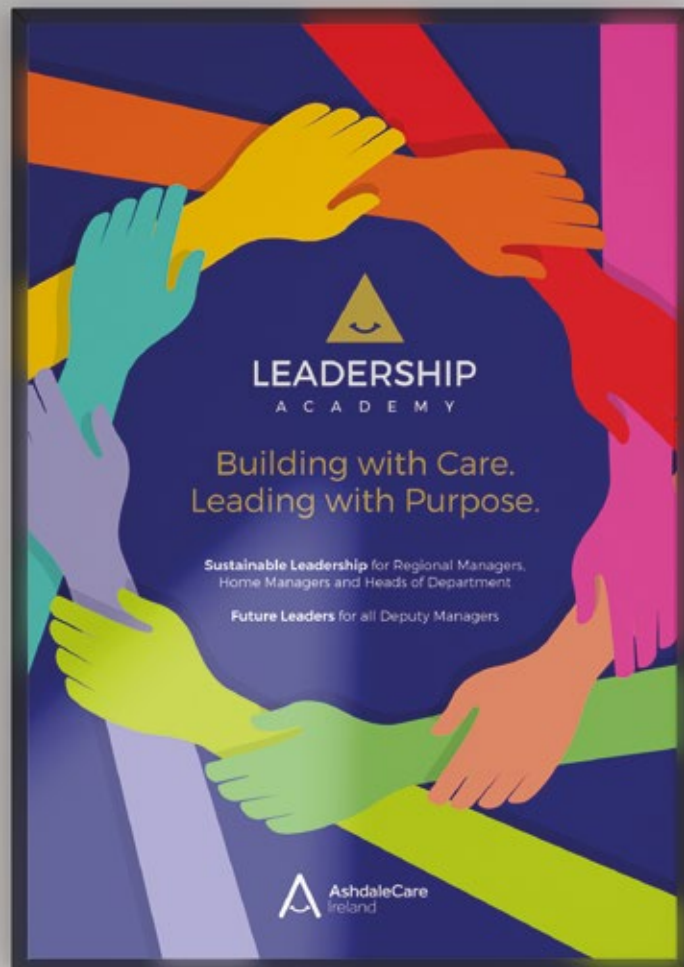
example, report that they have had much fewer situations where they are being called on to repair or remedy situations caused by incidents within the homes. The data provided as part of the analysis here, support this general sense of improvement with a quantitative measure of the reduction in incidents over time and therefore offers good evidence to support the hypothesis that there has been a general improvement in quality and safety over time within the service for staff and young people alike.

As with all small scale, retrospective analyses, it should be noted that these conclusions should be interpreted with some caution and are limited in several ways. The data used were convenience data and the metric used (average number of incidents per home) is an indirect measure of quality and safety. The data are also general and undifferentiated and does not capture many other important aspects of quality and safety. Finally, there are many other datasets that, if they were included, might offer a more nuanced and complex picture of progress with regard to quality and safety within Ashdale Care's service.

Ashdale plans to undertake additional data analysis in the coming months to enable us to explore in a more detailed way additional questions relating to quality and safety across the service. We have also begun to systematically assess and measure a range of outcome metrics for our young people and our service over time across a range of relevant quantitative and qualitative variables. Our new client management software system, Clearcare, which is due to be implemented in 2025, will be of great assistance in continuing this process and enabling us to demonstrate in more detail our commitment to improving and monitoring quality across all aspects of our care.



Leadership Academy





Leadership Academy

In October 2024 we announced the launch of our Ashdale Care Leadership Academy.

- A key element of roles across the homes and support departments is to provide leadership to our teams and colleagues. We know in all organisations that teams with strong and consistent leadership perform better than where this is lacking.
- Our leaders are critical to us as Ashdale continues to grow and develop much needed services across Ireland and we want to invest in our leaders to ensure that they feel equipped to lead their teams and develop their careers into the future with us.
- We have employed the services of Naoise Blake Training & Development to deliver an accredited training programme. Naoise is highly experienced in delivering leadership and management training and development programmes across a wide variety of industries.
- The two programmes we commenced in October are due to finish in June 2025.
- **Sustainable Leadership** - A total of 38 people participated in this programme, which included 32 hours of in-person classroom sessions and 140 minutes of individual coaching.
- **Future Leaders** - A total of 26 people participated in this programme which included 24 hours of in-person classroom training and 140 minutes of individual coaching.

Involvement in Children's Residential Services Awareness Week

Valerie Johnston was presented with the Lifetime Achievement Award by Tusla's CEO Kate Duggan during Children's Residential Care Awareness Week. Valerie has 30 years experience in the field, starting as a Residential Social Care Worker, working her way up to our Training Team. Through her experience and guidance, Valerie is able to help each member of our team to reach their full potential.

Ashdale Care also sponsored the Student of the Year Award at the ceremony held in Athlone.







Human Resources



Ashdale Care
Ireland





TALENT ACQUISITION

- To enhance our recruitment efforts and attract top talent, a new Recruitment Strategy has been rolled out over the course of the past year, incorporating innovative platforms and targeted approaches.
- To better address the specific hiring needs of individual homes, additional Talent Partners have been aligned, allowing for a more tailored approach to workforce expansion in our homes.
- To improve the candidate experience we have added a dedicated onboarding team.
- Furthermore, social media campaigns have been launched to increase visibility and engagement, broadening the reach to potential candidates and reinforcing the organisation's commitment to hiring the best professionals in the field. This strategic approach is designed to strengthen our workforce quality and enhance overall recruitment success.



ENGAGEMENT

- Employee engagement has been a key focus, resulting in several impactful achievements. Significant improvements were made in response to feedback from our Employee Engagement Forum, including the successful implementation of changes to our rotas, along with changes to the application of our long service leave.
- To foster a supportive work environment, reflective space sessions were introduced as part of support and supervision initiatives.
- Pay bands were published to ensure transparency, while the Social Care Leader Programme was revamped to enhance career progression.
- Communication was strengthened through the revamp of our monthly employee newsletter, and additional support was provided for CORU registration.
- Engagement and morale were further boosted with events like the summer party, reinforcing a positive workplace culture.



LOOKING AHEAD IN 2025

Looking ahead, the Employee Engagement Survey has provided valuable insights that will shape the focus for the coming year. Strengths identified include a shared commitment to ensuring that the young people in our care remain at the heart of everything we do, reinforcing our core mission. Additionally, management development initiatives, such as the Future Leaders and Sustainable Leadership Programme, have been recognised as key drivers in fostering strong leadership within the organisation.

Career progression, training and development continue to be priorities, alongside enablement - ensuring employees have the necessary tools and autonomy to be successful in their roles. As we move into our new financial year, the focus will shift towards addressing staffing challenges and enhancing internal communications, further strengthening engagement and creating a supportive, well-connected workplace.



Retention

2024

- Reduced Attrition by 10.8%
- Internal Mobility, 43 Internal Promotions, 10 Leadership positions and 31 Social Care Leaders
- Increased the number of Education Supports by 25%
- Gender Pay Gap Report
- Employee of the Month Spotlights

2025 Focus

- Onboarding & Buddy Programme
- Career paths at all levels
- Review of overall Compensation & Benefits Package
- Long Service Awards & changes to Long Service Leave
- Well Being Programmes
- DEI programmes to reflect the make up of our workforce and strong DEI results in our Employee Engagement Survey



Retention Strategy

Employee Retention and Engagement is a critical factor in the delivery of our services. We recognise the importance of consistency in the lives of the young people in our care. We have set a goal of reducing our current employee attrition by a further 7% in this financial year.



**Onboarded
173
new hires**

**Introduced
Employee
Referrals through
Social Media
Training**

Investment in Systems

After the successful conclusion of the Employee Engagement Forum, which brought together a representative group of employees from each home to meet bi-monthly and review necessary actions based on the 2023 Employee Engagement Survey, we are now investing in a new platform, Culture Amp. This platform will offer external benchmarks for survey questions, allowing us to prioritize and target areas identified as key drivers of employee engagement.

The Culture Amp platform provides a range of survey options, including an exit survey, which will help us collate valuable exit data in a more confidential manner, which will also feed into our retention initiatives.

Investment in Internal Employer Branding & Employee Engagement

We have worked with our Marketing Partners to redesign and deliver a monthly employee newsletter which gives the leadership team an opportunity to deliver key updates on a regular cadence, a roundup of all the great work happening in each of our homes, employee of the month, employee milestones and recruiting updates.



Summary of the Year 2024

To support our growing workforce, we have expanded our HR Operations team by introducing dedicated HR Generalists who will work closely with our homes. These professionals will partner directly with Home Managers to enhance employee retention, engagement through strategic guidance and hands on support. Additionally, our HR Coordinators play a vital role in ensuring the seamless execution of HR processes, providing essential administrative support, and assisting our employees in a timely fashion.

Together, our HR Generalists and HR Coordinators help foster a positive and responsive working environment, ensuring that employees feel valued and supported in their roles. This investment in our HR structure reflects our commitment to maintaining a thriving workplace culture that benefits both our employees and the young people in our care.

Employee Engagement Team

We have added a Programmes Manager to the HR team, this person's primary function is to project manage all HR initiatives associated with Employee Engagement.





Academic Partnerships



Building on our strong relationships with universities and colleges we have welcomed 15 students into Ashdale Care in 2025 for their placements.

We attended six Careers Fairs in 2024.



Staff Recognition Awards







Environment, Social & Governance



Ashdale's Commitment to Sustainability



Robotic Lawnmowers

We are currently trialing robotic lawnmowers in a number of our homes.



Motor Fleet

50% of vehicles purchased in the last 12 months were hybrid with the aim going forward for all replacement and new cars to be hybrid.



Homes

7 homes retrofitted with PV panels in the past year. All new homes coming on stream will have EV charging points and we will be installing PV panels for all new homes.



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