

Orchard  
fostering   
Building brighter futures



ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2020



## A note from the Managing Director

Orchard Fostering, established in 2008, is the largest Irish-owned independent provider of high quality foster care services. I am delighted to have the opportunity to present the first Orchard Fostering annual report. The year 2020 was both exciting and challenging for our service, staff and foster families. I am delighted to have been able to support our foster families in our service throughout the year. I look forward to our continued work together.

**Jennifer Sinnott**  
Managing Director

## A note from the Quality Assurance Manager

I have worked with Orchard Fostering as a member of the social care team since 2015 and was promoted to the role of Quality Assurance Manager in January 2020. This role entails ensuring that the service operates within all legal and regulatory requirements and is compliant with the National Standards of Foster Care Services and the policies of the agency. This is achieved by adhering to a cycle of audits, monitoring and service development as required.

The change in role at Orchard Fostering was a fantastic opportunity, one that I was very grateful for and excited about as I was eager to make a positive contribution to Orchard Fostering. I thoroughly enjoyed my first year in the Quality Assurance role and I hope you enjoy reading about some of Orchard Fostering's achievements in 2020.

**Fiona Dunne**  
Quality Assurance  
and Training  
Manager



# Highlights of 2020

## Alternative Care Inspection

2020 was a very busy year for Orchard Fostering. It began by welcoming the Tusla Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service in early February. The monitoring team spent four days at our head office. The Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service's objective is to provide assurance about the quality of care, challenge poor performance, promote improvement, and safeguard the rights of the young person in care. The monitoring team facilitated this by building a profile of our agency, getting to know Orchard Fostering staff and reviewing all files to ensure that Orchard Fostering adheres to legislation, regulations and standards in respect of the provision of foster care. During their visit in February 2020, the monitoring team gave particular attention to the following National Standards for Foster Care (2003):

- Standard 7 - Care Planning and Review.
- Standard 8 - Matching Carers with Children and Young People.
- Standard 16 - Training
- Standard 19 - Management and Monitoring of Foster Care Services.
- Standard 20 - Training and Qualifications.

Upon completion of their inspection, the monitoring team furnished Orchard Fostering with a very positive report, a real reflection of the hard work and dedication of the staff and foster families within Orchard Fostering.

## Managing Orchard Fostering within a Global Pandemic

Just as the days began to get longer and the weather turned warmer, many of us began making plans for the brighter months ahead, but these plans were soon dashed as the Covid-19 pandemic took over our world. Orchard Fostering made adjustments to its day-to-day functioning in order to cope with the global pandemic. Staff began working remotely, young people throughout the service began home-schooling, and social distancing, handwashing and cough etiquette became the 'new normal'.

Orchard Fostering, aware of the risk Covid-19 potentially posed, implemented various new systems to help prevent the spread of the virus amongst staff and foster families within the service. Linkwork support visits, training, information and other fostering events turned virtual, risk assessment protocols were implemented and PPE was delivered to all staff. Thankfully, due to the hard work and dedication of all the staff and foster families throughout the service, we all adapted well to the new way of working together. This commitment continues to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

## Ambassador Boards

Without our foster carers and young people, Orchard Fostering would not be what it is today. The continued growth of Orchard Fostering depends on both the voice of the foster carer and the young people in the service. The year 2020 was a significant year of "the voice" within Orchard Fostering; the voice of the child (fostered and fostering) and the voice of the foster carer. The year 2020 saw the development of two ambassador boards to provide foster carers and young people with an opportunity to express their thoughts, views and opinions on decisions and services that affect them.

The foster carer ambassador board meets with the Managing Director every second month to discuss pertinent issues relating to the world of fostering and how Orchard Fostering can continue to improve and strengthen its service. This group dynamic comprising of eight board members has assisted Orchard Fostering to develop policies and practice while exploring the needs of foster carers; from training workshops to event management. The operational set up of the meetings moved online following governmental Covid-19 guidance but our hope is to resume to in person meetings when it is deemed safe to do so. Orchard Fostering looks forward to the possibilities that this collaborative work can bring to the agency.

The continued growth of Orchard Fostering depends on both the voice of the foster carer and the young people in the service.

A Young Orchard's Voice, the young person's ambassador board was set up by members of Orchard Fostering's social care team. A Young Orchard Voice is comprised of eight members (four young people who are fostered and four young people who foster). These young people are aged between 8 and 17 years of age and together represent the voice for all young people within Orchard Fostering.

In 2020, A Young Orchard's Voice completed two projects:

1. A placement move booklet titled 'Getting To Know You'. The board highlighted a need for more communication and information sharing with young people coming into care, moving placement and when a family begins to foster. This led to the creation of this booklet.
2. An information booklet for all young people titled 'A Little Book of Big Words'. This is a booklet from young people to other young people, to offer advice, support and guidance, as well as information around commonly used 'care' words. This booklet provided an insight into personal experiences of the young people on the board around entering the care system and being in foster care as well as being part of a family who fosters.



Number of  
ambassador board  
meetings that  
took place in 2020

12



## Children's Activities

### 1. Competitions:

Talent is something that is plentiful among the young people at Orchard Fostering which was really evident throughout 2020 as Orchard Fostering facilitated various competitions at different intervals in the year in an attempt to develop innovative ways to support all in our service during what was such a difficult time. Such competitions included;

- A short story competition in April
- An Easter recycling project
- Halloween art competition
- Calendar competition in December



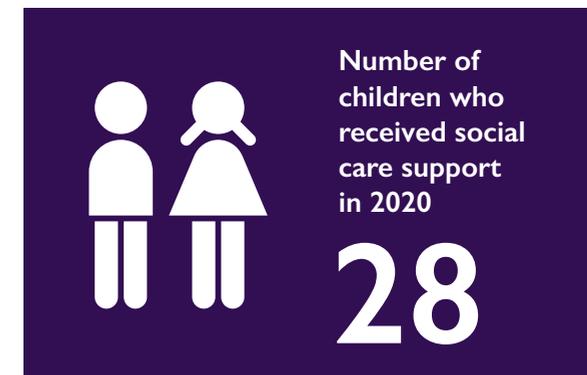
### 2. Aftercare Programme:

The year 2020 saw the development of the first aftercare programme, which was 6 weeks in duration. The aftercare programme was aimed towards the young people in the service aged 16 years and over to equip them with the knowledge they need to prepare for leaving foster care. Each session of the programme was facilitated by various members of Orchard Fostering with additional sessions from guest speakers from organisations such as EPIC and Way2Work.

The aftercare programme provided information sessions on the following areas:

- Financial entitlements and supports
- What to expect as a care leaver

- Advocacy
- Accessing community services
- Education and training options
- Grant entitlements
- Budgeting
- Emotional well-being
- Mental health supports



### Foster Carer Training

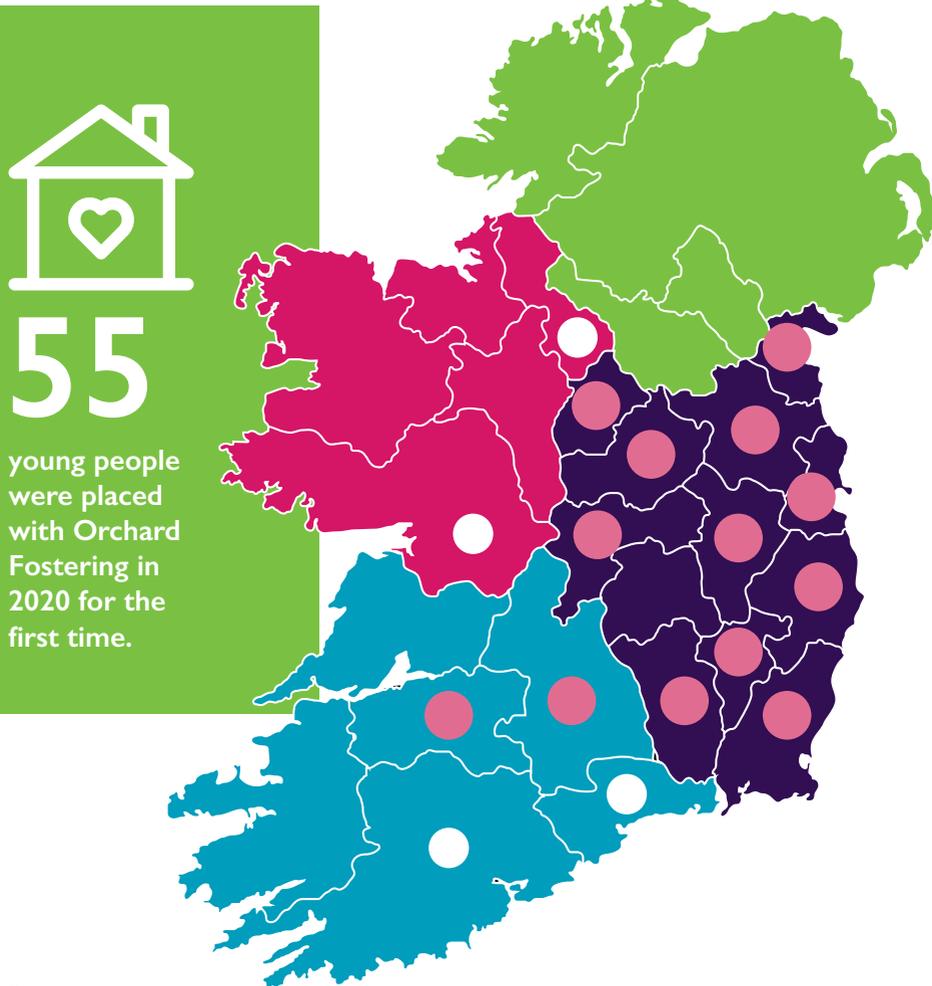
Training was a hot topic for discussion in 2020. The training policy, in consultation with the foster carer ambassador board, was updated and amended to include the completion of a minimum of two training workshops per calendar year. We are delighted to announce that 100% of foster carers in the service met this requirement in 2020.

Mandatory training was a major focus throughout 2020 as foster carers were required to renew their Children First training. A second mandatory training course was introduced at the beginning of 2020 as foster carers were requested to complete Paediatric First Aid training. 81% of foster carers in the service completed Paediatric First Aid training in 2020.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, training planning was adapted, and workshops were delivered online. Orchard Fostering facilitated seven different training workshops online, with strong attendance, throughout 2020. Orchard Fostering remains confident that training development and attendance will continue in strength into 2021 as we schedule more training events based on foster carer requests and the needs of the young people within the service.

# Growth of Foster Carer Base

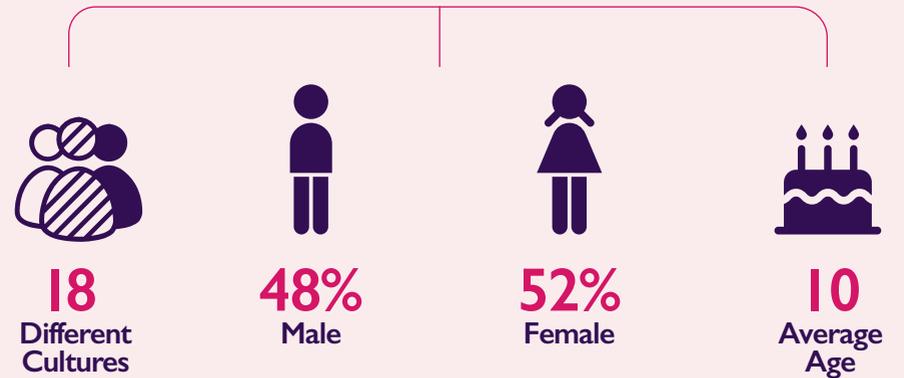
Orchard Fostering's family base has grown significantly in 2020 and we are now a nationwide service. The map below highlights the various locations of our foster families. The locations in white show the counties where Orchard Fostering recruited carers for the first time during 2020. Those counties with a pink marker are those where Orchard Fostering has an existing carer base which was further strengthened during 2020.



# Children's Profile

Orchard Fostering provide foster care and supported lodgings to a wide range of children and young people of all ages and cultures with a variety of different needs. We work closely with Tusla's Separated Children's Team to provide foster placements to children seeking asylum.

## Young people placed with Orchard Fostering



Number of children who had foster placements within our service during 2020

# 146

# Quality of Care

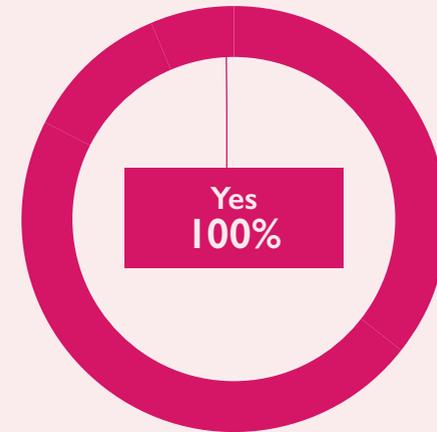
## Foster Carer Feedback

Orchard Fostering recognises our foster carers and their families are central to the promotion of the health, development and well-being of the children placed with them. We appreciate ideas and suggestions from our foster families on how we can better support them, so we actively seek feedback from all those involved in our service.

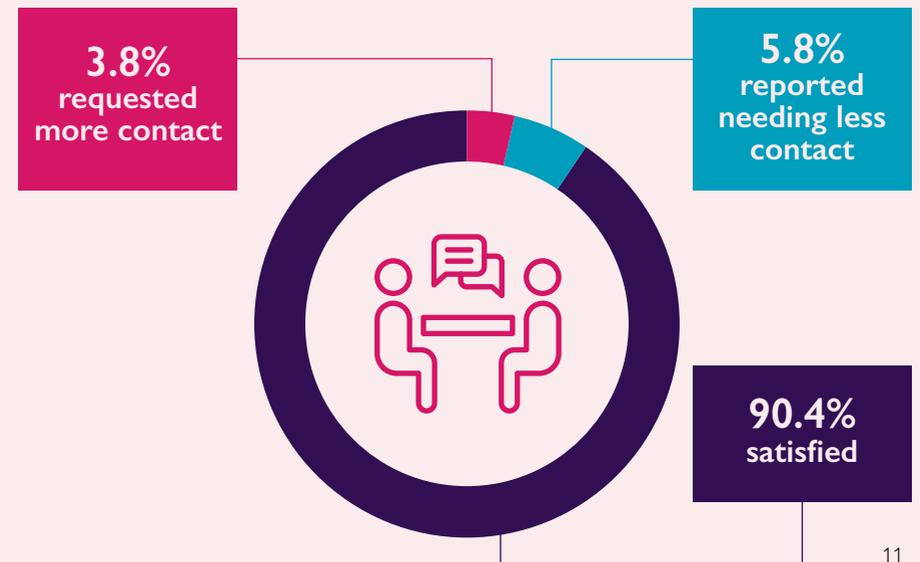
In May 2020, we launched an online survey for our foster carers to offer feedback on our service. The online survey comprised of 18 questions relating to the various areas of the service such as training preferences, support received, communication styles and ongoing challenges to name but a few. Overall, the responses received were extremely positive. Based on the responses received, an action plan was developed to document all necessary follow up along with a timeframe for completion. Some of the feedback we received is included.



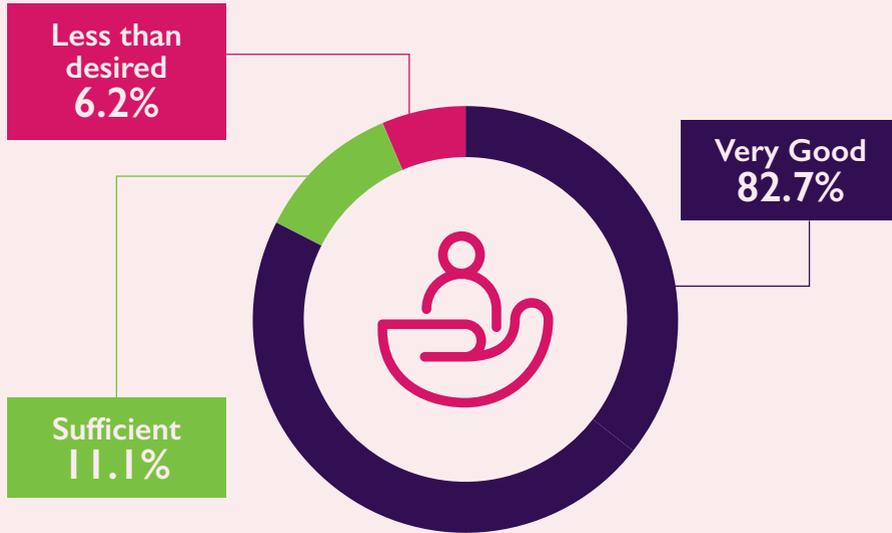
**Q. Do you feel Orchard Fostering provide sufficient training?**



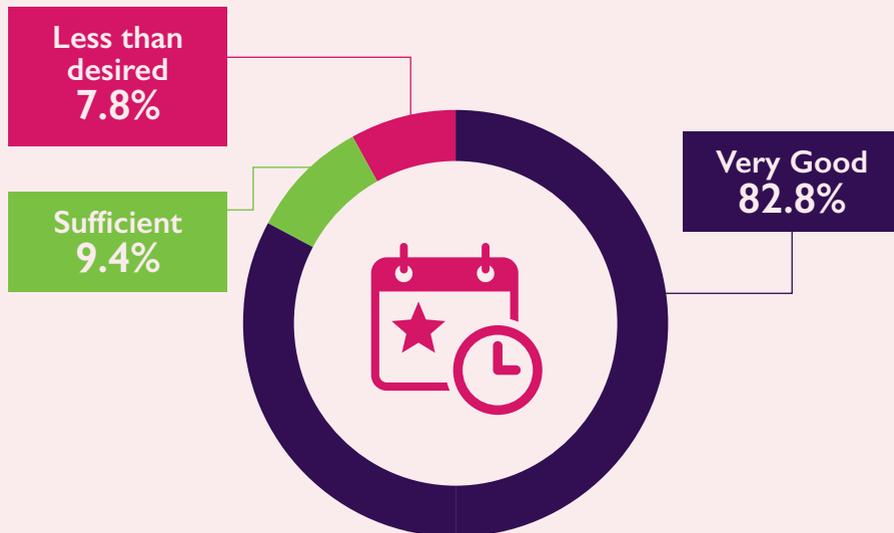
**Q. Are you happy with the interaction with your link worker?**



**Q. How do you rate the support provided to you by Orchard Fostering?**



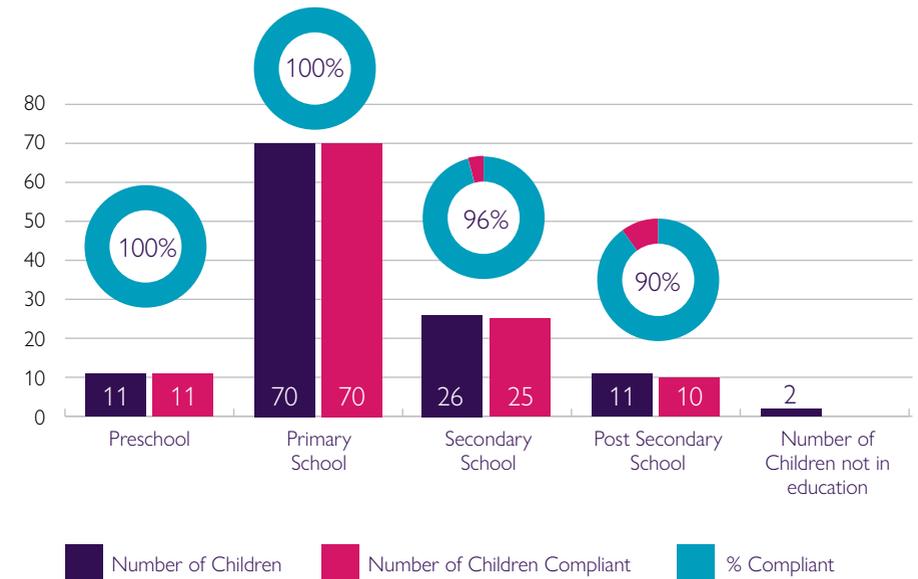
**Q. How do you rate Orchard Fostering events?**



**Education Outcomes**

We believe that a key element of our role is that the children in our care have access to education and are supported to achieve their potential. For this reason, in 2020 we appointed an Education Officer to assess the needs of our children and provide additional supports where necessary.

In 2020, 98% of the children and young people in our care were regularly attending school.



Despite the challenges of 2020 the rate of absenteeism was low amongst these children and young people at 2.3% versus the national average of 9.1% (according to Tusla school attendance data)

We were also really proud that all of the 3 young people who completed their leaving certificate in 2020 proceeded to third level education on the basis of their results.

### Placement Stability

At Orchard Fostering we offer a range of different types of fostering including respite, emergency and short-term placements but we also find that many of the children who are referred to our service require support for their entire childhood and beyond. It is therefore our aim to ensure that they are in a suitable and enduring placement.

In 2020;



We sometimes have children referred to our service who have been in a number of unsuccessful placements before entering our service so we are particularly focused on maintaining a stable placement for these children.

In 2020 we are particularly proud that the 12% of children in our service who have had more than 2 foster placements prior to being placed with Orchard Fostering families are now in enduring stable placements.



# Looking Ahead

Having looked back on 2020, the question now is what will 2021 bring for Orchard Fostering?

## **Enhanced Placement Service**

At the end of 2020 we appointed an enhanced placement co-ordinator who will assess and review the support needs for all incoming placement referrals. This is to ensure support needs are identified in a proactive manner, and the necessary supports are implemented. Where an additional need arises within a current placement, the enhanced placement service co-ordinator will be notified, and the support needs of this placement will be reviewed. This is to ensure the best outcomes for all children, young people and foster carers within the service. In addition to the benefits of a standard placement, an enhanced placement consists of:

- More regular link work contact
- Increased social work team leader and principal social worker oversight
- Access to educational support(s)
- Access to psychotherapeutic support
- Up to two hours of social care support/respite per week
- Specific therapeutic training
- Interaction with the therapeutic team

## **Development of the first Orchard Foundation**

The Orchard Foundation will be launched during the first quarter of 2021. The aim of the foundation will be to provide funding opportunities to young people, within our service, that there would otherwise be a barrier for them to experience.

The foundation committee is made up of a team of staff and foster carers and they will administer a fund provided by the board of directors.



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