



Clones Family Resource Centre Strategic Plan 2024-2028



1. Introduction

The content of this plan was determined by Clones Family Resource Centre (CFRC) Board of Management considering a consultation with stakeholders (App 1) on the work of the FRC over the past three years (App 2). We welcome and affirm the strongly positive assessment of the work and governance of the FRC in the consultation report. We were also guided by an analysis of the 2022 census returns for Clones¹ (December 2023) and a needs analysis of the Clones area² (February 2024), and an external evaluation of the Beacon Project in 2023³, which also strongly affirmed the work of Clones FRC.

We recognise the resourcefulness of the Clones community in dealing with a succession of challenges going back 100 years to the creation of the border and the isolation of the town from much of its economic and social hinterland. That resourcefulness is still evident in how the population is responding to new challenges at present. We have an exceptionally high number of migrants and refugees resulting in a range of new communities, many of whom are struggling with language and welfare issues. We also have significant pockets of poverty among the old communities within the town. Much of the FRC resources are geared towards responding to those twin needs. Here we note with strong concern that the core funding for Clones FRC is below the national average for FRCs. Much of our management time is invested in securing annual ancillary funding. There is an area of work which is critically needed that is currently not being addressed. That is the further development of overall community capacity and community relations to ensure social cohesion in our very diverse population into the future. We will be advocating for core funding for the post of a fulltime community development worker. We also recognise that funding of individual agencies alone will not resolve the issues facing our community. As is highlighted in the needs analysis report there is need for an overall Clones plan that enables the various agencies operating here to better coordinate our collective work and the use of our collective resources. We would greatly welcome the opportunity to contribute to that plan. Our priority in this plan is to sustain our current programmes of work under strong governance, managing growth in keeping with available resources.

2. Vision

Clones Family Resource Centre aims to empower the people of Clones to have an improved quality of life and sense of well-being through encouraging equality, participation, community ownership and recognition of the diversity of families.

3. Mission

This vision is brought about by:

- a) Supporting, encouraging, and providing opportunities to individuals and families, groups, and communities.
- b) Networking and working in partnership with community, voluntary and statutory organizations.
- c) Maintaining and developing a strong, vibrant organization that works well together as a team.

4. Objectives and programmes for our work in the community 2024-28

As a Family Resource Centre, we work within the five national priorities set by Tusla. These national priorities frame our five local objectives in our work with the people of Clones. *That children, families and the broader community be:*

- A. *Healthy, both physically and mentally.*
- B. *Supported in active learning.*
- C. *Safe from accidental and intentional harm - secure in the immediate and wider physical environment.*
- D. *Economically secure.*

¹ Clones: Key statistics, Census 2022, Ruth Daly, *Sort It*, December 2023.

² Clones Area Needs analysis, Ómra Support Agency, February 2024

³ A Review of the Clones Beacon Project of Family Support, Ruth Daly, *Sort It*, 2023).

E. *Part of positive networks of family, friends, neighbors and the community; included and participating in society.*

Objectives	Programmes	Note
A. Supports provided for mental and physical well being	1. Counselling service to youth and adults at 400 sessions per year.	Initiative will be taken to delegate greater operational responsibility in this service.
	2. Holistic therapy: 3-6 sessions for 50 people per year.	
	3. Social Prescribing programme – service to 50 people per year in north Monaghan	
	4. Play therapy programme – 50 children per year receiving six sessions.	
B. Active learning supports provided	5. Women’s Shed – weekly programme for membership of 90.	
	6. Low-cost ETB accredited adult education programme, outreaching to the migrant and non-english speaking population.	Incorporating language and other basic skills. Class of 12 and waiting list.
	7. Education and life-path supports offered on one-to-one basis	
	8. Parenting courses promoted	
C. Safety supports provided	9. Beacon Family Project for 20 families annually. (This will be accompanied by an information and education initiative to promote the work of Beacon to local stakeholders as recommended in the Beacon evaluation.).	Beacon project external evaluation highlighted the value of the programme to the families and Tusla.
	10. Weekly support clinic for 100 families annually.	48 weeks per year. Follow on from Beacon Project
	11. Bi-Lingual drop in facility for	

	support on welfare issues initiated.	
	12. Senior Alert scheme administered	Additional 50 users per year.
	13. Family and Community mediation service programme reviewed.	
D. Supports for economic security provided	14. Food hamper and voucher programme maintained.	
	15. Welfare and advocacy service for 200 individuals annually	
	16. Charity shop operating five days per week	Environmental education element – promoting circular economy and recycling.
	17. Work placements for Tus, CE workers and 2 nd level students.	
E. Positive networks	18. Community choir programme maintained.	
	19. Cool Kids Club maintained.	
	20. Baby & Toddler group	
	21. Parenting group maintained.	
	22. Advocacy for core funding for development worker to address community relations.	With a particular focus on capacity building in old and new communities to foster social cohesion.
	23. Advocacy for Cootehill Town Team model for Clones.	Working towards an overall Clones strategic plan.
	24. IFI Peace programme maintained.	In partnership with Armagh Community Development group.

5. Objectives and programmes for the governance of Clones FRC

We will always work to maintain best governance practice in line with the requirements of the Charities Governance legislation of 2018 and the Companies Registration Office, and any further requirements from funders. This covers six areas of responsibility:

- A. Advancing the purpose of the organisation - planning and review
- B. Integrity - being independent and not acting in own self-interest or the interest of others.
- C. Leading people - roles and procedures for all staff and volunteers.
- D. Exercise control - governance document, legal requirements, financial control, risk management.
- E. Work effectively - manage Board agenda and meetings.
- F. Be accountable to all stakeholders.

Governance objective	Programme	Note
A. Advancing purpose	1. Review of strategic plan maintained including publication of annual work plan and quarterly on-line SPEAK returns.	Will include a mid-term review in 2026.
	2. Networking maintained and further developed with all relevant agencies	Will seek a stronger CIS presence in Clones.
B. Integrity	3. Ethical standards reviewed across all aspects of work	
C. Leading people	4. Staff support and development needs responded to and appropriate training delivered as required	
	5. Programme maintained to recruit, train and sustain volunteers on the Board, in the Charity shop, and in the networks.	
	6. Support maintained for Board of Management and sub-committees.	

D. Exercising control	7. Review of all legal and financial requirements maintained	
	8. FRC building maintained and developed.	A review of office space will be undertaken in the event of additional staff being recruited.
	9. Funding applications maintained annually.	Case advanced for additional core funding to bring Clones FRC up to national average.
E. Work effectively	10. Regular staff and Board meetings maintained to ensure operational and strategic effectiveness.	Transition planning for staff and board retirements undertaken.
F. Accountability	11. Programme of communication with the community maintained across a variety of media platforms.	Includes new social media initiative to be undertaken under GDPR guidelines and review of website.
	12. Reports to and communication with stakeholders maintained.	

Appendix 1 - Reports on interviews with Clones FRC stakeholders; summaries of Clones Census 2022 and Clones needs analysis.

1. Summary

Three factors especially emerge from the census data on Clones, the Clones needs analysis, and the interviews on Clones FRC.

- The economic impact of its border location in the context of the troubles of the last century is still strongly felt in Clones. It continues to experience high levels of deprivation. The whole town falls into the ‘disadvantaged’ economic category, and a significant section into ‘very disadvantaged’. A range of poverty indicators across education, profession, house ownership, single parent families, access to a car, and others are all well above national averages.
- On top of this situation in recent years there has been huge growth in the numbers of migrants and economic refugees coming into the area. Around 50% of the current population was born outside of Ireland. Many of these people are struggling with language, accommodation, and generally finding their way in a new environment.
- The growth of population has not been matched by a proportionate increase in services. Existing agencies, including the FRC, are greatly stretched.

While throughout there is a strong sense of the resourcefulness of the community in the face of deep rooted and multiple challenges, this shouldn’t be taken for granted. Community cohesion is fragile. The combination of these three factors is perceived as representing a risk that needs to be urgently addressed.

2. Consultation with Clones FRC stakeholders

2.1 Stakeholders’ read of needs in Clones

A total of 48 people were interviewed in this exercise in preparation for the Clones FRC strategic plan 2024-28. These included service users, professional workers, agency personnel, FRC staff, and FRC management. The focus was on their sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the FRC and the needs it should be addressing in the coming years. The majority I spoke to have a ‘feel’ for the town but not an explicitly articulated analysis of its situation. A minority have developed an analysis. In what follows I have tried to hold the two together and to abstract from what they have said about the FRC their views of the situation and needs of Clones.

a. New communities

The main issue that emerged is the change in the population profile – the massive growth in foreign nationals rising now to 50% of the urban population. I didn’t pick up any overt racism, but there is some sense of unease among the old population – *I feel like a tourist in my own town*. Among those who are familiar with the circumstances of the new population there is a clear sense of the difficulties the economic migrants and the refugees are facing – language, accommodation, finding their way in the new environment. There is a sense of frustration at Government practice with refugees - people being landed in the town with less than adequate supports.

b. Old communities

This new development is occurring on top of the legacy of partition and the troubles over the last century. The old population has suffered from its location in a border town during that period, resulting in the significant deprivation levels captured in this and previous censuses. There are considerable pockets of poverty and stress across the area. The combination of this with the situation of new arrivals is seen by some interviewees as dangerous and even *reckless*. There is a certain

competition for resources between the old and new populations that needs to be attended to before it leads to social conflict. The shortage and poor quality of accommodation was frequently cited as an example. The growth in population by a full quarter has resulted in scarcity of accommodation, high prices and no incentive for landlords to upgrade. There wasn't a sensationalist tone to this commentary – people generally see the people of the town – old and new - as mutually tolerant. But there is also a considered analysis among some of social 'tectonic plates' under pressure with the potential for an eruption.

c. Opportunities

People also spoke of economic development in the area that has the potential to prosper both old and new populations. The recent upgrading of the streetscape in the center of the town is seen as a symbol of this. The development of the canal and the pending connection of the town to waterways across the whole island point to economic opportunity.

d. Challenges

Taking advantage of growth opportunities will require some local leadership. As a border community Clones is seen as marginal not just in the country but even in the county. There are few services available locally. There needs to be a self-organising energy that can pull the Clones stakeholders together. There is a sense for now that this is absent. Another very practical deficit regarding economic development is the absence of full daycare childcare facilities.

2.2 The response of the Family Resource Centre to the situation of Clones

Because of the way its work is structured across a range of activities, some highly confidential, few people I interviewed have a detailed sense of the whole FRC. Most could only speak about it from the point of view of their involvement in one or other service.

e. Summer tragedy

This was frequently referenced by the interviewees. The response of the FRC to the sudden and awful tragedy is seen as emblematic of how the FRC is in the community – close to the people; responsive to needs; able to act in an immediate, empathic, and organised manner; steady and steadfast in its work. At this terrible moment there is a sense that the FRC represented Clones at its best in solidarity with both its old and new communities. But there is also a sense that the tragedy highlighted the FRC's greatest difficulty – resources not adequate to the structural challenges. The demands on the staff were huge at the time and since. As a small organisation already stretched to full capacity their wholehearted and continued response to the tragedy has pushed the staff commitments beyond the limits of sustainability. This one event summarises the general view of the FRC in the interviews: a consistent and high regard for the quality of its work; a recognition of the pressures it is experiencing and the limits that imposes on its work; a sense of how additional resources could best be employed in that work. I'll unpack this sense in the paragraphs that follow.

f. Service users

There is a huge variety in the services provided by the FRC, from highly confidential work with at-risk families (Beacon project) to its public space in the Charity shop. In between it operates counselling and mediation services; play therapy for children; complimentary therapy; social prescription; a one-stop drop-in service for migrant workers, refugees, and the old Irish community; a parenting programme and Baby & Toddler service; social programmes including the Women's shed and the cross-community choir; education and peace programmes; an alarm service for the elderly. It also networks with a range of services across the local area and county. As noted, most service users have familiarity with only some of these outreaches. But there is a strong, positive common thread on how they report their experiences. The FRC is seen as respectful, welcoming, and well organised.

From the lay out of the charity shop to one-on-one encounters with individuals the culture of the FRC is seen as one of attention to individuals and attention to detail.

g. Service providers

Among professional workers and agency personnel there is a sense that the FRC has grown organically in the Clones area in a manner responsive to its environment. There is an ecology metaphor here of integral evolution, a system finely attuned because of its responsiveness. There is strong confidence that as one of the few services based in the community the FRC knows its community and functions in an effective and professional manner. It is an agency that other agencies feel they can do business with. Governance is seen as strong. While it has a strong heart and a deep soul, it also has a strategic head. Overall, there is a clear message that the FRC is highly regarded among its peers across the community and county.

h. Profile

Generally, there is a sense that while its profile in the community is growing, that profile is still weak in comparison with organisations such as the Credit Union or GAA that have a single, publicly visible, and familiar function. The FRC brand is new and diffuse. People only know it for the most part through the FRC service they engage with. There are two reactions to this in the interviews. One regrets the low profile and looks for the FRC to be better known in the community at large. Another is reticent about further promotion, given that the current demand already overstretches the supply.

i. Succession planning

The next few years will see some changes in staffing and membership of the Board. Succession planning will be needed to maintain its very effective governance, and the very strong advances that the FRC has made over the last number of years.

j. Challenges

There is a strong reluctance among those interviewed to criticise the FRC. There is a view that it is providing a very high-quality service in difficult circumstances. Given the limited resources it has it is already punching well above its weight, and it would be unreasonable to look for more from the FRC. Much of its current work is devoted to crisis support for individuals and families in both the old and new communities. Its Beacon project and range of counselling services engage confidentially with individuals and families drawn mainly from the older community. This service is largely invisible except to relevant agencies and the service users. The drop-in service is now used mainly by members of the new community. This is more visible and has created the impression among some that the FRC mainly engages with migrants. Here the pressure on the existing service is unsustainable, especially given the language difficulties. A bi-lingual worker is urgently needed to further support the work with non-english speaking migrants and refugees who avail of the FRC as a one-stop shop for sign posting and practical needs.

What has suffered has been development work. While some has been maintained in group activities such as the choir, peace work etc. the perception is that much more development work is required in the town given the situation described in terms of old and new communities. (This point is strongly echoed in the needs analysis report.) There is a fear of short term conflict such has arisen in other parts of the country in relation to refugees. There is also a sense of fear for the longer-term implications of the current mix - old community deprivation, new community deprivation, and poorly funded services.

Development work resources are needed to address broader structural issues in the community:

- Building capacity among marginalised groups. This touches on a point made in some of the interviews that the pressures of the support work push the FRC towards helping people, rather than helping them to help themselves.
- Building relations across different sectors
- Building a coalition of stakeholders for Clones development, including on such issues as childcare.

The FRC on its own couldn't be expected to lead out on all these roles. But given its strong reputation in terms of its connection with the community and its governance capacity, it could make a significant contribution. That would require some increase in core funding. While Clones FRC currently operates with a budget of some €459,000, more than half of that in 2023 was derived from some 20 short term funding applications and its income from the charity shop. Core funding to the FRC is among the lowest provided for FRCs across the country. Additional core funding to enable the employment of a full-time development worker would be a significant development.

3. Clones census figures

Population

- While the population of Clones urban and rural has increased by 10% to 2,713 the population of the town has gone up by over 25%. This represents the first rise in the town population since the troubles.

Clones Urban deprivation

- The measurement for Clones Urban is -13, down from -15 in 2016, placing it still in the disadvantaged category and the poorest part of County Monaghan. Parts of the town are in the highly disadvantaged category, with a measurement of -25. These belong to the poorest 1% of communities in the whole country.

Clones Urban deprivation indicators

- 38% of families are single parent compared to 23% in the county.
- 21% of the population didn't achieve any 2nd level education compared to 11% nationally.
- 17% of the population have 3rd level education compared to 41% nationally.
- 35% of the population have no access to a car compared with 10% nationally.
- 37% of the population live in houses rented from private landlords, compared to 18% nationally.
- 46% of the population was born outside of Ireland compared to 20% nationally (This figure doesn't consider the more recent arrival of refugees from Ukraine and asylum seekers.)
- There is 11% unemployment in the town, down from 26% in 2016.
- 24% of the population are registered for a disability and 18% have no access to the internet.

Clones rural and surrounding areas

- With the exception of one area categorized as disadvantaged (Lisegerton / Clondergole) all other parts of Clones rural are categorized as marginally below average on the deprivation scale.
- Education levels in Clones rural are below county and national averages, and its dependency ratio at 44% is nine points higher than the national average.
- Drum, Newbliss, Currin, Killevan and Aghbog are all in the marginally below average category for deprivation. At -8.32 Drum is closest to being in the disadvantaged category. St Tierney, Killynenagh, and Drummully are all marginally above average.

4. Clones Needs analysis summary.

This study offers a highly detailed picture of Clones that is in keeping with the broad thrust of the consultation with FRC stakeholders above. It affirms the resourcefulness of the community in dealing with its many challenges. But it also recognizes tensions old and new. There is still much healing needed in relation to the troubles, and there are now new tensions arising from the presence of such large numbers of the new communities. Given high levels of need in both old and new communities there is a risk that competition for scarce resources will cause a rupture in the fragile cohesion.

A wide range of issues that need to be addressed are identified. These include community integration, provision of housing, access to health services, pressure on the education system, childcare facilities, graduate employment opportunities, broadband quality, mental health and addiction issues, youth facilities, pressures on smallholders, support for Travellers, and public transport. The work of the FRC in relation to families in need is acknowledged, and the pressure the FRC is working under that limits what it can achieve. There are issues in relation to domestic violence, parenting and child welfare that go unaddressed. It is a huge and very challenging list of issues. No one agency can be expected to address all of these. Considering that the report makes three core recommendations that have all to do with a coming together of Clones area stakeholders to form a cohesive and united front.

1. Greater service integration with strong and well supported input from the community through the formation of an Inter-Agency / Community Team.
2. Seeking additional resources from the county and from the State must be top of the agenda for this Team.
3. Development of a purpose-built or purpose-renovated community facility.

Appendix 2 – Summary of the work and finances of Clones FRC 2021-23 Resources

	Budget	Staffing
2021	€256K	4: Manager, Family Support Worker and two divided posts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial Admin P/T and Peace Dev Worker P/T• Development Worker P/T and Family Support Worker P/T
2022	€317K	4: Manager, Family Support Worker and two divided posts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial Admin P/T and Peace Dev Worker P/T• Development Worker P/T and Family Support Worker P/T
2023	€459K*	4: Manager, Family Support Worker and two divided posts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial Admin P/T and Social Prescriber P/T• Development Worker P/T and Family Support Worker P/T

*€236K of this figure, more than half, is non-core funding. €161K was derived from a total of 20 funding applications. A further €30K was contributed by Tusla in wake of the summer tragedy. The charity shop turnover for the year was €45K, which has more than quadrupled over the last four years.

Programme of work 2021-23

The following summarizes the work of the Project over the last three years. The information was gathered from annual work plans and work reviews published each year. Clones FRC operated 33 programmes of work during the last three years. 24 of these were direct outreaches under the Tusla

priorities. The remaining ten were organisational development activities following best practice as stipulated in the Charities Governance Code (2018).

A. Physical and mental Health

1. Counselling service further developed to 400 sessions per year.
2. Social prescribing programme mainstreamed.
3. Holistic therapy programme introduced.
4. Play therapy programme introduced.

B. Active learning

5. Clones *Women's Shed* maintained.
6. Low-cost ETB accredited educational programmes provided for refugees and economic migrants.
7. Education and life-path supports provided for individuals.
8. Parenting courses promoted.

C. Safety

9. Beacon family project - an outreach programme under auspices of Tusla for 20 families in need annually.
10. Weekly support clinic provided to 100 families (connected with Beacon).
11. Drop-in facility for support and advocacy on welfare issues maintained.
12. Funding for bilingual welfare support secured.
13. Older people and home security - Clones FRC administered the senior alert scheme for Clones region.
14. Family and Community Mediation service maintained.

D. Economic security

15. Food hamper and voucher programme maintained.
16. Welfare and advocacy service is maintained for 200 individuals annually.
17. Charity shop maintained - open five days per week.
18. Work placements provided for students, CE workers and TUS workers.

E. Inclusion and participation

19. Community choir maintained.
20. Cool Kids programme initiated.
21. Baby and Toddler group maintained - linked to Beacon project - 12 families
22. Parenting group programme maintained - 20 families.
23. IFI peace programme maintained.

3b. Organisational development objectives achieved 2021-23

24. Programme of communication maintained with the community across a variety of media platforms.
25. Programme maintained to recruit, train and sustain volunteers.
26. Funding applications are maintained annually.
27. Networking maintained with all key agencies including Tusla, HSE, County Childcare Committee, CYPSC, Barnardos TLC, Cavan-Monaghan ETB, and other FRCs.
28. Support maintained for Board of Management and sub-committees.
29. All policies and procedures required by Governance Code legislation (2018) maintained.
30. FRC Centre maintained and developed.
31. Staff support and development needs responded to and appropriate training delivered as required.
32. Review of strategic plan maintained including publication of annual work plan and quarterly on-line SPEAK returns.

Prepared on behalf of the Board of Management of Clones FRC by Martin Kennedy 16/02/24.