

Belfast Family Support Hubs Strategic Analysis Report 2025/26

**Integrating Family Support Hub and
Outcomes Monitoring Evidence**

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Executive Summary



This report brings together Family Support Hub monitoring information and Outcomes Monitoring data to provide a deeper understanding of demand, need and future planning implications within the Belfast Outcomes Group area.

Belfast experienced a significant increase in Family Support Hub activity during 2025/26, with referrals increasing by 437 families compared to the previous year. Alongside this growth, Belfast continues to experience some of the most pronounced social, economic and health inequalities across Northern Ireland. The evidence suggests that Family Support Hubs are increasingly responding to the cumulative impact of poverty, emotional wellbeing concerns, neurodevelopmental need, educational pressures and increasing diversity within local communities.





Understanding Demand



Family referrals increased from 2,708 to 3,145 families, representing a 16% increase. Children referred increased from 1,641 to 2,307 and parents from 2,079 to 2,793. Belfast Hubs also responded to 1,768 professional enquiries and 1,870 telephone enquiries, highlighting substantial demand beyond formal referrals. Whilst Belfast has the smallest child population proportionally among Trust areas (20.7%), referral activity remains extremely high, suggesting both significant levels of need and strong awareness of Family Support Hub pathways.

Financial Hardship Remains a Defining Context



Financial support remained the largest reason for referral with 1,772 referrals, unchanged from the previous year. This aligns with Outcome Monitoring evidence which consistently identifies Belfast as experiencing some of the highest levels of deprivation and social inequality. Belfast records the highest rates of children living in temporary accommodation, elevated levels of domestic abuse, lower life expectancy and poorer health outcomes compared with many other Trust areas. Financial hardship therefore appears not simply as an isolated presenting issue but as an underlying factor contributing to broader family stress and vulnerability.

Neurodevelopmental Need is Emerging as a Major Driver



Disability and neurodiversity support generated 199 referrals. Belfast recorded 274 children with disabilities referred through Hubs and 508 children awaiting assessment, representing the highest proportion awaiting assessment across all Trust areas at 22%. Autism accounted for the largest disability category among referred children. Outcome Monitoring data shows Belfast also has the highest rate of children receiving Disability Living Allowance and increasing numbers of autism diagnoses alongside rising Special Educational Needs statements. This

Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (844 referrals), counselling referrals (393) and emotional support needs highlight significant demand for emotional wellbeing services. Outcomes Monitoring data reinforces this picture. Belfast records higher than average CAMHS waiting lists, higher rates of self-harm admissions among children and young people, elevated alcohol-related admissions and poorer self-reported health outcomes than many other areas. Together, these indicators suggest increasing pressure on both preventative and specialist emotional wellbeing services.

Referral Pathways and Help-Seeking Behaviour

Self-referrals remained the largest referral pathway at 35% of all referrals, followed by community organisations at 27%. This reflects strong community awareness and accessibility of Family Support Hubs. The continued growth of self-referrals suggests families are increasingly willing to seek support before difficulties escalate, supporting the role of Hubs as an early intervention mechanism.

Education and Early Identification

The largest referral age group was children aged 5-10 years, accounting for almost half of all referrals (48%). This aligns with Outcome Monitoring data showing substantial increases in Special Educational Needs statements in both primary and post-primary education. Belfast also records the highest levels of school absenteeism, with 12.8% of primary pupils and 21% of post-primary pupils attending less than 85% of the time. These findings suggest schools remain a key environment where developmental, behavioural and emotional needs become visible and where early intervention opportunities can be strengthened.



Family Circumstances and Vulnerability

One-parent families continue to represent the largest household type referred to Family Support Hubs, accounting for 2,182 referrals. Outcome Monitoring data demonstrates that lone-parent families continue to face increased exposure to poverty, welfare dependency and housing instability. Belfast also records the highest rates of looked after children, domestic abuse, temporary accommodation and child victims of domestic violence. This suggests that many referred families experience multiple layers of vulnerability beyond their presenting referral reason.

Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility

Belfast is the most ethnically diverse Trust area in Northern Ireland and Family Support Hub data reflects this diversity. Twenty-six percent of children referred and 22% of parents referred identified as being from minority ethnic groups. Black African, Roma Traveller and Arab communities were among the largest groups represented. Interpreter demand was highest for Romanian and Arabic. Outcome Monitoring evidence further identifies Belfast as having the highest minority ethnic population, the largest migrant population and the highest number of residents unable to speak English well. These findings reinforce the importance of culturally responsive and accessible family support services.

Implications for Future Planning

Future planning should focus on: Addressing the impact of poverty as an underlying driver of family support need, Strengthening emotional wellbeing, counselling and behavioural support services, Expanding support for children awaiting neurodevelopmental assessment and diagnosis, working with schools to identify needs earlier and improve attendance outcomes, Continuing to develop culturally responsive and accessible support services for increasingly diverse communities, Using unmet need data to inform commissioning decisions and service development, Strengthening preventative pathways which support families before issues escalate to statutory intervention.

Points for Discussion

- How can Family Support Hubs support families affected by persistent poverty and housing instability?
- What additional support should be available for children awaiting autism or neurodevelopmental assessment?
- Are current counselling and emotional wellbeing services sufficient to meet growing demand?
- How can Family Support Hubs further support school attendance and educational engagement?
- What additional resources are required to ensure culturally responsive services for Belfast's diverse communities?

CONCLUSION

Belfast Family Support Hubs operate within a context of significant socio-economic inequality, increasing diversity, rising neurodevelopmental need and sustained emotional wellbeing pressures. While financial hardship remains the dominant presenting issue, referral data increasingly indicates complex and interconnected family circumstances. Future planning should focus on integrated, preventative and early intervention approaches that address both immediate needs and the wider social factors influencing family wellbeing.

Data Sources:

[Belfast Family Support Hub Annual Report Card 25/26](#)
[Outcome monitoring report 24/25](#)



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