

Family Support Hub Activity and Engagement Report 2025/26



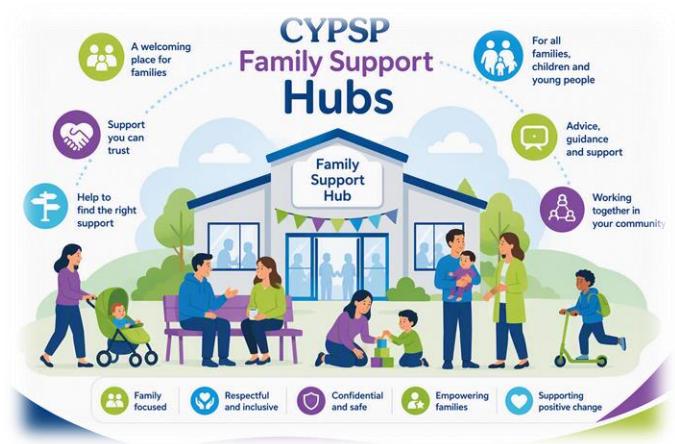
CONTENTS



	PAGE
Introduction	3
Executive Summary	4
The Hub Network at a Glance	5
Understanding Member Engagement	6
Hub Area Profiles:	7
• Belfast Area	7
• Northern Area	9
• South Eastern Area	11
• Southern Area	14
• Western Area	16
What Are Hubs Connecting Families To?	18
Emerging Learning	19
Questions to Inform Future Planning and Development	20
Conclusion	21

INTRODUCTION

Family Support Hubs (Hubs) continue to play a central role within the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) early intervention infrastructure, bringing together statutory, community and voluntary organisations to ensure children, young people and families can access support at the earliest opportunity.



While annual reporting provides information about referral activity and presenting need, there has been less focus on the Hub Network itself. This report seeks to address that gap by examining the reach, activity and engagement of Hub members across Northern Ireland.

The report complements the Family Support Hub Annual Reports by exploring:

- active Hub membership;
- referral acceptance activity;
- family referrals and connections;
- patterns of member engagement;
- differences in Hub models across Outcomes Group areas; and
- emerging implications for future Hub development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings



Between 2024/25 and 2025/26:

- 🔑 Total families supported through Hubs increased from 8,124 to 9,199.
- 🔑 Connections made increased from 10,813 to 12,456.
- 🔑 Average active receiving membership reduced slightly from 39.8 to 37.4 members per Hub.
- 🔑 Several Hubs achieved increased activity despite reductions in membership levels.
- 🔑 Referral activity appears increasingly concentrated around highly engaged members in some Hubs, whilst others demonstrate broad participation across their membership.

The findings suggest that Hub effectiveness is influenced less by the number of organisations participating and more by the degree to which members actively engage in accepting referrals and supporting families.

The report also demonstrates that Hub activity reflects differing local circumstances. Belfast Area activity appears strongly influenced by financial hardship and community-based support pathways, while Northern, South Eastern and Western Areas demonstrate stronger patterns of emotional wellbeing, disability, neurodevelopmental and family support activity.

THE HUB NETWORK AT A GLANCE

Reach

Across Northern Ireland, the Hub Network continued to mobilise a substantial number of organisations willing to receive and support referrals.

While many Hubs recorded reductions in active receiving membership, activity levels increased overall. This suggests that Hub performance cannot be assessed through membership numbers alone and that engagement levels provide a more meaningful measure of network effectiveness.



Largest Membership Increases (Hub)	Largest Membership Reductions (Hub)
Omagh (+61)	Antrim & Ballymena (-29)
Ethos (+25)	Inner East Belfast (-18)
Waterside (+23)	Greater Shankill (-18)
Armagh & Dungannon (+11)	Magherafelt & Cookstown (-17)
Upper Springfield & Whiterock (+8)	Fermanagh (-15)

Activity

Despite reductions in membership in several locations, activity continued to increase.

 Total family referrals increased by 13%.  Connections increased by 15%.

This demonstrates that Hub Networks continued to provide significant early intervention support and that member engagement remained strong across the Network.

UNDERSTANDING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

A key purpose of this report is to move beyond simply counting Hub members and explore how actively members engage in supporting children and families. The referral acceptance data highlights significant variation across Hubs.

Broad Participation Hubs

This Hub demonstrated activity distributed across a wide range of member organisations.

Omagh

Omagh increased from 64 to 125 active receiving members whilst also increasing referrals and connections substantially. Referral acceptance was distributed across a large number of organisations rather than concentrated among a small number of providers.

This suggests a resilient Hub model characterised by widespread engagement.

Concentrated Delivery Hubs

This Hub achieved significant activity levels through a relatively small number of highly active organisations.

Dry Arch

Dry Arch generated more than 1,100 connections through only 18 active receiving members. Several organisations accepted exceptionally high numbers of referrals.

This model can be highly effective but may present risks associated with dependency upon key providers.

Deep Engagement Hubs

These Hubs combine moderate membership levels with strong referral activity.

Ethos

Ethos increased its active membership from 41 to 66 members and continued to demonstrate high levels of referral activity across a broad range of organisations.

Upper Springfield & Whiterock

The Hub continues to demonstrate strong engagement and high connection volumes relative to membership size.

HUB AREA PROFILES

Belfast Area

Belfast Area remained the most active area in terms of overall Hub activity during 2025/26, facilitating **3,145 family referrals and 4,030 connections** across its ten Hubs.



While activity increased significantly, active receiving membership reduced across most Belfast Hubs, with notable reductions in:

- Inner East Belfast (46 to 28 members),
- Greater Shankill (44 to 26 members) and
- Outer South East Belfast (53 to 40 members).

Only Upper Springfield & Whiterock and Lower North Belfast reported membership growth.

Despite these reductions, several Hubs became more active.

- Inner East Belfast increased connections from 345 to 404 while active membership fell by 18 members.
- Greater Shankill increased connections from 230 to 406 despite membership reducing from 44 to 26.
- South Belfast 1 (LORAG) increased connections from 393 to 498 while active membership reduced slightly from 29 to 26.

HUB AREA PROFILES

This suggests that activity within Belfast Area Hubs is increasingly concentrated amongst a core group of highly engaged members. The referral acceptance data indicates that while overall membership has reduced, many of the remaining members are accepting larger volumes of referrals and maintaining high levels of activity.



The services accessed through Belfast Hubs remain heavily influenced by financial support pathways, including hardship funds, voucher schemes, food support and practical assistance. This reflects wider findings within the Belfast Area Annual Family Support Hub Report which identify poverty, financial hardship, inequality and strong community referral pathways as important drivers of demand. The Hub Network therefore appears to fulfil both a family support function and a critical community access role for families experiencing financial vulnerability.



Emerging Learning

Belfast Area demonstrates that increased Hub activity does not require increased membership. A smaller but highly engaged membership base is generating growing levels of support activity, particularly in response to financial hardship and practical family support needs.



HUB AREA PROFILES

Northern Area

Northern Area Hubs present one of the clearest examples of declining membership alongside sustained or increasing activity. Active receiving membership reduced across all four reporting Hubs:

- Antrim & Ballymena (61 to 32),
- Coleraine/Ballymoney/Moyle (64 to 55),
- Magherafelt & Cookstown (70 to 53) and
- Newtownabbey/Larne/Carrick ^{*}(87 to 80).



However, the picture is more nuanced when activity is considered. While Antrim & Ballymena recorded a reduction in connections (706 to 662), the remaining three Hub areas increased activity. Coleraine/Ballymoney/Moyle increased from 443 to 611 connections, Magherafelt & Cookstown increased from 396 to 404, and Newtownabbey/Larne/Carrick increased from 881 to 954.

Overall, Northern Area recorded **1,636 families referred** and **2,631 connections** during 2025/26

Referral acceptance patterns suggest that activity is being sustained through a combination of broad participation and a core group of highly active providers. This appears consistent with the Northern Area Hub model where families are frequently connected to multiple services and supports.

HUB AREA PROFILES

The most frequently accessed services reflect demand for emotional wellbeing, counselling, parenting and neurodevelopmental support rather than financial assistance. Parent Talk, NEISS, Choices and Autism-focused supports feature prominently across the area. This mirrors findings within the Northern Area Annual Family Support Hub Report, which identifies emotional wellbeing, counselling and neurodevelopmental need as defining characteristics of local demand.



Emerging Learning



Northern Area demonstrates that strong Hub activity can be maintained despite declining membership when members are embedded within coordinated pathways and actively engaged in supporting families with emotional wellbeing and neurodevelopmental needs.

HUB AREA PROFILES

South Eastern Area



Direct Hub-level comparison is not possible because 2024/25 data was reported for South Eastern Area as a combined area rather than by individual Hub. The introduction of separate reporting for Down, Lisburn and North Down & Ards in 2025/26 establishes an important baseline for future analysis and will allow trends in membership, activity and engagement to be monitored at individual Hub level going forward.

In 2025/26, the three Hubs reported a combined **43 active receiving members**, supporting **903 families through 779 connections**. Lisburn recorded the largest active membership (17 members), followed by North Down & Ards (15) and Down (11). Compared with other Hub Areas, South Eastern operates with a relatively small pool of active receiving members.

Referral acceptance data suggests a reasonably broad pattern of participation across members, with activity spread across a number of organisations rather than being concentrated within a small number of providers. Nevertheless, several organisations occupy a particularly prominent position within the Hub Network and account for a substantial proportion of referral activity.

HUB AREA PROFILES

A distinctive feature of the South Eastern Area model is the significant investment made by the Trust in commissioning services specifically to support Hub delivery.

Services such as Barnardos, Changing Lives, Family Support Workers and YMCA feature prominently amongst the most frequently accessed supports and represent a substantial investment in ensuring families can access timely support through the Hub pathway.



This model offers a number of strengths. Dedicated commissioned provision provides clear referral pathways, predictable service availability and established capacity to respond to demand. It also appears well aligned to the area's profile of emotional and behavioural difficulties, disability-related support and neurodevelopmental need, which are highlighted throughout the South Eastern Area Annual Family Support Hub Report.



At the same time, the data raises some interesting questions regarding how the structure of local provision may influence referral activity.

The comparatively small number of active receiving members, combined with the prominence of commissioned services within referral activity, suggests that South Eastern Area may operate through a more structured service Network than is evident in some other Hub Areas.

HUB AREA PROFILES

This is not necessarily a weakness. However, it may influence the balance between referrals being matched to the widest possible range of available services and referrals being directed through established commissioned pathways. Future analysis may wish to explore whether the current model affects the diversity of services accessed, the breadth of Hub membership engagement and the extent to which families are connected to multiple forms of support.



The South Eastern Hub Network therefore appears to operate as both a coordination mechanism and a gateway into a well-developed commissioned early intervention infrastructure, helping families navigate education, health, disability and assessment pathways.

Emerging Learning

South Eastern Area represents a distinctive Hub model characterised by significant commissioned service investment and comparatively lower numbers of active receiving members. As individual Hub reporting develops, there will be opportunities to better understand how this model influences engagement, referral patterns, family outcomes and the balance between needs-led matching and structured service pathways.



HUB AREA PROFILES

Southern Area



Southern Area Hubs recorded **989 family referrals and connections** during 2025/26, compared with 916 referrals and 1,084 connections in 2024/25. This indicates that more families were supported, although families were connected to slightly fewer services on average than in the previous year.

The Area presents a mixed picture in relation to membership. Armagh & Dungannon increased active membership substantially from 15 to 26 members, while Craigavon/Portadown/Banbridge reduced from 34 to 20 and Newry & Mourne reduced from 16 to 10.

Although Southern Area has a comparatively small active membership base, referral activity remains strong.

Across the three Hubs, 56 active receiving members generated more than 1,000 connections. Referral acceptance patterns suggest that responsibility for referrals is shared across multiple organisations rather than concentrated amongst a very small number of providers.



HUB AREA PROFILES

The types of services accessed are also distinctive.

REACT, Parenting Focus, EISS, Home Start and disability-related supports feature prominently amongst the most frequently accessed services. This aligns closely with findings within the Southern Area Annual Family Support Hub Report which describes Southern Area as a parenting-focused, school-linked early intervention system.



Financial support services feature less prominently than in Belfast and parts of the Western Area.

Emerging Learning

Southern Area demonstrates how relatively small Hub Networks can maintain effectiveness through active participation, strong school partnerships and a focus on parenting and family support interventions.



HUB AREA PROFILES

Western Area

The Western Area Hubs recorded the largest volume of activity outside Belfast Area, facilitating **2,526 family referrals and 3,992 connections** during 2025/26. The area contains some of the strongest examples of membership growth and some of the most distinctive Hub engagement models in the region.



Membership increased significantly in several Hubs, including:

- 🌱 Omagh (64 to 125 members);
- 🌱 Ethos (41 to 66);
- 🌱 Waterside (40 to 63); and
- 🌱 Strabane (19 to 27).

At the same time, Fermanagh reduced from 80 to 65 members and Outer West reduced from 22 to 17.



Omagh is perhaps the clearest example of broad participation.

Membership almost doubled while connections increased from 333 to 656. Referral acceptance data suggests that this growth was spread across a large number of organisations, indicating a highly engaged and resilient Network.

HUB AREA PROFILES

Ethos similarly increased both membership and activity, while Waterside achieved substantial membership growth despite more modest connection levels.

In contrast, Dry Arch generated 1,128 connections through only 18 active members, with several organisations accepting exceptionally large referral volumes. This represents a highly productive but more concentrated delivery model.



The profile of support accessed reflects findings within the Western Area Annual Family Support Hub Report. Financial assistance remains important, but the service profile also includes family support, counselling, parenting interventions, emotional wellbeing services and neurodevelopmental supports. This suggests Hub activity is responding to increasingly complex and interconnected patterns of family need.

Emerging Learning

Western Area demonstrates that there is no single model of Hub success. The Area includes examples of broad participation, deep engagement and concentrated delivery, all contributing to significant levels of activity and support for families experiencing complex needs.



WHAT ARE HUBS CONNECTING FAMILIES TO?

Analysis of the most frequently accessed services suggests that Hub activity extends well beyond a single intervention type.

Four broad themes emerge:



Financial Support

Hardship funds, voucher schemes, cost-of-living supports and food support feature prominently across Belfast Area and parts of Western Area.



Emotional Wellbeing

Counselling, Emotional Wellbeing Teams and mentoring services feature strongly, particularly within Northern and Western Areas.



Family Support

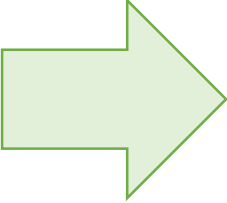
Family support projects, Early Intervention Support Service and parenting services remain prominent across all Areas.



Neurodevelopmental Support

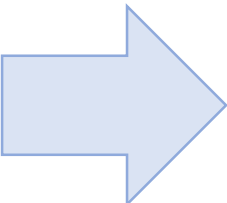
Autism-related services, ADHD supports and assessment pathway activity are increasingly visible across all Areas.

EMERGING LEARNING



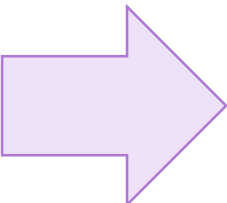
Hub effectiveness is about engagement, not membership.

Several Hubs increased referral activity despite reduced membership levels. This suggests that active participation is a more useful measure of Hub effectiveness than membership numbers alone.



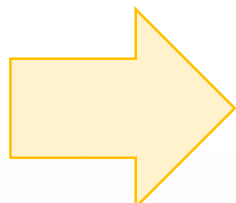
Similar activity volumes can reflect very different needs.

Connection numbers should be interpreted alongside the nature of support provided. A Hub facilitating large volumes of hardship support may operate differently from a Hub responding primarily to emotional wellbeing, disability or family functioning issues.



Neurodevelopmental need is increasingly visible.

All Companion Reports identify growing pressure associated with autism, ADHD, assessment pathways and SEN-related need.



Different Hub models exist.

The evidence suggests no single model of success. Some Hubs demonstrate broad participation, others deep engagement, and others concentrated delivery arrangements. Each model presents opportunities and risks that should inform future development planning.

QUESTIONS TO INFORM FUTURE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

-  How should Hub effectiveness be measured beyond membership and referral volumes?
-  What can be learned from Hubs demonstrating high levels of member engagement?
-  Are any Hubs overly dependent on a small number of providers?
-  How should increasing neurodevelopmental and emotional wellbeing demand influence commissioning priorities?
-  What opportunities exist to strengthen Hub resilience and engagement across the Network?
-  How can Hub activity data be used alongside Outcomes Monitoring and Annual Report findings to inform local planning?

CONCLUSION

Hubs continue to demonstrate their value as a key element of Northern Ireland's early intervention infrastructure.

Although active membership levels have fluctuated across areas, referral activity and family connections have increased substantially.



The evidence suggests that the strength of a Hub lies not simply in the number of organisations involved, but in the willingness and capacity of members to engage actively in meeting the needs of children, young people and families.

Future development should therefore focus on strengthening engagement, understanding local patterns of need, and ensuring Hub Networks remain resilient, responsive and effective.