



**cornerstone**

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE NORTHWEST**

Annual Report

**2024**



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## VISION

ALL IN NORTHWEST OF IRELAND  
HAVE A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE  
AND LIVE IN A FAIR AND JUST  
SOCIETY

## MISSION

CORNERSTONE SERVES THE  
COMMUNITY THROUGH THE  
PROVISION OF TARGETED  
SERVICES WHICH IMPROVE THE  
QUALITY OF LIFE OF INDIVIDUALS  
AND FAMILIES IN THE  
NORTHWEST OF IRELAND

# foreword

anne hickey  
chariperson

On behalf of the Board of Cornerstone I am pleased to present the annual report for 2024 which highlights the services provided in supporting children, adults and families who are vulnerable and marginalised in the North West.

The work has only been made possible by hardworking and dedicated staff led by the CEO Christina and a team of almost 200 volunteers who work, day in and day out, to provide the services. On behalf of the Board I thank you all for your professional, dedicated and caring work.

I also acknowledge with thanks, the continued support from our statutory funders, the HSE, the Department of Social Protection, The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Sligo County Council, the Office for the Minister for Children and our ongoing support from, and partnership with, the Diocese of Elphin which is much appreciated.

Demand for all our services is increasing, with the need for housing being the most critical and demanding. We continue to engage with Sligo County Council and with the Department in providing support in this area but more housing of all types is urgently needed to supply the demand.

As our previous name of Sligo Social Services proved confusing for service users and no longer reflected the geographical area in which we now provide services, we engaged in the process of changing our name to one more reflective of our identity and are now named Cornerstone. We hope that, after some engagement with the public, this name will be more widely known and will improve our profile.

Finally, I would like to thank the other members of the Board for their expertise and guidance in the development of Cornerstone and to their help particularly to me since taking over as chair.





# welcome

christina mc taggart  
ceo

Over the last 56 years, we have touched the lives of thousands of people. Our growth has always been guided by a clear vision to ensure that all in our community have a good quality of life and live in a fair and just society. As an organisation our core focus has and continues to be on the needs of those who use our services.

Over the decades as society changed so too did the challenges facing the children, families, and communities we engage with. Much of our success has come from the fact that we have adapted to ensure vital services are provided to those at the margins of our society who need our help and in the past number of years, we have expanded to deliver services across Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal.

As part of our strategic plan 2023-2028 we recognised that we needed a new name to reflect today's organisation, the supports we deliver and the area we operate across. Changing our name as you can imagine has been quite a journey, not just in letting go of the existing but in the responsibility of identifying a name which we felt truly reflected who we are today and throughout 2024 we engaged with various stakeholders to identify a new name to better represent the organisation. After much consideration we have changed our name to NW Cornerstone CLG – trading as Cornerstone.

As we all know a Cornerstone is the first stone set in a building on which everything else is founded on or it is an important quality or feature on which a particular thing depends upon. By providing a range of personal and community services, Cornerstone provides the vital stability that empowers people to build their lives from sometimes very difficult circumstances.

While the name has changed the same level of support and programmes will be provided by our staff, volunteers and Community Employment Participants.

None of this could be achieved, of course, without the active support of the wide range of organisations and individuals who work with us. I would like to thank the caring and committed staff within the organisation who when needed always go the extra mile.

Volunteering has been central to the organisation since its beginning and remains so today. Thank you to our superb team of volunteers, who give up substantial amounts of their time to work with our clients, man our thrift shop and fundraise on our behalf and off course sit on our Board.

In order for us to ensure services continue we must maintain and grow our income each year. We depend on the generosity of individuals, schools, and businesses to support us to sustain our services. We are extremely grateful to the many individuals who support our work each year by donating to us, attending our fundraising events, or raising money in their local communities to support our work.

My thanks also to the wide range of partner organisations in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors who fund our work and work in partnership with us. Thank you to our statutory funders who supported our work over the course of the year including the H.S.E, Dept. of Employment Affairs & Social Protection, Sligo County Council, The Northwest Regional Drug

and Alcohol Task Force, and The Office of the Minister for Children and Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Also thank you to the Friends of Cornerstone and to the Diocese of Elphin for their ongoing support.

We are extremely proud of the difference which Cornerstone has made over more than five decades, and we hope to strengthen and grow the organisation over the coming years, to ensure that we can continue to support those who need our help and are very much looking forward to our future as Cornerstone.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cherita".

# directors report 2024

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Fr. Michael Drumm  
Orla Barry (retired September 2024)  
Maeliosa O'Brien (retired April 2024)  
Caroline Costello  
Eamonn Grennan  
Geraldine Gordon  
Tommy Mc Manus  
Anne Hickey  
Martin Kavanagh  
Sharon Boles (appointed December 2024)

## **SECRETARY**

Fr. Michael Drumm

## **REGISTERED OFFICE**

Retreat House  
Charles Street  
Sligo  
F91 RV0D

## **CHARITY NUMBERS**

CHY9731  
CRA 20024390

## **COMPANY NUMBER**

140759

## **AUDITORS**

Gilroy Gannon  
Chartered Accountants & Statutory Audit Firm  
Stephen Street  
Sligo

## **BANKERS**

Allied Irish Banks PLC  
Stephen Street  
Sligo

## **SOLICITORS**

Hegarty & Armstrong Solicitors  
Top Floor, Millennium House  
Stephen Street  
Sligo

Permanent TSB  
O'Connell Street  
Sligo



The Directors submit their report together with the audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2024.

## **1. Objectives and Activities**

Cornerstone aims to achieve long-term, sustainable improvements in the quality of life of those needing our services and support in the Northwest region, delivered in partnership with statutory agencies and other non-profit organisations, and through the support of our local communities.

The principal activities of the organisation consist of the provision of services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness including homeless hostels for single adults, short-term family accommodation, substance misuse support, housing liaison service and housing first services. We provide services for older people including a meals on wheels service and a befriending service. We also provide education support to school age children in our targeted afterschool support services. Cornerstone also provides support to communities through our advice and information service and delivery of a large community employment scheme.

The main areas of attention are the development of the company's existing activities, securing financial and human resources to make these sustainable and achieving the highest standards of corporate governance.

Our areas of focus during this period will be:

**A. Meeting Service User Needs**

**B. Continued Service Development**

**C. A Sustainable and Fit for Purpose Organisation**

As part of our strategic plan 2023-2028 we recognised that we needed a new name to reflect today's organisation, the supports we deliver and the area we operate across. Throughout 2024 we engaged with various stakeholders to identify a new name to better represent the organisation and after much consideration we have changed our name to NW Cornerstone CLG – trading as Cornerstone. In December 2024 we submitted our new name to The Charities Regulator for approval and once received, this was submitted to the Companies Registration Office for this change to be made 2025 will see us launch the new name.

## **2. Financial Review, Achievements and Performance**

The financial results for the year are set out in the Statement of Financial Activities on page 12 of the financial statements.

2024 saw our Homeless Services continue to be very busy with bed occupancy at high levels throughout the year. 65 Individuals were accommodated in Maryville Emergency accommodation in 2024. 24% remained in the service for less than two weeks with 53% remaining in the service for more than three months.

With the ongoing high demand for emergency beds Sligo County Council continued to accommodate single adults who were experiencing homelessness in private accommodation. Cornerstones homeless service team provided support to 32 individuals, who were accommodated in private accommodation throughout the year

Our Housing Liaison worker continued working with people who are inpatients in Sligo University Hospital and have been identified as being homeless or having a housing need. In recognition of the very high demand on this service in 2024 the HSE provided funding for an additional part time position to work with the existing full-time worker.

Cornerstone continued to provide the Housing First Service in Counties Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal, with the team working with 42 service users in 2024. Service users required intensive support from the staff team throughout the year. The difficulty in acquiring one-bedroom units continued as a significant challenge for Housing First.

Households continued to experience immense financial pressure in 2024. A total of 573 visits were made by families and individuals to our drop-in Open Access Service. The majority of these visits were households seeking help with food which we were able to provide with the support of the FEAD programme. We also distributed 280 school packs to children at the start of the new school year.

Our meals on wheels service supported 210 individual recipients, delivering 24,374 meals. While the number of recipients was unchanged from 2023, it is notable that the number of meals the service provided decreased by 4,455. 45% of this reduction is due to a town-based day center no longer requiring us to supply them with meals. However, the balance of this reduction in meals is due to individuals availing of less meals or availing of the service for shorter periods. This raises a concern as to whether this is due to the increased cost of living for older people.

Cornerstone depends significantly on individual and corporate support to sustain our services. Our Thrift shop contributes considerably to our income and contributes to the community within which it is based. Cornerstone must maintain and grow its income sources to ensure the sustainability and continuation of its work and services. To sustain and grow the organisation the directors review the sources of income on an ongoing basis and monitor the reserve levels to ensure that they are maintained at a reasonable level in the context of planned expenditure and future commitments.

Our primary fundraising income is generated from our Thrift Shop. In 2024 we introduced card payments as an option for our customers and this has been a very welcome change. 2024 saw our shop continue to slowly increase sales and its income.

Volunteers continue to play a key role in the organisation's work. These volunteers provided a range of help including:

Delivering the following services

- Meals on Wheels
- Advice and Information Services
- Solace Cafe
- Befriending

Assisting bucket collections

Helping out working in our thrift shop

Participating in the Board of Directors

Staff recruitment continued to be very challenging in 2024. In late 2023, a proposal was agreed in the WRC with statutory funders acknowledging that workers in Section 39 (health and disability services), Section 56 (services to children), and Section 10 (homeless and addiction services) agencies deserve pay equality. This agreement will see funders provide an increase of funding for salary costs which they fund. This increase is to spread over the course of 12-month period which will amount to a total of 8% at the end of the period. This was a very welcome agreement and allowed NW Cornerstone CLG provide staff with the first salary increase in a number years.

### **3. Structure, Governance and Management**

#### **Structure**

NW Cornerstone CLG is an Irish Company incorporated under the Companies Act 2014. It is a company limited by guarantee and does not have a share capital. It is governed by a Constitution which was amended to change the company name from Sligo Social Service Council CLG to NW Cornerstone CLG – trading as Cornerstone, at the Extraordinary General Meeting on 16 October 2024. Cornerstone is a public benefit entity - the benefit we provide is demonstrated through our work with individuals, children, families, and communities.

## **Governance**

The Board of Directors of Cornerstone is committed to maintaining high standards of corporate governance. Cornerstone prepares an annual report and financial statements and makes them available to the public on our website. Members of the Board are elected by the members of Cornerstone at the Annual General Meeting and, subject to early retirement, serve for a four-year term which may be renewed once (a total of eight years). The Board has the power to appoint directors in the interim until the next Annual General Meeting.

The Board give their time to Cornerstone on a voluntary basis and receive no remuneration. Out-of-pocket expenses may be reimbursed.

## **Finance, Audit and Risk Committee**

The role of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee is to keep under review the adequacy, scope and effectiveness of the internal control systems of Cornerstone. The Committee members have oversight of the external audit process, and they review the findings of internal audits carried out by external consultants (on behalf of funders). This Committee consists of three Board members. The CEO is in attendance along with the required members of the Executive Management Team. During 2024 the audit committee reviewed and updated the Company Risk Register and met with external auditors to review the company's statutory accounts.

## **Board Recruitment**

When recruiting new directors to the Board, the Board aims to attract a diverse range of candidates with relevant skills. When vacancies arise, the Board identifies the skills, experience and knowledge required from the new Board member by considering the collective skill profile of the current Board. Potential candidates are identified through several channels including from members and from non-board members. There were two changes to Board membership in 2024 with two Board members retiring and one new Board member appointed.

## **Training & Induction**

All new directors are required to go through an induction process which includes coverage of the aims of Cornerstone and how they are being fulfilled; the role and duties of the directors; and financial and risk management.

New directors are encouraged to visit one of our projects to gain a better understanding of the services Cornerstone provides. When required, further training is arranged for individual directors or for the Board as a whole.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

Cornerstone has a Conflict-of-Interest policy in place for all Board members. The Board of Directors make annual declarations of conflict of interest. No conflicts of interest were declared in 2024.

## **Protected Disclosures**

Cornerstone has a protected disclosures policy in place to promote the disclosure of information relating to possible wrongdoing in the workplace. The policy offers protection for workers from penalisation in circumstances where they make a protected disclosure or "whistle blow" about concerns they may have about work, standards of practice or other areas of malpractice, dangerous, illegal, or improper activity. No disclosures were made during 2024.

## **Decision Making**

The Board ensures that the activities of Cornerstone are consistent with its charitable objectives and aims. There are clear distinctions between the roles of the Board of Directors and the Executive Management Team, to which day-to-day management is delegated. Matters such as policy, strategic planning, and budgets are drafted by the Management Team for consideration and approval by the Board, who then monitor the implementation of these plans. The Executive Management Team are the Key Management Personnel of Cornerstone.

## Standards

The Board of Directors of Cornerstone is committed to maintaining high standards of corporate governance. Cornerstone Board adopted the Charities Regulator, Charities Governance Code in 2019. Cornerstone prepares an annual report and financial statements in full compliance with the Charities SORP (Statement of Reporting Practice under FRS102) each year and makes them available to the public on our website.

## 4. Directors and Secretary

The names of the individuals who were directors at any time during the year ended 31 December 2024 are set out below. All directors served for the entire year unless otherwise stated.

Fr. Michael Drumm

Orla Barry (retired in September 2024)

Maeliosa O'Brien (retired in April 2024)

Caroline Costello

Eamonn Grennan

Geraldine Gordon

Tommy Mc Manus

Anne Hickey

Martin Kavanagh

Sharon Boles (appointed December 2024)

### Company Secretary

Fr. Michael Drumm

The Board meets ten times a year. Meetings took place both in person and via video platform in 2024. Attendance was as follows:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	Aug	Sept	Oct	Dec
Orla Barry	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
Fr. Michael Drumm	√	√	x	√	√	x	√	√	√	x
Geraldine Gordon	x	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x
Eamonn Grennan	√	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	x	√
Maeliosa O'Brien	x	√	x							
Tommy Mc Manus	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	√	√
Sharon Boles										√
Caroline Costello	√	x	x	x	√	√	√	x	√	x
Martin Kavanagh	√	√	√	√	√	x	x	√	√	√
Anne Hickey	√	√	√	√	√	x	√	√	√	√

## 5. Principal Risks and Uncertainties

Business risks and mitigating actions are regularly scrutinised by the Board and management team.

The principal risks identified that could have a serious impact on performance are:

### Financial Risk

The organisation has budgetary and financial reporting procedures, supported by appropriate key performance indicators, to manage credit, liquidity, and other financial risk.

All key financial indicators are monitored on an on-going basis.

### **Insufficient Funding**

The company is reliant on grants from Government and donations from the public to have sufficient funding to deliver its work. The directors monitor the organisation's cash position carefully and strive to always maintain sufficient reserves to enable the organisation to continue to operate for at least six months should cash inflows deteriorate for a sustained timeframe.

### **6. Going Concern**

The directors have a reasonable expectation that the company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Thus, they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the annual financial statements. Further details concerning the adoption of the going concern basis can be found in note 3 to the financial statements.

### **7. Events Subsequent to the Financial Year End**

There have been no significant events affecting the company since the year end.

### **8. Accounting Records**

The measures that the directors have taken to secure compliance with the requirements of Sections 281 to 285 of the Companies Act 2014 with regard to the keeping of the accounting records are the employment of appropriately qualified accounting personnel and the maintenance of computerised accounting systems. The company's accounting records are maintained at the company's registered office at, Retreat House, Charles Street, Sligo.

### **9. Statement of Relevant Audit Information**

In the case of each of the persons who are directors at the time this report is approved in accordance with Section 332 of the Companies Act 2014:

So far as each director is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the statutory auditors are unaware, and Each director has taken all the steps he or she ought to have taken as a director in order to make himself or herself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the company's statutory auditors are aware of that information.

### **10. Auditors**

Gilroy Gannon, Chartered Accountants and Statutory Audit Firm, have expressed their willingness to be re-appointed in accordance with Section 383(2) of the Companies Act 2014.

Signed on behalf of the Board on 29th May 2025.



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**Anne Hickey**  
Director



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**Fr. Michael Drumm**  
Director

# 2024

## The Year in Numbers

### MEALS

cooked and delivered to older people in the community

24,374

### CHILDREN

attended our afterschool services each day

51

### ACCOMMODATED

people accommodated in our residential services

80

### HOSPITAL DISCHARGE

people in hospital supported by our staff

118

### OPEN ACCESS

presentations to our Open Access service

573



We help children reach their potential in our  
targeted Afterschool Services



# childcare services

## Supporting Education Through Afterschool Services

Education is a powerful tool in breaking the cycle of poverty and addressing the long-term impacts of social disadvantage. At Cornerstone, we believe in investing in the future of children by supporting their educational journey from an early age. Our afterschool services play a crucial role in ensuring that children not only remain engaged with learning but are also emotionally and socially supported as they grow.

By offering structured educational support and recreational activities in a safe, nurturing environment, our afterschool clubs help children maximise their learning experience in primary school and prepare them for a smooth transition to secondary education and beyond.

## Our Afterschool Programmes

Cornerstone operates two afterschool centres in the community, delivering a range of activities and supports throughout the academic year, as well as during school breaks and a Summer Activities Programme in July. Each child receives:

- **Homework support**
- **Nutritional hot meals**
- **Enriching group activities**
- **Delivered in a safe, child-centered environment**

### Cranmore/Abbeyquarter Afterschool

In partnership with the Cranmore/Abbeyquarter Community Centre, this programme caters to up to 33 primary school children aged 4–13. In 2024, the service was fully utilized, with 33 children regularly attending. The programme continues to be a vital educational and social support in the area.

### St. Edwards Ballytivnan Afterschool

With the ongoing support of St. Edwards Primary School staff and management, this programme serves local children directly within the school setting. In 2024, 18 children attended the Ballytivnan Afterschool service, receiving daily care, learning support, and engagement in structured activities.

Our afterschool programmes reflect Cornerstone's deep commitment to early intervention, equality of opportunity, and holistic child development.



We help people  
who are  
experiencing  
homelessness  
rebuild their lives.



# housing & homelessness

## residential services

Cornerstone continued its mission to provide safe, supportive accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability in Sligo. Demand for our services remained consistently high throughout the year, reflecting the ongoing housing crisis and the urgent need for both emergency and transitional support.

### Maryville Hostel – Emergency Accommodation

Maryville Hostel offers 15 emergency beds for single adults, both men and women, who have been assessed by Sligo County Council as in need of homeless accommodation. Each resident is assigned a keyworker upon entry to help them address the factors contributing to their homelessness. Service users are supported to access additional services such as addiction counselling, mental health care, and medical support.

Maryville staff also provide first response support to individuals who present as homeless when Sligo County Council offices are closed.

#### 2024 Highlights:

- 65 individuals were accommodated (44 men, 21 women)
- 24% stayed less than 2 weeks
- 53% stayed longer than 3 months

Bed occupancy remained consistently high throughout the year

Average No. Bed nights	13
No. accommodated for less than 2 weeks	15
No. accommodated < 3months	17
No. accommodated for 3 to 6 months	19
No. accommodated for > 6 months	14

### Ballytivnan – Short-Term Accommodation

Ballytivnan provides 5 short-term beds for individuals who are capable of independent living but require floating support while seeking permanent housing. Though not staffed full-time, Cornerstone staff visit regularly to provide informal support and keyworking sessions.

#### 2024 Highlights:

8 service users accessed the Ballytivnan service

### McAuley House – Transitional Housing

McAuley House offers four self-contained apartments (1 and 2 bedroom units) to individuals or families at risk of homelessness. In addition to providing stable accommodation, the service offers off-site support to help residents overcome potential barriers to long-term housing.

#### 2024 Highlights:

- 1 family moved into long-term housing
- 1 individual entered the service during the year

## Private Emergency Accommodation Support

Due to the continued shortage of emergency beds, Sligo County Council relied on private emergency accommodation to house single adults. Cornerstone's outreach team provided case management and support services to these individuals to ensure continuity of care.

### 2024 Highlights:

- 32 individuals supported (22 men, 10 women)
- Services included housing support, health referrals, and social integration assistance

## Housing Development

In 2024, Cornerstone took an important step toward expanding and improving our services by initiating a partnership with the Housing Agency to redevelop the Maryville site.

Staff from the Housing Agency visited the site during the year and provided invaluable support and technical expertise. Their involvement culminated in the completion of an initial feasibility report, laying a strong foundation for the next phase of the project.

Cornerstone also offers a range of other support services to people who are out of home or at risk of homelessness. This includes :

## housing liaison support

The Housing Liaison Service plays a vital role in supporting patients at Sligo University Hospital who are facing housing difficulties. The service helps individuals navigate the complexities of the housing system by assisting with social housing applications, liaising with housing providers, and referring individuals to relevant support services.

The Housing Liaison Worker also advocates for individuals experiencing homelessness while attending hospital and supports their transition to appropriate accommodation. A key part of this role is encouraging engagement with primary care services post-discharge, ensuring people receive ongoing care in the community—whether in their own homes, residential settings, or continued hospital care.

### 2024 Highlights:

- 118 individuals supported (83 male, 35 female)
- 87 new referrals received
- 108 cases successfully closed

Clients included both inpatients and outpatients requiring housing assistance

### Strengthening the Service:

In response to the growing demand, the HSE funded an additional part-time position in late 2024 to support the existing full-time worker. This expansion has enhanced the service's capacity to meet the complex and urgent housing needs of vulnerable hospital patients.

# substance misuse support

Cornerstone's Substance Misuse Service complements and strengthens the existing network of treatment and recovery supports in Sligo. Delivered through an outreach-based, harm reduction approach, the service works directly with individuals who are using drugs and/or alcohol, as well as those in recovery.

Participation in the service is voluntary, and all service users must express a willingness to engage. The primary goal is to improve each individual's overall health and well-being, while helping them to access and sustain rehabilitation through both mainstream and specialist services.

Support is holistic and includes assistance with:

- Mental health and emotional well-being
- Diet and nutrition
- Stress management
- Employment and education
- Housing and living conditions

## 2024 Programme Highlight:

In 2024, the service continued to provide one to one support for individuals. The substance misuse worker also delivered a harm reduction and recovery-focused programme funded by the Northwest Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force. The programme provided a range of group-based supports to promote healthier lifestyles and sustained recovery, including:

- Healthy eating and cookery workshops
- Wellness activities
- Guest speakers covering topics relevant to recovery
- A Christmas dinner event designed to foster social interaction in a substance-free setting

This initiative helped participants strengthen life skills, build community connections, and reinforce positive coping strategies



# housing first

Cornerstone delivers the Housing First Service across the Northwest of Ireland, covering Sligo, Leitrim, and Donegal. This service is targeted at individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness, including those sleeping rough or residing long-term in emergency accommodation, and who have complex support needs such as mental health challenges or substance misuse.

The Housing First approach prioritises providing individuals with a permanent, secure home as a first step, rather than a reward at the end of a treatment process. Housing is not conditional upon sobriety or engagement in services. Instead, wrap-around individualised support is offered from the outset and for as long as needed.

## 2024 Service Overview:

- 37 individuals were supported in their own housing throughout the year: 21 male 16 female
- The team also supported 4 service users who are awaiting housing
- The team provided intensive, ongoing support to help service users maintain their tenancies
- Three service users sadly passed away in 2024
- A critical shortage of one-bedroom units remained a major barrier to housing access and stability

## Holistic, Long-Term Support:

The multidisciplinary team includes specialist staff providing mental health and addiction support, and in 2024, the service was further strengthened by the addition of a Peer Support Worker. This role brings the valuable perspective of lived experience, helping service users feel understood, supported, and less isolated in their recovery journey.

Housing First maintains a commitment to continuity; in cases of tenancy failure, the service continues to engage with individuals and actively works to secure alternative housing. The aim is not only to end homelessness but to promote lasting recovery, stability, and dignity.

*"Before Housing First I was all over the place, moving between shelters, sometimes sleeping rough. I didn't have much stability.*

*Housing First staff believed in me when I didn't believe in myself.*

*They gave me a home, support and for the first time I felt safe. I could focus on my health and start over".*

*Housing First Participant*

# solace cafe

## The Solace Café: Mental Health Support in the Community

Cornerstone was proud to launch The Solace Café on October 17th, 2024, in partnership with the HSE. This important new service is part of a national initiative under *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone* and the *National Model of Care for Crisis Resolution Services*. It aims to expand access to out-of-hours mental health support in local communities. The service is available from Thursday to Sunday, 5:00 PM – 10:30 PM.

## A Safe Space for Support

The Solace Café provides a free, non-clinical, and welcoming environment for adults (18+) in the Sligo and Leitrim region who are:

- Experiencing a mental health crisis or emotional distress
- Supporting someone in crisis

Service users are welcomed into a friendly, non-judgmental space where they can draw on their own strengths, connect with staff and peers, and explore supportive resources. The café is staffed by a dedicated team of trained professionals and compassionate volunteers who offer emotional support, practical assistance, and referral to further services if needed.

## Impact Since Opening (Oct–Dec 2024)

- 30 unique individuals accessed the café
- 59 total contacts/bookings
- 63% male, 37% female clients

## Looking Ahead

We are incredibly encouraged by the response to this new service and are committed to growing and evolving the Solace Café in 2025. Plans include broader outreach, and further volunteer training to ensure the café continues to meet the needs of the community during times of crisis.





supporting older  
people





# meals on wheels

## Meals on Wheels Service

Our Meals on Wheels service continues to be a lifeline for individuals who are unable to prepare meals for themselves. Meals are freshly prepared by our dedicated kitchen staff in our premises in The Lungy and are delivered directly to homes across Sligo City and the surrounding areas, extending into North County Sligo. Deliveries are carried out by a committed team of volunteers and staff. Referrals to the service are typically made by Public Health Nurses, other healthcare professionals, or via self-referral.

In 2024, 210 individuals (75 male and 135 female) received support through our Meals on Wheels program—the same number as in 2023. Among the recipients, 16% were over 90 years old, including two individuals aged over 100. During the year, 78 new clients began receiving meals, while 64 exited the service.

A total of 24,374 meals were cooked and delivered throughout 2024. This represents a decrease of 4,455 meals compared to the previous year. While the overall number of recipients remained steady, this reduction is partly due (45%) to a local day centre no longer requiring our support. The remainder reflects a trend of individuals either requesting fewer meals or using the service for shorter durations.

We were fortunate to secure HSE National Lottery funding in 2024, which enabled us to replace two of our kitchen ovens, significantly enhancing our capacity and efficiency. Additionally, through the HSE Older Persons Community Refurbishment Programme, we were able to purchase a new delivery van, ensuring our ability to reach service users in North County Sligo.

# befriending

At Cornerstone, we recognise the significant impact that social isolation and loneliness can have on an older person's quality of life. These issues often lead to physical and mental health challenges. Our Befriending Service aims to reduce these negative effects by connecting older adults (aged 65 and over) with trained volunteers, offering companionship and support. The Befriending Service pairs older individuals with trained volunteers who visit once a week. We support people across Sligo town and its environs.

During befriending visits, the volunteer and the participant can:

- Engage in friendly conversation.
- Explore shared interests and hobbies.

Identify social activities that might help expand the person's social circle, creating opportunities to make new friends and acquaintances. The goal is to improve social interaction, reduce feelings of loneliness, and enhance overall well-being.

Referrals to the Befriending service can be made by:

We also provide a Friendly Call Service which offers a free telephone service designed to provide friendly conversation and emotional support for individuals aged 65 and over who feel lonely or isolated in County Sligo. This service aims to offer regular phone calls to check in and provide a connection to the outside world. The service operates 5 days a week, Monday to Friday. Calls can be made 1 to 5 days a week, based on the individual's preference. A volunteer will call you to chat about your day, ensuring that you are well and providing a friendly, supportive voice. If the phone call is not answered, the Friendly Caller will check in with a family member, neighbour, or friend to ensure everything is okay. This service offers a vital link for those who might not have regular in-person interactions, providing a social lifeline and emotional support.

# community services



We support and give advice on housing, finance, entitlements, and welfare issues...



...and help with basics such as food and clothes.

## open access

The Open Access Service is a vital drop-in support initiative offering families and individuals confidential assistance, advice, and information on a broad range of issues, including housing, financial hardship, health, welfare entitlements, and related social concerns. The service operates on a walk-in basis three days a week—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9:30am to 12:00 noon—and is staffed by a dedicated team of trained volunteers.

A key component of the support we provide involves collaboration with the FEAD (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived) Programme, which supplies non-perishable food items such as cereals, tinned goods, pasta, and rice. In addition, we are deeply grateful for the generous donations received from the public, local community groups, and schools. These contributions significantly enhance our ability to assist families and individuals in need of food aid throughout the year, particularly during the challenging Christmas season.

In 2024, households continued to experience severe financial pressures. The Open Access Service supported 264 individuals, accounting for a total of 573 visits during the year. Of those who accessed the service:

- 70% were female
- 55% were families with children under 18, representing support for 398 children

Presenting needs were as follows:

- 83% sought assistance with food or other material aid
- 8% requested advice on rights and entitlements
- 3% were experiencing homelessness or were at risk of losing their housing

We also provided 280 school packs in 2024, ensuring children had essential supplies to start the school year.

In addition to direct support, the service collaborated with other voluntary and community organisations. Through these partnerships, we distributed food parcels to 69 families and individuals identified by partner organisations as in need of assistance.

## community employment

Cornerstone is proud to sponsor a large Community Employment (CE) Project, funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. We operate two distinct CE programmes: a Mainstream Community Employment Programme and a Community Employment Drug Rehabilitation Programme, both of which are designed to provide meaningful work experience and personal development opportunities for participants.

### **Mainstream Community Employment Programme**

The Mainstream CE Programme currently supports 38 participants across Sligo Town. This initiative aims to assist individuals who are long-term unemployed or otherwise disadvantaged in re-entering the workforce. It provides part-time, temporary placements in community-based roles, helping participants build workplace experience and confidence.

Each participant follows an Individual Learning and Development Plan, tailored to their existing skills and personal goals. Through this structured support, participants have the opportunity to:

- Gain hands-on work experience
- Access relevant training
- Achieve educational qualifications
- Build a supportive network of peers and mentors

This programme not only enhances employability but also contributes to participants' overall well-being and social inclusion.

### **Community Employment Drug Rehabilitation Programme**

The Community Employment Rehabilitation Programme is a specialised CE scheme focused on supporting individuals in recovery from addiction. It offers 15 participant placements and 2 CE support worker positions. This programme provides a structured path back to employment through a combination of training, work experience, and supportive supervision, enabling participants to rebuild their lives in a safe and supportive environment.

### **Challenges in 2024**

In 2024, the increased availability of jobs in the wider labour market posed significant challenges for CE recruitment. As employment opportunities grew, interest in CE placements declined, making it increasingly difficult to fill available positions in both the mainstream and rehabilitation streams. This trend highlights the need for continued adaptation of CE offerings to remain attractive and accessible to those who can benefit most.

# fundraising

Each year, Cornerstone is deeply grateful for the generosity and creativity of our supporters, who fundraise in a wide variety of ways to help sustain the essential services we provide. One of our most consistent sources of support is our Thrift Shop, which not only contributes significantly to our income but also serves as a valued community hub. To ensure the sustainability and continued delivery of our services, maintaining and growing our income streams remains a key priority.

## Community Generosity in 2024

Despite the ongoing challenges faced by many, the people of Sligo once again showed outstanding generosity. We continued to receive steady donations of second-hand clothing and household items for resale in our Thrift Shop. In addition, schools, individuals, businesses, and community groups rallied especially around Christmas—donating money, food, and toys, which allowed us to support more families than ever and bring joy to many children during the holiday season.

## Income Overview for 2024

In total, **€129,891** was raised to support our work in 2024. The breakdown is as follows:

- **€81,045** – Income from our **Thrift Shop and Recycling**
- **€3,050** – Raised through our **Annual Church Collection** on **December 8th**
- **€45,796** – Donations from **businesses, churches, community groups**, and **individual donors**

While it is not possible to name each supporter individually, we extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed, whether through one-time gifts, regular donations, or fundraising efforts. Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a real difference in the lives of the people we support.

# volunteers

Our volunteers are active across a wide range of areas, including:

- **Meals on Wheels**
- **Open Access Service**
- **Befriending Service**
- **Solace Café**
- **Thrift Shop operations**
- **Fundraising activities**
- **Governance as members of our Board of Directors**

In addition to these roles, we are grateful for the professional services offered voluntarily by individuals who provide valuable advice and guidance to the organisation.

All of our volunteers provide their time with kindness, professionalism, and dedication, helping us to deliver high-quality, compassionate services to those who need them most. They receive ongoing support and guidance from our staff and management to ensure they feel equipped and valued in their roles.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to every volunteer who contributed to our work throughout 2024. Your commitment and energy are at the heart of everything we do.

# finance & governance

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

(Incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account)

For the financial year ended 31 December 2024


		Unrestricted	Restricted	Total	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total
		Funds	Funds	Funds	Funds	Funds	Funds
		2024	2024	2024	2023	2023	2023
	Notes	€	€	€	€	€	€
Income							
Donations and legacies	3.1	46,671	-	46,671	44,783	-	44,783
Charitable activities							
Grants from governments and other co-funders	3.2						
Revenue Grants and							
Subsidies			1,627,813	1,627,813		1,199,515	1,199,515
CE Programme			533,690	533,690		440,323	440,323
Income Generated from							
Services			255,682	255,682		265,469	265,469
Net Waiver of CAS Principal							
Amounts			19,025	19,025		18,471	18,471
Other trading activities	3.3	89,119	-	89,119	84,561	-	84,561
Other Income	3.4	4,428	-	4,428	4,419	-	4,419
Total Income		140,218	2,436,210	2,576,428	133,763	1,923,778	2,057,541
Expenditure							
Raising Funds	4.1	35,460	-	35,460	40,810	-	40,810
Charitable activities	4.2	-	2,575,957	2,575,957	-	2,073,454	2,073,454
Total Expenditure		35,460	2,575,957	2,611,417	40,810	2,073,454	2,114,264
Net Income/(expenditure)		104,758	(139,747)	(34,989)	92,953	(149,676)	(56,723)
Transfers between funds		(167,481)	167,481	-	(164,387)	164,387	-
Net movement in funds for the financial year		(62,723)	27,734	(34,989)	(71,434)	14,711	(56,723)
Reconciliation of funds:							
Total funds beginning of the year	16	937,050	213,465	1,150,515	1,008,484	198,754	1,207,238
Total funds at the end of this year		874,327	241,199	1,115,526	937,050	213,465	1,150,515

The Statement of Financial Activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the financial year.  
All income and expenditure relate to continuing activities.

Approved by the Board of Directors on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025 and signed on its behalf by:



Anne Hickey  
Chairperson



Fr. Michael Drumm  
Director

# BALANCE SHEET

as at 31 December 2024

		2024	2023
	Notes	€	€
<b>Fixed Assets</b>			
Tangible assets	8	383,374	385,465
Investments	9	2,011	2,011
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		385,385	387,476
		<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Debtors	10	39,876	51,982
Cash at bank and in hand	11	1,544,363	1,556,088
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		1,584,239	1,608,070
		<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year</b>	12	(381,510)	(352,847)
		<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Net Current Assets</b>		1,202,729	1,255,223
		<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Total Assets less Current Liabilities</b>		1,588,114	1,642,699
		<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Creditors</b>			
Amounts falling due after more than one year	13	(472,588)	(492,184)
		<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Total Net Assets</b>		1,115,526	1,150,515
		<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Funds</b>			
Restricted trust funds		241,199	213,465
Designated funds (Unrestricted)		617,500	617,500
General fund (unrestricted)		256,827	319,550
		<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Total funds</b>	16	1,115,526	1,150,515
		<hr/>	<hr/>

Approved by the Board of Directors on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025 and signed on its behalf by:



Anne Hickey  
Chairperson



Fr. Michael Drumm  
Director

**Cornerstone wish to acknowledge all our funders including:**

Health Service Executive

Office for the Minister for Children and Department of Justice and Equality, administered by Pobal

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage via Sligo County Council

Northwest Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force

Department of Rural and Community Development

Department of Social Protection

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Environment

HSE Older Persons Community Refurbishment Programme 2024

HSE National Lottery 2024

Friends of Cornerstone

Diocese of Elphin

Revenue Generated by Thrift Shops

Income from Services

Benefactors