



HARNESSING CHILDHOOD POTENTIAL THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED COLLABORATIONS

WHAT IS THE 'CHILDREN'S PROMISE' GRANTS PROGRAMME 2026

The 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme is an initiative within Katharine Howard Foundation (KHF), an independent foundation focused on improving the lives of young children and their families living in disadvantaged circumstances. The programme is a collaboration with [Community Foundation Ireland](#) and the [Sunflower Charitable Foundation](#).

AIM OF THE GRANTS PROGRAMME

The 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme aims to support community-based organisations working with young children¹ and their families, who may not reach their potential due to the corrosive impact of poverty.

Despite Ireland being a prosperous, developed country, an estimated one in five children are living in enforced deprivation². All children are born with the potential to thrive, and the 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme aims to support community-based organisations working to protect that potential and to support the wellbeing of their families. The Programme will build on the powerful work taking place at community-level to address child poverty with funding of up to €1,500,000 in financial and non-financial supports over its duration 2026-30.

The 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme is a promise from KHF to provide financial and other supports to selected organisations, to support and develop the potential of the children engaged with the organisations.

CRITERIA

Eligible organisations will	Eligible projects/programmes will
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a child or family-focused, community-based organisation working at local level. • Be a registered charity or a company limited by guarantee (CLG)³ – or apply in collaboration with a 'Lead partner' that is a registered charity or a CLG. • Have an annual income of less than €2,000,000 or collaborate with a 'lead partner' within the income limit. • Have up to date and sufficient governing documents, annual accounts and child safeguarding policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support young children aged 0–5 and their parents or caregivers. • Support children and families from 'at risk' backgrounds, such as socio-economic hardship, violence, homelessness, disability, imprisonment, or substance misuse. • Address unmet needs - infant and early childhood mental health, early learning in the home/community, community integration, creativity and play, parent/family health and wellbeing. • Be an innovative solution to a local, regional or national challenge.

¹Young children is defined here as in the 0-5 age range. However, organisations may support children of primary school age, in addition to those in the 0-5 age range as part of a family initiative.

²[Survey on income and living conditions \(SILC\) 2023](#). Accessed on 23 January 2025.

³DEIS primary schools may apply in partnership with a service that focuses on early years services (0-5 years)

ABOUT KATHARINE HOWARD FOUNDATION

Katharine Howard Foundation has supported organisations focused on addressing child poverty since 1979, mainly through investment in community-based programmes focused on 'prevention and early intervention' initiatives, early years childcare and education, or parenting support programmes.

It has also supported research into areas where there may be service 'gaps' or 'needs', in recognition of the fact that it can be difficult to secure funding to generate and capture evidence on local or regional needs.

Katharine Howard Foundation has a strong ethos of working in collaboration with other funders and statutory bodies and with community-based programmes. Our aim is to encourage the best outcomes for programmes, reduce duplication and ensure there is collective, shared learning and understanding.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR THE 'CHILDREN'S PROMISE' GRANTS PROGRAMME

The Programme supports **promising community-based projects** that help prevent or address the impact of poverty on young children and their families. It welcomes applications from **small organisations or partnerships** that target gaps in services and use **innovative approaches** to meet unmet needs. Integrated approaches bringing community and statutory organisations together or initiatives which 'join-up' supports and services will be prioritised.

Applications are welcome from rural and urban organisations supporting marginalised groups such as lone parent families, Traveller families, families of prisoners, families of people suffering with addictions, migrants and asylum seekers, displaced and homeless families, and families who have been affected by domestic and gender-based violence or other issues.

While there is no one 'magic bullet' to tackling poverty's impact on children and families, some approaches are known to help. Evidence shows that interventions are most effective when they:

- **Support parents early**, ideally during pregnancy and the first 1,000 days of a child's life.
- **Strengthen parent-child relationships** by supporting positive responsive caregiving interactions.
- **Promote positive parental mental health** by offering practical help and psychological support and reduce the negative impact of stress.
- **Promote early learning** through strengths-based approaches within the home and community.
- **Provide wraparound support** delivered through relational working within the community to reach, engage and support all families.

Projects based on these principles, or backed by evidence, can improve outcomes for children and families. Many are created and led by community and voluntary organisations with limited resources. Initiatives that **avoid duplication** and **link services together** help reduce barriers and enable families to access support earlier.

CATEGORIES

The 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme will support organisations in the following categories:

1. Age:

Perinatal support, supporting parents during pregnancy and the first year of life – (pregnancy to 1 year).

Early years projects, within community-based settings supporting young children (1-3 years).

Preschool initiatives which bridge the gap between home and Early Learning and Care services (ELC). These can be implemented through ELC services or other community services in parallel to ECCE provision (3–5 years).

Transition to primary school initiatives that support children and families as they transition to primary school (5-7 years).

A whole family approach initiatives which support the whole family including young children (pregnancy – 12 years +).

2. Initiative:

Parenting programmes – evidence informed group or individual approaches to supporting parents.

Parent peer support – individual or group based.

Parent-Infant or Toddler Groups – wide range of health, development, relationship-based or early learning community-based groups.

Innovative therapeutic supports for infant, early childhood and child mental health which are accessible and community based and relative to a child and family's unique context.

Capacity building implementation with combined research strengthening leadership capacity, strengthening your evidence-base or improving your standards of practice.

Pilot/implement innovative initiatives not specified above.

3. Reach:

Larger more complex 'breakthrough' initiatives which scale up proven approaches or build on 'what works' to create sustainable systemic change for children and their families and may help to build policy support in those areas.

Community – Area based - wraparound supports focused on a particular identified need within communities experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage.

Addressing a specific identified need related to a family's experience of one of the following for example:

- homelessness,
- domestic violence,
- parental mental health,
- early childhood disability,
- migration,
- temporary/international protection,
- imprisonment,
- substance misuse or
- marginalisation due to ethnic background.

SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS ARE LIKELY TO INCLUDE

- **An evidence-informed approach** which shows the need for the project.
- **Integration** with other voluntary or statutory services in the community in both planning and delivery (E.g. CYPSCs / CFSN / Healthy Communities / LCDC / FRCs / HSE – CHNs).
- **Consultation with parents in identifying needs** and participation of parents in project planning, delivery and review. If possible, this should extend to ensure child participation.
- **Strategic benefit** of project to parents, the wider community.
- **Sustainability** of the work specifying how the benefits of this project will be maintained in the organisation.
- **Success criteria** and a strategy for monitoring success and managing risk.

FUNDING LEVELS

The 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme offers two options for grant applications:

1. **Momentum Grants:** Multi-annual grants of up to €45,000 (€15,000 per annum over a three-year period) to small, not-for-profit organisations with **an annual turnover of less than €2,000,000**. In 2026, approximately six projects will be selected for multi-year support for the period **May 2026 – June 2029**.
2. **Breakthrough Grant:** A single multi-annual grant will be available for one 'Breakthrough' project to the total value of €100,000 over a three-year period **May 2026 – June 2029**. A 'Breakthrough' grant should build on evidence-based projects which have demonstrated successful implementation on a small scale enabling them to become embedded on a larger scale. In addition to addressing the categories outlined on page 4, the Breakthrough Grant should be a **partnership application** which proposes sustainable options for ongoing implementation post 2029. They should clearly address a national policy commitment.

Organisations already in receipt of multi-annual funding from the 2024 or 2025 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme may not apply in 2026, however the grant would be open to those in receipt of funding from 2023. **The grants programme will open for applications on 18th February 2026.**

A summary of both financial and non-financial support offered through 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme can be found below.

NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Katharine Howard Foundation believes in partnering with organisations, in addition to providing funding. We know that many programmes are run on tight resources with committed staff, and we want to help you to build your capabilities as an organisation and to aim for 'realistic' change. We know this will not always be linear and there will be challenges along the way. Therefore, all successful initiatives selected for the 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme will be offered non-financial support, such as participation in a 'Community of Practice' (CoP) with other grantees, strategic planning, sustainability advice, help with measuring impact and building an evidence base. The CoP has proven to be very beneficial to grantees since the launch of 'Children's Promise' in 2023:

'What I like, is that the KHF seems to be trying to empower us to find other funding.'

'Really enjoy how relaxed friendly and informative KHF is. The support is so helpful and encouraging.'

'Thanks, always an energising session, and surrounded by others making great strides for change is always motivating.'

'The [KHF] team are so supportive and helpful especially regarding reporting.'

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

The 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme will support organisations who apply on their own and those who apply with other organisations. If you are applying as a collaborative project, one organisation should be the 'lead' project and undertake to complete the online application. The 'lead' organisation must be able to provide a registered charity number.

You are encouraged to make clear how you collaborate with other statutory or voluntary organisations in your area and how the project will strengthen these connections. Documentation regarding annual accounts, governance arrangements and child safeguarding policies should be uploaded for each organisation. Collaborative projects will not exceed the maximum budget of €45,000 in total for three-year 'Momentum' grants or €100,000 in total for three-year 'Breakthrough' grant.

OTHER FUNDERS

We want to hear about your other funders. This is because we know it can be difficult to be sustainable with funding from one source alone. It also means we may be able to help you to continue or to grow your funding relationships while we are working with you. If your project combines our funding with other funding, that is okay for us.

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

MOMENTUM Multi-annual – 3 years (UP TO €45,000)

This support is an opportunity to develop an existing promising initiative, a new programme identified to address an unmet need, or which introduces new evidence informed/based learning into practice.

Considerations for ongoing sustainability will be essential with applicants asked to clearly outline their proposals for implementation after the 3-year grant period.

Building collective partnerships and identifying once off mechanisms, which can embed and sustain practice, will be prioritised.

BREAKTHROUGH Multi-annual – 3 years (UP TO €100,000)

This grant programme recognises the challenges of embedding proven practice into mainstream systems. It supports effective, evidence-based initiatives that address a clear need but have not yet secured sustainable funding.

Priority will be given to initiatives that use **existing national or regional infrastructure** to embed and scale **local delivery**, such as implementation through the **Family Resource Centre model** or similar structures.

Examples include:

- A standardised model for facilitated parent-toddler groups.
- A model that connects maternity and community services to ensure infants and families at highest risk of poverty receive support from the earliest stages of life.
- Wraparound models and partnerships that scale best practice for supporting children in at-risk contexts.

APPLICATION PERIOD

The 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme 2026 will accept applications online from **Wednesday 18th of February** and close on **Thursday the 19th of March at 1pm.**

All applications must be submitted through the **online portal SUBMIT**, available to access on our website (www.khf.ie), along with guidance on how to use the portal.

All applicants are encouraged to attend a **Zoom information session on the 26th of February at 1 pm.** This 45-minute session will explain the application process, give you information on how to use the application portal and answer your questions and you can sign up to attend via a link on the KHF website. Applications may be completed on a computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. Enquiries will be dealt with **through email only to info@khf.ie.**

APPLICATION PROCESS

The application for the '**Momentum**' funding will take approximately 1.5 hours to complete and the '**Breakthrough**' funding application will take approximately 2.5 hours to complete. The application will also require you to submit information on your budget, accounts, intended impact and examples of your work. Organisations may submit only one application. Further clarifying information may be sought during the review process. Projects should be in place as soon as possible once funding has been received - ideally by September 2026 to maximise the grant period of 3 years. Grantees will be required to submit an annual report through Submit.com in June of each grant year.



INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

The following categories are outside of the remit of the grants programme:

- Individuals, bursaries or scholarships.
- Minor works.
- Medical expenses.
- Capital projects.
- Animal welfare activities.
- Commemorative structures.

BUDGET AND STAFFING

We understand that many projects require some staff input and this may be included in your budget. This might be of some additional help to prepare and deliver the project. However, we would prefer not to fund core staff costs, as this may be a risk to organisational sustainability, due to the short timeframe for the grants programme. **Staff costs will ideally not comprise more than 65% of your overall budget.**

Projects should also note that if successful, funding will be transferred to each organisation in June 2026. Subsequent annual payments will be made in June on receipt of annual reporting.

Projects will be asked to outline any staff recruitment in their application.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION ADVICE

- Sign-up for a **Zoom information session** on our website (www.khf.ie) and think about the questions you might like to ask.
- Download the application questions from our website (www.khf.ie) to help you in drafting your responses offline, before you begin your online application.
- If you have completed funding applications before, begin with what you know has worked before and build from there.
- Selected organisations will report on their projects, so please aim to outline an initiative that is realistic, achievable and has the potential to be sustainable after the 3 years.
- Log onto Submit.com in advance to become familiar with it – don't leave it to the day of submission in case you have queries.
- Check your budgets and timelines – make sure they are realistic especially if recruitment is necessary.
- Stay within the word count and consider inviting a 'critical friend' or colleague to review your draft.
- Submit all required documents.
- Keep a record of the email and password you used to complete your online application; you will need these details for **all communications** about your application.
- Review all the information before you submit and ensure you do not miss the deadline.
- Good luck!

WHY APPLY

The KHF 'Children's Promise' Grants Programme will provide financial support and a network of supports for grantees. KHF aims to partner with grantee organisations so that we can work towards our shared vision of making Ireland a place in which all children can thrive, regardless of socio-economic background. We also expect it will provide valuable opportunities to work collaboratively with other funders and statutory organisations. Most importantly, we hope it will have tangible impact on the lives of vulnerable young children and their families and make your organisations and communities even stronger.



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