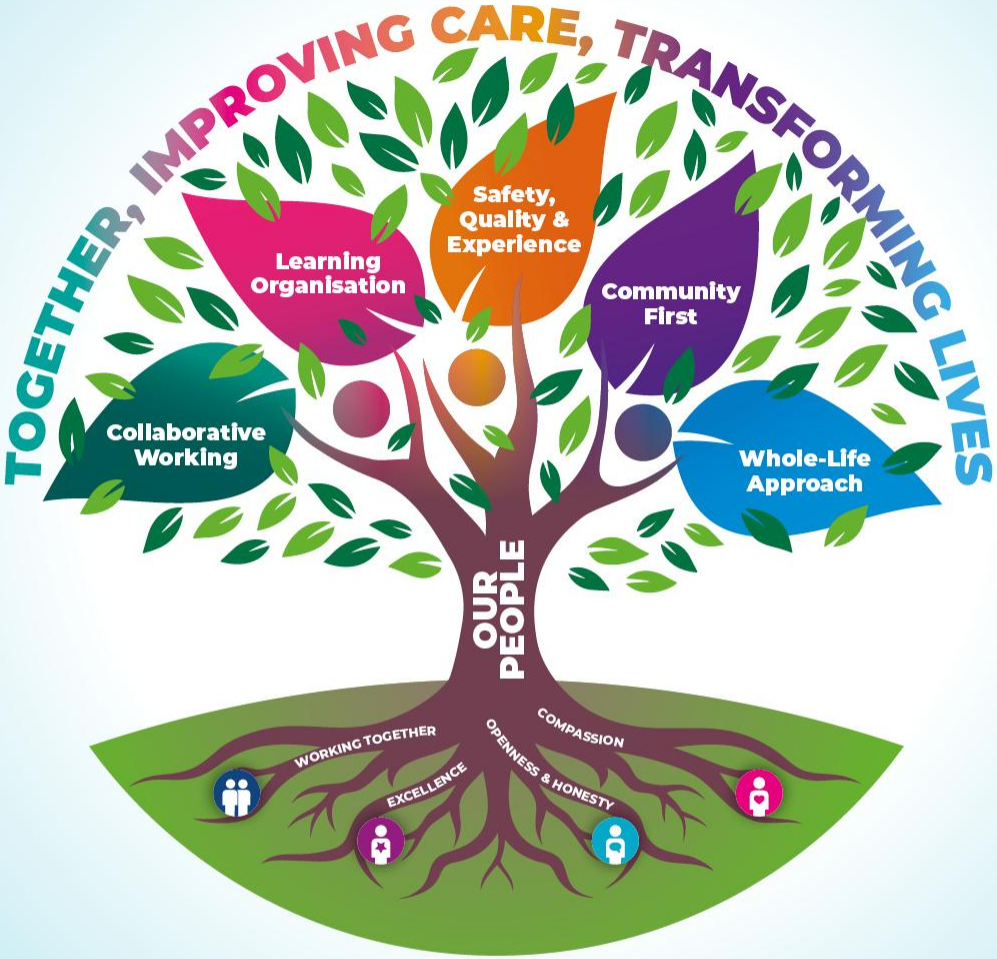
Section 75 Annual Progress Report May 2026

Equality in Action Newsletter 25/26



Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Team - Tel: 028 3756 4151
Email: equality.unit@southerntrust.hscni.net

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

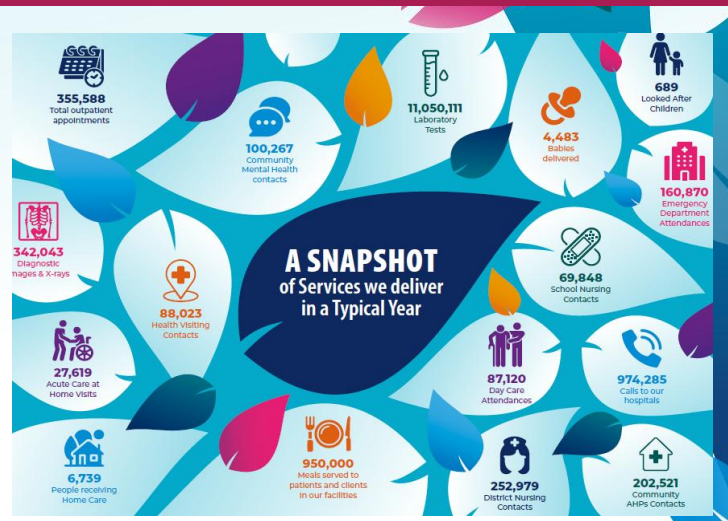
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Section A – Workforce Equality and Monitoring



Equality Diversity & Inclusion

The Trust employees approximately 15,000 staff and welcomes diversity and inclusion, recognising that difference brings value to the organisation. During 2025-26, the Trust has continued to take steps to promote equality and inclusion and continues to mainstream it and make it a key strategic priority for the organisation. Some key highlights for 2025-2026 year are detailed on the following pages.



Diversity & Inclusion Calendar

This year we continued with promoting our Diversity & Inclusion Calendar, making a commitment to celebrate a number of diversity days throughout the year. For the 2025/26 year this included awareness raising and sharing of information on celebratory events such as:

STAFFNETWORKS

REACH
RACE, ETHNICITY and CULTURAL HERITAGE STAFF NETWORK

International Women's Day

VALUABLE

INTERNATIONAL MENSDAY November 19

LGBTQ+ HSC Staff Forum
Promoting equality and inclusion

SOUTHERN TRUST SUPPORTS PRIDE
#Diversity #Inclusion

International Day of Persons with Disabilities
3 DECEMBER

diverse inclusive together

OCTOBER IS GLOBAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS MONTH

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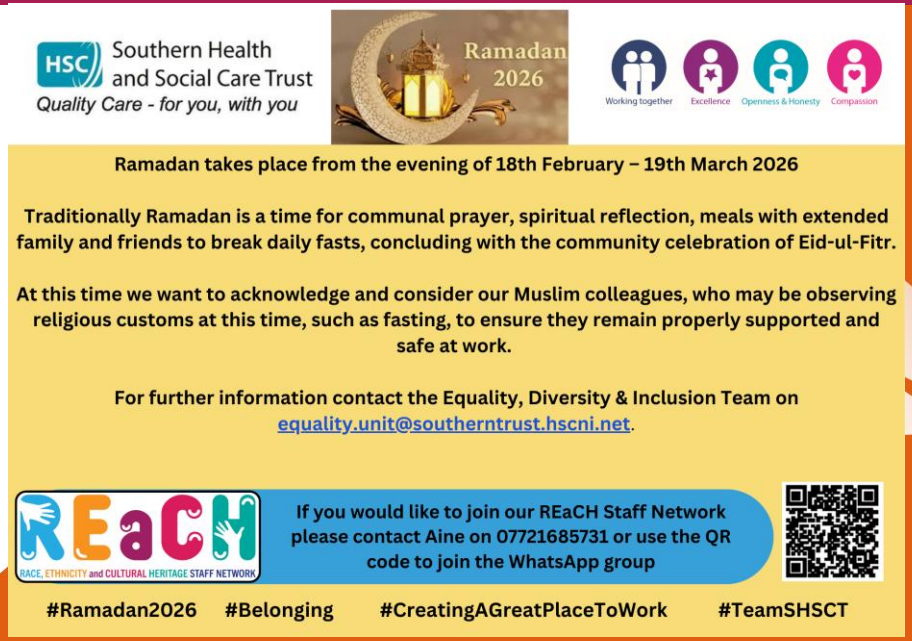
Diwali

20th October saw the celebration of Diwali, also known as Deepavali. It is the biggest festival in the Hindu calendar and is also known as the "Festival of Lights" that celebrates the triumph of light over dark, good over evil, and the blessings of victory, freedom, and enlightenment. On the night of Diwali, celebrants light dozens of candles and clay lamps (called *diyas*), placing them throughout their homes and in the streets to light up the dark night.



Ramadan

Ramadan took place from the evening of 18th February to 19th March 2026. As a Trust, we have a diverse workforce and it is important that we consider our Muslim colleagues during this time, who may be observing religious customs such as fasting, to ensure they remain properly supported and safe at work. In recognition of our staff practising Ramadan, we offered a provision of light snacks in both CAH and DHH dining rooms overnight and shared information on how to support staff and colleagues throughout the month of Ramadan.



Good Relations Week

The Southern Trust is committed to the promotion of good relations amongst people of different religious belief, race or political opinion. During GRW the EDI team took the opportunity to promote many of our resources that are available to staff.

- Our Good Relations Statement and highlight our commitment that our staff and service users should be treated with respect and dignity in line with the HSC Values.
- Cultural Competency Framework
- Importance of our Names
- Interpreting and Translations Toolkit
- SHSCT Interpreter Cards
- REaCH and valuABLE Staff Networks
- Multi-Cultural and Beliefs Handbook
- Reporting a Hate Crime Guide

















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Sign Language Awareness Week

Sign Language Awareness Week – we took this opportunity to raise awareness of the Regional Communication Support Service and how it can support the delivery of services to ensure they are accessible to d/Deaf, d/Deafblind and hard of hearing individuals and their carers.



International Day of Persons with Disabilities

To help raise awareness of **International Day of Persons with Disabilities (**3 December) the valuABLE staff network organised a number of events for staff including:

- valuABLE network get together
- Mindfulness session
- Schwartz round





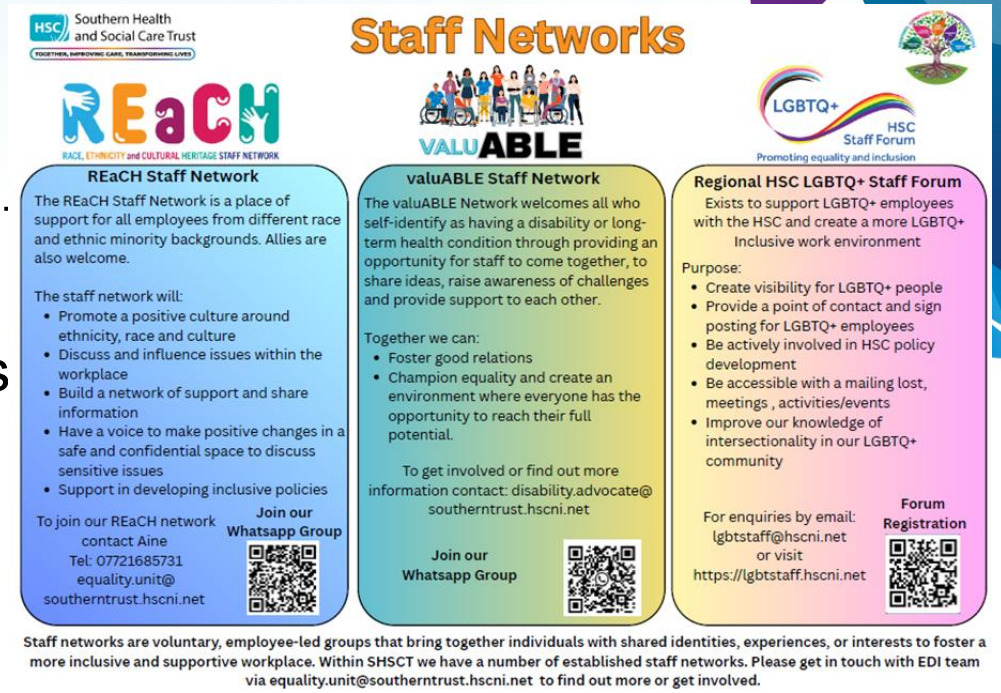


Staff Networks

The **REaCH Staff Network** is a place of support for all current and new employees from different race and ethnic minority backgrounds and allies. The network continues to grow. There are regular meetings and organised events throughout the year and continued communication via the What's App grp, regular emails, meetings and drop in even

The **valuABLE** Staff Network is for staff and students with disabilities and long-term health conditions. This network is an opportunity for staff and those within the Trust to come together on a regular basis to support each other, discuss challenges and possible solutions to issues which are common across the Trust.

The **Regional HSC LGBTQ+ Staff Forum** exists to support LGBTQ+ employees within the HSC and create a more LGBTQ+ inclusive work environment. During this time, the EDI team hosted 2 engagement sessions in CAH and Daisy Hill Hospital, where Rainbow lanyards and the Rainbow Pin were available for staff.



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Multicultural Fun Day 4 October 2025

On Saturday 4 October 2025, staff joined together for our third multicultural event. Over 150 staff, senior management and Trust Board members attended. This year saw us partner with ABC community network to offer staff and families an interactive and fun in celebration of our International Staff and the cultural diversity within the Southern Trust. The day included traditional dancing, chi me, arts & crafts, live animals, games, mehandi art, glitter art and food.





















Disability Advocate

The Disability Advocate Dr Clodagh Corrigan continues to work within the Trust to support managers and provide advocacy for staff and students with disabilities and long-term health conditions. Dr Corrigan has been involved in the review and development of the new regional management of sickness absence policy, disability equality policy and workplace adjustment plan as well as the introduction of the sunflower pin scheme which is due to be rolled out in June 2026.

Dr Corrigan continues to work closely with the staff network in advocating for clearer guidance and consistent application of policies and promoting awareness and understanding of disability-related issues across the organisation to influence positive changes. Future priorities are around car parking, estates accessibility and providing support for staff with neurodiversity.



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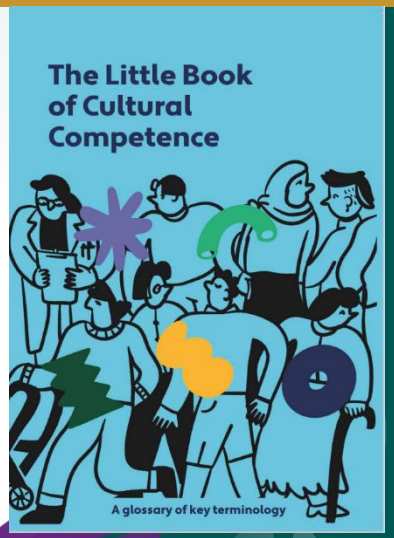
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A Cultural Competency Framework to Guide Health and Social Care

Further to the launch of the Cultural Competency Framework in February 2025, continued development has led to the updating of the previous mental health toolkit for ethnic minority communities (2014). To further enhance inclusive mental health care, a new Practitioners Toolkit ‘Mental Health and Ethnic Minority Groups’ has been launched.

This resource includes three posters providing communication tips, information on barriers, links to community resources, and referral pathways. It also includes a copy of our booklet resource, The Little Book of Cultural Competence.

This regional initiative aims to reduce health disparities experienced by ethnic minority communities and improve engagement across HSC services.





Flexible Working

During 2025-26 we continued to promote the HSC Flexible Working Framework along with supporting resources. During the time frame *April 2025 to March 2026*, we received 990 requests for flexible working (previous year 848). The most common reason for requesting flexible working was Compressed Working and the biggest staff group requesting flexible working is Nursing & Midwifery. Over 70% of requests were accepted.

Menopause Policy and Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse Policy

Our **Menopause Policy** was updated during the year, and the Menopause Workplace Pledge was signed in March 2026. By signing the pledge, we committed to recognising that the menopause can be an issue in the workplace and some women need support.

Our **Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Policy**, along with updated guidance, support and resources for employees and managers, was reviewed and refreshed during the year.

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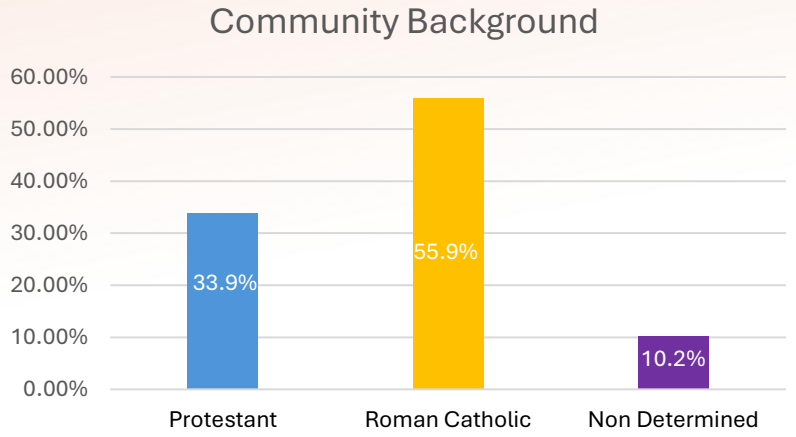
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Annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return and Article 55

The Trust submitted its statutory Annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return to the Equality Commission showing workforce composition between the two main communities in NI, applicant flows/appointees, promotees and leavers for the year.

As at 1 January 2026, the community background was as follows:

- 33.9% Protestant,
- 55.9% Roman Catholic
- 10.2% non-determined.



The analysis is in line with an increasing trend within the Health Sector in favour of Roman Catholics as evidenced in the Equality Commission's Annual Fair Employment Monitoring Report No 34 – A Summary of NI Monitored Workforce Returns 2023.

As at 1 January 2026, the Trust employed 15,299 staff of which 14.6% were male and 85.4% were female. According to the NI Health and Social Care Workforce Census March 2025, published by the Department of Health (DoH) 78.0% of the HSC workforce were female and 22.0% were male. **(NI HSC Census 2025)**

Article 55 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 is a legal requirement mandating employers with 11+ staff to review their workforce composition and employment practices every three years. It aims to ensure fair participation in employment between Protestant and Roman Catholic communities, often requiring affirmative action if imbalances. This was submitted 31 March 2026

Equality, Good Relations & Human Rights eLearning Training – *'Making a Difference'*

During the 2025-26 year, the Trust continued the emphasis on enhancing our staff knowledge and capacity around equality, diversity and inclusion, across all parts of the organisation. To this end, we continue to roll out the corporate mandatory online training equality training "Making a Difference".

The Corporate Mandatory Training (CMT) Compliance comparisons since March 2022 are outlined below:

Training	% Compliance as at 31st March 2022	% Compliance as at 31st March 2023	% Compliance as at 31st March 2024	% Compliance as at 31st Dec 2024	% Compliance as at 31st March 2026
Equality, Good Relations & Human Rights	53%	65%	83%	88%	88%

Uptake has remained at 88%, working to increase this percentage will remain a priority.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

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SECTION B - SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

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‘’Many Cultures, One Community: Human Library Events”

Three Human Library events were organised in Armagh (Oct), Portadown (Jan) and Lurgan (Mar). Human Libraries aim to open dialogue about personal experiences, expertise, cultures, and identities. We want to use these conversation to promote empathy and connectivity with our diverse community. Participants from diverse backgrounds and many countries shared their powerful life stories, promoting understanding, empathy and inclusion. These events created safe spaces for dialogue, challenged stereotypes, and celebrated the richness of cultural diversity with feedback describing the event as “Inspiring, Insightful and Impactful”.



International Women’s Day

IWD took place on *8 March 2026.* With 86.5% of our workforce female, raising awareness of IWD helps to demonstrate our commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace for everyone.

A number of events were held in Armagh, Portadown and Lurgan focusing on women’s physical health and wellbeing and providing access to health information, support services and community connections.







Celebrating Women Event

Over 160 women and organisations from across the Trust came together in March 2026 for the “Celebrating Women” event.

The objective of the event was to actively engage and empower women from local and diverse backgrounds by creating an inclusive space for connection, cultural exchange and shared experiences. It aimed to reduce isolation, build confidence and increase awareness of health and well-being services.







Women’s Wellness Event

- The Woman’s Wellness involvement activity brought together local women and women from different cultural and social backgrounds to promote health, wellbeing, and social inclusion. The event encouraged interaction, learning, and connection through informative sessions, wellness activities, and shared experiences in a supportive and inclusive environment.
- Event highlights included an inspiring talk and music from local comedian Emer Maguire and physical activities such as dance, table tennis, badminton, and boccia, encouraging women of all ages and fitness levels to get active and try new things.
- There were also health checks and complementary therapies providing opportunities for stress relief, relaxation, and self-care plus a wide array of local health organisations on hand to share valuable resources including Women’s Aid, PCSP, Volunteer NOW, Red Cross, SHCST – Breast Health, Sexual Health, Promoting Wellbeing Division, People First and SRC.





Sunflower Room



A new sensory room officially opened at South Tyrone Hospital to support patients with learning disabilities as they prepare for dental surgery. Funded through charitable donations, the Sunflower Room was created by transforming a former storeroom into a bright and calming space. Equipped with dim lights, fidget toys, less noise and fewer staff, it offers patients a safe environment to relax before going into theatre.

My Care Supporting People with Sight Loss



Dr Neil Black featured in a podcast with Royal National Institute for Blind people to discuss how My Care is supporting patients and service users with visual impairments.

My Care makes it easier for people to stay informed about their hospital information and electronic access is particularly useful for people with visual impairments. The app is accessible and compatible with assistive technologies like VoiceOver, for those who rely on screen reader tools for assistance. The accessibility helps service users navigate their records independently, reducing the reliance on paper-based communication.

International Children's Day

June saw the celebration of International Children's Day which welcomed the participation of over 70 children. This day promoted inclusion, cultural awareness and early community engagement.

Feedback and overall impact centered around strengthened community connections across the Southern Trust area, increased awareness of cultural diversity and lived experiences and supported health, wellbeing, and inclusion through partnership working.







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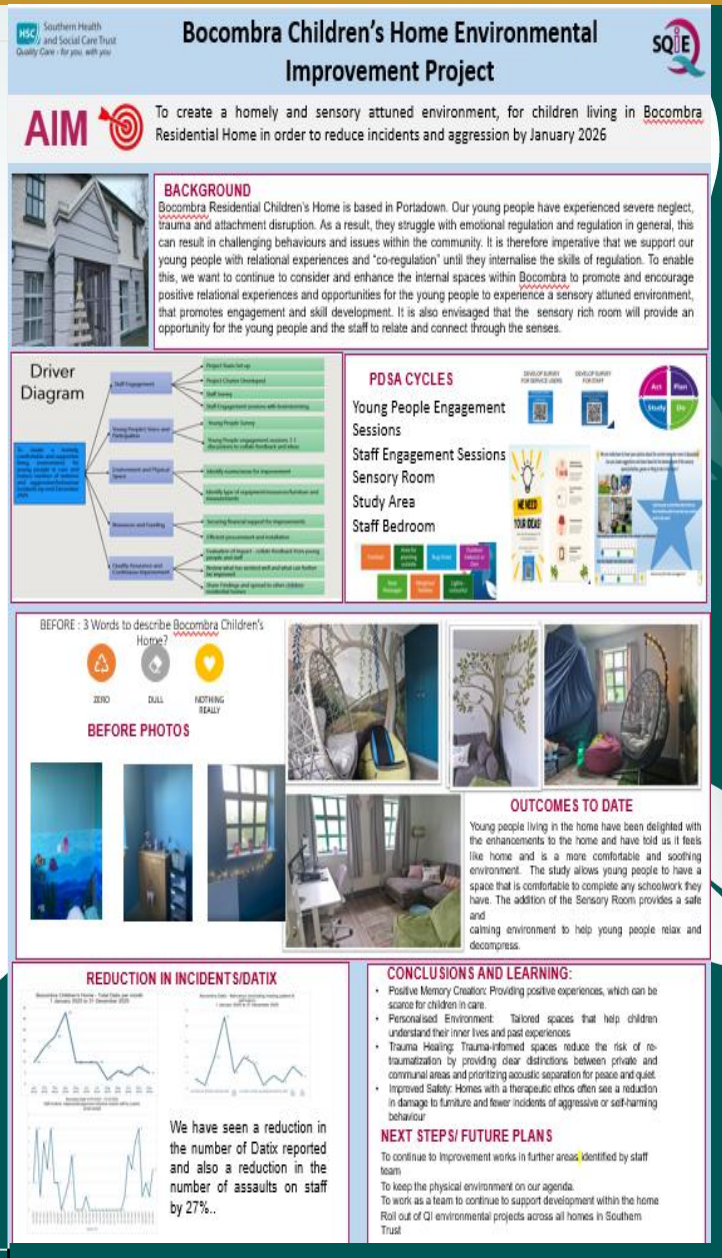
Bocombra Children's Centre Sensory Room QI project

- Staff and young people in Bocombra Children's Home have created a trauma-informed study space and sensory room.
- Many young people in residential care have experienced neglect, trauma, and attachment difficulties, which can affect emotional regulation and lead to challenging behaviours. These enhanced spaces support co-regulation, positive relationships, and provide a sensory environment that encourages engagement and skill development.

Benefits:

- Young people report the space feels more like home and is calming and comfortable
- Dedicated area for completing schoolwork
- Supports relaxation and emotional regulation
- Reduction in Datix reports
- Staff assaults reduced by 27%

Young people have been delighted with the enhancements and have told us it feels like home and is a more comfortable and soothing environment.



Enhancing Dementia Care Across the Trust Programme

Staff recently took part in the first World Café learning session as part of the Enhancing Dementia Care Across the Trust (EDCAT) programme.



The World Café brought together colleagues from mental health, disability, adult community and acute services, including nurses, social workers, healthcare assistants and support workers, to share experiences and explore new approaches to care.

A key part of the session involved hearing from service user Peter Alexander, who is living with dementia. Staff said that listening to his story gave them a deeper understanding of what the condition can feel like day to day, and how small changes in communication, empathy and patience can make a meaningful difference to someone's experience.



A live before-and-after survey showed a clear increase in staff confidence, particularly in recognising different presentations of dementia and thinking through the possible reasons behind them.

Woodlawn House Short-break Respite Unit Welcome pack

Learning Disability Carers Consultants launched an exciting Welcome Pack for newcomers to Woodlawn House & Hillview Shortbreak Unit in Dungannon. The pack was one of the outcomes of the Carers and Stakeholders workstream group facilitated by Learning Disability Carer Consultants and co-produced by Carers.



The Welcome Pack is just one of the exciting developments from this group and has been designed with Carers and Service users in mind with key messages, photos of the unit, what to expect during your shortbreak, and useful contact numbers.



Carers have commented that the pack is practical, service user- and carer-friendly, and will act as an object of reference and communication aid when their loved one receives a shortbreak in the Unit.

Take 5 Sensory Arts Programme

The Promoting Wellbeing Division funded a four week ceramics course as an innovative way to reach into the local Deaf Community with the Take 5 messages for wellbeing.

The course was co-designed by service users who are deaf, hard of hearing or have tinnitus as a way to enable them to creatively express themselves.

Participants enjoyed socialising with old and new friends in a supportive environment. Everyone learned new ceramic techniques and created three unique pieces.

The event was very well received, and participants had some wonderful Christmas pieces to take home and enjoy.











Accessible Communication for Service Users

During 25-26 the Trust made 45,921 (last year – **47,761)** requests for interpreters through the NI Regional HSC Interpreting Service. The top 3 languages requested were Polish, Lithuanian and Bulgarian.

The top four location requests for an interpreter in the 2025-2026 period were: Radiology, Physiotherapy, Health Visiting, Outpatients and Radiology.

Top 10 Southern Trust Languages

	SHSCT Languages	Requests
1.	Polish	8853
2.	Lithuanian	6882
3.	Bulgarian	6241
4.	Tetum	6111
5.	Portuguese	5413
6.	Romanian	2795
7.	Arabic	1780
8.	Russian	1645
9.	Ukrainian	1067
10.	Latvian	798

HSC Organisation	Number of Requests
Belfast Trust	54,725
Southern Trust	45,921
Northern Trust	15,389
South Eastern Trust	10,077
Western Trust	6,771
Other	176
Total	133,059

In addition, 7,919 calls were serviced through the telephone interpreting service during 2025-26 and 67 documents were translated into different languages.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

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Key Priorities for the Year Ahead 2026-27

- Policy review and development - Disability leave – working with TUS and approval from HRDs
- Continued support for Trust managers and support for staff with disabilities/ long term health conditions, to ensure best practice and effective reasonable adjustments in the workplace.
- Provision of appropriate accommodation/changing and toilet facilities for transgender people. With lack of clear guidance from the ECNI, there is a vacuum in relation to being able to provide appropriate guidance and advice both from an employment and service perspective.
- Implications from new legislation - Identity and Language (NI Ireland) Act 2022 and how this may impact on the Trust. It is hoped that further information will be shared during 26/27 so as a Trust we are prepared for any changes.
- Equip (replacement digital system for HRPTS) – challenges and changes that brings, in particular to statutory reporting to ECNI.

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Equality Diversity & Inclusion Team Contacts

Cathy Lavery

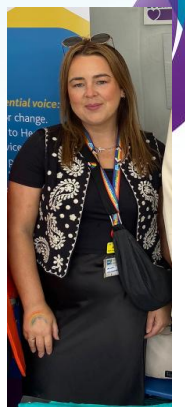


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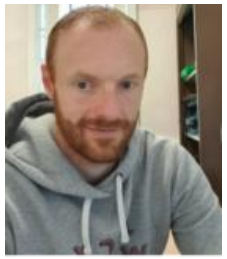


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For more information please visit the EDI SharePoint site.
Comments and feedback are always welcome. If you have any suggestions for progressing the diversity and inclusion agenda within the Trust, please get in touch with any of the team.

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