



Inspiring life through art

Our Impact 2025

Scaling our reach, elevating participation, and
increasing inclusion for children in the arts

*"I felt very included
because the people there
would listen to me and
everyone else."*

- Participant



Helium is dedicated to improving the wellbeing of children and youth in Ireland living with long-term physical health conditions. These conditions are defined as ongoing or persistent illnesses, diseases, or disorders that usually last for 12 months or more. Rather than being curable, they typically require continuous medical management to manage symptoms and maintain quality of life.

According to the Central Statistics Office (Irish Health Survey 2024), almost one in five (18.4%) children in Ireland aged 2 to 17 live with a long-standing illness or health problem. Additionally, over 30,000 annual hospital discharges are recorded for children with such conditions. These figures demonstrate the need to address the complex psychosocial challenges these children and youth face, including social isolation, stigma, and significant emotional strain placed on their families.

From 2024 to 2025, we have continued to grow and deepen our impact. Participation in our hospital-based programmes increased by 16.7% this year, with the overall number of children we reached across all programmes growing to 6,485 (up from 5,555 in 2024). This growth included a significant increase in the participation of youth across our programmes, with 1,489 youth aged 13+ now engaged in our creative community.

While we grow, we remain dedicated to improving the quality of our service so that children can achieve improved outcomes in health, wellbeing, social connection, and creative expression.

Supporting Youth

Youth aged 13-16 years often encounter increased social isolation due to their conditions and face transition challenges within health services as well as their daily life. We are proud to see a 55% increase in youth participation in our community programmes and their participation in our online programmes more than double.

Deepening our hospital presence

We are proud that we have continued to embed ourselves within the hospital and clinical settings where we work. In 2025, we increased the number of outpatient (OPD) clinics by 22% and saw a 37% increase in the number of hospital staff engaged with our programmes. Staff report on the marked difference our programmes make, with 99% reporting a positive impact.

Increasing Inclusion

Our Journeys project allowed us to specifically target children facing the greatest social exclusion, including those who face the challenges of the immigration system. 37.3% of participants came from areas designated as 'below average' to 'very disadvantaged' in the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, showing a positive shift toward ensuring our programmes reach those with the least access.

Our Strategy

In the third year of our six-year strategy, we are proud to have reached a record number of children and youth – achieving a 16.7% increase that ensures we remain well ahead of our long-term participation targets.

Expansion in 2025 was marked by the successful launch of our first programmes in Kilkenny and the further deepening of our reach within the Dublin region.

Simultaneously, our online programme achieved a greater national scale, connecting participants across 29 counties (increasing from 26 in 2024). By aligning our youth activities across both digital and in-person settings for the first time, we are building a more robust, connected community.

Our strategic goals are:



Create to Grow:

Generating creative encounters with children who have long-term health conditions, in the heart of their own communities



Advocate:

Working with children and youth to advocate for the child's right to participate in culture



Share:

Sharing our model in partnership with others to increase access to creative practices



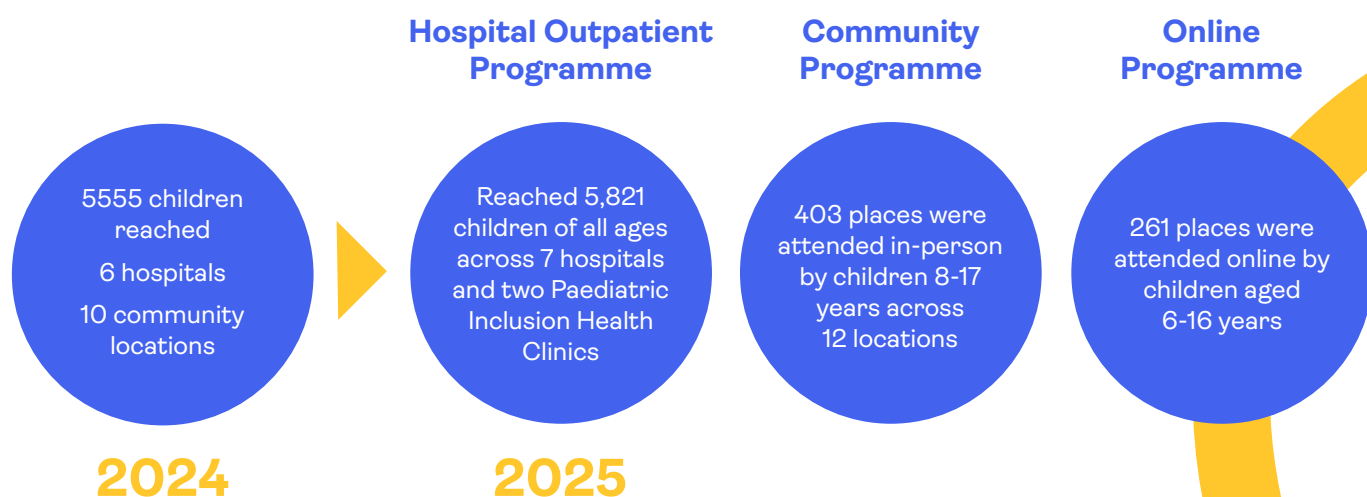
Sustain:

Continuing our strong track record of governance underpinned by a solid financial model, ready for the next stage



Improve to Include:

Commit to the development and delivery of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy



Helium 2025

Impact by County



Number of Children

- Hospital, Community, and Online Programme
- Online Programme only

Health and Wellbeing Impacts

6,485 children and youth engaged in our programmes through hospital outpatient clinics, community and online programmes.

They participated in our Creative Health Hubs across 415 hospital clinics (up from 341 in 2024), 309 community based workshops across 8 counties in 12 locations, while 261 children and youth also got to have a fulfilling creative experience by joining us virtually through our national online programme.

Our work is underpinned by a learning approach - hearing from the children, youth, parents and healthcare staff involved in our programmes to ensure they can have the best experience possible, and so we can demonstrate the importance of this work. Here is a snapshot of their experience and what they had to say!

99% of children reportedly enjoyed the arts while attending the hospital clinics, with 99% of staff reporting a positive impact on the waiting room atmosphere.

Impacts of our Hospital Outpatient Programme

In the outpatient clinics, our artists provide children, youth, and their families with the opportunity to try out different age-appropriate creative activities. Following their participation in the hospital clinics, children and youth can be referred to our Community and Online Programmes for longer-term workshops and camps.

In 2025, this programme reached **5,821 children** across **415 clinics**.

88% of children and youth reported they felt happier when going to hospital.

100% of parents said that their child's mood was positively impacted.

100% of parents reported that their own mood was positively impacted and their stress was reduced while in the waiting room.

92% of medical professionals reported that their experience of delivering healthcare to children with long-term physical health conditions was positively impacted.

The feedback from hospital staff members engaged in 2025 highlights how the arts have become a vital tool for improving the hospital experience:

Smoother Clinics: Staff noted that when parents and children are happier and less stressed, it leads to clinics running more efficiently.

Better Rapport: Clinicians saw the arts activities as a valuable opening to engage with children, allowing them to develop a deeper rapport and better connection with their patients.

"Kids come in and their eyes light up... it's like a little haven for them... It takes the anxiety away from the clinic and makes the waiting enjoyable."

- Hospital Staff

Impacts of our Community Programmes

In 2025, our community programmes took place in 12 locations across 8 counties. Whether through a series of workshops, meetups, camps, or our year-long youth programme, children living with long-term health conditions were able to explore their creativity supported by our professional artists.

Feedback from parents and children participating in the 2025 community programme shows significant positive outcomes:

100% of children reported **enjoyment of the arts activities.**

81% of parents reported their child showed **improved persistence** and coping skills

76% of parents reported their child showed **greater self-expression**

81% of parents reported their child demonstrating **greater collaboration and a stronger sense of belonging**

95% of parents reported their child had improved **imagination, creativity and self-efficacy**

Children and youth enjoyed many aspects of the community sessions, such as having fun, getting to know the artists, and making friends. They explored a wide range of creative ideas, including clay modelling, jewellery making, zine creation, t-shirt printing, and UV light art.

98% of children and 83% of youth in the community programme would like to continue doing art workshops with Helium.

97% of parents reflected positively on the quality and implementation of the programme, highlighting how well the activities met the needs of the youth.

"We are extremely grateful for the experience. Helium has highlighted to us how our child is highly creative when before we worried about her difficulties in school."

- Parent

Impacts of our National Online Programme

In 2025, our online programme continued its growth, reaching 261 children and youth. The programme's reach is now truly national, supporting families across 29 counties, an increase from 26 counties the previous year.

The online approach provides a vital creative outlet for children who find attending in-person workshops challenging due to their health conditions. Each participant receives a high-quality resource pack curated by the artist, enabling them to engage in artistic exploration from the safety and comfort of their own homes, supported by our professional artists through digital platforms.

"She loved having all the supplies to complete a project in full and loves following the directions to complete the project."

- Parent

100% of youth in the online programme reported improved happiness and wellbeing after participating.

85% of parents observed a positive impact on their child's mood and happiness following the online sessions.

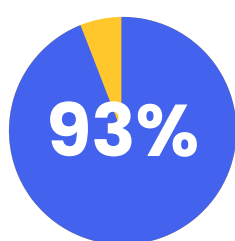
93% of children reported a strong sense of enjoyment and engagement with the creative activities provided.

Arts & Creativity Impacts

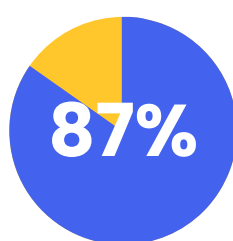
At Helium, creativity is more than a tool for increased wellbeing – it is the heartbeat of how we connect with children and families, sparking meaningful artistic discovery.

Our practice is grounded in an evidence-based model designed to cultivate lasting creative habits. Through this framework, children are empowered to be **Imaginative, Inquisitive, Collaborative, Persistent, and Disciplined** as they explore their own unique creative voices. These habits go far beyond the canvas, equipping children with a versatile toolkit of skills that nurture resilience, confidence, and imagination in every aspect of their lives.

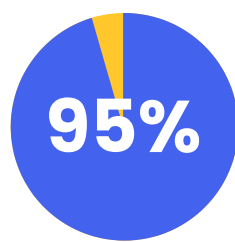
Our programmes lead to **greater artistic and creative engagement**, with children reflecting that they grew in terms of:



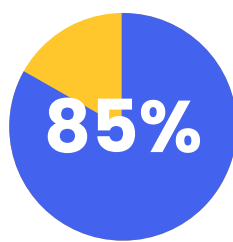
Greater Imagination



Collaboration



Persistence



Inquisitiveness



Winchester University's Centre for Real World Learning (CRWL) Five-dimension Model of Creativity (Lucas, 2022).

98% of children and **83%** of youth in our community programme felt they were more frequently participating in arts/creative activities following engaging with Helium.

95% of parents reported an improvement in their child's creativity, imagination, and self-efficacy following the community programme.

"What's special about it is that the focus isn't on the illness, it's on the art – he's always been creative and now he's thinking more about art, that keeps him busy."

- Parent

Insights From Parents

In 2025 we engaged with parents on an in-depth survey to look at the experiences and impacts of the programmes. We heard from nearly 180 families to learn more about the impact.

- Meeting peers with **shared life experiences** was the most significant highlight for many – children felt a deep sense of belonging by connecting with others who share similar experiences.
- Workshops provided a haven where children could escape clinical labels and simply be ‘kids again’, **reducing feelings of social isolation**.
- The hands-on nature of completing projects **reinforced a child’s sense of competence**, fostering an identity shift from patient to artist.
- Children thrived on the diversity of materials and techniques, from clay to zines - which allowed them to **feel in control and empowered** through choice.
- For parents, the sessions offered a vital distraction and **a space of calm**, providing a break for the entire family unit from the emotional strain of chronic illness.
- The presence of onsite medical support allowed parents to **fully relax** for the first time, knowing their child was in a safe, specialised environment.
- In hospital settings, creative activities **reduced anxiety and built rapport**, transforming scary medical visits into positive, looked-forward-to events.
- Having a regular, organised creative activity brought a much-needed **sense of stability** to lives often disrupted by medical emergencies and appointments.

"They come back asking for [the artist] by name. It makes them feel like someone cares about them as a person, not just a patient."

- Healthcare Staff, Inclusion Clinic

"I enjoyed the Saturday morning, still in our PJs sometimes, sitting down at the kitchen table having time together, basically... it was me and him sitting down, having that connection together and it does help him, and that boosts his confidence."

- Parent, Online Programme



Showcases of the Art

While our data highlights important improvements in wellbeing, the most vibrant evidence of our impact lives within the art itself. We are delighted to find ways to showcase the talents of our children and youth which we encourage you to explore through the links here!

Take a moment to explore the creative showcases below by scanning the QR Code



Improve to Include

One of our core strategic goals is to ensure we are reaching children from all backgrounds and walks of life, and that our programmes allow for children to engage no matter the barriers they face, whether due to their condition or other factors.

In 2025, we maintained a strong focus on inclusion across our national programmes, expanding our reach into communities with the greatest need:

37.3%

of participants were from areas characterised by deprivation (Pobal below-average areas).

43.4%

of participants came from rural areas.

60.7%

of all participants had a disability or additional need, a significant increase reflecting the deepening complexity of the children we support.

The gender balance for our community programmes remained steady, with 58.7% girls and 41.3% boys participating.



We implemented new approaches to break down barriers and increase access for children from marginalised areas, such as the pilot travel initiative in Ennis. We operated this pilot for two seasons, Summer and Autumn 2025, in partnership with the Red Cross Clare who provided the bus and bus driver, with a bus escort hired and trained by Helium to provide support. 4 children took part in the initiative in both seasons.

Our commitment to access remains steadfast: we ensure the presence of onsite medics for our community programmes, maintain our workshops as free of charge, and utilise accessible venues located directly within the communities we serve.

To further support diverse families, flyers, posters, parent surveys and comment cards used in hospital outpatient settings have been translated into 11 languages, including Arabic, French, Polish, Somali, and Ukrainian. Additionally, with the launch of the new Helium brand and website, this platform now has the functionality to be translated into multiple languages. The website also has a web accessibility plugin, providing users with essential accessibility options.



Further Impacts

In 2025, our mission was bolstered by the dedication of **57 volunteers** and **128 full days of medic support** who supported our programmes. Our incredible medical team provided vital onsite support across our Creative Health Hubs, ensuring a safe and worry-free environment for all participants.



Family Support Programme

This year, we brought together several initiatives into a cohesive Family Support Programme. This programme is designed to improve opportunities for parents to meet and support each other through complementary activities.

Family Connect: This initiative was piloted in Cork in the Spring of 2025, alongside a creative workshop for children. It provides a relaxed space for parents to connect with one another while engaging in optional creative activities. By late 2025, it had been delivered to 20 parents, with additional pilots taking place in Clare and Dublin to determine the most suitable format for wider implementation.

Post Pal for Parents: Launched at the start of 2025, this is a creative exchange specifically for families participating in the Online Programme. Building on the success of the children's Post Pal project, it offers parents a simple way to connect by post and share experiences across distances.

Family Advisory Council: Established in 2024 to amplify parent and guardian voices, the council's membership doubled to 10 in 2025. The Council was consulted throughout the year, including on the development of a new booking system, 'Transitioning to Adulthood' theme as part of the Future Careers Pathways initiative, and the formalisation of the 3-year Family Support plan extending to 2028.

Youth Leadership and Participation

2025 marked a transformative year for youth voice with the launch of the Helium's Youth Participation Framework. Co-developed with our Youth Advisory Group (YAG), this framework ensures children and youth are central to our strategy. Participation increased sixfold this year, further strengthened by the introduction of a YAG Alumni group and annual Youth Voice Focus Groups.

Our youth took a leading role in creative advocacy, launching a youth-led zine project at the Dublin Digital Hub and co-facilitating our staff "Dream Big" planning day to shape future programmes. We also began planning for the 2026 All-Island Youth Forum 'Let Them Make Art', focusing on cultural access for those with health conditions.

By transitioning from service users to active leaders, our participants are ensuring that Helium is truly youth-led, amplifying their influence both within the organisation and across the national arts landscape.





Shauna's Story

Shauna lives with AMC, a rare condition that affects how her joints move and develop. As a powerchair user, access is always important – and when her mum discovered Helium on social media, she knew it would be the perfect fit.

Shauna was a little worried at first — she was trying something new, after all — but her nerves soon faded. Five years later, and she's a regular. As well as our Saturday workshops, Shauna's joined us for special weekend sessions, camps, and even trips to galleries and an urban sculpture trail.

But for Shauna, what Helium has given her most, is creative freedom.

"I've learned a lot about different types of art," she explains. "There are things I wouldn't have heard of before, but then I try them and discover I love them."

Where Shauna found school art a little restrictive, at Helium she could just let loose.

"You can experiment," she continues. "I like that at Helium, you can start something and see where it goes."

It paid off. Shauna's mum never fails to be impressed by the variety and imagination in the work her daughter brings home. There's been animal collages, t-shirt prints, and even a painted apron. But it's the clay turtle that wins the day.

"I think it's absolutely brilliant," she says, laughing. "The stuff they make. It's so beautiful. I'm so proud of what she's created."

Of course, it isn't just the chance to make art that's important.

"It's nice that on a Saturday we have something that's just for her," Clare continues. "It's lovely seeing her meet new people as well. It's important for me too – talking to other mums while we're waiting for them to come out. I love it!"

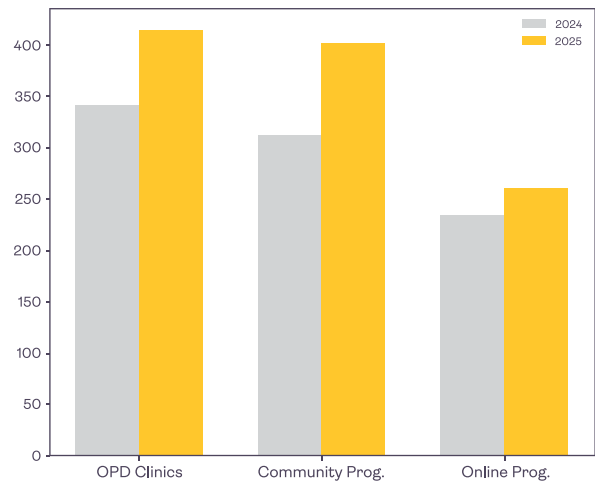
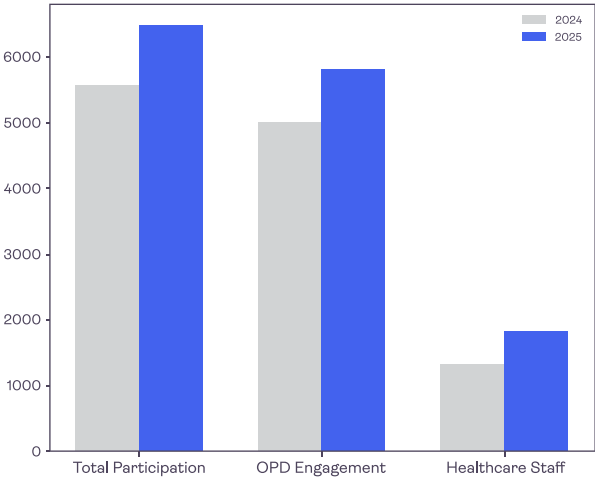
Shauna doesn't know exactly where her career will take her, but she does know it will be creative. She'd love to use the skills and experiences she's built through Helium and is looking forward to seeing where they take her.

Charting Our Scale

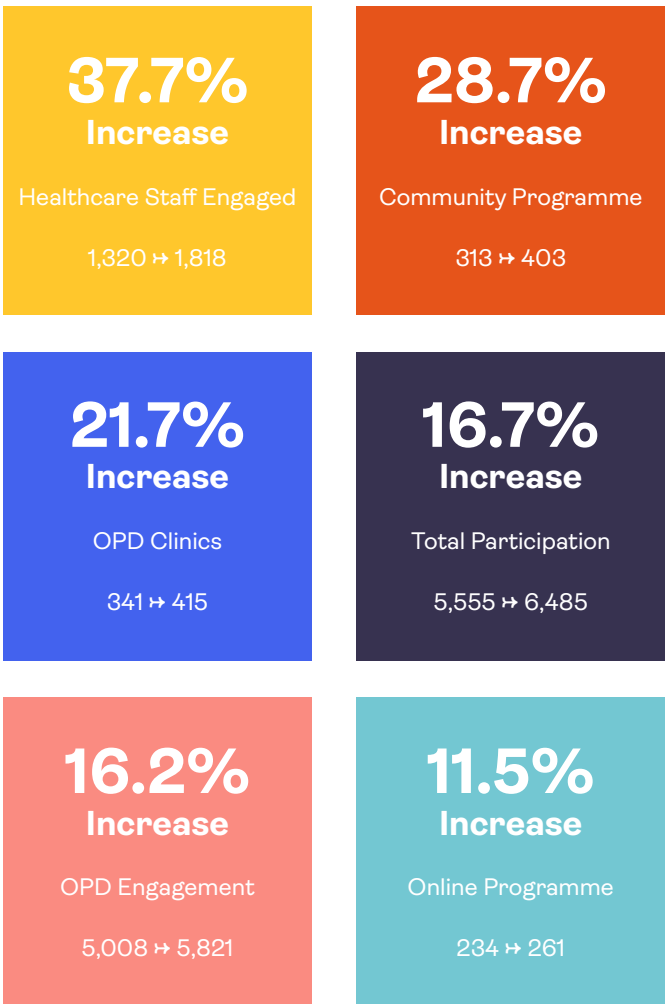
Comparing the Increase in Participation between 2024 and 2025

2025 has been a year of increasing participation, engagement, and reach across all of our programmes. In these graphs we see the story of our growth, built on our strategic commitment to broaden access and work towards ensuring all children and youth can be a part of Helium.

‘High Volume / Low Volume metrics’



2024 to 2025 Growth Impact - All Metrics Are Percentage Increases







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The 2025 Impact Report was created from data gathered by Helium's internal Evaluation and Monitoring Coordinator throughout 2025, January-December, using an established Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) Framework. The outcomes data was peer reviewed externally by Dr Helga Sneddon of Outcome Imps.

Helium is committed to evaluating and improving our activities so youth and families have the best possible experiences. We gather robust data at the end of every programme to evaluate how well our activities are run, whether they are making a real difference, and any suggestions for improvements. We listen to the children and youth, their parents, the staff and our Helium team. Data is collected through surveys, interviews and focus groups.

For a digital version of this report and to access the regional reports (East, West, South, Mid West, South East and Online) please go to: <https://helium.ie/our-impact/impact-reports/> or follow the QR code below:



helium.ie

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Helium is a registered charity and compliant with the requirements of the Charities Regulator, the national regulatory authority for charities in Ireland, while also being a double Good Governance Award winner and awarded 'Triple Lock.'

Acknowledgements

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Helium was awarded an RTÉ Toy Show Appeal grant by Community Foundation Ireland to deliver our Youth Programme.

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