

# ANNUAL REPORT

Project Play

2024

[www.project-play.org](http://www.project-play.org)







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# LETTER FROM THE TEAM



2024 was an extremely difficult year for those living on the UK-France border as the death toll grew and hostilities intensified. It was the deadliest year recorded - at least 82 people were killed, of whom 14 were children.\* Every death is a tragedy. We share our condolences with the friends and family of each person killed.

Alongside the tragic loss of lives, the political backdrop of our work has been more tumultuous on both sides of the Channel. We have seen the rise of the far right across Europe and civil unrest, as well as a doubling down in dehumanising policies of "deterrence". This affects us, our community and our fellow organisations directly through hate attacks and hostilities, and indirectly through reduced funding avenues. This climate makes it harder than ever to support people-on-the-move. We stand by every human's right to seek safety and live in dignity, free from violence and discrimination.

2024 has been a year of development and change for Project Play. Entering our fifth year it was clear that the need for our service is not diminishing, and we have been making strategic decisions about our next steps to ensure we remain able to respond to the needs of the communities we work with. This meant growing our remote team - including our amazing new board, safeguarding consultants, play specialists and psycho-social support team. We have felt the effects of their support and look forward to watching the service flourish further in 2025.

The children that we work with continue to motivate us with their resilience, imagination, and humour. Despite the unthinkable challenges they face, their insight, curiosity and laughter brings joy to our sessions. They inspire us to continue to work towards a future in which no childhood looks like this.

We would like to extend a huge thank you to each and every person who has supported us this year - we really couldn't do this without you.

## Thank you all!

*Big love from Rachel, Katie, Juliette, Julie and all the Project Play family x x*

\*International Organisation for Migration, '[Missing Migrants: English Channel to the UK](#)', accessed 25/01/2025.

# FINANCIAL REPORT

## Financial Summary

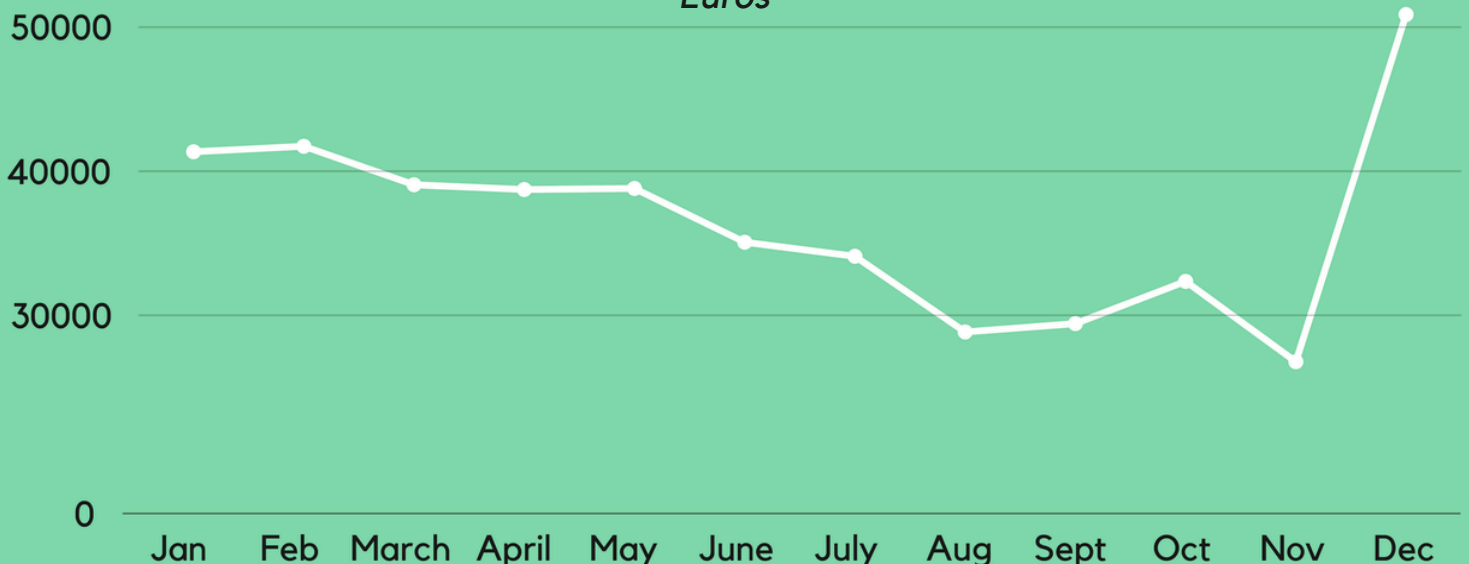
2024 was a positive year of growth for Project Play financially. We saw a **marked increase** in our year-on-year **income**, and a **small decrease** in **expenditure**.

	2024	% Change from 2023
Balance Year Start	€ 37,974.64	/
Total Income	€ 110,873.95	+ 24.75 %
Total Expenditure	€ 97,970.68	- 1.77 %
Balance Year End	€ 50,877.92	+ 33.98 %

We benefitted from **steady income from monthly donors**, boosted by our January raffle, helping to create stability. In particular, the support of **Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) CIC**, who worked with us on our match-funding campaign in the autumn, was invaluable in enabling us to achieve our healthiest end of year balance in Project Play history!

## 2024 Month-End Balance

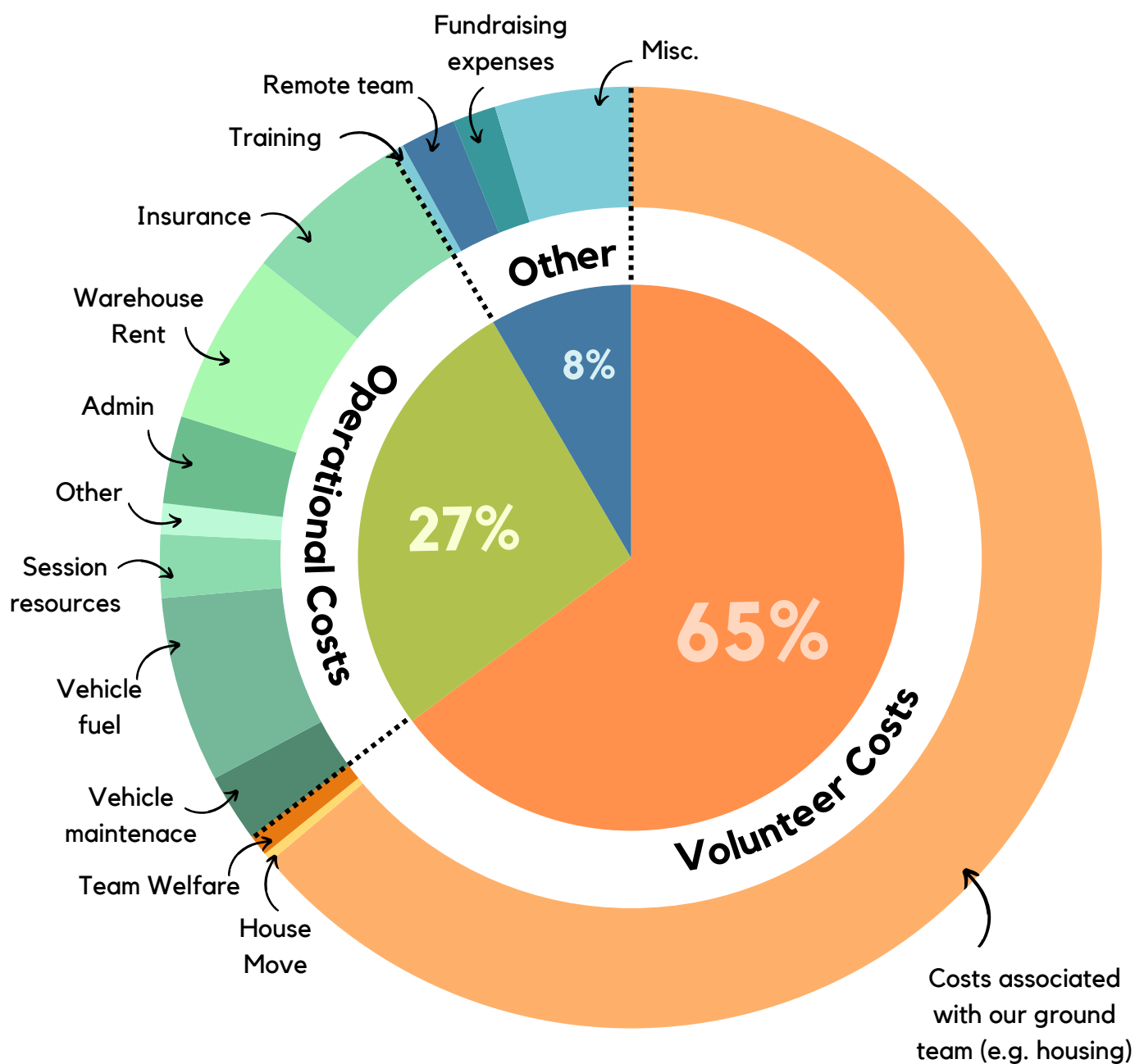
Euros\*



\*includes our French bank account and forRefugees - exchange rate based on year average (1.18)



## Expenditure

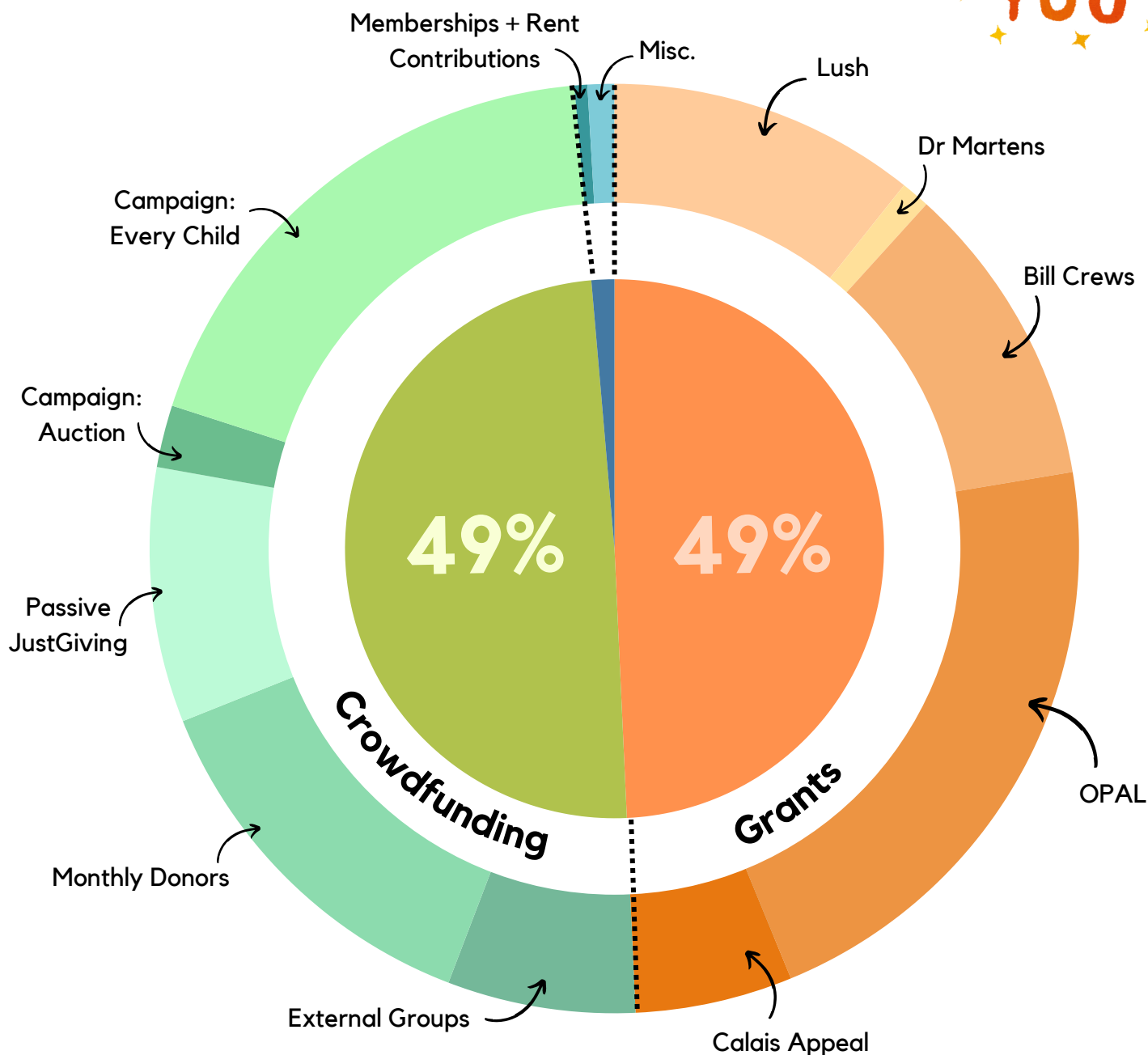


As with previous years, the majority of our expenditure goes to supporting our **ground team**, without whom we could not run our service. Ensuring that they are supported, including through the provision of accommodation, is therefore of utmost importance.

Other significant areas of spending include **vehicle fuel (6.4%)** and **warehouse rent (5.9%)**, but increased transparency of month-on-month spending as a whole team enabled us to remain attentive to budget, and we **ended the year both under budget and with a decrease in overall spending** compared to 2023.

## Income

THANK  
YOU



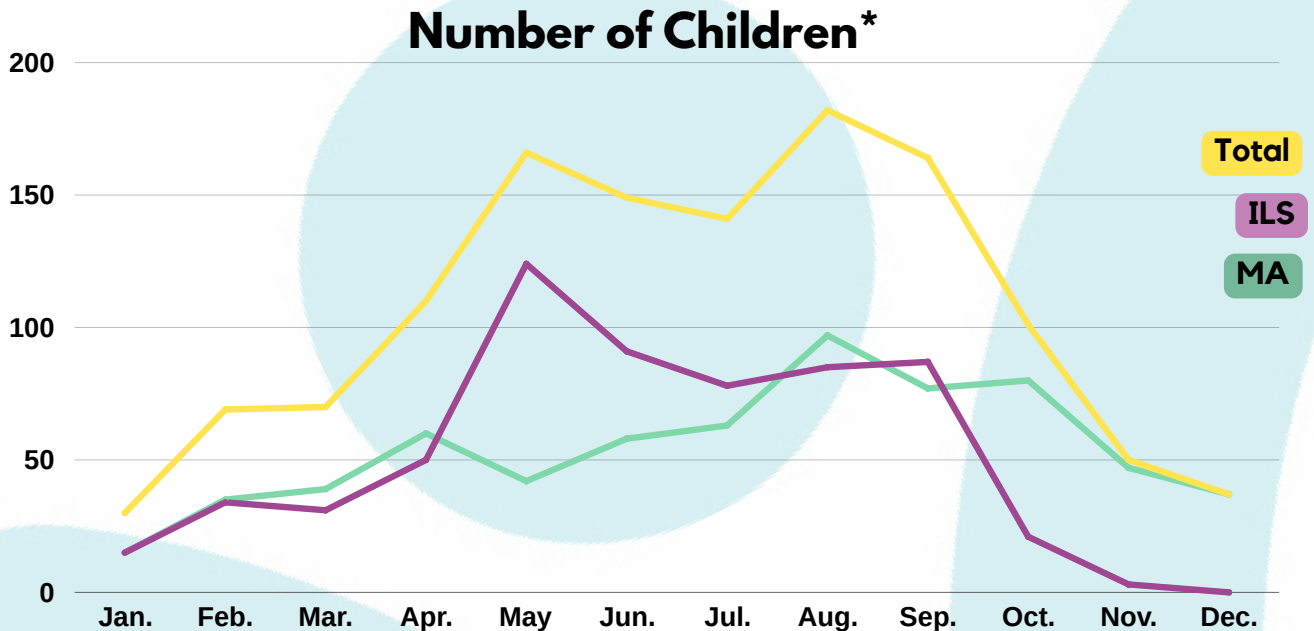
In 2024 we saw a significant increase in our number of **monthly donors**, and their support has been a valuable source of forecastable income this year (13%). We also received significant donations from external groups (6.5%). A **huge thank you** to the Unity Centre Glasgow, Bearsden Guild, The Nottingham, Bristol and Sussex STAR groups, Blackheath Quakers, Cam Crag, Nick Blundel and Stefanie Walker for their support.

We've also received a number of generous grants. In particular, the **Bill Crews Foundation (10.6%)** supported our purchase of a new gazebo, team vests and improved resources. OPAL's support bolstered the success of our primary Crowdfunding campaign, which we ran in autumn this year, and which returned **173% more** than our equivalent Christmas campaign in 2023. **We are immeasurably grateful** for everyone who has supported us through donations and fundraising this year - **thank you**.



# OUR YEAR IN PLAY

## THE CHILDREN WE WORKED WITH



**990**

Children  
worked with

In 2024 we worked with **990 children** in both **informal living sites (ILS)** and **independent safe houses and day centres (maisons accueillantes - MA)**. This is a slight increase from 905 in 2023, illustrating that the number of children on the move on the UK-France border remains as high as ever.

**3.7**

Weeks on the  
border

Conditions for these children are **hostile, violent and a threat to mental and physical well being** - indeed, this year saw an increase in violence and fatalities on the UK-France border. At least **82 people were killed, 14 of whom were children\*** - the highest number since records began.

**3.5**

Sessions  
attended

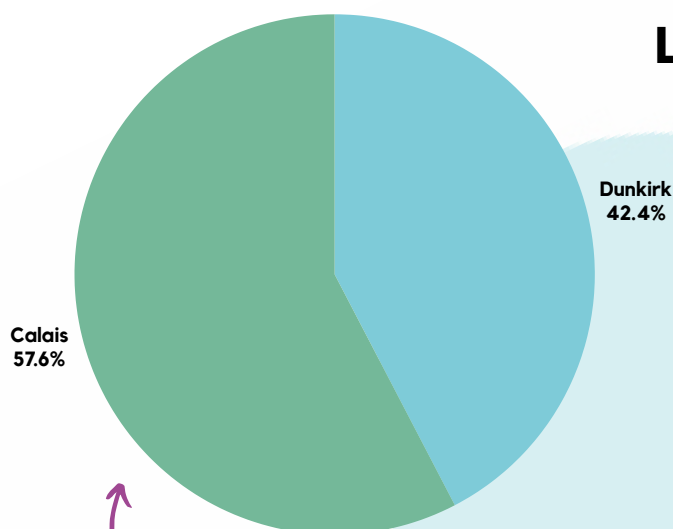
For many children, the increased violence on the border has meant that they've been **stuck in limbo on our border for extended periods of time** - we worked with one child who was present for at least **23 weeks**. On average, children **remained on the border for 3.7 weeks** - during which time they were forced to live in deeply challenging conditions, with no state provided access to shelter, food, water or sanitation, and facing regular police violence.

Our sessions provide some small respite for children in this situation - offering them space to relax, play and grow. On average, the children we worked with **accessed between 3 and 4 of our sessions**.

\*- the number of children we work with is not representative of the total number of children on the move in northern France.

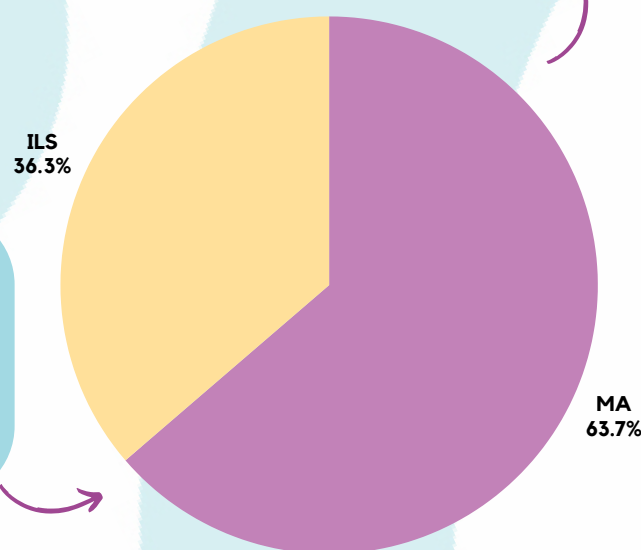
## THE SESSIONS WE RAN

### Locations

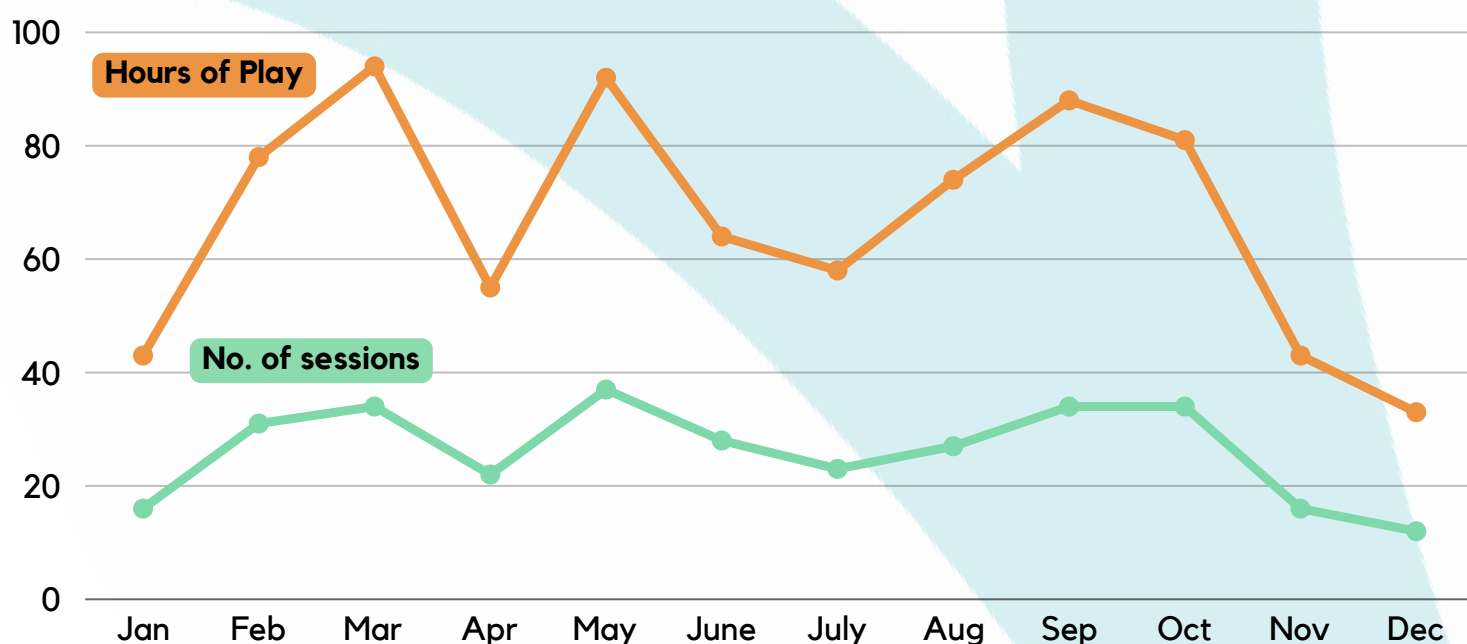


In 2024, we ran more sessions in Calais. Alongside our regular sessions in MA, we worked in ILS which we have not previously visited extensively, enabling us to bring play to more children. Challenges, such as eviction operations and security concerns, meant that we ran fewer sessions in the ILS near Dunkirk than in previous years.

This year we expanded our service in MA. We worked closely with families and staff in these centres to design sessions that met the needs of children present in these spaces for extended periods of time.



### Sessions and Hours of Play Facilitated



We facilitated **314 sessions** and **803 hours of play** in 2024. Unlike previous years, our provision was more consistent across the months, and we ran more sessions earlier in the year - responding to the demand in MA and the extended periods of time children remained in northern France.



# Our Core Activities:

# SAFEGUARDING

In 2024, we saw the safety of children at the border more compromised than ever before. The number of children experiencing violence from the state increased, as access to shelter and sanitation decreased. In addition, the number of children who have died is significantly higher than in previous years. We have developed and adapted our service to meet the emotional and psychological needs of the children who have been either affected directly or witness to these events. The state fails these families and they are often left without basic access to shelter or support, leaving them without the protective factors necessary to recover from these tragedies.

At Project Play, we have continued to respond to the needs of children while also improving our safeguarding provision long-term. We have expanded our networks, strengthened our safeguarding policies and embedded a culture of 'do no harm' throughout our organisation.



## Deaths at the Border and Increased Violence

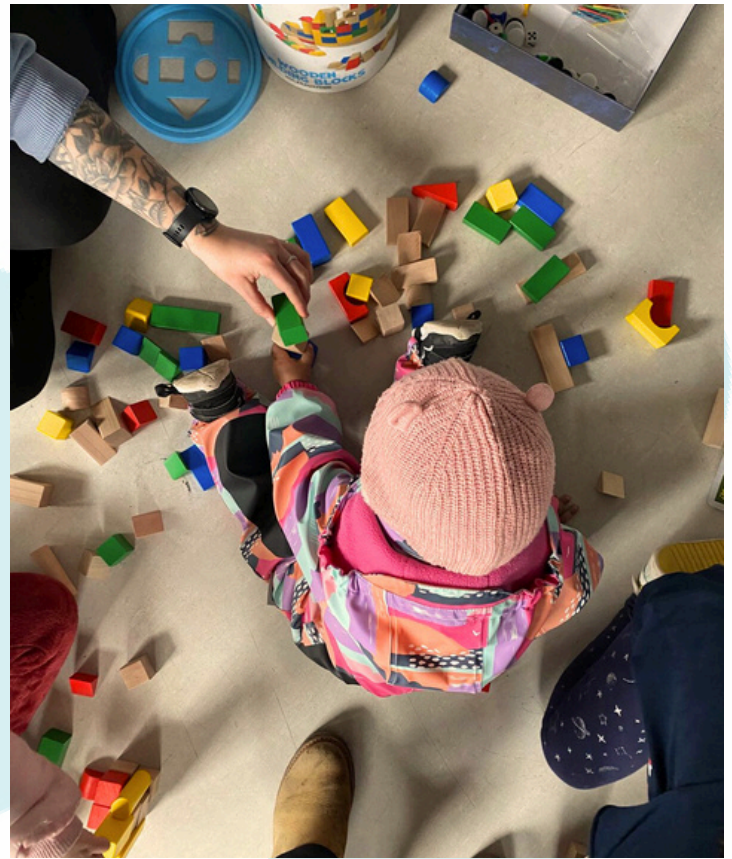
At least 14 children were killed or went missing on the UK-France border in 2024\* and crossing attempts have become more dangerous. This is the result of more hazardous routes being taken, due to the increased state intervention on the beaches, attempts being made in perilous weather and poor quality boats being over-crowded - leading to shipwreck and people being crushed.

Every death at the border is a tragedy, and every death is one too many. The deaths of children, babies and young people have felt particularly saddening for our teams in 2024. We have supported families who have lost sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and have become a key part of their network in processing their grief. We have approached the situations with the upmost caution and compassion.

Furthermore, children regularly recount to us these stories of police violence or dangers they have experienced. From being teargassed, chased or witnessing violent behaviour, children are being subjected to traumatising and damaging experiences. Many children have been hospitalised as a result. In response, as a team, we have increased our capacity for taking these testimonies. We hope to contribute to ending this cycle. We have improved our training for taking these disclosures, and ensure our team has adequate welfare provisions in place. We have seen, through play, the children use imaginative and creative mediums to express themselves and try to process the events that have taken place.

\*International Organisation for Migration, ['Missing Migrants: English Channel to the UK'](#), accessed 25/01/2025.





## Widening Capacity and Provision and Building our Networks

Over the past year, we have adapted our service to meet the needs of families facing different vulnerabilities. We have received support from different networks and consulted with experts to provide case-specific support. This has allowed us to plan specific activities and sessions and adapt our approach to different needs, such as children with additional needs, problematic sexual behaviour and traumatic events. To assist us in supporting these families, we have strengthened our partnerships with other organisations to provide connected support for both children and parents.



We have also built a network of safeguarding consultants to provide first-response advice and assistance in navigating French Social Care Systems. By building this network, we can ensure our risk-response provision remains thorough and we have contingency plans in place for unexpected absences.

Furthermore, we continued to provide advice and training for various partners and offering regular trainings for external organisations regarding child protection and safeguarding. This has helped to build a stronger shared and collective understanding of safeguarding children and helped evolve a culture of spotting and reporting concerns.



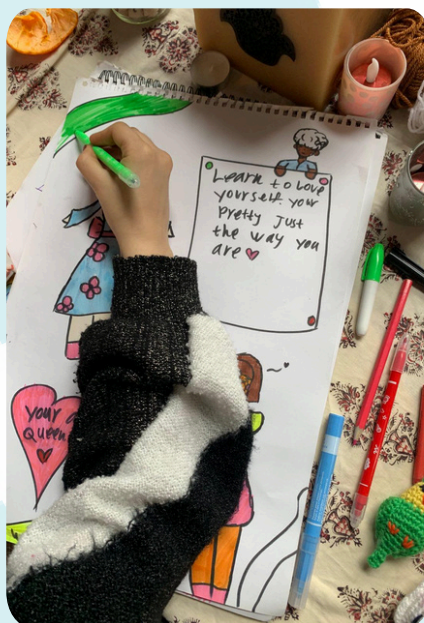
# Our Core Activities:

# ACTIVITIES

When planning sessions, we consider how to support children to engage, relax and have fun! With children not accessing other forms of education or safe spaces to play, we also consider how to support them to develop key skills. From emotional awareness and regulation, to teaching them about health and self-care, to fine motor skills - we strive to make sessions impactful. An objective is always hidden away in all the fun! Here are some of our highlights from 2024.

## Imagination Week

During our imagination week, apart from designing incredible costumes and unicorn hats, we gave the kids the opportunity to write and illustrate their own stories. While the youngest children were creating playdough characters and acting out their stories on an imaginary stage, the older kids designed comics. From one of them came a beautiful motivational phrase: "Learn to love yourself, you're pretty just the way you are." These are amazing examples of confidence development, identity appreciation and community building.



## Space Week

During space week we went inter-galactic! We loved colouring and creating straw rockets, and competing to see how high they could go. We also created a Black Hole Game through which the children could further develop their gross motor skills, such as targeted throwing.



We learned all about the planets — making a planet string to learn about their order, colour and size. Any sensory activities are always a huge hit and the children loved making space glittery puffy paint which they used to paint their own galaxy.





## Animal Week

One of our favourite themes is animals! We did several activities around this theme in 2024: making colourful caterpillars out of egg boxes, super fun snakes out of bottle tops and building a large crocodile out of cardboard and letting the kids decorate it. We also ran some more of our famous farm days. While being farmers for the day, the kids had to wash muddy animals, plant seeds, shear sheep, collect eggs, and milk a cow. Farm day is such a favourite as it demands a number of skills and is sensorially diverse.



## Storytelling Week

Another wonderful and proven theme is storytelling. On the one hand, it brings a lot of joy and allows children to dress up and immerse themselves in different worlds. Beyond this, it also creates a space where children can express their emotions and process their experiences through acting.



Furthermore, depending on the stories we act out with the children, it enables us to introduce important topics such as cooperation, helpfulness and conflict resolution in a playful and engaging way.



## Emotion and Senses Week

For children who have experienced violence and toxic stress, it's especially important to help them reconnect with their emotions and senses. To support this, we created a small sensory course where the children could explore their senses.

To gain a better understanding of their own feelings, we created emotions masks and, among other activities, played emotion charades and acted out different emotions with the children.





# Our Core Activities:

# ADVOCACY

The governments of France and the UK have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill children's rights - regardless of their race, gender or legal status. Yet the children we work with face insurmountable barriers to accessing these rights. In 2024, we've continued to observe and document failures to uphold children's rights to inform our advocacy work.

## Fatalities

2024 was the deadliest year recorded on the UK-France border, with over 82 people killed, and many more remain missing. This includes 14 children - more than the past four years combined.\*

We have felt the impact of these deaths on the children in the communities in northern France who have either witnessed these tragedies, or are aware of deaths of people they know.

## Intensified violence

This year police violence has continued in the form of regular evictions of informal living sites, and we have also seen an increase in the violent intervention of people, including families and children, during crossing attempts. We have worked with children as young as 3 months old who have been teargassed by police on the beaches. Many others tell us about boats being stabbed. This year, we received over 80 testimonies from children who had faced such violence.

This has directly contributed to the increase in deaths - boats become more overcrowded, and people take more dangerous routes in an effort to avoid police interception.



## Injuries and illness

We have seen an increase in injuries and illness amongst the children we work with - including injury to limbs, skin conditions such as scabies, and mosquito bites. Many of these are attributable to inadequate standards of living, a failure by the state to provide sanitation facilities, and the increased violence faced by children.

## Disability services

This year, we worked with a number of children with disabilities. The state provides no adapted support for these children, even though their rights are specifically protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Every child deserves to have their needs met.

# Our Core Activities:

# ADVOCACY

Throughout 2024, our team has observed a marked increase in the rights abuses faced by children on the move on the border. The children we work with have experienced heightened violence and fatalities, inhumane standards of living and a lack of access to essential services, including to health, food and shelter. We have worked to strengthen our advocacy provision and build the capacity we need to advocate for a future in which no childhood looks like this.

## Data collection and testimony gathering

As the only independent organisation working with children of all ages on the UK-France border, the data we collect is crucial to ensuring that their stories are represented in cross-border advocacy. Beyond our own monthly reports, this year we have contributed data to **Solidarité Internationale** and **Observatoire des Expulsions**. We also submitted evidence to the **Cranston Inquiry**, and will continue to follow this in 2025.

The increased violence in 2024 also saw an increase in the number of disclosures our team received from children on session, and testimonies which adult family members wished to share with us. We worked with the **Border Violence Monitoring Network** and **Humans for Rights Network** to improve our approach to testimony gathering.



## Campaigns and Partnerships

Our **"Every Child"** campaign, run in September-November, created crucial opportunities for awareness raising communications. Our fantastic ground team helped develop some impactful and informative short-form video content, enabling us to reach new audiences and raise awareness of the situation for children on the move in northern France.

We also ran a successful mini-series during Refugee Week, collaborating with three different organisations to highlight issues surrounding the right to food, healthcare and child protection. Thanks to **Refugee Community Kitchen**, **FAST** and **Utopia 56** for their support.

As always, partnerships are crucial for our advocacy work. We remain part of a number of working groups, including **Calais Appeal**, the **Cross Border Forum** and the **InterAsso** groups, and have contributed to press statements, open letters and other efforts through these groups. We hope to continue to expand our collaborative efforts in 2025, and have some projects already underway.



# GOALS FOR 2025

2024 has been a successful year of play - seeing us run more consistent sessions across each month of the year. It has also been a year of change, as we round out the year with a new board in place and in the strongest financial position yet.

In 2025, we want to use this to continue to build our resilience and visibility, whilst strengthening service user participation to ensure we are centring - at all times - the voices that matter most.

## Organisational Resilience

2025 is a year in which we will strengthen our organisational leadership to ensure our sustainability and growth.

We will adopt a distributed leadership approach, allowing board members, coordinators and all volunteers to productively contribute to the development, safe running and resilience of the organisation.

We will also reimagine how we support our team at all levels of the organisation by developing systems for better valuing, compensating and investing in people.

This transition shall be underpinned by our new organisational values: transparency, reflectiveness, compassion and intersectional solidarity.

## Organisational Visibility

Now into our 6th year, it is time more people knew about Project Play!

We will work to position ourselves as experts on children's rights and the right to play in the European border context.

We will build partnerships and share our expertise with those working with or advocating for children-on-the-move.

This will allow us to share our specialist insights and improve the reach of our work.

## Child Participation

In 2025, we will strengthen service user participation by ensuring that children and parents have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them. We will embed a child-rights based approach to our advocacy strategy, create child-friendly safeguarding resources and build feedback mechanisms which allow service users to shape our activities.

# SPECIAL THANKS



This year, Project Play has been uplifted by the extraordinary support of countless individuals and organisations. Whether working directly with children, offering remote assistance, or collaborating with us to create moments of joy and connection, every contribution has been vital. Your dedication and generosity have allowed us to continue providing spaces for children to play, learn, and thrive.

**To our wonderful volunteers** - your enthusiasm, creativity, and compassion have made an immeasurable difference. Whether you joined us for weeks or months, your efforts brought light to some of the darkest moments. A heartfelt thank you to: **Ben, Izzy, Caro, Kizzy, Alan, Daniele, Erwan, Sarah, Reza, Yasmin, Marina, Megan, Ellie, Emily, Chiara, Laura and James.** Special gratitude to **Emma**, who redesigned our van into an incredible tool for our work, and **Golnaz**, whose beautiful project added inspiration and magic to our sessions.



**To our committed coordinators** - your leadership, care, and determination have guided us through every challenge and success this year. You've shown immense dedication to both the team and the children we serve. Thank you to: **Elena, Gloria, Lily, Nick, Philine, Ilias, Connie, Anna, Beth, and Dianne.** Your efforts are the backbone of Project Play, and we are endlessly grateful.

**To our remote team** - **Harry, Ellie, Chiara, Camila, Max, Mattie, Sophie, Abi, Marion and Sara.** Thank you so much for all your time and expertise. Growing our remote team this year has made such a difference. From safeguarding advice to fundraising energy, your support has been invaluable for keeping us going through a tough year. We can't wait to expand our capacity, sustainability and service with your help!



We also want to extend our deepest gratitude to our partners who opened their doors to us and welcomed us into their spaces with kindness and generosity. Thank you to **Maria Skobstova House, Maison Sesame, La Margalle, and Secours Catholique** for providing places where children could play, create, and just be kids. Your hospitality has been a cornerstone of our work this year.

A special thank you to the incredible projects that visited us and brought unique experiences to the children. **Wind-Up Penguins, Changing Stories, and The Living Snow Globe**, your music, theatre, and creativity have left lasting smiles and unforgettable memories. To **Make Do Play** and our other International Day of Play partners - thank you for sharing in a special day together and reminding us of the international power of play!

We are also immensely grateful to the organisations we collaborated with during sessions. Thank you to **Refugee Women's Centre, CHIP, and Kaleidoscope** for your partnership, expertise, and shared commitment to supporting children on the move.



Partners who have **supported us financially** and who without our work wouldn't be possible. **Amber and the For Refugees** team who are invaluable to our sector. **Michael and Claire from OPAL** - your support, advice and belief has been such a beacon to us. To **Bill and Olwyn** - all the way across the world - your support is so appreciated (Bill - do come and see us again soon!). To **CamCrag, Lush, Dr Martins, Glasgow's Unity Centre, our supporters at Student Action for Refugees** and **Alice from Calais Appeal** - thank you for your support.

**To our new board members: Christina, Sara, Miriam, Meg, Savannah, Wieke and Holly.** Your dedication and leadership have helped us navigate challenges and plan for the future. Thank you for your belief in Project Play's mission and for your invaluable contributions behind the scenes.

Project Play's work is a collective effort, powered by a community that believes every child deserves a space to laugh, grow, and dream. To everyone who has supported us this year - thank you. Together, we've created something extraordinary, and we look forward to continuing this journey with you.



LE PLANNING FAMILIAL  
NORD-PAS-DE-CALAIS



MAKE-DO PLAY



forRefugees



MARIA SKOBTSOVA HOUSE



CHANGING STORIES



# PLAY AGAINST BORDERS.



Project Play is a French registered association, no: W594012083

We operate in the UK under the umbrella of forRefugees, Charity No: 1168435