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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

A Vision of HOPE for Kilmore Quay: New Opportunities, Experiences and Employment for Wexford

HOPE Autism Care Centre outlines plans to transform the former Saltees Coast Hotel into an inclusive camp, holiday, recreational and learning centre for children, young people and families with autism and other additional needs, while contributing to the local community.

Kilmore Quay, Co. Wexford, November 2026

HOPE Autism Care Centre has outlined its vision for the former Saltees Coast Hotel in Kilmore Quay, Co. Wexford, with plans to develop the property into an inclusive camp, holiday, recreational and learning centre for children, young people and families, with and without additional needs, including autism and other learning and physical disabilities.

For HOPE, the project is the next chapter in a fifteen-year commitment to ensuring that children and young people with additional needs have the same opportunities as their peers to learn, explore, make friends and experience life to the full. It is also a vision shaped by the personal experience of HOPE's founder, Sherene Powell-Okafor, as a mother and an educator.

What is proposed

The planning application lodged with Wexford County Council describes a change of use of the former hotel to a respite and short-stay holiday centre for children and young people with autism and disabilities and their families, with seasonal respite accommodation for people of all ages with disabilities. That is what HOPE intends to operate.

In the summer and school holidays the centre will run camps for children and young people with autism and other additional needs, with their brothers and sisters alongside them. Outside the holidays it will provide short respite breaks for children with disabilities whose families are on waiting lists, host residential trips for special schools and autism classes, and offer respite breaks for adults with disabilities and the families who care for them.

The operating model is for the centre to be staffed around the clock by trained, Garda vetted staff, with staff sleeping in every bedroom alongside the children.

HOPE's board includes a consultant paediatrician who advises on the health and medical side of its services. Any regulated respite service will obtain the necessary registration from the appropriate regulator, which for residential respite for children with disabilities is HIQA, before it begins. HOPE's five centres in Dublin, Cork and Limerick are registered and inspected by Tusla, and HOPE is sanctioned by the Department of Education to provide early intervention classes for children with autism.

The centre will not be an IPAS centre or accommodation for anyone other than the children, young people and families it serves, and HOPE has no objection to the planning permission being conditioned to that use. The proposed acquisition of the property remains subject to planning permission.

"People at the community meeting in October asked fair questions, and some of the answers were not as clear as they should have been. That is on us. We want people in Kilmore Quay to know exactly what this is, and to see it for themselves once it is open."

A vision built on experience

Established in 2011, HOPE Autism Care Centre has grown from a single service for children with autism into an organisation providing mainstream childcare, early intervention and specialist educational support. Its approach rests on a simple belief: every child deserves the opportunity to develop, participate and achieve, whatever their needs.

Sherene Powell-Okafor is a qualified primary school teacher with thirty years in classrooms in Jamaica and Ireland, an educational leader and the mother of an autistic daughter. Alongside like-minded parents and professionals, she helped establish Scoil Sinéad Ltd, a school patron body which operates a mainstream primary school with autism classes in Dublin and is a trustee of a secondary school with an Education and Training Board. The patron body and its schools are separate from HOPE, but the philosophy is the same.

"Children learn from other children. They learn through play, friendships, shared experiences and being part of a group. That is true whether a child has autism, another disability or no additional needs at all. Every child has something to contribute, and every child deserves the opportunity to belong."

Bringing home the experiences that took us abroad

As the mother of an autistic daughter, Sherene knows how hard it can be to find holiday camps and activities where a child with additional needs can do what her peers do. Over the years she travelled abroad, including to the United States, to give her daughter experiences that were not available in Ireland.

"As a mother, I wanted my daughter to experience everything other children her age were experiencing. I wanted her to go to camp, make friends, try new things, have adventures and enjoy being a child. There were times when I had to take her to America to find that. And I remember thinking, why should families have to travel to another country for this? What about the families who cannot afford to, or whose circumstances make it impossible? Those children deserve these experiences too."

"I do not want a child to miss out on camp because they have autism or another disability. Equally, I do not want to create a place where children with additional needs are always kept apart from everyone else. What I want is to bring home some of what I travelled abroad to find for my own daughter, so that other families can have it here in Ireland."

More than a summer camp

The intention is a centre used throughout the year, with different programmes at different seasons: holiday camps, outdoor and educational activities, short family breaks, and respite outside the camp season, each where consistent with the permitted use and with staffing, safeguarding and support appropriate to those attending.

HOPE also sees a gap for young people with additional needs who have finished secondary school and have not found a path into further education, training or work. Leaving school can mean losing the routines, friendships and structure that held the week together. The centre would offer these young people social, recreational and independence programmes alongside their peers.

"We want this to be somewhere people look forward to visiting. Not every child will need the same level of support, and not every programme will suit everyone. But with good planning, the right staff and a real commitment to inclusion, we can create opportunities that are very hard for some families to find."

Why Kilmore Quay

The village's calm, its maritime heritage, its natural surroundings and its strong sense of community make it an ideal setting for outdoor learning and family experiences, and a calmer, more predictable environment suits many children and young people with additional needs.

"Imagine a child at her first seaside camp, exploring the beach and learning about marine life. Imagine a group of young people at the harbour watching the boats come in and hearing from the fishermen how the sea shaped this village. Imagine a family having a few days away together, visiting the cafés and restaurants, in a place that understands their needs. Those are the experiences that build confidence, independence and memories."

HOPE wants to work with local businesses, activity providers and community organisations so that visitors experience the best of Kilmore Quay and the surrounding area.

A year-round opportunity for the village

The redevelopment would create work for local trades during refurbishment and then ongoing employment in care, education, activities, administration, catering, housekeeping and maintenance. A year-round operation brings visitors and families to Kilmore Quay beyond the summer season, with the demand for restaurants, cafés, shops and activities that follows.

“The intention is not to open for a few weeks in the summer and close the doors for the rest of the year. We want people to work here all year round, and local businesses to benefit from visitors across the seasons.”

HOPE’s growing commitment to Wexford

Kilmore Quay forms part of HOPE’s wider investment in County Wexford. HOPE is preparing to open a purpose-built childcare and early intervention centre at Roxborough Manor, Wexford, in January 2027, with 89 places including 24 dedicated early intervention places for children with autism.

“Education and early intervention matter, but children’s lives do not stop when the school day ends. At Roxborough Manor we are investing in children’s early years. With Kilmore Quay we want to extend those opportunities into holidays, friendships and experiences beyond the classroom.”

Looking to the future

“When I look at what we are trying to achieve, I think about the opportunities I wanted for my own daughter. I think about the children who have never been to camp, the young people who have left school and are wondering what comes next, and the families who would love a holiday together but cannot find somewhere suitable. If we can make those things possible here in Ireland, while bringing employment and new life to a beautiful place like Kilmore Quay, that is something worth working for.”

The proposed Kilmore Quay development remains subject to planning permission and all other necessary approvals.

About HOPE Autism Care Centre

Established in 2011, HOPE Autism Care Centre is a privately owned Irish childcare and education company, not a charity, providing mainstream childcare, autism early intervention and educational support from five Tusla registered centres in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Its values are Play, Learn, Grow, Belong, Achieve. www.hopechildcare.ie

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