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**The Willow Tree Children’s Centre**

**Mission Statement**

The Willow Tree Children’s Centre is a Túsla registered setting providing quality, affordable early education and afterschool services for children aged 12 months to 15 years serving the Blennerville/Tralee Community: ECCE Sessional and Full-Time Childcare Service; Afterschool for School-Age Children; Full-Time Childcare for School-Age Children outside of ECCE/School Term.

At The Willow Tree Children’s Centre, we are committed to providing a childcare service of the highest standard which provides the perfect environment for all children to develop their social, personal and education skills. We provide a loving home-from-home environment where each child is treated with respect and valued as individuals who will develop confidence in their knowledge, opinions and abilities. Our play-based curriculum addresses children’s well-being, identity and belonging, communication, exploring and thinking which follows Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework of Ireland and Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. It is a broad-based, flexible, well-documented programme which emphasizes hands-on activities, mental well-being and connection to nature.

**Our Ethos**

We aim to actively promote the holistic development and welfare of children attending our service by providing a safe, secure and developmentally appropriate environment. Our name is based on the classic Aesop’s fable The Oak and The Willow which emphasizes the importance of establishing strong roots, a sense of belonging in our early environment and thereby nurturing resilience for life. Above all, the welfare, mental and emotional well-being of each child is of utmost importance to us.

**The Oak and the Willow – Aesop’s Fable**

In a garden, there was an Oak at one end, and a Willow tree at the other.

Whenever a wind moved through the garden, the Willow swayed in the wind, while the Oak remained unmoved.

When this happened, the Willow said to itself, “I wish I was as strong as the Oak, instead of bending over with every breeze”. Then one day a large windstorm whipped through the field.

When the storm passed, and the darkness lifted, the Willow looked across the field, and was shocked to discover that the Oak was lying on the ground, broken. When the Gardener came into the field, the Willow said, “Oh sir, what happened to the Oak? How is it that I survived the storm, weak as I am, and the Oak fell?”

The Gardener said, “Oh little Willow tree, do you not understand what happened? When the winds blow, you bend with it, while the Oak remains still. So when a really powerful wind comes along, you can bend with the wind, and survive it. But the Oak cannot bend, and so if the wind is strong enough, it will break.

We feel this represents our journey as a service and our overarching ethos based on strengthening emotional development and wellbeing.

Our room names are inspired by the tree’s seeds and flowers, catkins and acorns.

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**Encourage Explore Experience Empower**