Francis House Children's Hospice CEO has announced plans to step down next year

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The long-standing chief executive of Francis House Children's Hospice has announced he will retire next year.

Revd David Ireland will stand down from his position in 2025, after 20 years leading the much-loved Manchester charity.

David became the second only person in the hospice's history to hold the role of chief executive after the retirement of Sister Aloysius the founder of Francis House in 2005.

As a young architect in 1986, David first walked through the gates to meet Father Thomas Mulheran and Sister Aloysius to do a small job designing office space for the Catholic Children's Rescue Society.

Four years later he oversaw the conversion of the former convent, the home of some 16 religious Sisters, into Francis House Children's Hospice.

At the time there were only four children's hospices in the country and demand for a hospice in the north-west was great. Martin House in Wetherby had opened in 1987 and was a valuable model for Francis House.

David said: "It was a difficult challenge not only from the point of view of providing something that was right for the families, but to do something that was architecturally acceptable with an old 1950s building within a tight budget.

"I'll never forget the sight of the Sister's possessions being wheeled down the drive as the builders moved in to transform what was their home into a place for children and families to rest and recuperate on their difficult journeys. Francis House was born out of their sacrificial gift."

In less than two years, Francis House was fully operational and opened in November 1991, by the late Diana, Princess of Wales.

David formally joined the board of trustees in July 1994. In 1995 he was ordained and became the Minister at the United Reformed Church in Oldham. Being offered the job as chief executive in 2005, changed David's life forever and his passion for the hospice and its work has never waned.

During the last two decades, he has led the organisation through a period of significant growth, meeting the demand for respite care for teenagers and young adults with life-limiting conditions with the opening of Francis Lodge in 2014.

Effectively doubling the size of the original seven bed hospice, the young adult wing provides a space for young people over the age of 16 to enjoy some independence in a parent-free zone.

Today, more than 600 families are supported by the Didsbury based hospice, through respite care, homecare, day care, sibling support, parental support, end of life care, emotional and bereavement support. It costs £4.8 million per year to run Francis House with 14% of income from government. The majority of income comes through voluntary giving.

David's achievements include the opening of two residential care homes, one in Didsbury close to the hospice and one in Heaton Moor. The groundbreaking projects, provide a place of permanent residence for young people with life-limiting conditions and complex needs.

David Ireland, Francis House Chief Executive said: "It has been the greatest privilege to have been able to follow in the footsteps of Sister Aloysius, the founder of the hospice. I have been honoured that the Trustees have allowed us to develop and expand the services over the years to meet their increasing need.

"I have had three absolutely brilliant Registered Managers and a great team, both care team and ancillary workers. But the biggest thanks has to go to the children, young people and their families who have allowed us to walk alongside them in good and difficult times. The mums and dads who have

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trusted us to care for their children and allowed us to help them make wonderful memories.

“I will be around until some time in 2025 dependant upon who is appointed as my successor. I cannot thank everybody enough, volunteers, staff, and supporters out in the community for the tremendous work they have done over the last twenty years.”

The first thirty years of Francis House are documented in a new book ‘A Worthwhile Error – The History of Francis House Children’s Hospice’ available for £19.95 (plus postage and packing) by calling the hospice on 0161 434 4118 or from www.francishouse.org.uk/online-shop. All proceeds will be donated to the care of children, young people and their families.

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