



Systems Change: Final Evaluation Report on Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme

Key Findings

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Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS)

This is a programme of action being undertaken by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, as part of its National Service Delivery Framework. The programme seeks to embed prevention and early intervention into the culture and operation of Tusla. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway has undertaken an evaluation study focusing on the implementation of and the outcomes from the PPFS Programme. The study's overall research question is:

Is the organisational culture and practice of Tusla and its partners changing such that services are more integrated, preventative, evidence informed and inclusive of children and parents? If so, is this contributing to improved outcomes for children and their families?

We have adopted a Work Package approach reflecting the key components of the PPFS Programme. The five Work Packages are: Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks, Children's Participation, Parenting Support and Parental Participation, Public Awareness and Commissioning. While stand-alone studies in their own right, each Work Package contributes to the overall assessment of the programme.

What is the focus of this report?

This report is about the systems level change intended by Tusla's Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support. At a systems level, it details the overall implementation and outcomes of the PPFS Programme. In doing so, it answers the overarching question for this study:

Is the organisational culture and practice of Tusla and its partners changing such that services are more integrated, preventative, evidence informed and inclusive of children and parents? If so, is this contributing to improved outcomes for children and their families?

The report focuses on the overall implementation and outcomes of Tusla's PPFS Programme of work and the areas where the Programme was expected to have an effect. These areas include:

1. Tusla's Structures, Policies, Procedures, Roles and Budgets;
2. Tusla's Culture and Climate;
3. Capacity of Tusla and its Stakeholders to engage in prevention, early intervention and Family Support work;
4. Parents and Children, both those who use the services of Tusla and its stakeholders, and those in the general population.

How was the information collected?

Data collection involved both secondary analysis and qualitative interviews. It brings together the findings and learning from the five individual Work Packages; key academic literature; documentary analysis; examining Tusla's operational environment since 2015, both internal and external; and 106 qualitative interviews conducted with key stakeholders. These stakeholders include: those internal to Tusla and external partner organisations; representatives from the community and voluntary sector, as well as from government departments. Combined, these data sources provide the evidence on which to draw conclusions on the implementation, outcomes and sustainability of the PPFS Programme at the overall systems level.

WHAT ARE THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS?

Work Package Meitheal and Child and Family Support

Networks: This programme of work is at the Implementation phase and moving into Sustainability; the findings suggest good quality implementation with much learning generated and some key issues identified requiring resolution.

Key Indicators

- The research demonstrates potential for the Meitheal model to affect the lives of parents and children positively.
- Meitheal and CFSNs provide inter-agency collaborative responses to complex needs and are building capacity at a local level.
- Practitioners believe that Meitheal is a structured process that can facilitate change in family outcomes and the overall service provision system.
- During the period 2015-17, 2,288 Meitheals have been initiated. In Q4 2017, 99 CFSNs were in operation.
- Some overarching issues identified include the need for: careful consideration of the needs and difficulties that specific areas may be experiencing to implement the Meitheal and CFSN Model; clarity around the definition of Meitheal as a single and multi-agency response; and further development of the relationship between Meitheal and the CPW system.

Work Package Children's Participation

This programme of work is at the Implementation phase and moving into Sustainability; the findings suggest good quality implementation with key areas for attention identified.

Key Indicators

- Based on structural, procedural and practice indicators established by the Lundy and Council of Europe models. Good implementation identified.
- Strategic approach to children's participation through the National Children's Charter and Child and Youth Participation Seed funding projects.
- Structural and operational support through the Quality Assurance Process, Participation Training and Participation Toolkit.
- Some overarching issues identified include the need for: a national participation lead; greater awareness, continued investment and training; and time to engage in participation work.

Work Package Commissioning:

This programme of work is between Preparation and Implementation phases. However, it is set up for Sustainability through the creation of the Commissioning Unit. The findings suggest a lower level of implementation than hoped for but good foundations in place through what was implemented.

Key Indicators

- Operationally achievements include: infrastructure for implementing commissioning model is in place; clarity on the principles of effective commissioning; Tusla has identified what will be commissioned at national, regional, local and individual levels.
- Terminology of commissioning has become embedded in the language and corporate identity of the agency.
- Commissioning is accepted as having a distinct and capacity building approach.
- Some overarching issues identified include the need for: practices associated with the commissioning process to be embedded; and greater capacity building through training and support, particularly for the Community and Voluntary Sector partners.



Work Package Parenting Support and Parental Participation:

This programme of work is at Implementation phase with potential for future Sustainability through the PPFS structure and dedicated role. Good quality implementation was identified, with much learning. However, it is worth noting that the data collection process was completed before the programme was fully rolled out.

Key Indicators

- Strategic approach to Parenting Support and Parental Participation and its implementation is underpinned by the DCYA High Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families (2015) and Tusla's Parenting Support Strategy (Gillen et al., 2013).
- Clear remit for each of the elements within the project.
- Structural and operational support for the implementation of the parenting support and parental participation programme of work.
- Some overarching issues identified include the need for: clarity on how all of the different elements of the programme fit together and its applicability to the wider PPFS Programme; increased coordination, dedicated staff, evidence of impact/outcomes and management engagement with the overall programme of work.

Work Package Public Awareness:

This programme of work is mainly at Preparation phase. A significant amount of information and analysis has been generated through the study methods of survey, print media analysis and HIQA report analysis, which should inform implementation in the next phase. Sustainability will be supported by consolidation of a Communications Office role dedicated to the PPFS area and the implementation of a three-prong public awareness strategy.

Key Indicators

- Tusla now have a better understanding of public knowledge about Tusla generally, family support, and the PPFS specifically.
- The national communications team and Tusla's national and regional managers now have available clear information on help seeking patterns and strategies and activities that are likely to lead to greater public awareness and understanding of its services.
- Some overarching issues identified include the need for: greater clarification of the relationship between child protection and family support that can be communicated to the public generally and target groups (i.e. politicians, educators and policymakers); the media and the public need to be educated more about what family support is and how it relates to child protection and Tusla services generally; and to ensure high levels of knowledge and awareness amongst GP's, PHNs and Schools.



Systems Change

Structures, Functions, Roles: in order to achieve the outcomes of the PPFS Programme, new functions, structures and roles were created for the Meitheal and the CFSNs, Children's Participation, Parenting Participation and Parental Support, Public Awareness and Commissioning. Some outstanding issues remain regarding the filling of posts required to implement the PPFS Programme.

Capacity and Scale: taken as a whole, the PPFS Programme and its Work Packages have achieved broad national coverage. However, it is also reasonable to say that the Programme overall, and the individual Work Packages are not fully universal. Additionally, the implementation has not been as consistent and standardised as desired. The point here is not that services will look identical in each geographical location; the Programme should look different in places to reflect demography, geography, socio-economic conditions and general levels of service provision in each area. But the programme should not vary because of differences in the resources, commitment, or adherence to key principles and practices that constitute the overall PPFS approach.

Context: from a systems perspective, the various contexts for change are critical. While the wider context for state investment in services is more positive than it was when the programme started, child poverty levels remain high and their remains significant gaps in service provision, across the social policy landscape which affects the capacity of Tusla with regards to Prevention, Early Intervention and Family Support services. Another key context of the PPFS Programme was wider system developments such as: Tusla forming as a new agency; transition from the HSE; the introduction of Mandatory Reporting and the publication of the Child Protection and Welfare Strategy. In spite of these demands on the organisation's energies, the internal Tusla context for the PPFS has become more supportive over the lifetime of the programme to-date.

Integration: is a key theme in systems change analysis in terms of how the various system components and / or subsystems link and work together towards the achievement of overall system goals, in this case, Tusla's strategic objective. The findings suggest that the foundations are evident in this area, but more to be done with integrating the PPFS Programme within Tusla and with service provision by other agencies and government departments.

Sustainability: encapsulates the extent to which a programme/intervention has become embedded within an organisation. At an overall level, the findings suggest that the PPFS Programme is regarded by most respondents to be a sustainable approach to prevention and early intervention. In continuing the work and sustainability of the PPFS Programme, Tusla has committed to the scaling up of the PPFS Programme across all Areas and Work Packages; fully resourcing and supporting PPFS at Agency, Regional and Area-based level; and re-balancing resources to prevention and early intervention in line with government policy.



Leadership: is a central concept in the literature on systems change and implementation sciences. Leadership across the Tusla organisation at local, regional and national level has been significant in the implementation of the PPFS Programme and in driving change.

Evidence: the findings suggest that there is a greater move towards the routinized use of evidence in planning and service delivery. However, work is required to move the organisation to a more systematic use of evidence.

Culture and Climate: the findings suggest that cultural change is evident through the creation of new structures, roles and functions under the PPFS Programme. From Tusla's projected corporate image (website) and Corporate Documents (Corporate Plans and Business Plans) it is clear that the beginnings of a cultural shift is occurring towards embedding prevention and early intervention in service delivery. While more remains to be done regarding the implementation of the Work Packages, the actions undertaken demonstrate that prevention and early intervention is valued and becoming part of Tusla's organisational identity.

WHAT ARE THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS?

Outcomes

1. The Area-based approach has been implemented across all of Tusla's areas and is positively perceived by its stakeholders. It is not yet operating at full complement in all areas and as yet not fully standardised or consistent. The core principles are working well and the positive experience to-date represents a strong basis on which to arrive at consistent nationwide implementation.
2. The evaluation has demonstrated significant strides by Tusla in embedding children's participation in its culture and operations, although more work is required in specific areas.
3. New approaches to parenting support and parental participation have been tested out during the Programme and have demonstrated potential for operation at a system-wide level. The profile of parenting has been raised in the organisation by the implementation of the Programme. The experience of implementation has demonstrated the need for a specific leadership role for this part of the organisation's work.
4. The foundations have been laid for the achievement of a rigorous and evidence-informed commissioning approach, particularly in the form of organisational infrastructure, strategy and practice materials, and capacity within Tusla at area level. Much remains to be done towards capacity building generally and in particular supporting the community and voluntary sector in this new funding context. Tusla's capacity in relation to evidence for commissioning is at the early stages of development.
5. The findings demonstrate greater awareness of Tusla and PPFS over the Programme timeframe but there is no strong evidence to suggest greater awareness of available supports. Our findings from the Area-based approach are suggestive of reduced risk of falling through service gaps but there is no rigorous data to confirm this.



Evaluative Conclusion

Our strong conclusion is that the organisational culture of Tusla is changing such that it is becoming more preventative in focus and inclusive of parents and children. This is demonstrated across the Work Packages, in the findings from our data on systems change, reflecting the views of key actors in Tusla and external to the organisation, and in key organisational documents. While the finding indicates positive developments in relation to services becoming more integrated in the Area-based approach, there are issues which require ongoing attention. The organisation has committed to working in an evidence informed way and has developed some capacity to do so through the Commissioning and Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Packages, but much work is required in relation to data, analysis, and on outcomes and evidence frameworks.

Recommendations

At an overall level, we offer recommendations within the frame of the commitments made by Tusla regarding the continuation of the work of the PPFS Programme. Firstly, we recommend that Tusla implement all recommendations proposed by each of the Work Packages. In terms of organisational culture and climate, we recommend that the DCYA supports and resources Tusla in achieving its Prevention, Early Intervention and Family Support goals elaborated in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures national policy framework. Moreover, we recommend that Tusla continue to develop an organisational culture and climate that is inclusive of and supportive of Prevention, Early Intervention and Family Support. With regards to integration, we recommend that the DCYA works alongside and supports Tusla to generate commitments with other Departments of State and relevant agencies in the achievement of its actions on prevention and early intervention and Family support. We recommend that the PPFS national team further integrate the PPFS components

into the existing infrastructure (Family Support Services, Child Protection and Welfare Services and all other components of the service provision system) through the implementation of a simple audit of integration. This audit will allow Tusla to identify and develop an action plan to remove barriers and enhance the full integration of the PPFS Programme and in particular the Area Based Approach. Lastly, in terms of using evidence to inform service delivery, we recommend that Tusla prioritise the development of an outcomes framework that reflects its expectations for children, young people and parents at all points within the service delivery system. In addition, we recommend that Tusla develop a system-wide framework for generating and using evidence in the processes of: establishing service need; decision-making on service provision in the context of commissioning; and assessing the achievement of service outcomes.

About the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) is part of the Institute for Lifecourse and Society at the National University of Ireland, Galway. It was founded in 2007, through support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, Ireland and the Health Service Executive, with a base in the School of Political Science and Sociology, the mission of the Centre is to help create the conditions for excellent policies, services and practices that improve the lives of children, youth and families through research education and service development. The UCFRC has an extensive network of relationships and research collaborations internationally and is widely recognised for its core expertise in the areas of Family Support and Youth Development.



List of Publications for the Overall Systems Change Work Package:

Malone, P. and Canavan, J. (2018) *Systems Change: Final Evaluation Report on Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme*. UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway.

Malone, P. and Canavan, J. (Forthcoming) *Systems Change: A literature review on the adoption and implementation of systems theory in child protection and welfare reforms. Tusla's Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

Malone, P. and Canavan, J. (Forthcoming) *Documentary analysis: exploring the strategic importance of prevention and early intervention in Tusla, Child and Family Agency. Tusla's Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

Malone, P. and Canavan, J. (Forthcoming) *Systems Change: Qualitative Interview Findings. Tusla's Programme for Prevention Partnership and Family Support*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

Further Information

If you would like to read the Systems Change: Final Evaluation Report on Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme, or any of the publications listed above please visit our website www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch. If you have any questions on our research, please email cfrc@nuigalway.ie

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