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Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package Final Report

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 Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package?

The Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package is focused on:

- Developing the Parenting 24/7 website; publicising parenting information including 50 Key Messages
- Developing the Parenting Support Champions Project; promoting parenting knowledge and key messages in practice
- Embedding a practice of parental participation in the structures and culture of Tusla
- Utilising conferences as a means of participation and sharing of information
- Developing a National Commissioning Framework (NCF) for parenting support approaches and programmes.

What is the focus of this report?

This report details the overall findings of the parenting support and parental participation programme of work and contributes to addressing the overarching research question for this work package, namely to determine:

Is there a strategic approach to parenting in place within Tusla? Is participation by parents embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla?

How was the research conducted?

Data was collected from a range of stakeholders including; those internal to Tusla and external partner organisations, representatives from the community and voluntary sector, as well as from government departments. A mixture qualitative and quantitative data collection processes were developed to answer the overarching question for this work package. Information from 167 interviews and results from 3 surveys consisting of 507 responses and 3 questionnaires consisting of 130 responses inform the findings of this report.

WHAT ARE THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS?

Parenting Support Champions (PSCs)

The PSC Project is central to Parenting Support and Parental Participation as it intersects all projects associated with this programme of work. The research findings show the PSCs are somewhat of a lynchpin between the national office and local areas and between Tusla, its partners and networks.

There are 105 PSCs nationwide; these are practitioners who are involved in child and family services in Tusla and in their external partner organisations. PSCs promote parental involvement in services and parental participation initiatives; they also promote positive parenting messages to parents and are engaged in developing and promoting positive parenting in their communities. PSCs have received training, networking days and information materials to carry out this work.

Impact

While the project is still in its infancy, PSCs say that participation has had positive impacts on their practice, resulting in; increased energy, confidence and increased focus on and awareness of the parenting element of their work, and improved coordination and links with other agencies. PSCs also say that the practice of their colleagues has been impacted positively; in terms of sharing and using information, leading to increases in confidence. Information gained because of participation in the project is said to be benefiting parents, as practitioners are sharing resources and can provide parents with a range of information.

Challenges

A lack of engagement from some management and other services, organisations, and the statutory sector, as well as a shortage of time, resources, leadership and coordination were highlighted as challenges to the implementation and sustainability of the project. Areas are working in different ways and are at different stages which reflects the different levels of support the project has in each area.

Reflecting issues of consistency, a lack of strategic planning in terms of a national plan, an annual work plan and plans at local level, and a lack of clarity on the direction of the project are all identified by PSCs as problematic.

Overall

The PSC Project is seen as a hugely positive element of the parenting programme of work. While there are evidently challenges to overcome, the findings from all four reports on the project suggest that this project is having an impact even at this early stage in its development. Even the mere fact that there are 105 experienced practitioners driving the parenting support agenda nationwide is extremely beneficial for this programme.



Parental Participation

Parental participation is a key element in all of the parenting support projects. The aim of the Parental Participation Project is to encourage parents' participation in their own children's care and education, and to enable their participation in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of services. Tusla has focused on strengthening parental participation practice through the development of seed-funded projects, parental participation training for PSCs, and the development of online training for Tusla staff.



Parental Participation Seed Funded Projects

Tusla currently fund 36 projects across 17 areas nationwide. Projects are varied in scope and length.

The research on the projects examined managers and practitioners' views on the usefulness of the seed funding in developing parental participation practice, views on the challenges to engaging parents, the influence of the projects to date, and their sustainability into the future.

Impact

Managers and practitioners say that the projects have had a positive impact on practice, by improving interactions with parents, by improving their understanding of parenting in different cultures and by improving working with other organisations involved in supporting parents. Managers and practitioners also say that parents have benefited from the projects. They report increases in the confidence of parents and in their willingness to engage with services. While there are still challenges to engaging some parents, practitioners well developed relationships and presence in the community helps with this.

Challenges

Funding, staffing levels, time, and facilities, were highlighted as the biggest challenges to keeping these projects going.



Overall

At an overall level, the findings from the parental participation surveys carried out as part of this study, show that there has been some increase in awareness about Tusla's work in this area. But opportunities to use parental participation practice vary by organisation and the supports they have in place to help with this type of practice. In organisations that do use participatory practices, this approach seems to be increasing; and changes have happened because of this approach. Services are being tailored to the needs of clients, listening to clients has gotten better, and there have been increases in parents reviewing and evaluating services. However, challenges to getting parents involved still remain the same.

Suggestions on how best to support participatory practice in organisations were mixed. Making this type of practice mandatory and training for all practitioners on how to do this type of practice were suggested.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The importance of parenting support and parental participation in supporting children was highlighted in a number of the 167 interviews conducted for this study. People's views of the parenting support and parental participation programme of work were generally very positive. This programme is helping to give Tusla a positive image.

It is providing the drive, time, and resources to focus on parenting. It has supported and encouraged joint working and sharing of information across organisations, and has provided good resources and information to improve both parenting support and parental participation practices, which are seen to be very valuable at local level. For some, this programme of work will show Tusla as an organisation who is committed to supporting all families, and not one that responds just to crisis.

But in order for this programme of work to be as effective as it can be more needs to be done.

Dedicated staff, increased awareness, evidence of the impact and outcomes, resources, and management engagement with this work were all highlighted.

Coordination of parenting support across the country, joined-up thinking, future planning, and a clear picture of how all of the elements of this programme fit together, how its connected to both the wider PPFS Programme, and the strategic objectives of Tusla were all identified as needing attention.

The evidence in this Work Package is enough to justify building a sustainable structure to support the parenting support and parental participation programme of work going forward.



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.

Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package Publications:

Connolly, N. and Devaney C. (2016) *Working with Families: A Review of the Literature on Parental Participation*. Galway: The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Connolly, N., Devaney, C. and Crosse, R. (2017) *Parenting Support and Parental Participation: Mapping Parenting Support in the Irish Context*. Galway: The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Connolly, N. and Devaney C. (2017) *Parenting Support: Policy and Practice in the Irish Context*, *Child Care in Practice*, DOI: 10.1080/13575279.2016.1264365

Crosse, R., Devaney, C. and Connolly, N. (2017) *Parental Participation Survey Report*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Crosse, R. and Devaney, C. (2017) *Report of the Parenting Support Champions Regional Learning Group*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Crosse, R. and Devaney, C. (2017) *Parenting Support Champions Questionnaire Report*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Crosse, R. and Devaney, C. (2018) *Report of the Parental Participation Seed-Funded Projects*, Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway. (In Press)

Crosse, R. and Devaney, C. (2018) *Second Report of the Parenting Support Champions Regional Learning Group*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway. (In Press)

Crosse, R. and Devaney, C. (2018) *Parenting Support Champions Project: Process, Implementation and Outcomes*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway.

Crosse, R. and Devaney, C. (2018) *Parenting Support and Parental Participation: Qualitative Interview Findings*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway.

Crosse, R. and Devaney, C. (2018) *Parental Participation: Overall Survey Findings*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway.

Crosse, R. and Devaney, C. (2018) *Parenting Support and Parental Participation: Final Report* Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway.

Further Information

If you would like to read the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package Final Report, 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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