

# Sustainability Learning Review **2015**

## Barnardo's (PATHS programme)



*The*  
**ATLANTIC**  
*Philanthropies*

## Summary

Developed originally in the United States, PATHS is a universal programme for improving the social and emotional skills of children across Northern Ireland. With support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, this area-based project has been managed by an umbrella organisation called Together4All (T4A). Following six months of planning and research an adapted version of PATHS was implemented into local primary schools in the Brownlow and Craigavon area.

Despite the success of the programme, T4A were unable to obtain significant government support and funding for it to continue. A combination of challenging leadership and governance difficulties has subsequently forced T4A to merge with Barnardo's, the UK's largest children's charity. Barnardo's has since been successful in securing a substantial grant from the BIG Lottery, which, in addition to AP funding, has enabled Barnardo's to support the delivery of PATHS into 52 primary schools across Northern Ireland, as well as 47 primary schools in London, South Wales and Scotland.

Despite some successes, major challenges remain for PATHS to become sustainable in the long-term by selling the programme and related support services to education authorities and schools across the UK.

## Introduction

In 2007, Atlantic embarked on a pilot initiative to improve the lives of children and young people across Ireland.

Three areas were chosen in Ireland to pilot this initiative: two in the Republic and one in the Lurgan/Brownlow area of Co Armagh, Northern Ireland. Atlantic commissioned the England-based Dartington Social Research Unit to carry out a six-month planning process, working with local organisations and groups to identify issues that specifically affected the lives of children and young people.

They were also asked to assess the distinctive needs within the local area and identify how these needs could be tackled using the best models of international practice.

Dartington collaborated with a range of voluntary and statutory agencies within the Lurgan/Brownlow area to examine these issues, culminating in a three-day residential evaluation meeting. A parallel large-scale epidemiology survey was also undertaken with children in local schools. The results of this survey were compared with existing evidence from Northern Ireland, the UK and Europe. This comparison identified a particular problem for local children in relation to social and emotional learning, as well as conduct disorders.

In light of this study, it was agreed to focus on these issues as the desired outcomes, with local schools as the preferred location to deliver an appropriate universal programme. A review of international best practice, particularly Blueprints, identified PATHS in the US as the most appropriate existing programme to address these issues and challenges for children aged 5-11 years old.

PATHS or Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies, represents a universal, classroom-based curriculum that teaches social and emotional learning to primary school children. It

helps children to recognise emotions and values, make constructive choices about personal and social behaviour, and show understanding and empathy for others. The programme also teaches children how to label their feelings and apply self-control strategies, hopefully leading to improvements in classroom behaviour, resilience and verbal fluency.

### Together4All (T4A)

At end of 2007, and with support from Atlantic, Together4All was created. Initially it negotiated with the US programme developer to see how it could be adapted for use in Northern Ireland, the Republic and the rest of the UK. It was also agreed to undertake a random control trial evaluation of the programme (undertaken by the University of York), involving 12 schools, randomly allocated into the intervention and control groups.

The control group schools were to receive PATHS only after a two-year period. Specialist 'Social and Emotional Learning Coaches' were appointed to adapt the programme and support schools with delivery. This included advising on areas such as curriculum integration and extension. Finally, an expert advisory committee made up of international experts was appointed to complete the evaluation.

In the Republic of Ireland, the government agreed to match the funding from Atlantic on a 1:1 basis. However, in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education, which had not been involved in the planning process, made it clear they would not provide funding for the initiative. Eventually the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, through the Children & Young Person's Unit, was created to deliver a 10-year Strategy for Children & Young People. This provided £200,000 for one year.

Overall it took two years to fully adapt the PATHS programme for the UK and Ireland, This contact with the developer involved negotiating

programme content as well as the design, printing and distribution of materials.

Challenges created by the adaptation processes included spelling (from American English), names of characters, sporting references, cultural identities and visual representations. Design issues centred on presentation, updating illustrations and the physical production of the materials. With additional training of programme co-ordinators or 'coaches', PATHS was successfully developed and marketed for schools across the UK and Ireland.

### Challenges for Together4All (T4A)

By 2011, Atlantic funding in Together4All (T4A) equalled £3.2m. However the initiative has encountered a series of challenges to date:

- Together4All, which was established to deliver PATHS, has been hampered by a series of governance and leadership problems. This included a serious fraud case, which involved the misappropriation of funds and a criminal prosecution in 2015.
- Together4All, as a local organisation, had very limited access to schools outside the Southern Education & Library Board area, let alone elsewhere in the UK or Ireland.
- The schools that received the programme are for the most part satisfied. However, they were not required to contribute to it financially, therefore limiting their commitment to PATHS in the long term.
- There was also limited commitment to the programme from the Department of Education or regional Education and Library Boards.
- Although PATHS represented a proven international programme, the evaluation was initially completed in a US context. The results from the Northern Ireland evaluation

would not become available until 2014. Despite one clear success, the outcomes in general have not been as obvious.

- Atlantic was increasingly concerned about the future of T4A and PATHS, without additional financial support, or a robust business plan for it to become sustainable. Atlantic itself has also been wound up, with final grants to be made in 2015.

## Merger with Barnardo's

The board of T4A recognised the significance of these challenges and that it needed to seek the protection of a larger organisation. After some negotiations (and due diligence investigations completed by the potential partner), it was agreed to merge with Barnardo's, the UK's largest children's charity. Barnardo's already delivered more than 40 services in Northern Ireland and had also received funding from Atlantic for some of its evidence-based prevention and early intervention work.

After the merger in 2011, PATHS became part of Barnardo's portfolio of evidence-based programmes, which also included the 'Ready to Learn' project, 'All Stars' and 'Life skills'. PATHS received a further grant of £850,000 from Atlantic to upscale its activities whilst Barnardo's also successfully guaranteed a BIG Lottery Realising Ambition programme for a five-year UK-wide expansion. This included the PATHS PLUS programme, which created friendship groups for children with social and emotional difficulties.

## Key impacts and successes

The PATHS initiative has since had numerous successes, including:

- The effectiveness of Barnardo's in supporting the delivery of PATHS in 52 primary schools in Northern Ireland and 47 primary schools across sites in London, South Wales and Scotland.
- In addition to the Brownlow/Craigavon area PATHS is now being implemented in the northwest of Northern Ireland and the Greater Belfast area.
- The merger with Barnardo's has placed PATHS within a successful UK-wide children's charity creating a more resilient and potentially sustainable framework to support the growth of the programme in the future.
- Negotiations are underway to take over responsibility for supporting PATHS in Birmingham England.
- After two years, an evaluation of PATHS in Northern Ireland across six primary schools in Brownlow/Craigavon has shown the programme increases prosocial behaviours (empathy, co-operation, helping others) as well as improving the ability to identify and name emotions accurately; respond to appropriate situations; and engage in social problem-solving. In addition, PATHS pupils in P6/7 were more likely to spend time with, and not taunt, people who were different. These results mirror the findings from elsewhere (US, Germany and Croatia).

## Lessons from the work to date

The Together4All initiative represented an interesting and innovative social programme. To date there has been numerous lessons learnt:

- It is important to engage with key stakeholders and decision makers early in the planning process in order to guarantee long-term funding and support.
  - An outcome-focused planning process based on a large-scale needs (epidemiological) survey and based on evidence (the 'what works' literature of robustly evaluated programmes) proved to be effective, as did the area-based nature of the approach.
  - Establishing a local organisation to deliver a local service can make it difficult for the organisation to upscale the programme and ensure its long-term viability.
  - Schools may be willing to partner with an organisation to support the delivery of a free evidence-based programme. This does not mean they are willing to pay the full (or even part of) the cost of the programme, using a social enterprise approach.
  - Creating a closer partnership between universities and the third as well as the public sector can develop more effective policies that improve the lives of younger people.
  - Partnership with a well-resourced and focused independent funder, like The Atlantic Philanthropies, can help achieve significant social change.
- As one of more than 20 evidence-based prevention and early intervention programmes for children and young people in Ireland, the changes in policy and practice in Northern Ireland show it is possible to influence a government-wide change. These changes have included the development of cross-departmental structures committed to prevention and early intervention.
- A commitment to make use of international evidence to assess which programmes should or should not be delivered to address certain social problems.
  - The sustainability of work funded through large time-constrained grants is a major challenge, particularly in Northern Ireland where there is limited government engagement. The wider climate of austerity has also reduced the availability of public finances.
  - Ensuring a proven programme like PATHS is delivered efficiently has cost implications. At times it has been difficult to persuade customers to purchase PATHS, as opposed to cheaper non-proven programmes.
  - Upscaling the delivery of a proven programme like PATHS, even within a large organisation like Barnardo's, is still challenging and can meet internal as well as external resistance.
  - Recruiting/selecting and managing staff to deliver an evidence-based programme by distance (Belfast to London) is an ongoing difficulty.

## The future

Given the UK-wide presence of Barnardo's, the merger has created greater potential for replication, upscaling and sustainability. However, a number of external and internal challenges remain.

### External challenges

- The broader economic climate and lack of public finances represent an imminent threat. Local authority budgets have been cut substantially and are looking for ways to reduce spending. However, there is still a pupil premium in England given to schools according to the percentage of disadvantaged pupils. This may yet provide resources to support the delivery of PATHS, particularly in schools that have already identified problems with conduct and social behaviour.
- The concept of prevention, early intervention and evidence-based practice has not been well embedded in many local authorities or schools. A UK PATHS website has been established to market PATHS to schools in London and the northwest of England.
- The funding from both Atlantic and the BIG Lottery will end in 2017 and 2016, respectively. This represents a limited period to replicate and upscale PATHS so it achieves self-sustainability.

### Internal challenges

- The concept of prevention, early intervention and evidence-based practice is limited in parts of the Barnardo's branch of the organisation.
- Transitioning from a traditional funded service delivery to a social economy model has created its own challenges. Although Atlantic funding has provided resources to appoint a Social Economy Manager, Barnardo's have yet to.
- Encouraging Barnardo's in England, Scotland and Wales to market a programme that has been developed in, and is managed from, Northern Ireland is a challenge.
- Barnardo's seems unsure how to interpret or use the evaluation results, from the comprehensive and large-scale RCT, in order to market PATHS effectively.
- Carrying out financial modelling to be able sell PATHS at a price that is affordable without grant support from Atlantic or the BIG Lottery represents an ongoing challenge.
- Barnardo's are not marketing its other evidence-based programmes, ie 'Ready to Learn' and 'All Stars', in Britain. These are both being delivered only in Northern Ireland, so the organisation does not have a portfolio of programmes on offer across the UK.



## Keys to sustainable action and grant making

Atlantic has provided the leadership and resources to both develop the technical skills required to deliver evidence-based outcome-focused programmes for children and families with fidelity; to adapt to new ways of thinking and working. Now that Atlantic operations in Northern Ireland have been wound up, sustaining the progress that has been made, and further developing it, will require a new form of collective system leadership involving both the public and third sectors.

Collectively, Atlantic supported programmes have helped to improve the lives of young people and children across the UK. They have also had a specific impact on influencing policy and practice in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. A decade ago these approaches were shown to be innovative in a UK context, but resonated well with emerging academic evidence, which showed that to challenge significant social problems, the response needs to be based on clear outcomes of 'what works'.

The outcomes from the PATHS programme have demonstrated that replicating and upscaling an internationally proven programme can be challenging, even with financial support from an independent funder like Atlantic and collaboration with a large service provider like Barnardo's.

The initial area-based planning methodology proved flawed, because it did not engage with the key statutory decision-makers that could have provided the vital support to the initiative. The decision to work in schools was only made at the very end of the six months planning process. This timing was also unfortunate, as it was also too late to be included in the Programme for Government budget.

Establishing a new organisation to develop and deliver a large-scale and innovative programme like PATHS also proved to be problematic, especially in terms of leadership and management. A merger with Barnardo's was probably the only viable option to create the potential for long-term sustainability.

The limited experience of Barnardo's in the UK-wide marketing of proven programmes (like PATHS) to schools and education authorities, particularly ones that have been developed in Northern Ireland, has been difficult. Despite assistance from large external funding sources like the BIG Lottery grant.

In the future Barnardo's needs to develop and implement a sustainable strategy for the PATHS programme by replicating it and upscaling across the UK. The role of the Social Enterprise Manager (which has already been funded) and Barnardo's UK leadership and the Business Development Unit are important to achieving this objective.

## Conclusion

This review has presented an overview of the challenges and learning experiences arising from the PATHS programme. As part of Barnardo's, much has been learned in terms of developing and implementing evidence-based outcome-focused programmes. Given the imminent withdrawal of Atlantic, the next stage of the evidence-based and outcome-focused prevention and early intervention work with children and families in Northern Ireland will require a shift to a more collective system leadership. This will not be without its own challenges.

