



Prevention and early intervention  
in children and young people's services

# Ten years of learning



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## **Acknowledgements**

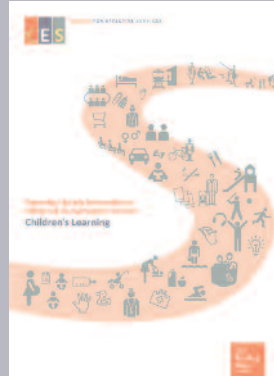
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## Section 1

# Key messages from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative

- 1 Supporting parents pays real dividends in terms of better outcomes for children.
- 2 Because of the importance of early brain development, a strong focus should be placed on supporting children's development from birth to three years.
- 3 Initiatives to support children's learning must promote a love of learning and be clear how they will integrate into the school setting.
- 4 Supporting key transitions – such as moving from an early years service to primary school – can make a significant difference to a child's life outcomes.
- 5 Programmes that support social and emotional learning and promote inclusion should be supported by wider school structures and policies.
- 6 The development of personal skills and aptitudes should be a part of formal and ongoing training for all professionals working with children.
- 7 Consulting with local communities helps to ensure that prevention and early intervention services and programmes fit with the needs of children, young people and their families.
- 8 Effective interagency structures are vital to ensuring better services for children, young people and families.

This is a summary of the learning emerging from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative. It is a summary of the six outcome reports in the Capturing the Learning Series: *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services*. The reports in the series are: **Parenting, Children's Learning, Improving Child Behaviour, Child Health and Development, Promoting Inclusion and Organisational Learning**. Reports and accompanying briefing papers are available from the CES website: <http://effectiveservices.org/prevention/early-intervention>



## The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII)

For more than a decade, the Atlantic Philanthropies, sometimes in conjunction with Government and other organisations, has invested over €127 million/£105 million in 30 partner agencies and community groups running 52 prevention and early intervention services and programmes across the island of Ireland. This document is a summary of the learning so far emerging from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII) over the past decade.

The PEII supports diverse services, across a wide range of settings and age groups, working in a number of areas such as:

- early childhood
- learning
- child health and development
- child behaviour
- parenting
- promoting inclusion.

It is estimated that, throughout the island of Ireland, the following have benefited to date from the investment:



**90,000** children and young people  
**24,000** parents or caregivers  
**4,000** professionals  
**39** partner agencies  
**52** programmes



## Extensive evaluation

A condition of funding for the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII) projects was that the organisations involved were required to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of their services in improving outcomes for children. The goal was to help the communities in which they work, but also to share their learning so that policy-makers and those who design, deliver and fund services for children can benefit from their experience and put it to work for other communities. Of the 25 evaluations included in this synthesis so far, 22 of the programmes or services can be deemed effective or as showing promising results. The evaluations were conducted by a range of universities and other third-level institutions, including NUI Galway, NUI Maynooth, Queen's University Belfast, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and the Dublin Institute of Technology. In addition to local evaluation expertise, the PEII also drew on a range of individuals internationally with specialist expertise to help in planning and reviewing the evaluations.

The learning from the PEII about designing, delivering, implementing and evaluating services/programmes has great potential to inform policy and the commissioning of services. This includes, for example, the Early Intervention Transformation Programme in Northern Ireland. This is a coming together of six Government departments and philanthropy as part of a Delivering Social Change Initiative, to jointly fund a programme of early intervention.

Experience and learning from the PEII is already being used in Ireland to inform the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme.

The National Policy Framework, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, covers the period 2014-2020 and the aim is to provide an overarching, whole of Government framework for the development and implementation of services for children and young people.

The ABC Programme is a joint venture between the Irish Government and The Atlantic Philanthropies, which targets investment in evidence-informed interventions to improve the long-term outcomes for children and families living in areas of disadvantage. It is informed by the learning emerging from the PEII and the Centre for Effective Services (CES) is helping to inject this learning into the design, planning, evaluation and implementation of the programme. As part of the ABC Programme, 10 new areas have been selected, including Cork, Limerick, Louth, the Midlands, Bray and 5 other areas of social disadvantage in

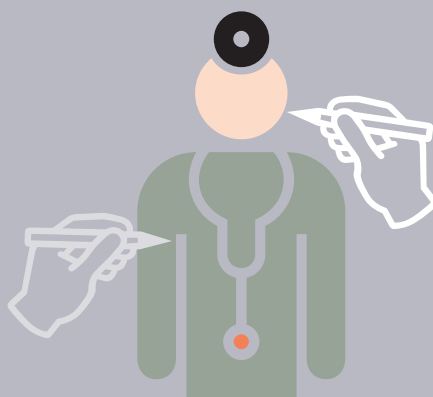
Dublin, in addition to the three existing sites from the PEII, i.e. Tallaght (Childhood Development Initiative), Darndale (Preparing for Life) and Ballymun (youngballymun). The learning has also been used by the Katharine Howard Foundation to inform its Parenting Support Initiative, which is a small grants programme to fund parenting support across Ireland.

In order to gather together the collective learning from the PEII projects, CES has undertaken the *Capturing the Learning* project. This has involved collecting data and information from evaluations conducted as part of the PEII and extracting the key messages about what works. Based on this process, CES has produced a series of six outcome reports and briefing papers setting out what we have learned from the PEII so far in relation to six outcome areas:

- Parenting (Sneddon and Owens, 2012)
- Children's learning (Sneddon and Harris, 2013)
- Improving child behaviour (Statham, 2013)
- Promoting inclusion (McGuirk and Kehoe, 2013)
- Child health and development (McAvoy et al, 2013)
- Organisational learning (Sneddon et al, 2012).

All of these reports are available on the CES website ([www.effectiveservices.org/prevention/early-intervention](http://www.effectiveservices.org/prevention/early-intervention)).

This present report will be updated as more evaluations become available. It does not endorse any particular programme or make comparisons between one programme and another. The objective is to extract findings from the programmes, interventions or services as a whole.



## Section 2

### The importance of prevention and early intervention in services for children, young people and families

Prevention and early intervention approaches aimed at children and young people have been implemented in Ireland and Northern Ireland over the past ten years. What early intervention means in the context of such work is intervening at a young age or early on in a problem, while prevention is about stopping a problem arising in the first place or preventing it from getting worse. Successful prevention and early intervention may result in reduced need for services later in life, especially more expensive remedial services such as youth detention. However, it is still necessary that high-quality, effective services that respond to immediate needs are available to children, young people and their families throughout their development.

Policies and initiatives based on these prevention and early intervention approaches aim to address the early indicators of problems in children and young people. These initiatives are beneficial not only to children, young people and their families – particularly for those in areas of social and economic disadvantage – but also to their communities and society at large. Prevention and early intervention initiatives help to give children the foundation they need to reach their potential and to lead happy, healthy and fulfilled lives.

At the heart of prevention and early intervention work is the understanding that a child's early years are critical in terms of their brain development, which can have a major impact on their future outcomes. The infant brain is 80% developed by the age of three<sup>1</sup> and the synapses or connections in the brain grow 20-fold during this period.<sup>2</sup> Of course, brain development continues throughout childhood and adolescence, but the evidence strongly supports a prevention and early intervention approach to ensure all children get the best possible start in life. This approach must be continued throughout childhood and adolescence to assist the child in achieving key developmental milestones.

'The foundation for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional, are laid in early childhood. What happens in these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and wellbeing.' – *Marmot Health Inequalities Review* (2010)

The early environment in which children receive care – in particular their home – is also fundamental to a child's development. The establishment of a positive

<sup>1</sup> Allen (2011)

<sup>2</sup> Huttenlocher and Dabholkar (1997)

and secure relationship between a caregiver and child in the first few months of an infant's life contributes greatly to the development of their positive social, emotional, thinking and self-control skills.<sup>3</sup> In this context, a mother's health and well-being can significantly impact on the quality of her relationship with her child. For example, if she experiences depression that lasts longer than the first 12 months of her child's life, this is significantly associated with poorer child outcomes.<sup>4</sup> In fact, *Growing Up In Ireland* data<sup>5</sup> has shown that the quality of the early parent-child relationship predicts how well children will get on with their peers later in life<sup>6</sup> and results from the *Millennium Cohort Study*<sup>7</sup> indicate that positive parenting styles can help improve early child development outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage.<sup>8</sup>

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men  
*Frederick Douglass, African-American social reformer (1818-1895)*

It is important to highlight that prevention and early intervention is not just limited to children who are young in age. Early intervention also entails tackling problems in their early stages and involves intervening early in the onset of difficulties or at key points in a child or young person's life where there is increased vulnerability, such as school transitions, adolescence and parenthood.

## Key learning

A number of important themes and lessons have emerged from the Capturing the Learning project and these are also supported by international research. These themes have been distilled down to the following key areas for change, which when taken together provide a coherent approach to prevention and early intervention to improve the lives of children, young people, their families and communities. The seven key areas are:

- 1 Supporting parents
- 2 Focusing on the first three years of life
- 3 Focusing on key life transitions
- 4 Supporting children's learning
- 5 Supporting professionals working with children, young people and families
- 6 Better interagency working
- 7 Community consultation and engagement

<sup>3</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004)

<sup>4</sup> Cornish *et al* (2008)

<sup>5</sup> *Growing Up in Ireland* is the national longitudinal study of children in Ireland (see [www.growingup.ie](http://www.growingup.ie))

<sup>6</sup> Nixon (2012)

<sup>7</sup> The *Millennium Cohort Study* is the national longitudinal study of children in the UK (see [www.cls.ioe.ac.uk](http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk))

<sup>8</sup> Kelly *et al* (2011)

## 1 Supporting parents

Parents play a crucial role in influencing their children’s development, before birth and during their lives. We know that it is what parents do with their children rather than who they are that is vital.<sup>9</sup> The international evidence states that the parent–child relationship is more important for children’s development than family income or structure. Thus, assisting parents in their parenting through support programmes not only helps parents directly, but offers an opportunity to promote the most important factor influencing child development. Offering parental support programmes is not intended to tell parents how to care for their children; rather, they provide a mechanism through which parents are empowered in their parenting role.

One of the key learnings from the PEII was that support programmes that worked directly with parents made positive improvements not just for parents, but also for children.<sup>10 11</sup> Parenting support programmes can make significant improvements in:

- reducing parental stress
- how confident parents feel in their parenting role
- parenting skills
- reducing depression
- feelings of social support
- improving child behaviour.

These positive results were achieved through a range of different approaches, including home-visiting, group sessions and individual work. Some programmes in the PEII worked with parents as their primary focus and some worked with parents to supplement the work they were doing with children. The programmes also varied in the level of need and the way in which services were targeted. The work with parents was also delivered in a range of settings, including the home, day care, pre-school, primary school and community settings.

An evidence base of parenting interventions now exists that can be delivered across the statutory and voluntary sectors. Service provision within the PEII included both universal and targeted approaches. *Triple P*, *Incredible Years*, *Lifestart – Growing Child Parenting Programme*, *Parents Plus* and *Parenting UR Teen* (now *Odyssey*) are all programmes delivered in numerous sites across Ireland and Northern Ireland, and they all demonstrated positive improvements for both parents and children.

<sup>9</sup> Allen (2011); Nixon (2012)

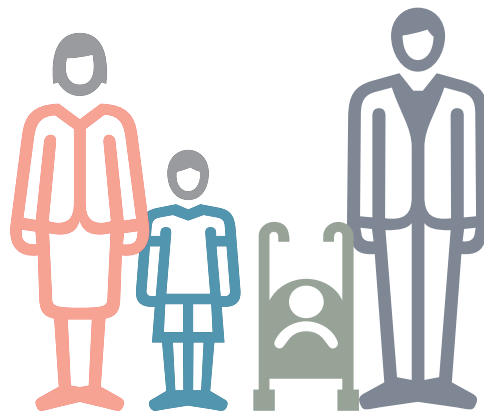
<sup>10</sup> Sneddon and Owens (2012)

<sup>11</sup> Statham (2013)

However, experience from the PEI has shown that it can sometimes be challenging to engage parents in support programmes. To counteract this, it is important to locate services in places that are accessible to parents and to deliver programmes and services at times suited to their needs, as well as to engage in outreach work to keep parents motivated and involved. This engagement with parents to take up a programme is crucial and can be especially beneficial in work with younger, first-time parents since it affords an opportunity to initiate and embed positive parenting practices. Engaging early with parents may also have a positive impact on future engagement with services relevant to their needs, which can help improve outcomes for both parents and their children.

### **recommendation**

**Develop and implement a Parenting Action Plan to support all parents.**



## 2 Focusing on the first three years of life

As stated earlier, the first three years of a child's life are a critical period of development. International evidence consistently shows that from birth to three years is a period where focused investment and attention can reap major future rewards for children, their families and society at large. Emerging evidence from neuroscience highlights the fundamental significance of early experiences on the developing brain and emphasises the provision of nurturing experiences and environments.<sup>12</sup> Providing infants with secure relationships, sensitive interactions and a safe home-learning environment during this early part of their lives supports neural development in its most rapid growth period and improves a wide range of future outcomes in relation to health, education, behaviour and social and emotional well-being. To put it simply, a focus on these formative early years provides rewards that may last a lifetime.

Good nutrition in this early period is also critical, especially in relation to future health and well-being outcomes. The quality and content of a child's diet has received increased attention in the context of rising obesity among children. A recent Irish study found that a longer period of breastfeeding was associated with significantly lower levels of obesity at three years of age.<sup>13</sup> Breastfeeding rates remain very low by international standards and are a significant concern with regard to child health outcomes.<sup>14</sup> Results from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study show that 1 in 4 children were overweight or obese by the age of three and the quality of a child's diet was linked to the risk of being overweight/obese.<sup>15</sup> Similar results were reported in the *Health Survey Northern Ireland*<sup>16</sup>, with 1 in 5 children in the survey being overweight. These results highlight not only the need for a prevention and early intervention approach to child health, but also the necessity of intervening in the early formative years to prevent childhood obesity.

The learning from the PEII<sup>17</sup> emphasises the importance of supporting parents and children from 0-3 years with programmes such as *Lifestart – Growing Child Parenting Programme*, *Preparing for Life* and *Ready, Steady, Grow*, all of which provide parents with accessible information on child development and support. Some programmes and approaches working with the parents of young children also worked on the health and well-being of mothers before and after the birth of their child, as well as addressing the parent-child relationship. The *Preparing for Life* programme, for example, provided direct home visits to parents and their infant, and has demonstrated significant positive impacts on the health of the children involved, including increased uptake of immunisations, better nutrition and infants being less likely to require a stay in hospital<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Winter (2010)

<sup>13</sup> Layte and McCrory (2012)

<sup>14</sup> OECD (2009); DCYA (2011); DHSSPS (2013)

<sup>15</sup> *Growing Up in Ireland* (2011)

<sup>16</sup> DHSSPS (2014)

<sup>17</sup> McAvoy *et al* (2013); Sneddon and Harris (2013); Sneddon and Owens (2012)

<sup>18</sup> Doyle and the PFL Evaluation Team (2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b)

From antenatal care through to the early years of a child's life, families may receive support from a number of professionals, often more so than at any other stage of development. Thus, it is important that parents are supported by a coordinated team approach to their child's health and well-being as part of a prevention and early intervention approach to improving child outcomes. It is clear that there is a wide spectrum of factors that can impact on child outcomes in these first critical three years and prevention and early intervention initiatives offer an opportunity to address children's immediate health and development needs, as well as their longer term capacity to thrive and develop.

### recommendation

**An infant health and well-being service should be delivered, one that integrates the work of public health nurses/health visitors, general practitioners, speech and language therapists, home-visiting and a range of other primary healthcare services.**





### 3 Focusing on key life transitions

As children and young people grow, they experience several key transitions in their lives. These include the transition from home life to pre-school, from pre-school to primary school, from primary to post-primary school, and then the transition to further education and training, the workforce and adulthood. Since transitions are key periods of change, they represent a significant risk, but also a period of great opportunity. Offering consistency in approaches across different environments provides stability. This can be especially beneficial in helping children and young people cope with transitions. For example, adolescence is a key transition period during which young people may be exposed to negative peer group influences, making them vulnerable to adverse outcomes.

Supporting mothers who are making the transition to becoming a parent for the first time represents a considerable opportunity to initiate and embed healthy behaviours during pregnancy, as well as positive parenting practices. Support for parents' health is also crucial for their child's development since factors such as parental mental illness and substance abuse impact negatively on their ability to parent well. Home-visiting programmes delivered across the antenatal and postnatal periods can also help service providers to engage with more hard-to-reach populations, including disadvantaged, first-time young parents.

From birth, children experience a range of environments and each can involve a different approach to learning, education and care. It is important to work with parents, caregivers, early years professionals and schools to ensure children's transitions are supported. This is especially significant for young children starting school. International evidence and the PEII have shown that some children cope well with starting school but others, especially those already experiencing disadvantage, can struggle. Experience from the PEII<sup>19</sup> shows how the entry to school life can be prepared for in advance by increasing links and using complementary learning approaches between home, early years settings and school, and, critically, by helping parents to develop a positive home-learning environment.

Parents, in particular, have a crucial role to play since they are, generally, an anchor for children undergoing transitions. Young children can experience transitions to numerous learning environments in the course of one day – from home to school or pre-school and possibly childcare. Given the premium placed on children's early learning experiences, careful and consistent managing of these transitions is required.

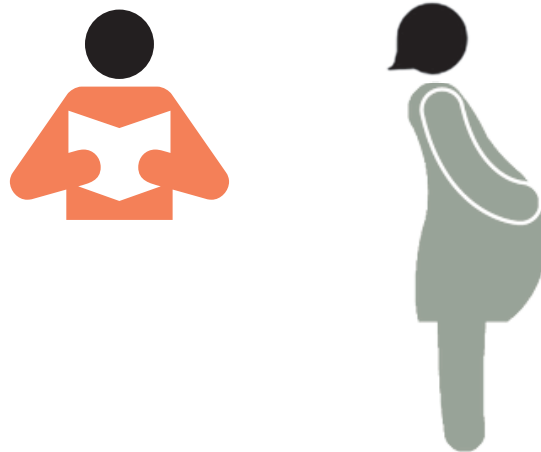
<sup>19</sup> Sneddon and Harris (2013)

Supporting children and young people who are making the transition between primary and post-primary school, as well as those who are moving from post-primary to further education, is also important. Schools need to support both academic achievement and children's emotional well-being. Learning from the PEI has provided valuable information about how best to manage these transitions. School-based mentoring programmes, like *Big Brother Big Sister*, can help children to bridge the gap between primary and post-primary by providing peer support from more senior students; such programmes help students making this transition to feel more safe, secure and settled in their new environment.<sup>20</sup>

## recommendations

**Transitions throughout children's lives – from infancy to young adulthood – need to be planned and managed in advance. School policies should identify responsibility for creating formal and informal links between early years settings, schools and parents in order to support children in these transitions.**

**Pre-service and in-service training for early years practitioners and teachers should aim to provide more continuity in curricular and learning approaches for children and increase awareness of the need for adequate support for children during these transition periods.**



<sup>20</sup> Brady *et al* (2012)

## 4 Supporting children's learning

The social and economic costs of poor educational attainment are high and can include increased criminality, unemployment, higher public health spending and even lower participation in political and civic activities later in life.<sup>21</sup> There are many reasons why children fail to learn to the best of their ability and it is important, as a result, that there are a range of interventions to support learning that address the different environments in which children live their lives and that are appropriate to their different stages of development.

The *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020*<sup>22</sup> in Ireland and the *Learning to Learn*<sup>23</sup> framework in Northern Ireland both highlight the need to foster children's literacy from early childhood and beyond, and this is reflected in the diversity of approaches to support learning in the PEII. These documents also highlight the link between disadvantage and educational outcomes, as do other Government policies such as Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) in Ireland and in changes to the Common Funding Scheme for schools in Northern Ireland to tackle educational disadvantage.

One of the key learnings from the PEII is that promoting a love of learning in children is as important as focusing on the specific skills of literacy and numeracy. Such an approach can be supported through fun and engaging activities, such as games, puzzles, access to books and shared reading. Programmes in the PEII were delivered by teachers, early years professionals and volunteers with children and young people ranging in age from birth to 12 years. PEII programmes that had a parental component showed improvements in how parents supported their children's learning and the quality of the home-learning environment. This highlights the critical role parents play in their children's learning. It is important that initiatives to promote children's learning operate in parallel with work that supports parental education. A pertinent finding from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study<sup>24</sup> is that levels of maternal education in particular can have a significant impact on emotional and behavioural outcomes for children.

Building capacity in early years settings was a focus of numerous programmes in the PEII. A key message from the PEII is that supporting the implementation of existing quality standards, frameworks, curricula and programmes (e.g. *Síolta* and *Aistear* in Ireland, and *Together Towards Improvement* and *Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education* in Northern Ireland) can help improve quality in these settings. Such implementation can positively influence children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes. Experienced professionals can provide

<sup>21</sup> Sneddon and Harris (2013)

<sup>22</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2011)

<sup>23</sup> Department of Education (2013)

<sup>24</sup> *Growing Up in Ireland* (2009)

insight, motivation, training, problem-solving and feedback on progress on implementation.

Programmes in the PEII also reported positive impacts on core literacy skills. In particular, programmes working directly with primary school children showed improvements in reading in terms of how much reading they were doing, their accuracy and fluency, as well as their enjoyment and confidence. Some programmes reported positive effects beyond core literacy skills, for example *Time to Read* bridged the link between schools and the business community by providing positive role models and promoting future aspirations for the world of work.<sup>25</sup>

As part of the PEII, a number of programmes were delivered that aimed to improve children's social and emotional learning, and promote inclusion and respect for diversity in children, such as the *Media Initiative for Children – Respecting Difference* and *BELONG*. This highlights the importance of taking a wider view of children's learning, beyond a primary focus on literacy and numeracy. The children involved in the programmes became more inclusive of others, were less likely to display racist attitudes towards their peers and developed a greater sense of belonging and cultural awareness. The programmes also provided children with effective conflict resolution skills.

## recommendations

**Parental education and programmes that support engagement in their child's learning should be promoted and increased in parallel with initiatives to support children's learning.**

**Use experienced professionals to provide training and support to practitioners to implement existing early years quality standards, frameworks, curricula and programmes.**

**Programmes should clarify how they will integrate into the ongoing work of the school setting, for example, whether to deliver as an after-school or extra-curricular activity, integrate into the mainstream curriculum or adopt a whole-school approach.**

**Children benefit from interventions that support social and emotional learning and promote inclusion in early years, primary school and community settings. It is important that these interventions are supported by school structures and policies that reinforce this work.**

<sup>25</sup> Miller *et al* (2009 and 2011)

## 5 Supporting professionals working with children, young people and families

The learning from the PEII highlights that other significant adults – particularly all professionals working with children, young people and families – play an important role in a child’s development.<sup>26</sup> Public health nurses and health visitors have a particularly important role to play during the key period before and after birth, especially in supporting the achievement of key developmental milestones like walking and talking. High-quality childcare and early years education, delivered by qualified trained staff, can contribute significantly to a young child’s emotional well-being. Professionals engaging with young children and their families also play a significant role in promoting early language development and identification of need. This can be supported in various ways, such as locating speech and language therapists in schools and providing ease of access to parents, as well as by providing training to other colleagues, as shown in the work of CDI Tallaght.

The *Learning to Learn*<sup>27</sup> framework in Northern Ireland and the report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, *Right from the Start*, in Ireland<sup>28</sup> – both highlighted that formal training in service delivery for such professionals is important for children’s outcomes. The *Right from the Start* report also highlights that the development of key personal skills and aptitudes is important. Some of the key skills identified included the ability to develop relationships with children and their parents, the ability to understand children’s perspectives and to praise, comfort and be responsive to a child’s needs.

The importance of both formal training and the development of these personal skills and aptitudes is supported by the learning from the PEII. For example, across a range of different settings, it was demonstrated that the quality of the relationship between the parent and practitioner contributed to the success of the programme. In addition, it was found that delivering formal training to teachers in classroom management makes them more confident in their ability to manage their classrooms and student behaviour more effectively and their classrooms became calmer and more pleasant places in which to work and learn as a result. From a financial point of view, the investment in such training for teachers makes sense because their new skills can be applied not just to their current students but also to subsequent cohorts of children.

<sup>26</sup> Sneddon and Harris (2013)

<sup>27</sup> Department of Education (2013)

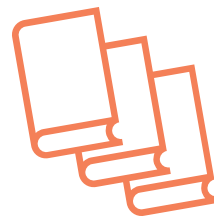
<sup>28</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013)

Given the dual importance of formal training in service delivery in addition to the development of personal skills and aptitudes, it is vital that a more active skills-based approach – characterised by ongoing workplace coaching and mentoring, as well as more formal pre-service and in-service training – is adopted to support those professionals working with children and their families.

## recommendations

**The development of personal skills and aptitudes should be part of formal and ongoing training for all professionals working with children.**

**It is recommended that training in interagency working is also provided as part of a children’s workforce strategy, to enhance communication between professionals and the sharing of good practice.**



## 6 Better interagency working

Learning from the PEII, as well as from international research, shows how necessary good interagency working is. For example, child death and serious case reviews, both nationally and internationally, have highlighted the importance of interagency working and the sharing of information to protect children and young people. When implemented well, interagency working can achieve changes in the way organisations work, share information and coordinate their services. It can transcend a ‘silo’ approach, to create a more supportive environment for better functioning of front-line services and staff.

Learning from the PEII<sup>29</sup> and international evidence<sup>30</sup> shows other benefits from an interagency approach. In this context, improvements were reported for:

- service users, such as improved access to services and a speedier response
- professionals, such as enhanced knowledge and skills, better understanding of children’s needs, greater enjoyment of their work and more opportunities for career development
- agencies, such as greater efficiency, less duplication and greater involvement of service users.

Findings from the PEII also highlighted that since the costs of unresolved childhood problems are borne by a range of agencies, especially when these problems progress into adulthood, the need for a partnership approach to planning and funding services is crucial. Two such partnerships, operating in Northern Ireland and Ireland, are detailed below.

The Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) brings together a range of agencies and sectors to put in place integrated planning and commissioning of children’s services based on realising the six high-level outcomes for all children and young people in Northern Ireland, as set out in its 10-year Children’s Strategy, *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge*.<sup>31</sup> Membership of the CYPSP consists of the leadership of relevant statutory agencies and voluntary and community organisations. The participation of children and young people and their families is also an important element of the CYPSP approach. The overall strategic aims of the CYPSP are supporting an early intervention approach to planning and commissioning of children’s services, communicating with Government to seek a more integrated cross-departmental approach, integration of planning leading to improved outcomes for children and young people, and optimisation of resources by coordinating and sharing of resources.

<sup>29</sup> Sneddon *et al* (2012)

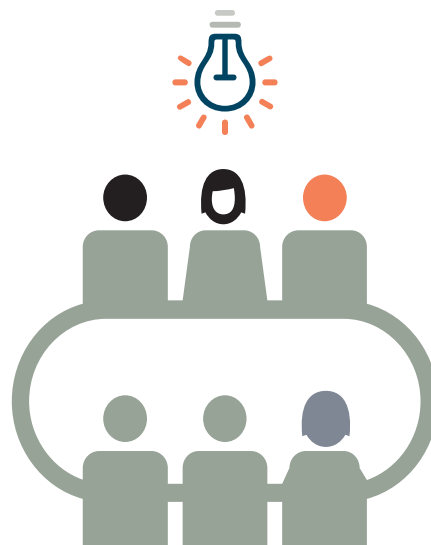
<sup>30</sup> Statham (2011)

<sup>31</sup> OFMDFM (2006)

Children’s Services Committees (CSCs) are a structure in Ireland for bringing together a diverse group of agencies in county areas to improve outcomes for children and young people through engaging in joint planning and coordination of services. They involve collaboration between Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; local authorities; the Health Service Executive (HSE); and other partners such as the local Education and Training Boards, the Educational Welfare Service, the National Educational Psychological Service, school principals, probation services, An Garda Síochána and the City and County Childcare Committees. Each CSC is required to produce a comprehensive 3-year *Children and Young People’s Plan* to direct their work in the local authority area. Currently, there are 21 CSCs operating throughout Ireland, with the aim being to establish full national coverage by the end of 2014.

### recommendation

**Children’s Services Committees and the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership need to be fully supported as the vehicles for interagency working to support children, young people and families to meet their full potential.**





## 7 Community consultation and engagement

Learning from the PEII showed that consulting and working with local communities was critical to helping organisations understand the reality of the problems that service users face, and ensuring that services addressed these realities.<sup>32</sup> One of the strengths of the PEII was that many of the services conducted needs analyses before selecting and implementing a proposed intervention, thus ensuring that programmes fitted in to the local context and, where necessary, adaptations were made. This consultation also helped facilitate buy-in from stakeholders and the wider community, and encouraged partnership-working at local level.

### recommendation

**Service providers should actively engage with local communities, including parents, children and young people, before considering what approach is most likely to work locally. Services should be customised to meet local needs and consultation and service user involvement should be an ongoing process.**



<sup>32</sup> Sneddon *et al* (2012)



## Section 3

# The economic case for investing in prevention and early intervention

The learning from prevention and early intervention approaches demonstrates real benefits to children, their families, communities and wider society through improved life outcomes and also demonstrates clear economic benefits. Spending on programmes that are of high quality, based on effective interventions, and implemented well can save significantly more than they cost over a number of years.

In times of limited resources, it is particularly important that money is invested in the services that produce the best value for money, i.e. services that demonstrate the optimal use of resources and achieve intended outcomes. These are not always the cheapest services at the point of delivery and savings may not occur until sometime in the future. It is important that, going forward, evaluations of programmes and services incorporate a cost-effectiveness and/or cost-benefit analysis component to illustrate the long-term savings. An evidence-base for the cost-effectiveness of prevention and early intervention programmes in the UK and Ireland is currently being developed.<sup>33</sup> Existing international and national figures on potential savings from prevention and early intervention initiatives are presented below.

### Early childhood care and education

Cost-benefit analyses conducted in the US of high-quality early care and education programmes have reported returns of \$2.50-\$16 for every \$1 invested.<sup>34</sup> The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) projected the benefits of investment in early care and education in Ireland to be between €4 and €7 for every €1 invested.<sup>35</sup> These estimated returns were calculated from measured educational outcomes (such as improved educational attainment, reduced need for special education provision), declining juvenile crime rates, and projected savings due to future participation in the labour force, increased attendance at third-level education and reduced prosecution and victim costs relating to adult crime.

### Educational attainment

The economic argument for investing in young children is now widely recognised.<sup>36</sup> Research shows that the rate of economic return on good early years' investment is significantly higher than for any other stage in the child's life, since development in children's earliest years increases the effectiveness of

<sup>33</sup> Social Research Unit (Dartington) and the Early Intervention Foundation

<sup>34</sup> Start Strong (2011)

<sup>35</sup> NESF (2005)

<sup>36</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013)

educational investments later in childhood.<sup>37</sup> There are considerable costs associated with poor educational attainment, with a UK study estimating the total costs to the tax payer of failing to learn to read as being between £44,797-£53,098 per individual.<sup>38</sup> Educational attainment among 15-year-olds is higher for children who attended quality pre-primary education, with the most favourable attainment outcomes seen in jurisdictions where early childhood education is inclusive and supported by high levels of public investment.<sup>39</sup>

## Parenting

A cost-benefit analysis of the *Nurse-Family Partnership* – which provides parenting supports through home visits to first-time mothers – shows a return of \$2.37 for every \$1 spent as a result of positive effects observed across a variety of future child outcomes, including school completion, crime and delinquency, and employment.<sup>40</sup>

## Child behaviour

Unresolved child behaviour problems can have costly long-term consequences. For example, one estimate puts the long-term economic impact on society of unresolved conduct disorder at more than £1 million per individual over their lifetime.<sup>41</sup> Two of the evaluations of the *Incredible Years* child behaviour intervention delivered in Dublin, Kildare and Limerick analysed the cost of providing the programme and considered whether they were likely to save money in the long run. Both concluded that they would, with results showing reduced use of specialist services (such as reduced contact with social workers) and reduced use of primary care services (including speech and language therapists), with savings of approximately €4,021-4,824 per child over a 10 year period alone.<sup>42</sup>

## recommendation

**Evaluations undertaken of services and programmes should incorporate a cost-effectiveness component. This should include the true costs for setting up and delivering the service, including training, resources and the costs of ongoing delivery.**

**Conducting cost-benefit analyses is also useful for interventions where initial costs for delivery may be incurred by one department/agency and long-term cost savings accrued by another.**

<sup>37</sup> Heckman and Masterov (2007)

<sup>38</sup> KPMG Foundation (2006)

<sup>39</sup> OECD (2011)

<sup>40</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2012)

<sup>41</sup> Muntz *et al* (2004).

<sup>42</sup> McGilloway *et al* (2012)

## Section 4

# Summary of recommendations

### Support for parents

Develop and implement a Parenting Action Plan to support all parents.

### Focusing on the first three years of life

An infant health and well-being service should be delivered, one that integrates the work of public health nurses/health visitors, general practitioners, speech and language therapists, home-visiting and a range of other primary healthcare services.

### Focusing on key life transitions

Transitions throughout children's lives – from infancy to young adulthood – need to be planned and managed in advance. School policies should identify responsibility for creating formal and informal links between early years settings, schools and parents in order to support children in these transitions.

Pre-service and in-service training for early years practitioners and teachers should aim to provide more continuity in curricular and learning approaches for children and increase awareness of the need for adequate support for children during these transition periods.

### Supporting children's learning

Parental education and programmes that support engagement in their child's learning should be promoted and increased in parallel with initiatives to support children's learning.

Use experienced professionals to provide training and support to practitioners to implement existing early years quality standards, frameworks, curricula and programmes.

Programmes should clarify how they will integrate into the ongoing work of the school setting, for example, whether to deliver as an after-school or extra-curricular activity, integrate into the mainstream curriculum or adopt a whole-school approach.

Children benefit from interventions that support social and emotional learning and promote inclusion in early years, primary school and community settings. It is important that these interventions are supported by school structures and policies that reinforce this work.

### Supporting professionals working with children

The development of personal skills and aptitudes should be part of formal and ongoing training for all professionals working with children.

It is recommended that training in interagency working is also provided as part of a children's workforce strategy, to enhance communication between professionals and the sharing of good practice.

### Better interagency working

Children's Services Committees and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership need to be fully supported as the vehicles for interagency working to support children, young people and families to meet their full potential.

### Community consultation and engagement

Service providers should actively engage with local communities, including parents, children and young people, before considering what approach is most likely to work locally. Services should be customised to meet local needs and consultation and service user involvement should be an ongoing process.

### Economic case for prevention and early intervention

Evaluations undertaken of services and programmes should incorporate a cost-effectiveness component. This should include the true costs for setting up and delivering the service, including training, resources and the costs of ongoing delivery.

Conducting cost-benefit analyses is also useful for interventions where initial costs for delivery may be incurred by one department/agency and long-term cost savings accrued by another.

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## Appendix 1

### Prevention and Early Intervention initiatives in Ireland and Northern Ireland included in the *Capturing the Learning* project

organisation	service/programme	location
<b>Archways</b> <a href="http://www.archways.ie">www.archways.ie</a>	Incredible Years (Childhood and School Age versions)	Dublin and Kildare
	Functional Family Therapy	Dublin
	Teacher Classroom Management (Incredible Years)	Limerick
	Parent and Child Training for Children with ADHD (Incredible Years)	Dublin
	Mentoring for Achievement (MAP)	
<b>Barnardos</b> <a href="http://www.barnardos.ie">www.barnardos.ie</a>	Partnership with Parents	being piloted in Ireland
	Wizards of Words	Limerick and Dublin
	Friendship Group	Dublin and Tipperary
	Tús Maith	Dublin, Tipperary and Cork
<b>Barnardos NI</b> <a href="http://www.barnardos.org.uk">www.barnardos.org.uk</a>	Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS®)	Antrim
	Ready to Learn	Belfast and Antrim
<b>BELONG</b> <a href="http://www.belongni.org">www.belongni.org</a>	Step BELONG	Southern Health and Social Care Trust

organisation	service/programme	location
<b>Brook</b> www.brook.org.uk/brook-northern-ireland	Brook Sexual Health	Coleraine and Belfast
<b>Business in the Community</b> www.bitc.org.uk/northern_ireland	Time to Read	Primary schools across Northern Ireland
<b>Colin Early Intervention Community</b> www.newcolin.com	various programmes and services	Colin neighbourhood, West Belfast
<b>Early Years Making it Work</b> www.early-years.org	Eager and Able to Learn	Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland
	Media Initiative for Children: Respecting Difference	
<b>Foróige</b> www.foroige.ie	Big Brothers Big Sisters (Community and Schools)	throughout Ireland
	Volunteer-led Youth Clubs	
	Leadership Development for young people (ASLFL)	
	Citizen Engagement (Youth Citizenship Programme)	
<b>Lifestart</b> www.lifestartfoundation.org	Growing Child parenting programme	throughout Ireland

<b>organisation</b>	<b>service/programme</b>	<b>location</b>
<b>Longford Westmeath Parenting Partnership</b> www.longford-westmeath.triplestaypositive.net	Triple P Positive Parenting	Longford and Westmeath
<b>MCI Ireland (formerly Mayo Children's Initiative)</b> www.mciireland.ie	Protective Behaviours	Mayo
<b>National Early Years Access Initiative (Pobal)</b>	National Early Years Access Initiative	11 projects throughout Ireland
<b>Northside Partnership (Preparing for Life)</b> www.preparingforlife.ie	Quality improvement  Preparing For Life (PFL) Group Triple P Parenting	Darndale and Coolock, Dublin
<b>Parenting NI</b> www.parentingni.org	Parenting UR Teen (renamed Odyssey)	14 locations across Northern Ireland
<b>Rialto Learning Community</b> www.rialtolc.com	Out of School Time Initiative	Rialto, Dublin

## organisation

Tallaght West Childhood  
Development Initiative  
[www.twcdi.ie](http://www.twcdi.ie)

## service/programme

Early Childhood Care and  
Education (renamed CDI  
Early Years in 2012)

## location

all based in  
Tallaght, Dublin

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Doodle Den

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Mate-Tricks

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Healthy Schools

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Community Safety Initiative

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Speech and Language  
Therapy (SLT) Service  
(component of the CDI Early  
Years programme and  
Healthy Schools)

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Restorative Practices

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**youngballymun**  
(Ballymun Partnership)  
[www.youngballymun.org](http://www.youngballymun.org)

Ready, Steady, Grow

all based in  
Ballymun, Dublin

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3,4,5 Learning Years  
(support and coaching for  
the implementation of the  
Síolta National Quality  
Standards and HighScope  
Curriculum in Early Years  
services)

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Incredible Years (Classroom  
management and Parent  
Training)

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Write Minded

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What's Up

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## Appendix 2

### The Centre for Effective Services

Established in 2008, the Centre for Effective Services (CES) connects research, policy and practice to improve outcomes for communities, children and young people across the island of Ireland. We work to influence policy and systems change; champion innovative service design and implementation; and build knowledge, skills and capacity for government departments, organisations, researchers and practitioners. Part of a new generation of intermediary organisations, CES is a not-for-profit that helps communities, children and young people thrive. Its work is supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Atlantic Philanthropies.

CES supports policy makers to use evidence when developing and implementing policy. Some examples are given below.

- CES assisted the Department of Children and Youth Affairs with the development of the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. The aim is to provide an overarching framework for the development and implementation of services for children and young people over the next six years.
- In 2013, CES, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), explored the feasibility of a ‘children’s budget’. The key aim of this project is an exploration of public expenditure on children and young people in Northern Ireland.
- CES supported the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy through the development of evidence papers on a number of areas, including early childhood care and education, child health and supporting parents in the early years.
- In 2013, CES began assisting and advising the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and The Atlantic Philanthropies with the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme. The aim of the programme is to help mainstream the learning from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative.
- CES, in collaboration with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, provides strategic and implementation support to Children’s Services Committees across Ireland. It has supported the development and expansion of this national policy initiative since 2009.

- Since 2011, CES has continued to provide advice and support to the Colin Early Intervention Community (CEIC) and to advise and support the ongoing development of the initiative.
- CES provided support to the Task Force on the Child and Family Support Agency. The objective of this support was to provide international information and evidence to inform the work of the Task Force and in planning the establishment of the new Agency.
- CES also works with other Government departments, national agencies and other service providers to help them use the evidence available from research and practice in their work.

For more information about the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative and the work of The Centre for Effective Services visit [www.effectiveservices.org](http://www.effectiveservices.org)







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