



Provided by the author(s) and University of Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

Title	Parenting support and parental participation: qualitative interview findings
Author(s)	Crosse, Rosemary; Devaney, Carmel
Publication Date	2018-09
Publication Information	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.
Publisher	UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
Link to publisher's version	http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/media/unescochildandfamilyresearchcentre/dmpfinalreports/Parenting-Support-and-Parental-Participation.-Qualitative-Interview-Findings.pdf
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/14553

Downloaded 2024-05-26T19:52:45Z

Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.





United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Chair in
Children, Youth and Civic Engagement
Ireland

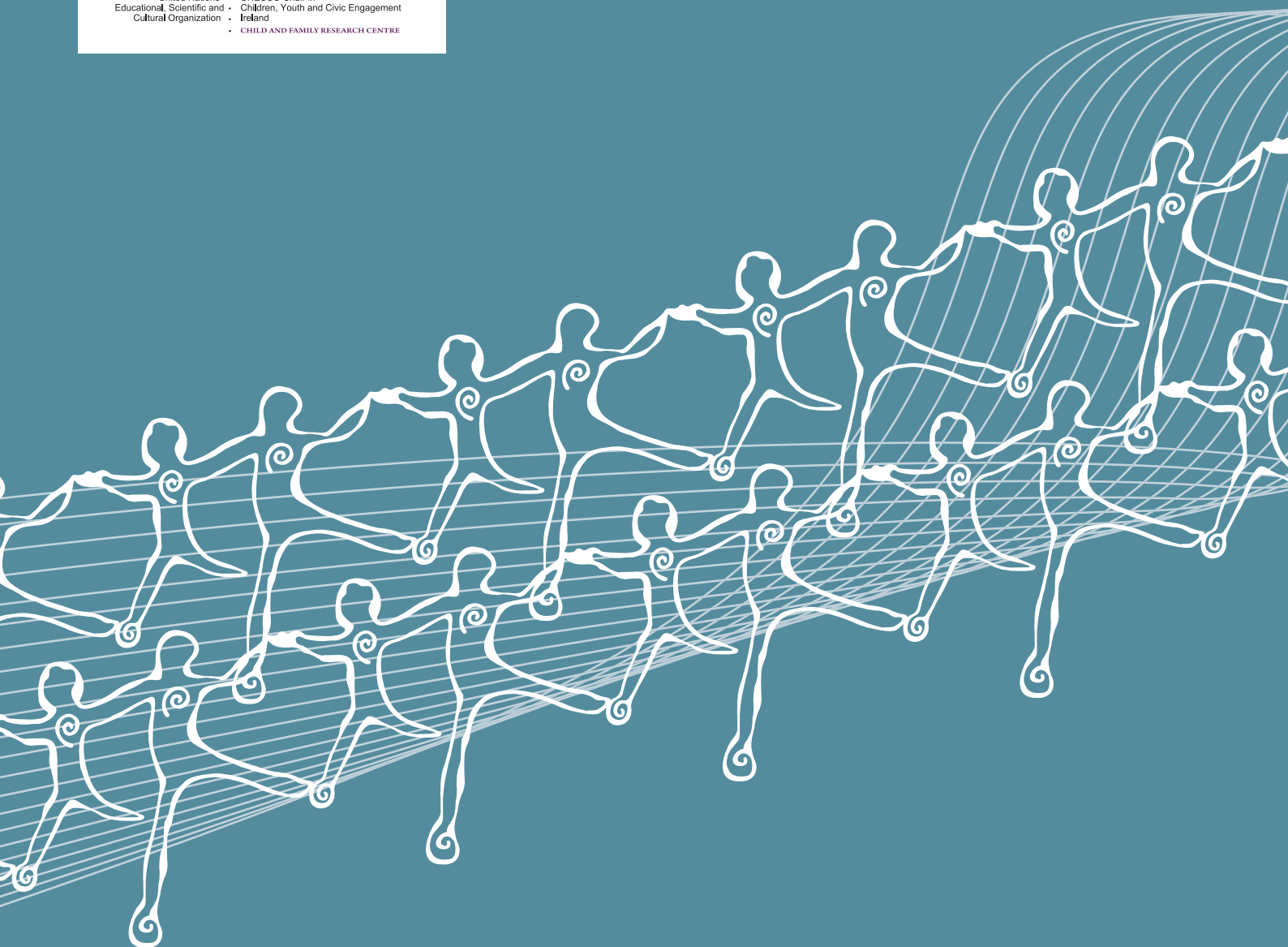


NUI Galway
OE Gaillimh

CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE



Institute for
Lifecourse and Society



Parenting Support & Parental Participation

Qualitative Interview Findings

By Dr Rosemary Crosse and Dr Carmel Devaney
UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway

SEPTEMBER 2018



The authors of this report are:

Dr Rosemary Crosse and Dr Carmel Devaney

Any citation of this report should use the following reference:

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.

ISBN: 978-1-905861-51-4

Copyright © UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC), 2018.

For further information, please contact:
UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre
Institute for Lifecourse and Society
National University of Ireland Galway
Galway, Ireland
T: +353 91 495 398
E: cfrc@nuigalway.ie
W: www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch

The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of views expressed in this report and for opinions expressed herein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organisation.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing of the copyright holder.

For rights of translation or reproduction, applications should be made to the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, Institute for Lifecourse and Society, Upper Newcastle Road, National University of Ireland Galway.

DISCLAIMER

Although the Authors and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at press time, the authors or publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident or any other cause.

About the Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support



The research and evaluation team at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC), NUI Galway provides research, evaluation and technical support to Tusla's Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS). This is a new programme of action being undertaken by Tusla – Child and Family Agency as part of its National Service Delivery Framework. The programme seeks to transform child and family services in Ireland by embedding prevention and early intervention into the culture and operations of Tusla. The research and evaluation carried out by the UCFRC focuses on the implementation and the outcomes of the PPFS Programme and is underpinned by the overarching research question:

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

The research and evaluation study adopts a Work Package approach. This has been adopted to deliver a comprehensive suite of research and evaluation activities involving sub-studies of the main areas within the Tusla's PPFS Programme. The Work Packages are: Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks; Children's Participation; Parenting Support and Parental Participation; Public Awareness; and Commissioning.

This publication is part of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package.

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 Services Executive (HSE), 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.

Contact Details:

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, Institute for Lifecourse and Society, Upper Newcastle Road, National University of Ireland Galway, Ireland.

T: +353 91 495398

E: cfrc@nuigalway.ie

W: www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch

Twitter: [@UNESCO_CFRC](https://twitter.com/UNESCO_CFRC)

Facebook: [ucfrc.nuig](https://www.facebook.com/ucfrc.nuig)

Table of Contents

About the Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support	i
About the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre	i
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Aims and Objectives	2
2. Methodology	3
2.1 Introduction	3
2.2 Data Collection	4
2.3 Data Analysis	4
2.4 Ethics	4
3. Findings	5
3.1 Influence on Tusla's Service Delivery System	5
3.2 Programme Embeddedness	7
3.3 Sustainability	9
4. Conclusion	13

1



Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme is a comprehensive programme of early intervention and preventative work which is being undertaken by Tusla, Ireland's Child and Family Agency with the support of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC), National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway). This Programme is being implemented collaboratively by Tusla and its partner organisations by way of five main work streams (Tusla, 2017): Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks; Parenting Support and Parental Participation; Children's Participation; Public Awareness; and Commissioning. The findings presented in this report relate to the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work.

Tusla is responsible for supporting and promoting the development, welfare, and protection of children as well as the effective functioning of families under the Child and Family Agency Act (2013). The Department of Children and Youth Affairs' 'High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families' (2015) gives a policy platform for Tusla to strengthen and grow parenting and family support as an effective prevention and early intervention measure to promote best possible outcomes for children. To that end, Tusla produced the Parenting Support Strategy, which 'sets out the strategic direction of the Child and Family Agency in its role in supporting parents so as to improve outcomes for children and young people' (Gillen et al., 2013).

The Strategy emphasises the mainstreaming of parenting supports through a continuum process from universal support to targeted and specialist services according to level of need. The engagement and participation of parents in developing such supports is increasingly acknowledged as an important issue for policymakers and service providers, both in recognising parents as having a right to participate in decisions affecting their families (Healy et al., 2011) and in contributing to better outcomes for children (Darlington et al., 2010). Participation is seen as important in voluntary and statutory service contexts (Corby et al., 1996).

The UCFRC is responsible for the research and evaluation of the PPFS Programme, and work focuses on the process, implementation, and outcomes of the Programme over its lifetime. This report is one element of the research being undertaken in the area of Parenting Support and Parental Participation 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?***

1.2 Aims and Objectives

In consideration of this overarching research question, the aims and objectives of this Work Package are to:

1. Explore the implementation of Tusla's programme of work in the area of parenting support.
2. Determine the impact on practice of Tusla's programme of work in the area of parenting support.
3. Explore the implementation of Tusla's programme of work in the area of parental participation.
4. Determine the impact on practice of Tusla's programme of work in the area of parental participation.

Preceding reports on the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package are available on the UCFRC PPFS Development and Mainstreaming Programme web page.¹

Section 2 of this report outlines the methodological approach used in this study, specifically how the data was collected and analysed, the limitations of the methodological approach, and ethical considerations. Section 3 presents a collated account of the findings from the empirical data. The responses from the qualitative interviews with participants such as Tusla's management and staff, organisations funded by Tusla, community and voluntary organisations, and government departments are grouped according to themes that are applicable to the overarching research question for the study. Finally, section 4 of the report offers some overall conclusions.

¹ www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/cfrc/mainstream/theworkpackageapproach/parentingsupportparentalparticipation/.

2

Methodology



2.1 Introduction

The methodological approach to this research is based on a multi-person strategy of data collection which targeted stakeholders involved in Child and Family Services in Ireland and took place over a five-month period. The data in this study is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews which were carried out with Tusla's management and staff, organisations funded by Tusla, community and voluntary organisations, and government departments, all of whom have roles in Child and Family Services in Ireland and therefore have the knowledge and expertise to consider the parenting support and parental participation programme of work in the Irish context.

Table 1: Respondent Groups

Tusla's Participants	Non-Tusla Participants
National Office/Tusla Senior Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Management Team/Office of the Chief Executive Service Directors National Office/General Managers 	Government Departments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior policy actors in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)
Tusla Operational Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Implementation Managers (RIMs) Area Managers Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Managers Principle Social Workers (PSWs) – Child Protection and Alternative Care 	Community and Voluntary Sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO and senior representatives from the community and voluntary sector, including: Barnardos; Foróige; Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) Ireland; Extern; Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC); Empowering People in Care (EPIC)
Tusla Key Functional Specialists² <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Data Information Officers; Communications Officers; Education and Welfare Services 	External and Stakeholder Organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representatives from: Public Health Nursing (PHN); Sample of Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs); Galway University Foundation (GUF)
Parenting Working Group (PWG) – comprising both Tusla and non-Tusla representatives Child and Family Support Networks (CFSN) – comprising both Tusla and non-Tusla representatives Children's Participation Working Group (CPWG) – comprising both Tusla and non-Tusla representatives	

² Key Functional Specialists are those with responsibility for key functional areas within Tusla.

2.2 Data Collection

Given the breadth of the PPFS study and the number of respondents required to answer research questions on the various areas of the Programme, the UCFRC undertook a process of common data collection. A research team from the UCFRC developed an interview schedule containing qualitative semi-structured questions that were applicable to the five PPFS Work Packages: Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks; Parenting Support and Parental Participation; Children's Participation; Public Awareness; and Commissioning, as well as a further set of questions on the overall programme of work referenced elsewhere as the overall implementation and outcomes study.

Potential respondents were selected on the basis of their job title as outlined in Table 1 above. They were contacted via email by a member of the UCFRC research team and invited to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview at a time and place convenient to them. A team of researchers from the UCFRC conducted the interviews, which lasted between one and two hours.

For this Work Package, questions centred primarily on the following areas: perceptions of the impact or influence of the parenting support and parental participation programme of work on the service delivery system within Tusla, perceptions of the embedment of the programme of work across the service delivery system, and sustainability going forward. Of the 125 interviews conducted, 118 responded to the questions on the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package.

2.3 Data Analysis

NVivo software was utilised to code all interview responses into thematic areas aligned with the interview questions, and this data was used to generate an analysis of the themes that evolved, which is presented in section 3 of this report.

2.4 Ethics

The research was guided by key ethical requirements of doing no harm and gaining informed, voluntary consent for participation in the research. Participants indicated their willingness to participate when they provided their consent for an interview. All those who took part in interviews were asked for and gave their consent. Anonymity was guaranteed for all participants, and therefore names and identifiable personal details throughout the report have been changed. Ethical approval for this research was granted by both the NUIG Research Ethics Committee and the Tusla Research Ethics Review Group.

3

Findings



This section presents the findings of the data collected for this study. It contains all respondents' views on the impact or influence of the parenting support and parental participation programme of work on the service delivery system within Tusla, the embedment of the programme of work across the service delivery system, and sustainability going forward.

3.1 Influence on Tusla's Service Delivery System

There was a mixed response to the question of the influence of the parenting support and parental participation programme of work on Tusla's service delivery system.

Some respondents, in the categories of Service Directors, PPFS Managers, those representing the CYPSCs, and some affiliated with Tusla's PWG, maintain that the practice of supporting parents is long established and already well developed. The elements of the parenting programme of work introduced are seen by some as extras, although there is the view that such elements will have an enhancing effect in this area:

It's an extra, do you know, the websites, parenting support website is an extra, the parenting support champions is an extra as well, and the parenting seed funding is an extra, it will enhance whatever is going on. The main core of our parenting work has already been established here, and that's the parenting programmes and courses that are locally and have done for many years. (P31)

While there is a certain awareness of the different elements of the programme of work happening, numerous respondents across all categories indicate that they simply do not know what impact this programme is having and that evidence is needed:

I have seen a lot of activity in so far ... a lot of good work. But I don't have any particular evidence that is presented to me showing the impact of it, so I don't know what the impact of it is ... So it is very hard to determine what the actual impact of all that really is, other than it has been very positive insofar as it has been very well received. The work and the documentation is very high-quality, but insofar as their impact on participation and parental support, it is very hard to know, to be quite honest. (P79)

Others believe that the programme is having no effect on Tusla's service delivery system. Responses from some Area Managers, PPFS Managers, CFSNs, PWG and PSWs indicate that a lack of effect may be attributable to a lack of awareness linked to poor information, or it may be because this programme of work was perceived to be the last in the group to be actioned. For others, a lack of operational plans and of knitting the different elements of the programme together may be contributing to the lack of effect. For some respondents in the Family Resource Centres (FRCs) and in the community and voluntary sector, engagement with the programme is minimal, and knowledge sharing may be the key:

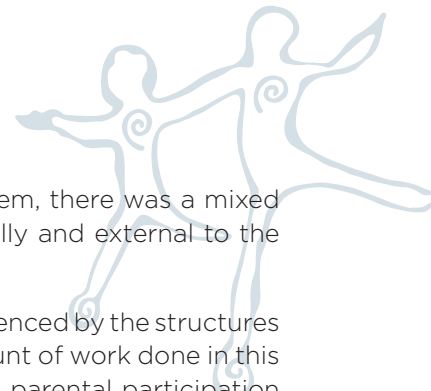
I think it could be broadened out ... You kind of wonder where is it all going. And it's good for Tusla staff or whatever to be informed around what's being delivered by more voluntary and frontline organisations. But where is the networking and the knowledge sharing among the wider organisations that are being funded? And I think there could be more potential for that, and more potential to actually get the information out into the community. (P135)

A number of positive views were presented by respondents categorised as: CPWG, PSW, key functional specialists, and Tusla's National Office. The parenting support and parental participation programme of work is seen to be having an impact on the service delivery system in a number of ways. For some, it has brought about changes in work practices. In addition, the parental participation programme is seen as a positive way of working with changes in terminology and practice identified. For those in child protection, priority being given to the views and wishes of parents in individual cases, enabling staff to deal with identified difficulties, is cited as being different to the traditional way of working. For others there is a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention resulting in clearer information on pathways and services, and therefore consequent options for family support interventions:

So in this stream of work there's a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention rather than crisis management, so that's a welcome development. So in terms of the impact on the service delivery framework within Tusla, it's having a positive impact, there is a link, so when cases come to the attention of social workers that don't reach the threshold for a social work intervention, at least give social workers and families other options for family support. (P21)

Evidently there is a perception that the parenting support and parental participation programme of work is having an effect, particularly for those directly involved in the programme. For others, however, it is only starting to have an impact on the service delivery system within Tusla, with a dominant view that there is more to do in this area. Areas cited as requiring responsiveness include: clear pathways for information and access to support services, standardisation of parenting support programmes nationwide, improved links from Child Protection Services to Family Support Services, and attention to the issue of internal disjointed services around parenting support. Irrespective of such issues, the significance of parenting support and parental participation in supporting children was highlighted in a number of interviews:

I think they are beginning to have an impact, yes, I do think they are beginning to have an impact ... There has been a rightful focus on children and young people up to now, and that was absolutely right ... I think to a certain extent we have forgotten the key partners who surround the child and who influence the child positively or negatively, and I think that the growth of parenting support programmes and parental participation is vital to really making a difference for children, because you can't really, I believe, make a difference for a child without considering the other environmental factors around the child, such as the key environmental factor of parents. (P157)



3.2 Programme Embeddedness

As with the influence of the programme of work on Tusla's service delivery system, there was a mixed response to the question of the embeddedness of the programme both internally and external to the organisation.

For a number of respondents across categories, the programme is embedded, evidenced by the structures in place and the roles of those with responsibility for parenting as well as the amount of work done in this area in recent times. For others, it is embedded because parenting support and parental participation is seen as always being the core business of Tusla. However, while this type of work has always been prevalent in the organisation, there are those who maintain that it has become more streamlined as a result of PPFS, in terms of coordination and clarity in this area:

We're already doing parenting support, so in many ways this is about making it better ... and so the parenting stream, a lot of it is about coordination and clarity as to what supports we're already providing, how to make sure that those supports cover the continuum of need, and trying to just make those more effective to support people who are commissioning parenting supports. (P156)

Evidently there is a view that this programme of work is embedded throughout the organisation. There is however a cautionary note to some of the responses to this question. Some believe that this programme of work is embedded more particularly for those who are directly involved in the work. In addition, a significant number of respondents indicated that more work needs to be done in order for this programme to become fully embedded in and across the organisation, which will take time, and that awareness is needed to ensure that parenting is recognised as core to Tusla's business:

In relation to parenting, you know, we would have within Tusla, we would have done that at the very start of these parenting briefings in relation to, yes, you know, that there is a parenting stream. But I think we have a distance to go again, if that makes sense, in relation to the embedding of it ... I think a piece needs to be done now in relation to who is aware of this ... Because sometimes when I hear comments around PPFS, I'm still like, Oh my God, are we at that stage that people don't know that parenting is everyone's business. (P91)

Awareness is a key theme throughout all interviews conducted, evidenced by a number of respondents indicating that they do not know if the programme of work has been embedded. Moreover there is a perceived necessity for more work to be done at the higher levels of need, in relation to parental participation capacity issues are highlighted as preventative:

[There is] greater capacity within the PPFS service than there would be in the other parts of the service, in that given that the level of demand and pressures on the social work teams as such and the vacancies within those services. I mean that undermines your ability [and] time to actually put into planning effective parental participation. (P101)

However Signs of Safety may contribute to the development of parental participation practice at this level of need:

The SOS, (Signs of Safety), that's coming in, practice development, I mean there's a huge emphasis on parental participation there. So that will significantly enhance parental participation and child participation, the Signs of Safety, so and you know that's actively being developed across the area now and we were chosen for two practice cases and the teams have really taken it on. So that will go a long way in respect of enhancing ensuring that the voice of parents have been heard across the service and influence in service development. (P101)

Generally, there is a belief that overall programme of work is disjointed and some clarity is required:

That's a hard one, as I said, because I think each area has embedded their own parenting programme. So I don't get a sense of a national parenting piece. As I said I know there's the website and there's the key messages and there's the parenting strategy but they're so, they're too woolly yet. (P39)

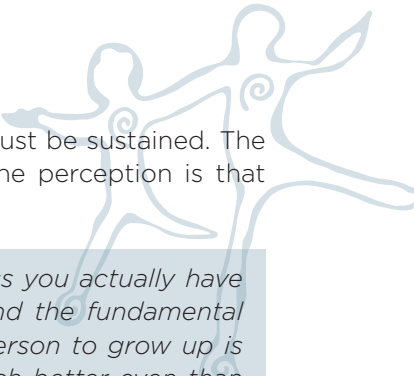
Notwithstanding such issues, there is a perception that the programme of work is not embedded across the organisation:

No, my view certainly would be [that] it's not. You know, there'd be a handful of people who would refer to it. (P125)

3.3 Sustainability

As with the previous two questions on this programme of work, the question of sustainability into the future also elicited a very mixed response across all categories of interview respondents. For some respondents attached to Tusla's National Management Office, PPFS Managers and the CPWG, the parenting support and parental participation programme of work is sustainable into the future, for a number of reasons. These include: working in partnership with voluntary and community sectors, the fact that this programme is seen by many to be a fundamental feature of the work carried out by Tusla and a priority for the agency, and the focus on prevention and early intervention, which is anticipated to effect change at the higher level of need:

There an understanding, a mutual understanding there, and how can then we put a team around the family at a high end that prevents the child leaving home and going to alternative care placement, you know. And if we can do that, we're going to make a big difference to those families and to the children within those families to actually effect change. (P75)



While a few respondents are unsure of its sustainability, others maintain that it must be sustained. The central premise of Tusla's work is to support and protect young people, and the perception is that parenting plays a fundamental role in this:

It has to be, you know. You can't change the lives of young people unless you actually have that parent support. Otherwise you're talking about the care system, and the fundamental starting point in all Tusla's work [...] is that the best place for a young person to grow up is in a family environment. Sometimes chaotic family environments are much better even than the care system, you know, but we need to do whatever we can to ensure that if supports are needed, and parenting is a huge part of it, you know ... I would say it just has to be. We have to find ways to make sure that it's sustainable. (P140)

All respondents put forward suggestions for what is needed to ensure the sustainability of the programme into the future. Not only will such suggestions assist with sustainability, but if actioned they will also assist with embedding the programme of work into the structures and culture of Tusla and consequently have a positive impact on the service delivery system. While respondents identified gaps in particular areas that the programme has yet to bridge, such as mapping services, cultural awareness, children in care, parental engagement and commitment, a focus on universal and one-to-one supports, and a need to focus on the familial environment, their recommendations generally concentrated on overarching issues.

Clarity, coordination, joined-up thinking, future planning, and a clear picture of how all of the elements of the programme fit together, as well as its applicability to the wider PPFS Programme and the strategic objectives of the organisation as a whole, were all identified as requiring attention.

The most-cited recommendations perceived as necessary to ensure sustainability, impact, and programme embeddedness, across all categories of respondents, were the need for dedicated staff, awareness, evidence, resources, and management buy-in.

A significant number of interview respondents spoke about the need to have staff whose roles are specifically dedicated to parenting support and parental participation work. While it is acknowledged that a substantial amount of work has been done to date in this area, and that there is a need for every staff member to be cognisant of supporting parents, there is a perception that doing this type of work as an add-on to other duties has resulted in a loss of fidelity. The perception is that a 'parenting lead' in Tusla is needed; additionally, parenting coordinators in each area or region are required, who could liaise with PSCs and feed into the national lead. This, according to many, would realise the full potential of the programme of work and have bigger impacts in the longer term:

I think we definitely need local parenting strategies and local posts tied to the development of parenting across the spectrum of needs, from foster care to early years. I think there needs to be a post resourced locally who has got this responsibility ... Nobody is the driver of it, and it does sit with the PPFS Manager, but so does everything else. If you'd a post tied into the PPFS Manager whose role it was to pull the thing together and to harness the skills of the Parent Support Champions. I think you need to put in a local parenting resource post ... locally they could do annual work plans, but in terms of making sure the parenting support and parents' participation is embedded across the services, I think you need a post. You need a dedicated resource to do that. (P37)

Recommendations on the need for awareness centred on three areas: public awareness, awareness among Tusla management and staff, and awareness among community, voluntary, and statutory organisations and departments about the programme of work in process. In addition, there is a distinct need for communication on where this programme of work fits and its applicability to employee roles.

There is a prominent view that there is a gap in public awareness about the role of Tusla, and that in order for Tusla to be seen as an agency that is supportive of all families rather than the prominent focus on its role in child protection, the issue of public awareness needs to be addressed:

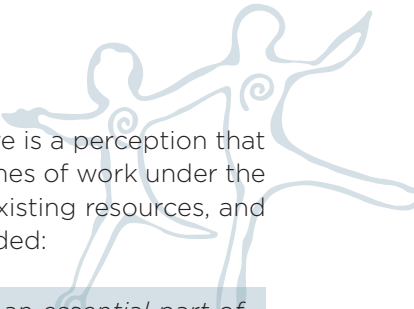
I think the huge gap in all of this is the public awareness piece. People do not turn to Tusla for parenting support – now some do, but they are certainly not the first port of call for parents. Even media, you see programmes on the television and radio articles, where do parents go for parenting? ... It is local voluntary, community and voluntary sector. People see Tusla as child protection still. I think the perceptions of Tusla as a support agency is nowhere near where it should be, so it is still being viewed as child protection, and possibly parents are nervous as well. If I contact Tusla, are they going to think I am not up to the job or otherwise? (P90)

Awareness among applicable government departments and all agencies that support families, be they community or voluntary, funded by Tusla or not, was identified by a number of respondents as being needed to sustain this programme of work. Moreover, there is a perceived need for awareness-raising within the Tusla organisation itself, as there is a view that there is a significant amount of ambiguity around the work programme:

There's a bigger piece of work that needs to be done by Tusla in terms of awareness and communication. I mean I know Tusla staff who would not be fully au fait with these, would not be fully au fait with plans even for their own area or their own sector. And I think that that communication piece hasn't been done to the level that it needs to be done to make these as successful as they can possibly be. And I think that's a huge piece of work that needs to be looked at again. (P148)

Linked to the issue of communicating with staff is the view that more needs to be done to show staff how the different elements of this work fit together and its applicability to their roles within the organisation and the families that they work with:

Nobody has come and done a quick presentation with us to go through each of the sections on it ... The information is there for people, but it is just taking the time out to actually go through it, and what does that mean for [us and] the families we work with, and things like that. So I think a lot of the raw materials are there, I just think it needs to be stitched in a bit better, so workshops and focus groups for staff. To take them out of the day-to-day stuff and actually have a look and focus on it is what is needed. (P18)



Inevitably, resources were identified by some as a necessity for sustainability. There is a perception that this particular programme of work has not been as well funded as other programmes of work under the PPFS Programme, that a lot of the work to date has been funded locally out of existing resources, and that if supporting parents is a key element of Tusla's work, then resources are needed:

It's like everything, it needs to be resourced, it needs to be recognised as an essential part of Tusla's work, and Tusla itself needs to say, 'Well, you know what' ... like, the idea of Meitheal is to slow down and to cut off, children potentially ending up in child protection. And if it really wants to do that, it needs to effectively fund it, it needs to effectively train people, it needs to effectively look at the capacity and resource issues that are there. And the same with the parental participation: if you want to hear parents' voice, you have to help them to get to the microphone. (P7)

It is worth noting that respondents pointed to the fact that much could be done with a little resourcing, referring to the work already complete. In addition, investment in increasing staff numbers along with streamlining existing services were identified as ways to improve the parenting programme of work:

There are already so many good existing services within the parenting piece that you wouldn't even need to create new services – you would just have to streamline the ones we have, and if you were to resource staff into [it] ... Sometimes it is not about having extra money; sometimes it is more having more frontline services or workers on the ground to really improve those programmes of work. (P6)

In addition to awareness and resourcing, respondents from a number of categories, particularly those speaking from an organisational perspective, said that evidence is critical to sustainability. Similar to section 3.1 above, which indicated that evidence of impact is required to ascertain the effect on the service delivery system, evidence of outcomes and impact overall is required to address the issue of sustainability. It is acknowledged however that more time may be needed to achieve this:

I think it would be great if we had ... evidence, so even a little bit more time and a little bit more research ... to really evidence the positive impact that it's having ... I think that would make a big impact. I think if we look at the resources going forward ... I think two years isn't that long in the implementation of a big change kind of programme, and if we have a little bit more time, I think my recommendation would be to keep it going. To find a way to kind of keep the budget there within Tusla and keep the programmes going, and then we'll see more, and if that's evidenced ... then all the better. (P53)

Management buy-in was identified by a number of respondents across categories of senior management, PPFS Managers, CPWG, PWG, key functional specialists, and government departments as being key to sustainability. Fundamentally there is a perceived need to have parenting on the agenda at meetings, during service planning, and as part of strategic initiatives. In addition, parenting managers at all levels are seen to be accountable for ensuring that the programme of work is front and centre in daily practice:

It needs the constant blessing of managers at different levels throughout the organisation. It needs to become part of the interventions or the toolboxes that we actually use when we are talking to our staff about what they might be doing in particular cases through supervision ... It needs to become part of that toolbox, and we need to hold our managers to account over that ... With these interventions and approaches that have been developed through the current funding, are they something that you talk about in supervision? Are they something you talk about at team meetings? Are they something that you organise local workshops about? Are they something that you spread throughout the networks that you're working with? ... Have you done any sort of public awareness about them? Are you sure that all your staff actually are aware? (P85)

4

Conclusion



Respondents' perceptions of the parenting support and parental participation programme of work were generally very positive. This programme is, according to some, helping to dispel myths about Tusla. It is providing the impetus, time, and resources to focus on parenting. It has supported and encouraged collaborative working and sharing of information across organisations, and it 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. Moreover, the focus on prevention and early intervention is anticipated to have an effect on higher-level-of-need cases into the future. For some, this programme of work, if pitched correctly, will position Tusla as an organisation committed to supporting all families regardless of level of need and not one that responds just to crisis.

Notwithstanding the positive perceptions of the programme, there is a general sense that there is more to do in this area, as outlined in section 3.3 above. At the overall level: guidance in terms of leadership, information on what is happening in this specific programme of work; why and what the process is. At an overall PPFS level: clarity on what is happening in each specific work stream, and how they fit together under the banner of PPFS is required. Overall, in order for this programme of work to have an impact on Tusla's service delivery system, to become embedded across the organisation, and to be sustainable into the future, all such suggestions need to be taken into account.

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre
Institute for Lifecourse and Society
Upper Newcastle Road
National University of Ireland Galway
Galway, Ireland

T: +353 91 495 398
E: cfrc@nuigalway.ie
W: www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch
🐦 @UNESCO_CFRC
f ucfrc.nuig



TÚSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Tusla – Child and Family Agency

The Brunel Building
Heuston South Quarter
Saint John's Road West
Dublin 8
D08 X01F

T: +353 1 771 8500
E: info@tusla.ie
W: www.tusla.ie
🐦 @tusla