

Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN)

Promoting positive outcomes for children, families and communities

The contribution of prevention and early intervention to eradicating child poverty

Introduction:

The Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN) brings together 36 evidence-based practice, advocacy and research organisations seeking to improve outcomes for children, young people and families and to promote quality, evidence-based, informed practice in prevention and early intervention. Here, the Network argues that re-orientating children's services towards prevention and early intervention models has a significant contribution to make to achieving better, more equal outcomes for children and breaking cycles of poverty and disadvantage.

The issue:

Children were disproportionately affected by the recession and now one in eight children in Ireland live in consistent poverty. The rate of consistent poverty in one parent households is over 22%. This means children going hungry, being without a waterproof coat or living in a poorly heated home. In 2015, children accounted for almost one-third of the homeless population, an increase by 90% (Children's Rights Alliance, 2016). In fact, some groups of children are at an even higher risk of living in poverty (children of lone parents, Travellers and those living in the direct provision system).

In addition to the direct material consequences of insufficient access to resources, poverty is also associated with poorer outcomes for children across various domains including language, literacy, behaviour, health and mental health, in both the short and longer term. The relationship between disadvantage and developmental outcomes and exposure to child abuse and neglect is especially pronounced when exposure to poverty persists over time (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016).

The Government's failing to address the rising levels of child poverty has been criticised at home by a range of NGOs and abroad by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (January 2016) and the EU Commission (May 2015).

Progress:

Poverty and inequality are complex and multifaceted and require a range of ambitious, joined-up initiatives in order to achieve meaningful progress. While the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures 2014-2020 strategy is ambitious in its actions to improve the outcomes of children, its implementation is slow so its impact is yet to be felt. There were some positive developments in Budget 2016, such as the increase in funding to Tusla and additional investment in the provision of early years services and adjustments to some tax and welfare rates. However, until there is clear political commitment, leadership and investment, the cycles of poverty and disadvantage will remain unbroken and the child poverty target to lift 97,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020 will be unfulfilled, and disparities in learning and wellbeing outcomes and life chances will continue.

The increase in Tusla's budget by €38 million will only support the agency to meet its minimum statutory demands in terms of critical crisis cases. Also the investment in early year's services is long overdue and still means Ireland's state investment of 0.2% GDP, in this area falls far short of the OECD average of 0.8%. In Nordic countries where child poverty is much lower, there is significantly greater investment in early years services.¹ This is despite numerous

¹ *Towards a Scandinavian childcare system for 0-12 year olds in Ireland?*. Barnardos and Start Strong, November 2012. [http://www.startstrong.ie/files/Barnardos - Start Strong - Childcare Briefing Paper final version.pdf](http://www.startstrong.ie/files/Barnardos_-_Start_Strong_-_Childcare_Briefing_Paper_final_version.pdf) [Accessed 8/9/2016].

reports clearly showing the positive benefits of quality childcare on children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, both in the short and long term.

Additional investment in services that can engage with families early to prevent problems developing and escalating is necessary across all areas of children's lives and there is considerable evidence from initiatives in Ireland that have demonstrated positive effects. Availability of quality supports and services during every key phase of childhood is proven to offset the impact of poverty and reduce inequality. It is also far more cost effective than interventions to solve problems later in life, generating significant savings to the exchequer in the medium-long term.

PEIN Recommendations:

Prioritise tackling child poverty

- Prioritise the implementation of the child poverty commitments in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures with specific cross departmental actions, clear timelines and resource allocations so that the target to lift 97,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020 is achieved.²
- In the context of the geographical break down of the instances of child poverty, undertake regular monitoring and provide information on progress against these commitments

Build on and develop prevention and early intervention practice

- Commit to sustaining and growing the prevention and early intervention practice, learning and experience developed across Ireland to date, such as the ABC programme, by increasing investment in Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes to €20 million a year, and by supporting the continuation the Prevention and Early Intervention network (€100,000 annually).
- Support the roll out of the Prevention and Early Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to track and monitor prevention and early intervention approaches across government departments and agencies³
- Ensure that Prevention and Early Intervention is a central component of the 10 Year Health Strategy.

Increase the budget of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

- Increase Tusla's budget by 15% in 2017 (€100 million), incorporating an expanded focus on prevention and early intervention and child welfare, as well as protection;
- Increase resources for practitioners in the health, education and community sectors and invest in capacity building to increase identification of child welfare and protection risks and to maximise potential for integrated, evidence-based working;

² In particular, develop detailed plans with dedicated funding for the commitments to 'Adopt a multidimensional approach to tackling child poverty, building on the life cycle approach... informed by the European Commission's Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage'.

³ This PEI Unit should introduce and oversee the following: 1) a concrete requirement that all Government Departments reorient their planning and budgeting to incorporate clearly defined prevention and early intervention approaches and report on this annually; 2) the creation of a framework which enables Departments to have a common approach to defining and allocating budgets along the PEI continuum; 3) the development of a tracking system to monitor Department spending in PEI vs crisis intervention; 4) a transparent process whereby Government departments set targets regarding the incremental move to PEI spending; 5) the set-up of a "transformation fund" of €20 million to incentivise Government Departments to integrate a prevention and early intervention focus to act as a catalyst for change in decision making and resource allocation processes. (E.g. workforce development, capacity building and effective service implementation and review); and 6) the development of models to assess the return on investment (Cost Benefit Analysis) of PEI measures.

Universal access to family support services

- Provide adequately resourced evidence-informed family support programmes and services on the basis of progressive universalism, with particular emphasis on service provision in communities with high levels of need; Ensure that every parent in the country has access to a proven parenting programme in their area during pregnancy and throughout childhood.
- Create a “Child and Family” Public Health Nursing service by a combination of redeployment of existing staff, filling of current vacancies and recruitment of 100 additional Public Health Nurses per year for 2017, 2018 and 2019, at a cost of €4.5million per year – reaching 500 Child and Family PHNs by 2020 (€4.4m in 2017).⁴
- In implementing the National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026, enhance the availability of midwife led care by appointing 100 additional community midwives in 2017 at a cost of €3.5m as part of a gradual increase of 400 midwives by 2020.
- Support a Public Health model of Speech and Language Therapy⁵ by extending to of early years services as well as schools in the proposed new SLT scheme and by recruiting an additional 100 SLTs in 2017 (€5.5 million).

Invest in early years care and education services

- Introduce paid parental leave and benefit payment so that a child can be a home with a parent for a least the first year of life. Budget 2017 could commence roll-out by providing the funding for 6-weeks parental leave, which can be taken by either parent after maternity leave (€62m extra in 2017);
- Ensure that the capitation payments available to early childhood care and education providers under the Free Preschool Year are increased for children over three-years and are introduced for children under-3 years, (including targeted childcare places in the forthcoming Single Affordable Childcare Programme) so that the State can ensure quality provision for children and childcare providers and offer childcare practitioners better pay and conditions. ⁶
- Extend subsidies to childminders, with the funding criteria stating that they must meet regulatory, curriculum and quality standards in order to be in receipt of public subsidies.
- Develop a child-centred, age-appropriate strategy for the provision of quality wraparound afterschool and out-of-school care and activities for the 4-12 age groups, to include actions on regulation, appropriate practitioner training, and quality standards.
- By 2021, to incrementally increase the spend on high quality early care and education services from the current level of 0.2 % of GDP to match the OECD average of 0.8% in order to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of early years provision for all children.⁷

⁴ DCYA (2013) *Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy*. See recommendation on page 5. The suggested figures are based on the recruitment of an additional 300 PHNs, and the redeployment of 300 PHNs, with an average caseload of 500 child health families per PHN. Ireland has approximately 300,000 families with children, and over 480,000 children under 6 years (Census of the population 2011)

⁵ A public health model of SLT is one which responds to the needs of the whole population and according to socially determined needs, focusing on primary prevention. Law, J., Reilly, S., & Snow, P. C. (2013). Child speech, language and communication need re-examined in a public health context: a new direction for the speech and language therapy profession. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 48(5), 486-496.

⁶ The amount of increase and the conditions attached to receipt should be considered taking into account evidence of the costs of providing a *quality affordable* service.

⁷ “OECD (2014) OECD Family Database.

Conclusion

Through our practice and international evidence, the key to tackling child poverty is for families to have access to quality responsive public services to meet both their child's needs and enhance parenting capacity. These suite of services, spanning family support, ante / postnatal, health, education etc., must be delivered through a combination of statutory and NGO providers.

The community and voluntary sector are a key partner, having pioneered innovative ways of working with practitioners in health, early years, education and community settings.

The Prevention and Early Intervention Network, as a coalition of organisations active in this field over many years, has valuable expertise in the development and implementation of strategies to tackle the causes and effects of intergenerational child poverty and can provide a range of supports and resources to share this expertise.

Budget 2017 is an opportunity to show a real commitment to addressing child poverty and investing in prevention and early intervention approaches. Failing to do so will mean recommendations in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures will be unmet and will instead facilitate the structural inequalities that perpetuate the cycles of poverty to continue.

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For information about the network visit our website: www.preventioninpractice.ie