Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package
Final Report

Key Findings

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Parenting Support Champions (PSCs)

The PSC Project is central to Parenting Support and Parental Participation as it involves a small number of projects associated with this programme of work. The research findings show the PSCs are somewhat of a lynchpin between the national office and local areas and between Tusla, its partners and networks. There are 105 PSCs nationwide; these are practitioners who are involved in child and family services in Tusla and in their external partner organisations. PSCs promote parental involvement in services and parental participation initiatives; they also promote positive parenting messages to parents and are engaged in developing and promoting positive parenting in their communities. PSCs have received training, networking days and information materials to carry out this work.

Impact

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

Challenges

A lack of engagement from some management and other services, organisations, and the statutory sector, as well as a shortage of time, resources, leadership and coordination were highlighted as challenges to the implementation and sustainability of the project. Areas are working in different ways and are at different stages which reflects the different levels of support the project has in each area. Reflected issues of consistency, a lack of strategic planning in terms of a national plan, an annual work plan and plans at local level, and a lack of clarity on the direction of the project are all identified by PSCs as problematic.

Overall

The PSC Project is seen as a hugely positive element of the parenting support work. While there are evidently challenges to overcome, the findings from all four reports on the project suggest that this project is having an impact even at this early stage in its development. Even the more developed of the PSCs, those who have had the most experience of parenting support and planning, are seen to be extremely beneficial for this programme.

Parental Participation

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

Parental Participation Seed Funded Projects

Tusla currently fund 36 projects across 17 areas nationwide. Projects are varied in scope and length. The research on the projects examined managers and practitioners’ views on the usefulness of the seed funding in developing parental participation practice, views on the challenges to engaging parents, the influence of the projects to date, and their sustainability into the future.

Impact

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

Challenges

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

Overall

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

Conclusions and Recommendations

The importance of parenting support and parental participation in supporting children was highlighted in a number of the 167 interviews conducted for this study. People’s views of the parenting support and parental participation programme of work were generally very positive. This programme is helping to give Tusla a positive image. It is providing the drive, time, and resources to focus on parenting. It has supported and encouraged joint working and sharing of information across organisations, and has provided good resources and information to improve both parenting and participation practice, which are seen to be very valuable at local level. For some, this programme of work will show Tusla as an organisation who is committed to supporting all families, and not one that responds just to crisis.

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

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

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

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


Further Information

If you would like to read the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package Final Report, or any of the publications listed above please visit our website www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch.

If you have any questions on our research, please email cfrc@nuigalway.ie

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