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PSI Review Process

Summary Report



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1. Context / Introduction

The overall aim of the Parenting Support Initiative is to support and learn from community based parent support programmes and projects that encourage creative and innovative ways of supporting parents of young children and promote and build on good practice using evidence-based and/or evidence informed approaches. The Parenting Support Initiative (PSI) is a collaborative partnership between the Katharine Howard Foundation (KHF) and the Community Foundation for Ireland (CFI).

The Katharine Howard Foundation (KHF) is an independent Foundation focused on improving the lives of young children and their families. The Foundation's work is underpinned by a commitment to equality and overcoming disadvantage and to promoting equality of opportunity for all children. The Foundation's approach involves working with others in identifying needs, building on existing programmes, making grants and sharing the learning.

The Community Foundation for Ireland (CFI) is a philanthropic organisation which seeks just and progressive social change. It provides a long term source of independent funding for the community and voluntary sector, mostly in Ireland. The Foundation empowers people who want to make a difference through a model of philanthropy that is based on trust, effectiveness and impact by helping donors to cause sustainable change.

The Parent Support Initiative (PSI) is a three year (2013-2016) strategic grants programme with a focus on children from 0 to 3 years and their parents, with a particular emphasis on supporting parents in their parenting role. The

KHF partnership with CFI allowed for the pooling of resources to increase the level of funds available for grants. A total amount of €600,000 was made available for grant allocation over the three years of the Initiative. This Initiative was developed based on consultations with key stakeholders and on research into the Early Year's Sector, where the gap for support for parents of children from pre-birth to three years was identified. KHF and CFI agreed that the Initiative would be implemented by KHF with the support of an Advisory Group.

The PSI was launched in September 2013 and over 200 applications were received. This response indicated a high level of interest from a diverse range of organisations within the community, voluntary and statutory sectors. Out of the 200 applications, 16 core projects (The Longford PSI Project was not in a position to continue beyond Year 1) were awarded funding totalling €181,397 in 2014 with a potential for these projects to secure a further two years of funding. Due to the high level of response and quality of applications a further €100,000 was allocated by KHF to 43 projects as once-off small grants in 2014. In Year (2) of the Initiative, €176,799 was allocated to the core PSI projects and in the final Year (3) the funding allocated was €156,241.

As part of the final year of the PSI, KHF considered the most effective way to capture the learning from each of the remaining 15 projects and decided to develop a facilitated Review Process rather than request projects to complete a progress report for Year (3). The purpose of this PSI Review was to provide a space for projects to reflect on the experience of planning and implementing a

PSI project. The Review Process aimed to provide important learning for both KHF and CFI as funders of PSI and for others working in this area. KHF has also been engaged in its own review process and is developing a new Strategic Plan 2017– 2020. Given the

importance of PSI for KHF over the past three years, KHF is keen to learn from the projects about their experiences and to think about how this work might best be supported in the future.

The PSI Objectives, Outcomes and Approach (as set out in October 2013)

The objectives of the PSI are to:

- Strengthen prevention and early intervention supports for children and families to achieve better health, wellbeing and learning outcomes for their children;
- Reinforce the developmental role of the Children and Young Persons Services Committees (CYPSC), City/County Childcare Committees (CCC), National Childcare Voluntary Organisations (NCVOs), Family Resource Centres (FRC) and other community based services working directly with children from 0-3 and their parents;
- Strengthen the links between existing health and community based services to support a holistic approach to meeting infants' and young children's needs;
- Build on the learning from initiatives such as, the Prevention and Early Intervention programme (PEIP) and the National Early Years Access Programme (NEYAI).

Outcomes

The PSI was designed to support prevention and early intervention evidence informed or evidenced-based programmes, practices and approaches that would:

- Support parents in meeting their children's developmental needs – physical, social - emotional and cognitive;
- Support parents as their children's primary educators in creating a positive home learning environment;
- Support informal learning of parents with a particular emphasis on parent literacy;
- Increase parental self-efficacy and confidence in their parenting role;
- Increase parenting skills and capacity;
- Reduce parental stress;
- Promote positive parent child interaction and attachments.

The PSI is a strategic targeted approach to grant-making and projects were selected that were based on the following criteria:

- Community based initiatives responding to identified local needs
- Operate within a socio-economically disadvantaged area or as a socially disadvantaged (target) group, with experience of working with parents and children
- Demonstrate a partnership approach to working with other services and supports in their geographic area and on strengthening links between community and statutory services, in particular the Health Services

- Understand and have some experience of using evidence based or evidence informed programmes, practices or approaches
- Focus on addressing improved outcomes for children with an understanding of evaluation and outcomes focus.

2 Overall Reflections from the Review Process

KHF on selecting the projects for funding did so in a very considered way based on clear criteria. The projects chosen were of a wide variety offering the opportunity to learn from the experience of projects supporting parents in the broadest sense. Projects were located in rural and urban areas offering both universal and targeted services. All the projects had a strong commitment to providing supports to vulnerable parents and young children. All projects were inclusive in that they set about reaching and including parents of different ethnicities, many of them without extended family support and experiencing intense isolation at this sensitive time in their lives.

Many projects had an interagency steering group and a small number were directly managed and delivered by one organisation and in such cases its Board of Management was the governance structure. One project, uniquely, was a new collaboration between nine Family Resource Centres (FRC) working as a collective with a named lead FRC.

PSI has provided a welcome development opportunity for the 15 core PSI projects. The diverse range of projects was selected in order to learn from the experience of their different contexts and approaches. Many projects knew from the outset what they wanted to achieve with PSI funding and were able to implement the project immediately. Others needed more development work for example the formation of a steering group; establishing themselves in a new geographic area; agreeing clarity of vision and objectives with different stakeholders, any of which

meant a longer lead in time to implementation stage. What the projects shared with KHF and CFI was an understanding, belief and passion that the early years are the most formative in a child's life; that parents are the first educators of their children; that early intervention is paramount in providing support to parents and babies; and that effective attachment and bonding is crucial to the child's long term effective development and wellbeing.

For all of the projects, the funding enabled them to innovate and develop opportunities to work with parents and young children. This was the first opportunity for a number of the projects to provide a specific focus on the 0-3s. During and following on from the economic recession, many of the projects experienced budget cuts and were impacted upon by restructuring in their organisations or that of their funders, thereby limiting possibilities to innovate and develop responses to the needs of parents and young children. For the PSI projects, surviving and sustaining their services through these challenging times was paramount. KHF through PSI brought a refreshing change to this, an opening up of possibilities; a renewal of developmental work, a reason to meet and be with other organisations, with a shared vision, shared objectives and now shared resources to make things happen. For many of the projects, the PSI funding, combined with other funding, assisted the projects to deliver on PSI plans. The PSI opportunity injected energy, a sense of hopefulness and renewal to those involved.

3 The Review Process

As part of the preparation for the Review Process, the 15 projects were sent a template to help them prepare for the facilitated session. The sessions were arranged in the project’s base between December 2016 and March 2017 with each session lasting three hours. The projects determined the participants for these sessions inviting, as appropriate, representatives from steering groups, parents (in some instances accompanied by their babies/small children) and other stakeholders.

KHF’s decision to carry out a facilitated PSI Review Process as a different approach rather than a progress report (as done in Years 1 and 2) was appreciated by the projects, providing a welcome space for a reflection on the overall experience of PSI.

On meeting the 15 projects the breadth and depth of the work was evident and there was an enthusiasm and positivity present in all of the sessions. The following is a snapshot of the projects.

Summary Description of the PSI Projects:

Organisation	PSI Project Review – A Snapshot
<p>1. Ballinasloe Social Services, Galway</p> <p>Delivery of Incredible Years Parenting Programme; Individual and group sessions targeting parents and children with additional needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Vision, skills and leadership of staff ❖ Strong parental engagement and feedback ❖ Collaborative relationship with HSE and Tusla ❖ Adapted to changing environment (Tusla) ❖ Established Steering Group including parent representatives <p>➤ Challenge: funding for future sustainability of the work.</p>
<p>2. Barnardos, Dublin 12</p> <p>Delivering a Parent Support Project including Flying Start and Parents Plus targeting vulnerable parents in D2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Collaboration with schools and HSE Primary Care team, in particular, PHNs ❖ Re- focus and relocation of project from Health Centre to local school ❖ Building in individual work with parents ❖ Training of staff (via Solihull Approach - aims to increase emotional health and well-being through both practitioners and parents) <p>➤ Challenge: reaching more vulnerable parents and establishing service in new area.</p>
<p>3. Bedford Row, Limerick</p> <p>Multi-faceted parent support project targeting young women prisoners and ex-prisoners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Working with the most vulnerable parents in and out of prison ❖ Working with wider families in community ❖ Strong collaboration and integration with partner organisations including Limerick Prison and the Probation Services etc. ❖ Trust and relationship underpinning work

	<p>➤ Challenge: level of need, complexity and long term nature of this work.</p>
<p>4. Bessborough Centre, Cork</p> <p>Supporting a Parent and Baby Group ‘Babble Group’ for very vulnerable mothers/fathers and babies resident in the family assessment unit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Specialised Infant Mental Health (IMH) training and establishment of the Babble Group ❖ Providing training for Centre staff trained in IMH ❖ Sharing expertise - training 60 IMH professionals in Kerry ❖ Disseminating knowledge at national /international conferences ❖ Potential for approach to be offered nationally <p>➤ Challenge: finding appropriate evaluation methodology for complex work.</p>
<p>5. Dublin South City Partnership (formerly Canal Communities Partnership)</p> <p>Delivery of Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) targeting vulnerable families in newly expanded Partnership area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Expanding programme to new Partnership area Crumlin, Dublin 12 ❖ Strong established and experienced collaborative partnership with HSE, Schools, Early Years Services ❖ Training of local Home Visitors to deliver PCHP. ❖ Parent engagement and positive feedback ❖ Contribution of PCHP as part of continuum of services through life cycle Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) approach <p>➤ Challenge: time and staff changes in HSE.</p>
<p>6. Chatterbox Speech and Language Project, Cavan and Monaghan</p> <p>Delivery of Elklan Speech and Language (SLT) programme targeting parents in disadvantaged communities in Cavan and Monaghan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Strong partnership between implementing SLT staff ❖ Supportive steering group ❖ Good parental engagement and feedback ❖ Capacity to adapt Elklan Programme to reach parents in local communities ❖ SLT early intervention having an impact on children and families <p>➤ Challenge: time and resources required to do outreach and reach more vulnerable parents.</p>
<p>7. Cork City Partnership</p> <p>Delivery of multi –faceted Parent and Baby Programmes targeting early years services in disadvantaged communities across Cork City</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Development of training and upskilling childcare services city wide. ❖ Engaging 250 children and parents in city-wide Arts and Play project ❖ Adapted local focus through early years network and neighbourhoods city wide ❖ Collaboration in research on sustaining community early years services

	<p>➤ Challenge: targeting communities with limited existing services.</p>
<p>8. Downstrands FRC, Donegal</p> <p>Delivery of Child and Parent Programmes through Parent & Toddler Groups (P&T) in nine Family Resource Centres and the wider community in Donegal including targeting of the more vulnerable families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Established a Network of the 9 Donegal FRCs ❖ Engaged new parents through range of activities in P&T groups ❖ Expanded reach to remote rural areas ❖ Gained recognition from Tusla – collective plan agreement and approval of new family support worker posts for each FRC <p>➤ Challenge: inclusion of parents from different socio-economic groups.</p>
<p>9. Kerry Children and Young People’s Services Committee (KCYPSC)</p> <p>Delivery of Language and Play Programme to FRCs and Parent and Toddler Groups (P&T) including targeting the more vulnerable families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Delivery of Language and Play Programme to large number of P &T groups ❖ Staff trained as Facilitators of the Language and Play Programme ❖ Adapted programme for asylum seekers ❖ Diversity of nationality in all groups ❖ Opportunity for KCYPSC through its partners to link directly with parents in communities <p>➤ Challenge: P&T groups reducing in numbers; identified need for development post.</p>
<p>10. Lifestart, Donegal</p> <p>Train the Trainers ‘Spirals’ Parenting Programme; Development of parenting materials and practices for parents and babies 0-3 including targeting more vulnerable families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Spirals Train the Trainers - large number and wide range of professionals trained ❖ Improved collaboration and interagency working ❖ Focus on vulnerable families - development of Sessional Interventions Programme with national potential ❖ Bookwork Babies/Nursery Rhyme book in multiple languages developed <p>➤ Challenge: time; working with increasingly complex issues in families.</p>
<p>11. Monaghan Integrated Development (MID)</p> <p>Delivery of Early Years Parents Plus Programme to Early Years Services in County Monaghan including targeting more vulnerable families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Delivery of Parents Plus training to staff in community childcare centres ❖ Countywide approach to delivery of parenting programmes developed ❖ Strong Steering Group with excellent collaboration between MID, Tusla and CCC ❖ Adapted project - established Parenting Monaghan, a network of 17 services working with children/young people 0-18 years

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Challenge: Year (2) recruiting community childcare staff to be upskilled in Parents Plus.
<p>12. Co-operative Housing Ireland/ Co-operative Childcare Ireland</p> <p>Training of staff and delivery of parenting support programmes to vulnerable parents - including Parents Plus Programme in three locations in Dublin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Staff upskilled across its 3 childcare services ❖ Work with very marginalised parents ❖ Established weekly parent support groups ❖ Capacity to respond to needs of parents with English as 2nd language identified ❖ Parents involved in their children’s learning through use of Aistear Journey Books <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Challenge: loss of key staff member; organisational restructuring.
<p>13. Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Dublin</p> <p>Parent Child Home programme (PCHP) Delivery of targeted programme to Traveller families in Blanchardstown and Finglas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Strong collaboration with National College of Ireland (NCI) ❖ Successful recruitment of Traveller Home Visitors and Traveller families to participate in PCHP ❖ Personal and professional development of the Home Visitors ❖ Commitment and retention of parents including presence of fathers ❖ Potential to expand to other Traveller sites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Challenge: the cost of co-ordination of the project.
<p>14. Southside Partnership, Dublin</p> <p>Delivery of an Integrated Early Intervention and Family Support Initiative targeting vulnerable parents in the Mounttown area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Strengthened working relations between partner organisations ❖ Successful recruitment and delivery of PEEP Programme (First Friends) ❖ Experienced lead practitioner for the project ❖ Established effective referral pathways ❖ Expansion to new sites across the county <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Challenge: sustaining momentum on top of existing workload.
<p>15. Dublin North West Area Partnership (formerly Tolka Area Partnership), Dublin 7</p> <p>Delivery of Parenting Baby Support Programme <i>(PSI Funding for year (1) and (2))</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Trained PHNs as Incredible Years Facilitators ❖ Very good uptake - all mothers in the area offered programme through PHNs ❖ Strong Steering Group developed and able to work through challenges ❖ Transition in Year (3) to Area Based Childhood (ABC) Grangegorman <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Challenge: initial stakeholder buy-in time and staffing resources - didn’t cost in co-ordination role.



PSI PROJECTS	
01	Ballinasloe Social Services, Galway
02	Barnardos, Dublin
03	Co-Operative Housing Ireland, Dublin
04	Dublin South City Partnership
05	Bessborough Centre, Cork
06	Chatterbox Cavan and Monaghan
07	Cork City Partnership
08	Downstrands FRC, Donegal
09	Kerry Children & Young People's Services Committee
10	Lifestart, Donegal
11	Longford Community Resources (<i>funded for Year (1) only</i>)
12	Monaghan Integrated Development
13	Bedford Row, Limerick
14	Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Dublin
15	Southside Partnership, Dublin
16	North West Area Partnership, Dublin
	43 Once-off Grant Recipients

4 General Overview of the work of the PSI Projects

The PSI projects crossed a spectrum from specific therapeutic interventions (targeted) to projects that operated on a self-referral open access basis (universal). What is striking throughout the Review Process was their commitment and capacity to reflect the varying needs of the parents and to ground their work in this experience. For all PSI projects, including those that had a universal approach, there was a key priority to engage those parents who were most in need. This raised particular challenges. Vulnerable people, including those whose first language is not English, found it harder to engage and participate. Parents already involved in statutory child protection services were at times cautious and mistrustful in their initial contact.

There were three priority components particularly evident in the work of the 15 PSI projects. These were training, collaborative working and engaging parents.

4.1 Training

The PSI projects had a strong focus on training. A range of training in evidence based and evidence informed programmes was provided to enable their successful delivery including:

- **Marte Meo; Parents Plus; Lifestart Spirals; Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP); Incredible Years (IY); Parents Early Education Programme (PEEP)**
- **Elklan Speech and Language; Language and Play Programme; Solihull Approach; Flying Start; Preparing for Parenting**
- **Infant Mental Health (IMH)**

PSI supported professional development training in most of the PSI projects. Particular examples of this approach were:

- **Spirals Train the Trainers** programme delivered by Lifestart Donegal to a wide range of professionals (75) including professionals in social care, GPs, Early Years Providers, Springboard Family Support Project, Social Workers (Tusla) and FRCs with the aim of developing a consistent approach and a common language to those working with families throughout Donegal.
- **Infant Mental Health Practice** training (Anna Freud Centre UK) was provided for three staff in the Bessborough Centre, Cork who in turn trained up the entire staff in the Residential Unit. An outreach project with Kerry CYPSC provided training in the 'Babble Group' approach to 60 professionals in Kerry.
- Co-operative Childcare Ireland focused on upskilling all the staff in its three community childcare services in order to raise standards and practice. This included a range of training programmes including **Parents Plus, Marte Meo and Aistear**.
- Monaghan Integrated Development (MID) promoted **Parents Plus** training for trainers in the community childcare centres and other appropriate services in the county.
- Cork City Partnership facilitated the training of interagency staff and parents in the **PEEP Programme** for delivery in one of the more disadvantaged communities in Cork (Mahon). The lead practitioner in Southside PSI was also trained in the PEEP model delivered as **First Friends**, an integrated early year's programme.
- **Solihull Approach** training was provided to Barnardos and HSE staff by the Barnardos project in Dublin 12 and **Parents Plus and Flying Start** parenting programmes were delivered to parents.
- **Incredible Years (IY)** training was provided by Dublin 7 Parenting Baby Programme with PHNs trained as facilitators to deliver the programme. A number of professionals in the Cork City Partnership were also trained in IY. It had been hoped to train a full cohort of early years providers in Cork but costs, time and travel were a barrier.

The PSI projects also focused on strengthening parent's capacity to parent. Particular examples of this approach were:

- Delivery of **Elklan Speech and Language Training** by the Chatterbox project to 79 parents in communities across Counties Monaghan and Cavan. The timing of delivery was adapted to make it more accessible to parents.
- **Incredible Years Programme** delivered by PHNs to 29 families in Dublin 7 as part of the DNWAP project. This is now offered to every new mother in the area.
- Establishing **First Friends** based on the **PEEP** programme as part of the Southside Partnership project and delivering it in Mounttown Dun Laoghaire to approximately 50 families and their children. This is now being expanded to other sites in the County.
- Cork City Partnership designed and developed the **Preparing for Parenting Programme** (30 parents) and is delivering the programme in communities across the City.
- Training focused on building school readiness and parental capacities in communities included the **Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP)** delivered in two communities, Dublin South City Partnership, in its newly expanded area (Dublin 12), and with Traveller families in Finglas/Blanchardstown delivered by the Pavee Point project. PCHP focused on training Home Visitors from within communities to deliver the Programme, thus having an impact for the individual's families, the Home Visitors themselves as well as the community as a whole.
- Kerry CYPSC: The **Language and Play Programme** reached 490 parents in 29 community childcare services through P & T Groups and FRCs. The approach encouraged parent leaders reaching asylum seekers and parents of many different nationalities.
- Downstrands project involved 9 FRCs co-operating and delivering a broad range of training across the County including **Paediatric First Aid** (204 parents) and **Baby Massage/Yoga** (238 parents); **Messy and Musical play** (approx. 600 parents).
- Therapeutic work with parents to support attachment and bonding was a feature of a number of the projects including those using **Marte Meo and Infant Mental Health Programmes**.

Many of the PSI projects spoke of the importance of a co-operative and respectful connection with the training providers e.g. Parents Plus, Incredible Years/Archways and PCHP/NCI. This was a valuable resource to the projects enabling their effectiveness and supporting fidelity to the programmes.

4.2 Collaborative Working

An important focus of PSI involved promoting a partnership approach with a view to strengthening services to support children and families. Projects were encouraged to demonstrate a collaborative approach to project planning and delivery. This element of PSI has proved to be very effective with the 15 core projects indicating strong engagement with a range of other stakeholders. One of the greatest benefits of the PSI funding was that it gave projects an opportunity to focus on collaborative practice. This was apparent in differing models and approaches and was reflected at both the **level of management and the level of programme delivery** with some evidence of projects working with each other.

Collaboration at Project Management Level

The vast majority of projects used an **Interagency Steering Group model with an identified lead** to manage the project. This approach recognised the relevance of early years work to a wide range of stakeholders. Interagency work is complex and requires investment in building relationships, developing trust and ensuring clarity of roles. There is some evidence that projects with a history of using this approach were better placed to address interagency challenges than those that were still in the development of interagency practice.

Organisations involved in PSI Steering Groups

- HSE Primary Care Services: including Public Health Nursing; Speech and Language Therapists; Early Intervention Teams; Psychological Services; Health Promotion; Dentistry; GPs; Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
- Tusla Child and Family Agency: including the Social Work Service and the 'Partnership, Prevention and Family Support Programme' (PPFS).
- Schools: including Principals / Vice Principals; Home School Community Liaison Service; Early Start Programme; National Education Psychological Service (NEPS).
- Local Authorities; Libraries; Community Departments.
- Local Development Companies (LDCs) /Partnerships.
- County Childcare Committees (CCC).
- Children and Young Peoples Services Committees (CYPSC).
- Prison Service: Probation Service; Probation and Linkage Limerick (PALLS)
- Family Resource Centres (FRC).
- Barnardos.
- Area Based Childhood Programmes (ABC).
- Springboard Family Support Projects.
- Community Childcare Centres.
- Community Development Projects.
- Housing Agencies.
- Local Drugs Projects and Treatment Centres.
- Parents Plus Ltd; Archways; Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (UK).
- National College of Ireland, Early Childhood Ireland; University College Cork, Letterkenny IT.

Examples of collaboration at project management level were:

- For a number of PSI projects, a steering group emerged during the course of implementing the project. In **Ballinasloe**, on the initiative of parents, an interagency/parents steering group was formed in Year (2) with agreed terms of reference. In **Bedford Row** an interagency group was established with young parents in prison as members.
- **Kerry CYPSC** used an existing sub structure the 'Parenting and Family Learning Group' to oversee the project.
- **Pavee Point** did not have a steering group but managed the project internally and in partnership with NCI.
- **The Bessborough Centre** and **Co-operative Childcare Ireland** were managed internally with strong intra- organisational relationships developed.
- The five LDC/ Partnerships (**Cork City, DNWAP, Dublin South City, Monaghan Integrated Development and Southside Partnership**) that led PSI projects each used interagency structures and networks to oversee their project.
- **Lifestart Donegal, Barnardos Dublin 12, and Chatterbox** also worked with an interagency steering group.
- **Downstrands**, uniquely, was managed by a new network of FRCs formed to make the PSI application. This PSI project was managed by Downstrands as the agreed lead partner.

Collaboration at Project Implementation Level

Collaborative working was particularly evident at local and County levels. There were a small number of examples where the PSI project work moved beyond County boundaries, for example the Bessborough project drew its parents from a wider geographic area than Cork. This wider geography was also reflected in its training work with other HSE Infant Mental Health professionals based in Kerry. In Donegal, Lifestart 'Sessional Interventions Programme' is now extending into a wider region through Lifestart Leitrim, Roscommon and West Cavan.

Examples of collaboration at project implementation level were:

- Collaboration between the PSI projects with **Tusla and the HSE** created an opportunity to address the challenge of building bridges between the statutory service partners and more vulnerable parents in a community context. The close working relationship between a number of the PSI projects and Tusla/HSE created important approaches and models in terms of addressing this. Examples are **Dublin South City Partnership and Ballinasloe Social Services**.
- Collaboration with **PHNs** was important in terms of project development and operation of referral pathways in a number of PSI projects. This partnership was key for universal projects such as **Dublin 7 & Lifestart** enabling every new parent in the target areas to engage with the project.
- The vast majority of PSI projects had direct links to **community childcare services** which was crucial in terms of building awareness of the projects, getting referrals, upskilling staff and the subsequent provision of parenting programmes in their different settings. Examples include **Downstrands FRC, Kerry CYPSC, Cork City Partnership, Southside Partnership and Monaghan Integrated Development**.

- A number of the projects were located in organisations that had existing practices in networking and interagency working. **LDCs/ Partnerships** demonstrated this capacity in respect of the management and implementation of the PSI project. This experience made collaboration somewhat easier.
- **Kerry CYPSC** benefitted from working through the 'Parenting and Learning Group' one of its own interagency sub structures and in co-operation with members (Kerry CCC and Kerry FRCs) developed direct links with P&T groups in communities across the County.
- **Downstrands** was an example of an innovative development in collaborative working. For the first time the 9 FRCs in Donegal formed a new countywide **Family Resource Centre Network** under a single lead organisation (Downstrands) to deliver an extensive project across the County including to remote rural areas not traditionally served by the FRCs.
- **Bedford Row and Bessborough Centre projects** operate in contexts where the parents using their services are particularly vulnerable. Most of the parents and their children may be currently experiencing separation and/or be at risk of separation. Both projects were strong examples of the importance and benefit of developing high quality inter and intra agency collaboration.
- In a number of the PSI projects, considerable work went into creating a partnership of substance that could play to the strengths of each partner and at the same time work with organisational differences. **Southside Partnership project** was a good example of this.

4.3 Engaging Parents

Different approaches were taken to engaging parents in PSI projects. All the projects specifically targeted parents most in need of supports, some in the context of universal provision and others directly focusing on specific target groups and/or disadvantaged areas. Some PSI projects found it easier to reach the more marginalised parents, for example, where these parents were already engaged in community childcare settings or in existing P & T groups. Other projects found it more challenging needing sensitive promotional work to reach parents in a way that was not stigmatising.

Particular examples of promotion of projects and development of referral pathways were:

- Among the approaches used to engage parents was advertising including design of colourful leaflets explaining the PSI project and dissemination of them in neighbourhoods and shopping centres, and direct promotion through schools and existing centres/services and churches. Some projects used social media effectively. Projects stressed the importance of promotional material being focused on supporting babies rather than a focus on parenting issues.
- Some projects had considerable support from PHNs for example Barnardos in Dublin 12 had two Assistant Directors of PHN on the steering group. In **DNWAP** Dublin 7, four PHNs were trained as Incredible Years programme facilitators and every new mother in the area is now offered a place on the programme.
- Existing **Early Years Networks** were a great way of reaching parents and PSI projects led by LDC/Partnerships were well positioned to utilise their networks to reach parents in more disadvantaged communities. The **Cork City Partnership** project through the Cork Early Years Network reached 250 parents and children from 12 services who participated together in a very successful Arts and Play Project. The **Southside Partnership** project likewise was able to

reach parents through Southside Childcare Action Group, a network of early year's providers. Parenting Monaghan, an outcome of the **Monaghan Integrated Development** project, now has 17 member organisations with a remit to develop the integrated delivery of parenting programmes.

- Parent and Toddler (P&T) groups were a very effective way of engaging parents. In the **Kerry CYPSC** project the Language and Play Programme was delivered to 29 P&T groups across the county. Through the International Resource Centre in Tralee, the project reached many asylum seeking families and adapted the programme to suit their particular needs. **Downstrands Donegal** and the network of 9 FRCs engaged with existing P&T groups making available affordable and accessible activities to large numbers of parents many from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The FRCs also outreached to remote rural areas and used a pre-booking approach to ensure parents found it easier to join a new, unfamiliar group.
- The importance of self-referral and word of mouth sharing of information was experienced in many of the PSI projects especially those with a strong community focus. In **Pavee Point**, the Home Visitors were themselves members of the Traveller Community and were very successful in recruiting families for the PCHP programme. This programme required families to facilitate twice weekly visits for a period of 2 years (school term time) which is a big demand for parents. Pavee Point noted the frequent presence of fathers who also positively engaged with the programme.

Particular examples of approaches for reaching more vulnerable parents included:

- The challenge of reaching vulnerable parents is well recognised by PSI partners, both statutory and non-statutory. A number of projects reported the challenge of engaging with parents referred by Tusla Family Support Services with some parents fearing that they were being monitored. The PSI project in each of these circumstances worked hard to build trust in reassuring parents that their engagement in the project activity was voluntary.
- The quality of the relationship with **Tusla and HSE** partners supported engagement with more vulnerable parents. Building trust was crucial to this. The **Ballinasloe** project has now developed a service that is trusted by parents whether referred through Family Support (Tusla) or Early Intervention (HSE). Professionals working with Tusla and the HSE attest to the improved access and partnership with parents as a result of their work with the Ballinasloe Centre.
- The **Bessborough Centre** project worked with the sensitivities of its very vulnerable parents who were residing in Bessborough as part of the Centre's family assessment process. It also worked with the challenge of including increased numbers of couples and smaller babies. The **Bedford Row** project worked with young parents in the context of prison. It was therefore imperative for both of these PSI projects to emphasise the voluntary nature of the invitation to participate. Bedford Row engaged with young mothers 'in reach' in Limerick Prison where the young mothers opted into the programme on a voluntary basis encouraging them to stay engaged with the project after leaving prison. Both of these projects had a particular focus on supporting attachment and bonding between parents and their small babies whether with them or separated from them.
- Some of the vulnerable parents referred were not ready for a group experience and so individual supports were provided, either instead of or in preparation for joining a group. Barnardos provided this service to parents in the **Barnardos project in D12** and also in the

Southside Partnership project where many of the initial referrals were not appropriate for group work. There is however a growth in awareness of the work of PSI projects which has resulted in more appropriate referrals.

- Projects were able to reach parents from a rich mix of cultural backgrounds and nationalities. **Kerry CYPSC** noted that all of the Language and Play groups throughout the County had a mix of participants from different cultural backgrounds. In **Lifestart**, as part of the Bookworm interagency initiative, the project developed a Nursery Rhyme book in different languages as a way of integrating new families in the County. As part of the project in **Cooperative Childcare Ireland**, a new initiative is being developed to explore and improve how services can work with parents for whom English is a 2nd language.
- A number of PSI projects noted the importance of appropriate materials and how parents and children benefitted from resources made available to them through the various parenting programmes. Some projects provided books and toys for example the PCHP programmes in **Pavee Point, Dublin South City Partnership**, and the Elklan Programme facilitated by **Chatterbox**. The Nursery Rhyme book developed by **Lifestart** will be available imminently and will be circulated widely through networks and services to all new mothers in Donegal. It was noted by the **Chatterbox** project that the programme did not have materials suited for parents with visual impairment and the project adjusted materials to work with the specific needs of these parents. The **Lifestart** Sessional Interventions programme was piloted with families and as a result of feedback the programme was simplified and made more user- friendly.
- Parent and Toddler groups are largely run by parents themselves (though some may be housed in an FRC setting). A number of PSI projects noted the importance of the first sessions in engaging and holding parents who often feel vulnerable joining a new group. **Kerry CYPSC** identified the need for an Early Year's Development Worker who could build the capacity of the local P & T groups and support their future development and sustainability.

Participants in PSI Projects

KHF with the support of CFI made an overall grant of €600,000 available for the core PSI projects over a 3 year period (2014-2016). The allocations to projects range from €7,500 to €15,000. The grant level in some instances varied year on year. This investment in the rich mix of PSI projects resulted in almost 3000 families with more than 3000 children aged 0-3 over a three-year period engaging in different ways in PSI. Significant numbers of professional staff also benefited. Further detail is outlined in the table below.

It should be noted that numbers can be deceptive and comparisons between very different PSI projects do not tell the real story in terms of the outcomes. Some of the projects delivered multiple short programmes for large numbers of people reaching vulnerable parents within universal provision; some did longer term work, for example weekly sessions over periods of two years and others did targeted therapeutic work with smaller numbers of very vulnerable parents in a concentrated timeframe. It is also worth noting that in addition to the numbers of children 0-3 years who benefited from PSI, there are many other siblings in those families who will have indirectly benefited from parent's enhanced skills and knowledge. It is also noteworthy that the Traveller Home Visitors and those in South Dublin City Partnership attest to the impact that the Programme

has had on their own parenting. The training of professionals will also impact on a much larger group of children than captured in this Review Process.

Organisation	Programme Delivered	Participants (approx.)	
Ballinasloe Social Services	Incredible Years Programme	52	
	Various Individual Sessions with parents and children	116	112 Children
Barnardos	Parents Plus	40 Parents	
Bedford Row	Family Support	80 Young Mothers	195 Children (inclusive of 0-3s)
Bessborough Centre	Babble Group (Infant Mental Health)	68 Parents (including 16 couples)	53 Babies
Dublin South City Partnership	PCHP	8 Home visitors trained; 39 Parents	39 Children
Chatterbox	Elklan Speech & Language Training	79 Parents	94 Children
Cork City Partnership	Preparing for Parenting	30 Participants	
	Marte Meo Training	20 Staff	
	PEEP Programme Training	18 Professionals /Parents	
	Arts & Play Project	250 Parents	250 Children
Downstrands FRC	120 Baby Massage/Yoga Sessions (11 locations)	238 Parents	238 Babies
	136 Messy & Musical Play Sessions (12 locations)	600 parents	600 babies
	17 Paediatric First Aid Courses	204 Parents Yrs (1) & (2)	
	9 Parent Information Workshop		
Kerry Children & Young People's Services Committee	Language & Play Programme delivered in 29 P&T groups	490 Parents	620 Children (aged 0-3)
	2 Training Programmes	10 Staff	
Lifestart Donegal	Spirals Train the Trainer	75 Professionals	
	1100 families are on the caseload of which 340 vulnerable families; Piloted Sessional Interventions with some of these families		
Monaghan Integrated Development	Parents Plus Train the Trainers in 13 Community Childcare Services	28 Staff	
	9 Parents Plus Programmes	69 Parents	

	Parenting Monaghan established with 17 services Website & Facebook developed		
Co-operative Housing Ireland	Marte Meo Training 4 Parents Plus Programmes Parent & Toddler Groups	25 Staff 21 Parents 12 Parents	12 Babies
Pavee Point	PCHP 6 Home Visitors trained	20 Families	20 Children
Southside Partnership	First Friends PEEP Programme Southside Traveller Parent & Baby Group 'Baby Steps' Shanganagh	50 Families 6 Parents/ Grandparents 9 Parents + Babies	50 children 7 Babies 12 babies
North West Area Partnership	Incredible Years Programme Peri-natal Yoga & Baby Massage Year (1) & (2)	28 Parents 16 Mothers	29 Babies 16 Babies

Total: Almost 3000 families with children under 3 years involved in PSI

5. Key Learning from the Parenting Support Initiative (PSI)

(1) The Katharine Howard Foundation Approach

The Katharine Howard Foundation (KHF) tested their belief that relatively small grants have the potential to make significant impact particularly where they are awarded to organisations with some existing infrastructure and expertise. KHF also believed that the provision of funding over a 3-year period contributes to better outcomes as the projects can reflect and plan, adjust and learn. It is clear from this Review Process that these beliefs are well founded.

It was evident from the Review Process that KHF paid attention to the relationship with the PSI projects throughout the three years of the Initiative. Each project noted how much they appreciated being trusted by the funders to get on with the work. They valued greatly the support offered when they faced challenges and believed that KHF understood the complexity of implementation and the work on the ground. With a consistent attitude of “what can we do to help?” KHF encouraged the projects to progress, and when they sometimes stalled they were encouraged to readapt resulting in better outcomes for 0-3s in the long run. It was noted by projects that KHF shares community development principles and values in common with many of them and that led to a mutually respectful partnership.

The projects reported that the KHF approach was enabling, programmatic, non-prescriptive and based on the simple concept of learning by doing. “Not getting it right” was experienced as a learning opportunity rather than a problem. They were encouraged to innovate and test out approaches and were supported to be flexible and adaptable.

The projects found that the PSI templates supplied by KHF were well structured and “asked all the right questions”. The annual progress reports formed a key part of projects’ self-evaluation process. The PSI Networking Events were greatly valued, providing important networking and learning opportunities. It was also evident from this Review that KHF provided clear criteria and structure for the projects. KHF successfully engaged with and further built on the expertise, skill and commitment of local early years services, trusted their expertise and competence and found ways to optimise it for the benefit of children, their parents and their communities including public service providers.

The key learning from the KHF approach is that building trust; enabling autonomy; being non-prescriptive; building on what is there; being supportive; minimising bureaucracy; having appropriate levels of accountability; being open to learning; understanding implementer’s perspectives; using community development approaches and values; fostering a real partnership with the projects made PSI effective. This learning needs to inform and influence the development and implementation of future commissioning strategies.

(2) Collaboration and Integration

All of the PSI projects evidenced important collaboration in terms of partnering with other agencies and organisations to deliver better outcomes for parents and children aged 0-3 years. 13 of the 15 PSI projects had interagency steering / working groups collaborating and overseeing the implementation of the project. Many of the projects had a long history of joint work with their PSI partners and others were forging new relationships with their key partners. Irrespective of this, the PSI projects provided strong evidence of the benefits of collaboration.

Key learning included the following:

- **Multi- agency working is complex.** A number of projects reported the benefits of attention paid to the development of relationships and trust in the Steering Group, along with a shared vision and terms of reference.
- **Coordination of multi-agency working takes time and resources.** A number of projects found themselves under pressure because they had not costed or factored in this need. It is a testament to their personal and professional commitment that they stretched themselves to find ways of sustaining the work while managing this challenge.
- **Creating the conditions to build sound foundations, and stakeholder buy-in** at the start of a project is important, and without attention to this, issues can arise later in a project that are more problematic to resolve.
- **Collaboration needs time and investment** -it doesn’t just happen! Project collaboration requires leadership, clarity of vision, and a whole lot of drive and energy.
- **Networks are extremely important** in facilitating communication, joint working and as a channel to share the learning and resources. The value of networks has been diminished in recent years but the learning from PSI reinforces their value. PSI has clearly shown what can be achieved with joined up networking opportunities and this learning needs to be built on in particular by CYPSCs.

When it works well, collaboration is rich, productive and effective. Resources need to be available to

promote, co-ordinate and ensure the crucial contribution of collaborative working, thereby, realising the

enormous potential to get the best from partners and improved outcomes for children and families.

(3) Relationship with Statutory Partners

There was significant development of relationships between PSI projects and statutory bodies, in particular, HSE Primary Care and Tusla Social Work and Family Support. In many of the PSI projects, Primary Care personnel and Early Intervention Teams were key stakeholders, involved with management, providing training, information sessions and referring parents. The role of PHNs, Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists, in particular, positively impacted on many of the PSI projects in terms of referral and in some instances training and delivery of parenting programmes.

Through PSI, statutory partners had a unique opportunity to make contact with a wide range of parents in a community context and the opportunity to engage with them in a different relationship. Vulnerable parents were encouraged to take up their own 'power' and responsibility and parents were seen less as a "problem" and more as a resource. The Probation Service for example, appreciated the partnership and team work with Bedford Row in their work with young women prisoners. Several of the PSI projects worked closely with County Councils particularly the Library Service. Relationships with Schools were of key importance to the successful implementation of PSI. The majority of PSI projects had links with Schools either in terms of reaching parents with smaller children; dissemination of information; participation in management delivery of PSI and in one instance hosting a PSI project.

Key learning included the following:

- **Building relationships takes time**, it needs to be factored into the job and managed by the employer. CYPSCs have the potential to assist in the development of these relationships.
 - **The voluntary nature of parental engagement resulted in relationships built on mutual respect.** PSI projects demonstrated the capacity of parents to jointly work with statutory and other partners together with a common purpose.
 - **The outreach nature of the work**, the neutral settings in communities, the welcoming environment and the warmth and encouragement of project staff led to changes of perception, each of the other.
 - **The loss/changes of key personnel**, in particular, HSE staff presented challenges both in terms of losing the knowledge and expertise of the particular individuals and strongly underlined the need to induct and support new staff to build the partnership.
- No single stakeholder can address the complex needs of parents and children aged 0-3 on its own. High quality comprehensive service provision requires all stakeholders in particular, parents/ community/voluntary organisations and statutory bodies to work together.***

(4) Vision, Skill /and Leadership of Staff

Through the Review Process, it was evident that there were many inspirational leaders and champions of early years work driving individual PSI projects. In terms of planning and implementation, all of the projects had really invested in the work, had thought about it carefully, had listened to parents and to their PSI partners and had adapted the projects accordingly. With the PSI grants, projects had considered creatively what could make a difference to parents and children in their area of work and developed projects based on this.

Key learning included the following:

- **Champions and leaders of early year's services need to be recognised, valued, trusted and supported** so that they can achieve the kind of outcomes that the PSI projects achieved.
Many of the PSI leaders were already carrying full workloads and the PSI project was done alongside their normal duties. It was their commitment and resilience that sustained and grew the work.
 - PSI implementers with vision benefited from having the **support of senior management and Boards** who understood the PSI project vision and supported those involved to be innovative.
 - A number of the PSI projects had inspirational leaders. Attention therefore needs to be paid to **building the capacity of other staff members so that there is a succession plan** in the event the current leaders leave their positions.
- Good leaders were able to work across systems, were good at networking, were able to bring people with them and were not afraid to make mistakes. PSI projects commented repeatedly that they were inspired to go the extra mile because they were trusted by KHF.*

(5) Parental Engagement

Some projects had direct access to parents, for example those working within community childcare and Early Year's settings and FRCs. Engaging more vulnerable parents was challenging for a number of projects and adaptations were made in these projects to make that more possible. As noted two of the PSI projects were successfully reaching some of the most vulnerable parents in residential/institutional settings.

The capacity of the projects to engage with parents, whether self-referred in a community context, or across the continuum of need to therapeutic models in particular settings, was notable. There was a great emphasis on social inclusion, in reaching the most marginalised, in adapting programmes to meet the needs of groups such as asylum seekers. The collaborative nature of the relationship between staff and parents was evident in the plans made in partnership with parents. The quality of this work was outstanding. The projects welcomed fathers, grandparents, au pairs- indeed whoever

was the key carer of the small child. As the PSI projects developed, it was evident that referral pathways became clearer with more appropriate referrals.

Key learning included the following:

- **Creating a respectful and successful partnership with parents is a first stage requirement in any parent intervention.** The learning from PSI is that effective parental engagement requires both promotion and co-ordination.
- **The importance of attachment and bonding in baby/ parent relationship is vital.** Raising awareness and education on this is crucial for the long-term development of the child.
- Parental isolation is sometimes complicated by geography, by language and by mental health issues. For these parents **it is vital that sessions start well, are inclusive and welcoming.** It is hard to walk into a room where you don't know anybody - and in some projects the use of 'buddy' and pre-booking systems helped parents to access and continue in the projects.
- For many vulnerable parents, participating in a group is not possible and so **individual complementary supports** need to be available to them.
- **Building trust, securing engagement with and responding appropriately to the complexity of the issues facing vulnerable families is complex and difficult work.** For many families, individual work is more appropriate than being part of a group as a first stage of parental engagement. It is important that appropriate supports are provided in an accessible and timely way.

To work successfully with parents, programmes need to “start where parents are at”, build on what is already in place (including the use of familiar neutral spaces), commit time, be creative and be prepared to adapt interventions as required. Targeting families including those who are most vulnerable takes time, expertise and resources.

(6) Changing Policy Contexts - challenges and unexpected outcomes

It became apparent throughout the Review Process that many of the PSI projects had been impacted upon by changes in national policy in recent years. Part of these changes resulted in community infrastructure being eroded. Required changes in the regulatory environment have added pressure to small community based early years' services which have not been adequately supported and resourced to implement requirements. Many community and local development organisations which traditionally supported children and families on the ground found themselves having to deliver a more prescribed programme of work with a narrower focus resulting in less opportunity for programme development, flexibility and innovation.

During the course of this review, it also became apparent that it is important to understand and anticipate the impact of policy changes that may be beneficial in part, but may have the potential for negative unintended consequences.

Key learning includes the following:

- **CYPSCs** are county level committees that provide a forum **for joint service planning and co-ordination of activity and for oversight of local policy and provision.** Their role is to

enhance interagency co-operation and to realise the 5 national outcomes set for children and young people. The PSI projects have important lessons for the operations of CYPSCs.

- **The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP)** with its emphasis on progressing individual adults into employment was challenging for LDCs/Partnerships in terms of sustaining a role with children and families. The introduction of SICAP brought with it specific challenges in terms of direction, focus and staff resources. The LDCs/ Partnerships involved in PSI found ways with the assistance of KHF to sustain their early years work embedding it into a life cycle approach. **Given SICAPs position as the largest social inclusion programme in the country, its relevance to children and families, particularly vulnerable families, needs to be reviewed.**
- **The role of City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) has been significantly limited in recent years resulting in the reduction or indeed loss of development work** that many CCCs had previously been engaged with. This Review Process raises the possibility that the reduction of supports at ground level may well be contributing to the demise of P & T groups.
- The introduction of the second year of **Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE)** has been broadly welcomed as a progressive universal development for young children. However, it is crucially important that **ECCE is complemented by additional parenting supports** for vulnerable parents whose priority need is to strengthen their ability to nurture their children effectively and who would benefit more from investment in the attachment /bonding relationship with their small children. Such complementary programmes will support their children’s readiness for preschool and school and have greater impact for them in the longer term.
- **Working with parents and children aged 0-3 is crucial in terms of children’s development.** More consideration is being given by Tusla to the importance of working with this age cohort particularly with those that are vulnerable within a community context. PSI has come to completion at a time when the learning can inform and support Tusla in its ongoing planning for young children and families at community level and in its implementation of the **Partnership Prevention and Family Support (PPFS)** of which **Parenting and Meitheal** are important strands.
Likewise, the HSE has embarked on an important change initiative through **The Nurture Programme - Infant Health and Wellbeing (Nurture Programme)** which has a focus on supporting parents and children. It is therefore important to make direct links between the PSI projects and the Nurture Programme strategy to support early years work. KHF with its role as manager of the Nurture Programme is in a unique position to make these important connections.
- **Community infrastructure is essential for the creation of appropriate supports for parents** in their local areas. Community childcare services have been and continue to be under serious financial pressure in relation to their sustainability. This is now reaching crisis proportions as outlined in the ‘Breaking Point’ research produced by the Cork City Partnership in collaboration with Cork City Childcare Committee, South Dublin County Partnership and South Dublin County Childcare Committees.

The experience, skills and expertise of locally based organisations / structures such as FRCs, LDCs/Partnerships, CCCs and CYPSCs, should be utilised in the further development of parenting policy and supports at local community and county levels.

(7) Providing Quality Training

A broad range of evidence based and informed training took place to upskill project staff and other professionals with a view to them being better equipped to work with parents and their children. Training varied from effective simple training programmes like the Language and Play Programme delivered over a number of days, to intensive 18-month staff training in a therapeutic Infant Mental Health Programme (Anna Freud Centre UK). None of this would have been possible without the investment of PSI. More detailed information about this training is contained in section 4.1 of this report.

Key learning includes the following:

- The importance of training and upskilling staff in early years' services is essential, benefiting many children and their families. Projects, that had been starved of resources for many years, spoke of **the impact of training** on their services, the achievement of consistency and quality and most of all the confidence that staff got from investment in their development.
 - A number of the projects found that **the cost of preferred training was inaccessible** to them and so adjusted their expectations, adapting to other more realisable training programmes. The cost for example, of bringing specialist training to different parts of the country from Dublin or the UK is a barrier for many projects.
 - The reality is that community childcare staff are paid for contact hours and because of the staffing ratio requirements **it is currently not financially or organisationally viable to free staff up for training and development** resulting in much of the training happening in staff members' own time.
 - There is now recognised potential for a number of the projects to **use the expertise built up in PSI to bring their training to other services** e.g. Bessborough Centre's Therapeutic Infant Mental Health approach or the Lifestart Sessional Interventions programme.
- It is crucial that time and resources are made available for training that is of a consistently high standard. It is also vital that following training there is ongoing supervision, support including mentoring for staff to ensure the delivery of quality parenting programmes.***

(8) Importance of Reflection and Evaluation

KHF was committed to optimising the learning from the PSI and encouraged projects to include reflection and evaluation as an integral part of the individual project's work. Projects were required

to complete progress reports at the end of each year with a plan for the following years' activity. Projects understood that funding was dependent on progress being made. In Year (3) the decision was made to undertake this independent Review Process and projects were provided with a template of questions to consider in preparation for the facilitated sessions. Alongside the annual progress reports, KHF organised two Networking Events which also supported reflection and learning.

There was an expectation that evaluation would be built in and might take different forms among the projects in the PSI. Some of projects additionally undertook a formal evaluation of their project. Evaluations of evidence based programmes were implemented using evaluation processes inherent in the programmes. All the projects engaged in a continuous review of their work. The process of continuous evaluation and / or review led to changes in programmes and approach across the duration of PSI. There was evidence of reflection in the projects' understanding of what was working well and/or not so well and responding to that. There was a strong awareness that the PSI provided a welcome and valuable service development opportunity, it also provided a real learning opportunity.

The Review Process found that the projects involved themselves in evaluation and reflective processes. These are enormously important. The Review Process itself provided a welcome opportunity for projects to pause and take stock of their experiences of PSI over 3 years. The reflective nature of the Review Process with a wide range of different stakeholders present was much appreciated with the projects recognising all that had been achieved together in developing and implementing PSI.

PSI has underlined the importance of committing to and investing in evaluation and reflection. This requires projects to be confident enough to be self-critical and to know, understand and celebrate achievement and recognise challenges that need to be addressed.

(9) Using Appropriate Parenting Support Programmes

A diverse range of projects offering relevant and effective programmes from very direct models of high level therapeutic interventions to universal services provided at County level were funded through PSI. There is a need to ensure that this range of parenting programmes is valued, resourced and where required complemented by additional one to one interventions. The evidence based and evidence informed parent support programmes in PSI ensured that the best use was made of proven approaches, taking account of particular geographical and target groups' needs. The experience of PSI highlighted the benefits of planning and delivering a diverse range of local programmes within a programme rolled out nationally, such as PSI.

As primary funders of early years interventions, Tusla and the HSE along with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Department of Health can gain from the learning of PSI as can other Departments including the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and relevant bodies with a key role in relation to children and families such as Pobal.

It is important to ensure programmes and support respond to particular needs and that, 'one size programme does not fit all'. The approaches used to support parents should be determined by local needs and build on the skills and competencies in local services/communities.

(10) Challenge of Sustaining Impact

The PSI projects achieved their impact because they went on a learning journey in terms of what it takes to collaborate, innovate and create mutually respectful relationships between services, organisations and parents. The projects also have an increased awareness of the importance of building the confidence and skills of staff.

A number of the PSI projects have completed what they set out to do and now have substantial new services and systems that are embedded in their work. A small number of the projects experienced challenges that delayed their ambition and full project implementation. With the agreement of KHF and a clear strategy for delivery, it is expected that these projects will complete their work in the coming months. Some of the projects do not have an alternative source of funding for essential core services that have been supported through PSI and are at risk of losing important work with parents of 0-3s.

Key learning includes the following:

- It takes **additional resources and a supportive, enabling approach** such as the support provided by KHF to achieve strong and positive outcomes for community based work with parents and 0-3s.
- A number of projects would benefit from **transition funding** until such time as the national strategies for parenting are in place.
- A number of the projects are key deliverers of services that support the

role and remit of Tusla and /or the HSE. **PSI projects that have proven their value should be supported to access mainstream funding.**

It is evident that a relatively small grant provided to develop projects based on a clear vision and collaborative and creative approaches, such as that received from KHF, can achieve significant impact.

6 Final Remarks

The Katharine Howard Foundation has demonstrated substantial leadership with the support of the Community Foundation for Ireland in generating a very rich Parenting Support Initiative with 15 carefully selected and diverse projects. KHF had a vision for what could be achieved and over the three years enabled this work in a very supportive and considered way. PSI provided opportunities for projects to implement interesting models and to work across different levels of parental support needs (low, medium and high), to develop and support parents to become more effective in their parenting roles.

There is a growing acceptance that positive early year's intervention with a focus on attachment and bonding are key starting points in the life cycle approach that encourages growth and learning. PSI has modelled a renewal of investment in the development of parent supports - one that is not just about money but is supportive, flexible, focused, valued and at the same time accountable. In the context where parenting plans are being developed at County level through the CYPSCs, where Tusla

is implementing PPFs/Meitheal and where The Nurture Programme - Child Health and Wellbeing (HSE) is being progressed, PSI has produced a number of useful projects and approaches that could provide insights and learning. KHF is ideally placed to harness its direct links with the HSE and Tusla, and with other Departments and organisations that have a role in strengthening parenting supports, to ensure that the learning from the PSI projects informs policy, planning and practice.

The PSI through all of the projects has built up an important body of work. For relatively small sums of money, there has been an enormous impact with several thousand families benefiting as a result. In a time when there has been little investment in developmental work on the ground in communities, PSI provided a welcome opportunity for those that participated, one that created a positivity and hopefulness as well as innovation and impact.

Marie Carroll

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