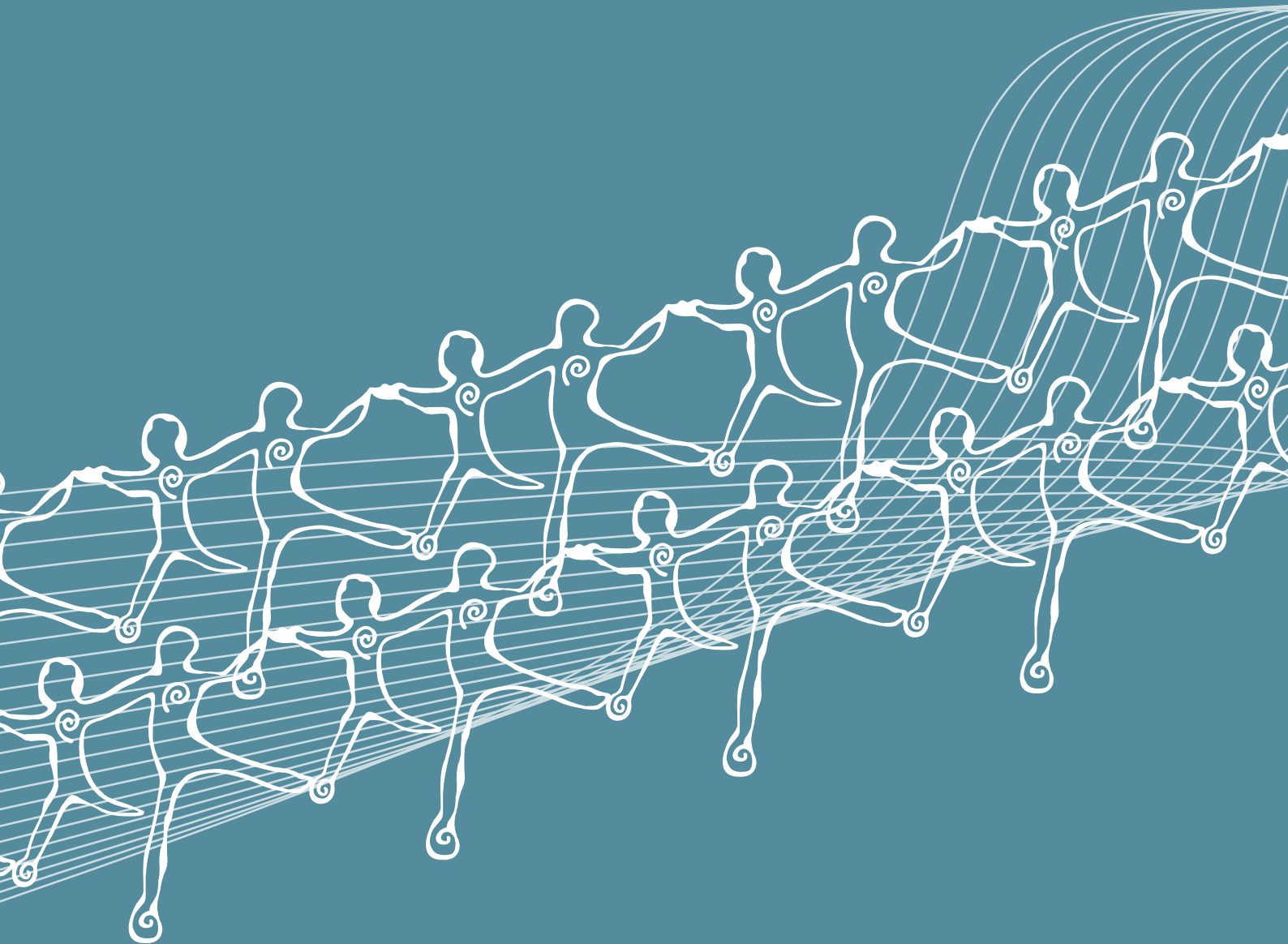
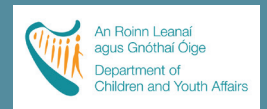


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Parenting Support and Parental Participation

Parental Participation Survey Report

BY
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The Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention Partnership and Family Support



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

... whether the organisational culture and practice at Tusla and its services are integrated, preventative, evidence informed and inclusive of children and parents and if so, is this contributing to improved outcomes for children and their families.

The research and evaluation study is underpinned by the Work Package approach. This has been adopted to deliver a comprehensive suite of research and evaluation activities involving sub-studies of the main areas within the Tusla Development and Mainstreaming Programme. The work packages are: Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks, Children's Participation, Parenting Support and Parental Participation, Public Awareness and Commissioning.

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

About the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) is part of the Institute for Lifecourse and Society at the National University of Ireland. Founded in 2007, through support from The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Health Services Executive, with a base in the School of Political Science and Sociology, the mission of the Centre is to help create the conditions for excellent policies, services and practices that improve the lives of children, youth and families through research, education and service development. The UCFRC has an extensive network of relationships and research collaborations internationally and is widely recognised for its core expertise in the areas of Family Support and Youth Development.

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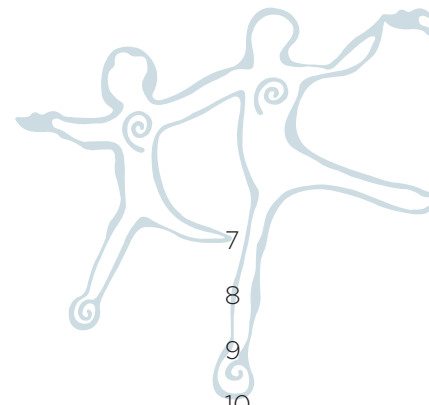
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1

1. Introduction

This research is part of a study to examine the extent to which parental participation is currently embedded in Irish organisations providing parenting support. The study is part of a wider programme of work to research and evaluate the Tusla Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support being undertaken by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

The purpose of the research is to ascertain levels of awareness about: Tusla's programme of work to support parental participation, participatory practice in organisations that support parents, challenges to participatory practice, and the skill development needs of those working with parents.

Answers provided through an online survey contribute to a baseline study of parental participation practice within Tusla and Tusla partner organisations, informing in a formative way the development of activities in this area.

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2. Description of Participants

This section describes participants' employment profile, geographical location and area of work.

2.1 Employment Profile of Respondents

The Parenting Participation Survey was completed by 200 respondents, including 167 Tusla employees, 25 partner organisations and eight others who did not provide details of their employer. Partner organisation respondents included those employed by agencies, charities, youth organisations, children's charities and health care.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Role	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Tusla Employees	167	83.5%
Partner Organisations	25	12.5%
Other	8	4%
Total:	200	100%

2.1.1 Respondents by Geographical Area

Tusla Employees

Tusla employees nationwide responded to the survey; no particular region was over-represented.

Table 2: Tusla Respondents by Geographical Area¹

Geographical Area	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	15	8.93%
Cavan/Monaghan	2	1.19%
Cork	19	11.3%
Donegal	2	1.19%
Dublin North	11	6.55%
Dublin North City	9	5.36%
Dublin South Central	4	2.38%
Dublin South East/Wicklow	8	4.76%
Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow	11	6.55%
Galway/Roscommon	15	8.93%
Kerry	4	2.38%
Louth/Meath	11	6.55%
Mayo	11	6.55%
Midlands	5	2.98%
Midwest	13	7.74%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	2	1.19%
Waterford/Wexford	14	8.33%
Other areas	12	7.14%
Total:	168	100%

¹ Figures do not tally due to some respondents answering the question mistakenly.



Partner Organisation Respondents

Partner organisation respondents were also from several parts of the country; however, a slight majority (27.27%) worked in Dublin.

Table 3: Tusla Respondents by Geographical Area²

Geographical Area	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Dublin	9	27.27%
Galway	3	9.09%
Kerry	2	6.06%
Limerick	5	15.15%
Roscommon	6	18.18%
Sligo	1	3.03%
Tipperary	1	3.03%
Westmeath	3	9.09%
Tipperary, Limerick and Clare	1	3.03%
N/A	2	6.06%
Total:	33	100%

² 33 respondents here is the addition of those in the 'others' group.

2.1.2 Respondents by Job Title

Tusla Employees

Many Tusla employees who completed the survey were social workers (34.73%) or social care workers (20.96%); 3.59% of respondents chose 'Other',² and 2.4% did not respond to this question.

Table 4: Tusla Respondents by Job Title

Job Title	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Social Worker	58	34.73%
Social Care Worker	35	20.96%
Family Support Worker	10	5.99%
Nursing	1	0.6%
Other Health Professional	2	1.2%
Education and Welfare Officer	7	4.19%
Other Support Staff	5	2.99%
Management	26	15.57%
VIII+ Administration	13	7.78%
Other (please specify) ³	6	3.59%
Unknown	4	2.4%
Total:	167	100%

³ Other' respondents consisted of coordinators, inspectors and trainers, and some who worked at corporate or managerial jobs.



Partner Organisation Respondents

Partner organisation respondents stem from a variety of service areas, and some offer a complex combination of different types of services.

Table 5: Partner Organisation Respondents by Job Title

Service Area	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Community-based family support	3	9.09%
Targeted family support	5	15.15%
Family resource centre	3	9.09%
Adolescent/Youth (Prevention/Intervention/Targeted/Mentoring)	3	9.09%
Parenting Support Service/Parenting Programme/Information/Advice	5	15.15%
Counselling, targeted family support, parenting support and early years	2	6.06%
Counselling, community-based, targeted, family resource centre, parenting support, early years	1	3.03%
Counselling, parenting support, domestic	1	3.03%
DSGBV, early years	1	3.03%
Community family support, parenting support service, adolescent/youth	5	15.15%
Targeted family support, adolescent/ youth, parenting support service	1	3.03%
No answer	3	9.09%
Total	33	100%

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3. Tusla's Programme of Work in Parenting Support and Parental Participation

In order to ascertain levels of knowledge of Tusla's work on parenting support and parental participation, respondents were asked about their awareness of different elements of that programme of work. Many respondents (47.5%) were aware of the parental participation toolkit, but many had no awareness of the toolkit briefings (49%). Almost half (48%) of respondents were unaware of the parenting support champions network, most had no knowledge of the champions practitioner handbook (56.5%), and only 29.5% were aware of the parental participation seed fund.

Table 6: Awareness of Tusla's Programme of Work in Parenting Support and Parental Participation

Programme of Work	Yes %	No %	Unsure %	No Answer %
Parental Participation Toolkit	47.5%	33.5%	9.5%	9.5%
Parental Participation Toolkit Briefings	30.5%	49%	8.5%	12%
Parental Participation Seed Fund	29.5%	51.5%	8%	11%
Parent Support Champions Network	32.5%	48%	8%	11.5%
Parent Support Champions Practitioner's Handbook	20.5%	56.5%	11%	12%

Respondents had a number of views on Tusla's programme of work on parenting support and parental participation. Almost one third (30.76%) maintained that knowledge of parental participation was limited to that which is in the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) programme and Workforce Learning and Development (WLD). Other responses maintained that there is inadequate dissemination of parental participation information and that there is a need for further training in this area (23.07%). However, some responses did indicate that there is full awareness of the parental support and parental participation programme of work (15.38%).

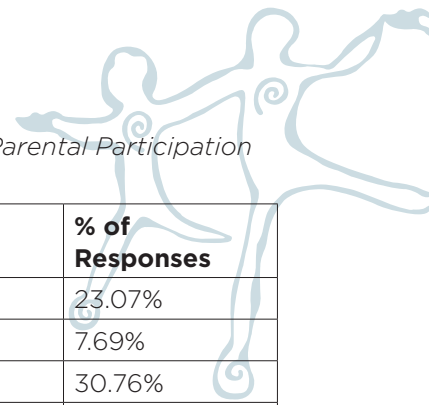


Table 7: Comments on Tusla's Programme of work around Parental Support and Parental Participation

Comments	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Inadequate dissemination/need for training	3	23.07%
Parental Participation not embedded in Tusla as an organisation	1	7.69%
Knowledge is limited to PPFS and WLD	4	30.76%
Lack awareness of tools	1	7.69%
Awareness of parental participation but not of Tusla programme of work	2	15.38%
Full awareness	2	15.38%
Total:	13	100%

4

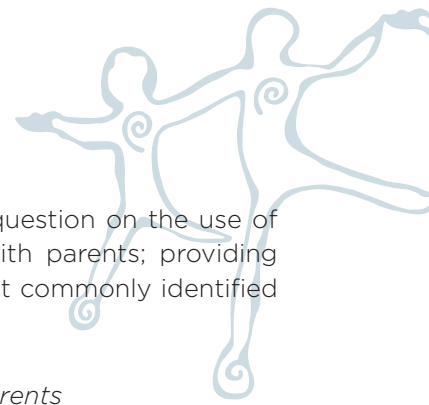
4. Working Directly with Parents

4.1 Tusla Respondents

In the course of their work the majority of Tusla respondents (79%) are in direct contact with parents and work with them on an individual level providing different supports. Many utilise participatory practices as part of their approach to working with parents; providing parents with the appropriate information they need to be involved was the most commonly identified participatory approach to working with parents (69.5%).

Table 8: Tusla Respondents' Participatory Approaches to Working with Parents

In my role I...	Definitely true (%)	Mostly true (%)	Unsure (%)	Mostly not true (%)	Definitely not true (%)	No Answer (%)
Provide parents with the appropriate information they need to be involved	47.5%	22%	1%	0.5%	1%	28%
Actively seek the views of parents	53%	16%	1%	0.5%	2.5%	27%
Support parents to express their views	53.5%	15%	2%	0.5%	1.5%	27.5%
Ensure parents' views are listened to	51%	15%	3.5%	0.5%	1.5%	28.5%
Work in partnership with parents to reach decisions	38.5%	24%	5%	2.5%	2.5%	27.5%
Provide parents with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken	50%	17.5%	2.5%	-	2%	28%



4.2 Organisation Respondents

In a similar vein to the Tusla respondents, there was a mixed response to the question on the use of participatory practices as part of their organisation's approach to working with parents; providing parents with the appropriate information they need to be involved was the most commonly identified participatory approach to working with parents (62%).

Table 9: Organisation Respondents' Participatory Approaches to Working with Parents

My organisation presently:	Definitely true (%)	Mostly true (%)	Unsure (%)	Mostly not true (%)	Definitely not true (%)	No Answer (%)
Provides parents with the appropriate information they need to be involved	26.5%	35.5%	8.8%	4%	-	25%
Actively seeks the views of parents	30%	28.5%	9.5%	6%	-	26%
Supports parents to express their views	31%	27.5%	10%	4.5%	1%	26%
Ensures parents' views are listened to	22.5%	24.5%	18.5%	7.5%	1%	26%
Works in partnership with parents to reach decisions	26%	29.5%	11.5%	5%	2%	26%
Provides parents with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken	30%	29.5%	8%	4%	2%	26.5%

5

5. Challenges to Working in Participatory Ways with Parents

While it is evident from Tables 8 and 9 above that a participatory approach to working with parents is an element of practice in many cases, a number of respondents indicated that there are challenges to this approach (58.5%). Respondents provided several examples of the challenges they experience. Some of the most common were parental unwillingness or inability to engage (31.48%); parental resistance towards Tusla, social work and child protection (20.37%); and parents having a range of issues requiring attention, including addiction, mental health issues, problems with housing and homelessness, and low levels of education (15.74%).

Table 10: Challenges to Participatory Practice with Parents

Challenges Encountered	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Unwillingness/inability to engage	34	31.48%
Services need to improve method to seek parental feedback (Tusla and partners)	12	11.11%
Parental participation is in place	3	2.77%
Need for training and resources	3	2.77%
Fewer services available in rural areas	1	0.93%
Parents of children in care difficult to engage	6	5.56%
Parental resistance towards Tusla/social work/ child protection	22	20.37%
Parental issues (addiction/mental health/ housing/education)	17	15.74%
Service limitations/ineffective policies	2	1.85%
Role of EWO is intimidating	1	0.93%
Participation not always voluntary	1	0.93%
Participation consumes times and resources	5	4.63%
Engaging fathers is difficult	1	0.93%
Total:	108	100%

6



6. Working in Participatory Ways with Parents

Respondents provided examples of how their organisation works in participatory ways in a number of areas, such as service planning, reaching decisions, and review and evaluation of services.

6.1 Parental Participation in Service Planning

The most common example of participatory practice in the planning of services was identified as the inclusion of parents' views in advisory committees (40.2%). However, 14.7% said that parents are not involved in planning services in their organisation.

Table 11: Parental Participation in Service Planning

Approaches to Parental Participation	Frequency of Response	% of Responses
Identify needs/assessment	5	4.9%
Work meetings	5	4.9%
Parents not involved	15	14.7%
Help accessing services/funding	5	4.9%
Meitheal	5	4.9%
Parental views/advisory committees	41	40.2%
Design plans/interventions	16	15.7%
Work consultations	2	1.96%
Provide information/parenting programmes	8	7.84%
Total:	102	100%

6.2 Parental Participation in Reaching Decisions

The most common example of working in partnership with parents to reach decisions was identified as seeking parental feedback (27.93%), with 4.5% of responses indicating that such practices were not in place in their organisation.

Table 12: Parental Participation in Reaching Decisions

Methods of Participatory Practice	Frequency of Response	% of Responses
Conferences/reviews/CPCC/CIRC	29	26.13%
Meetings/consultations/access reviews	17	15.32%
Meitheal	7	6.3%
Plan design	17	15.32%
Ask parental feedback	31	27.93%
Family support services/parenting programmes	5	4.5%
Not in place	5	4.5%
Total:	111	100%

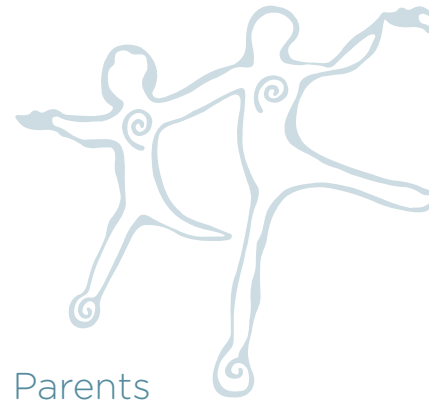
6.3 Parental Participation in the Review and Evaluation of Services

A number of respondents provided examples of how their organisations work in participatory ways with parents in the review and evaluation of services. Seeking parental feedback (37.25%) was highlighted as the most common form of participatory practice in this area. However, 9.8% of responses indicated that no such practice occurred.

Table 13: Parental Participation in the Review and Evaluation of Services

Methods of Participatory Practice	Frequency of Response	% of Responses
Consultation/meetings/care plans/welfares conferences	14	13.73%
Review systems need renovation	1	0.98%
N/A	7	6.86%
Parents not included in evaluation	10	9.8%
Seek parental feedback	38	37.25%
Meitheal	3	2.94%
Review of programmes/cases/plans HIQA	23	22.55%
Provide information/leaflets/programmes	4	3.92%
Lack of time/resources	1	0.98%
SCR	1	0.98%
Total:	102	100%

7



7. Tangible Change as a Result of Participatory Practice Parents

Comments are mixed on how such participatory practice resulted in tangible change in the areas of service planning, reaching decisions, and review and evaluations in the different organisations.

7.1 Change in Service Planning

Regarding service planning, 39.74% of partner organisation responses maintained that services were now tailored to the needs identified by parents, and 30.77% of responses indicated that dialogue with parents had modified their practice towards parental inclusion in service planning; 6.41% of responses revealed that practice had partially changed as a result of dialogue with parents, and 19.23% stated that no change had occurred in this area.

Table 14: Tangible Change in Service Planning as a Result of Parental Participation

Changes in Service Planning	Frequency of Response	% of Responses
Services tailored to needs identified	31	39.74%
No change	15	19.23%
Modify practices	24	30.77%
Meitheal success stories	2	2.56%
Evaluation of services in place	1	1.28%
Services only partially modified	5	6.41%
Total:	78	100%

7.2 Change in Practices around Reaching Decisions

Most responses (53.93%) indicated that the practice of working with parents to reach decisions had improved as a result of dialogue with parents, 3.37% stated that such practices were not fully implemented in their organisation, and 4.49% stated that this was not applicable to their organisation.

Table 15: Tangible Change in Decision-Making Practices as a Result of Parental Participation

Changes in Decision-Making	Frequency of Response	% of Responses
Improved parenting	8	8.99%
Care plans	1	1.12%
Improved practice (through dialogue)	48	53.93%
Specific success stories	4	4.49%
Meitheal	7	7.87%
Improve parental decision-making/ empowerment	13	14.6%
FSPN/A	1	1.12%
Not fully implemented yet	3	3.37%
N/A	4	4.49%
Total:	89	100%

7.3 Change in the Review and Evaluation of Services

The most prominent example of tangible change in review and evaluation services as a result of dialogue with parents is cited as modified practice (33.8%). A small number of respondents (2.8%) were of the view that reviews and evaluations in their organisations needed to be improved to include parents.

Table 16: Tangible Change in Review and Evaluation Practices as a result of Parental Participation

Changes in Reviews & Evaluations	Frequency of Response	% of Responses
N/A	13	18.3%
Specific case	4	5.63%
Systematic evaluation/parents involved	22	30.99%
Meitheal	2	2.82%
Modified practice	24	33.8%
Limited resources	1	1.4%
Not fully implemented	3	4.23%
Review needs improvement	2	2.82%
Total:	71	100%

8



8. Supporting Parental Participation in Organisations

Respondents provided several suggestions on how to support the implementation of parental participation in their organisations. Many (32.67%) suggested that parental participation should be fully implemented as policy in Tusla and across all partner organisations. The role of practitioners in supporting and encouraging parental participation was seen by many (28.71%) as fundamental to developing practice in this area. However, some responses indicated that there are insufficient resources and time to implement parental participation, and that more training is needed (9.9%).

Table 17: Suggested Organisation Changes to Support Parental Participation

Suggested Changes	Frequency of Response	% of Responses
Implement participation fully as a policy in Tusla and partner organisations	33	32.67%
Parental access needs to be improved	9	8.91%
Need for services for parents and vulnerable parents in particular	9	8.91%
N/A	5	4.95%
Need to encourage and facilitate parental involvement and feedback	29	28.71%
Need for cooperation and multidisciplinary practice	2	1.98%
Access to information online (social media)	1	0.99%
Insufficient resources/time and training to implement parental participation	10	9.9%
Evaluation including parents is in place	3	2.97%
Total:	101	100%

8.1 Skills/Training that Would Support Participatory Practice with Parents

Respondents identified several skills and gave suggestions for training that could improve the way their organisation approaches participatory practice with parents. Fifty respondents (25%) provided specific suggestions for training, outlined in Table 18 below.

Table 18: Suggestions for Training to Improve Participatory Practice with Parents

Suggestions for Skills/Training Development	Suggestions for Skills/Training Development
Brief Solution	Active Listening
Parenting and Parental Participation	Drama
Mindfulness	Transactional Analysis
Mediation	Coaching Skills
Conflict Resolution	Group Dynamics
Communication Skills	Advocacy
Self-Care	Safety
Motivational Interviewing	Community Development
Qualitative Research	Support Systems Development
Goal-Setting	Parent Plus Training
Winners Pyramid	Facilitation Skills
Counselling Skills	Family Therapy
Training needed for non-social workers	Training for complex issues required ⁴

In addition to specific skills and training needs, respondents identified other areas that require attention for participatory practice to succeed. For example, 10.42% of responses suggested that there is a need for resources, management and structural support to implement parental participation. Other areas for consideration are outlined in Table 19.

Table 19: Other Suggestions to Improve Participatory Practice with Parents

Skills/Training Needs	Frequency of Response	% of Responses
Training Suggestions (as above)	50	52.08%
Need for resources, management and structural support.	10	10.42%
Need of more research and evidence-based programmes	1	1.04%
Training needed for non-social workers	1	1.04%
Training for complex issues	13	13.54%
N/A	10	10.42%
Trainers need front-line experience	1	1.04%
Need to involve fathers	10	10.42%
Total:	96	100%

⁴ Training is required for complex issues such as: parents in prison, abuse, addiction, violence, parents with low literacy levels, mental health issues, resistant parents, and parents involved against their will.

9



9. Conclusion

This survey forms part of a baseline study of parental participation practice within Tusla and will be followed up by a further survey at a later date.

9.1 Key Messages

This section provides an overview of the key findings based on the results of the analysis.

- Levels of awareness around Tusla's programme of work in the area of parenting support and parental participation are mixed. While there are good levels of awareness of the parental participation toolkit and the Parenting Support Champions (PSC) network, few are aware of the PSC practitioner handbook or the parental participation seed fund; inadequate dissemination and the need for further training were highlighted as issues by the respondents.
- A participatory approach to practice is used by the majority of respondents in the course of their work, with seeking, listening to and supporting parents to express their views being the most prominent forms of participatory practice. However, results did show that participatory practice was not used by all respondents, and some were unsure whether such an approach is taken in the course of their work. Results are similar for organisation respondents.
- A number of challenges were identified to working in participatory ways with parents. The most common challenges identified were: unwillingness or inability to engage; parental resistance towards Tusla social work and child protection; and parents having a range of issues requiring attention, such as addiction, mental health issues, problems with housing and homelessness, and low levels of education.
- There are a number of ways in which parental participation is facilitated in areas of practice. The inclusion of parents' views in advisory committees is the most common practice in the area of service planning, with parental feedback being the dominant form of participatory practice in areas of decision-making and review and evaluation. However, a number of respondents were of the view that no form of participatory practice occurred across these areas.
- Comments are mixed on how participatory practice resulted in tangible change in areas of service planning, reaching decisions, and review and evaluations. For many there were tangible changes in areas of services being tailored to the needs of parents, reaching decisions as a result of improved dialogue, and modified practice in the area of review and evaluation as a result of participatory practice; for others, however, no such changes occurred, and improvements could be made.
- To support the implementation of parental participation in practice, some respondents suggested that parental participation should be fully implemented as policy in Tusla and across all partner organisations, and that focus should be on the role of practitioner to support such work. However, some respondents were of the view that there are insufficient resources and time to implement parental participation practices, and that more skills training is needed, with management and structural support also being necessary to achieve this.



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