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CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE



Institute for
Lifecourse and Society

Children's Participation Work Package Final Report

Key Findings

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Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS)

This is a programme of action being undertaken by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, as part of its National Service Delivery Framework. The programme seeks to embed prevention and early intervention into the culture and operation of Tusla. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway has undertaken an evaluation study focusing on the implementation of and the outcomes from the PPFS Programme. The study's overall research question is:

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

We have adopted a Work Package approach reflecting the key components of the PPFS Programme. The five Work Packages are: Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks, Children's Participation, Parenting Support and Parental Participation, Public Awareness and Commissioning. While stand-alone studies in their own right, each Work Package contributes to the overall assessment of the programme.

What is the Children's Participation Work Package?

The Children's Participation Work Package is one of the five Work Packages of the project. Tusla developed a programme of work to embed children and young people's participation within the agency. This programme of work includes the following: the development and dissemination of a Tusla participation strategy and National Children's Charter; child and youth participation training and a participation toolkit for practitioners; the development of a quality assurance framework for participation using the Investing in Children Membership Award™ and Agenda Days™; a seed fund initiative; three national conferences on child and youth participation; the establishment of foster care fora in conjunction with Empowering People in Care (EPIC) to support children and young people in foster care to feed into policy development and service provision; and the development of a child-friendly complaints service (see Figure 1). Through this programme of work, Tusla is committed to developing its participatory practice at all levels in the organisation.

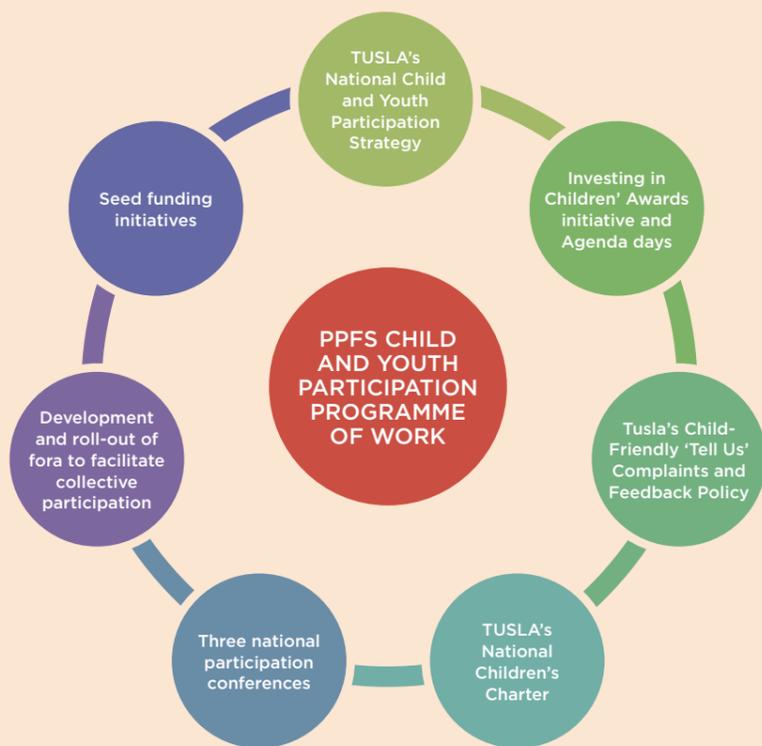


Figure 1: The PPFS Child and Youth Participation Programme of Work

What is the focus of this report?

The aim of this research was to find out to what extent children and young people are participating in decisions made by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and if this has become routine practice.

How was the research conducted?

The study involved a mixed methods baseline and follow up approach, using various research streams to measure progress with embedding participation in Tusla. A baseline report was published in 2016¹.

Eight research streams and data sources across a number of participant perspectives

1. A literature review exploring the how well structures and procedures intended to support children's participation in child welfare, child protection and alternative care services are working
2. Secondary analysis of Tusla's compliance with participation standards published in HIQA Inspection Reports 2013-2015 and 2016-2017
3. National baseline and follow-up participation survey of all Tusla staff
4. Interviews with children and young people about their experience of individual participation in Tusla services
5. Evaluation of fora which were set up to support the collective participation of children in care
6. Evaluation of child and youth participation training - Pre, post and follow-up survey with all participants in the child and youth participation training during the period January -June 2017
7. Documentary analysis of various aspects of Tusla PPFS children's participation programme
8. Interviews with internal and external stakeholders

¹ Kennan, D., C. Forkan and B. Brady (2017). Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making within Tusla: A Baseline Assessment Prior to the Implementation of the Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support. Galway, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

WHAT ARE THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS?

1.

There is strong evidence of children and young people's participation being embedded across Tusla.

2.

The PPFS Child and Youth Participation Programme of Work, has supported this. Especially the participation training for staff and the tool kit which helped support participation of children and young people in line with the Lundy Model of Participation.

3.

Other reasons such as an openness to work in a participatory way and a strong national legal and policy framework supported children's participation to become normal practice in Tusla.

4.

Collective participation is less embedded than individual participation, but has showed large improvement over the course of the PPFS Child and Youth Participation Programme of Work being carried out.



5.

The presence of a trusted adult, whom children and young people could express their views to and would speak on their behalf supports participation.

6.

Obstacles to embedding participation include the time for staff to do participatory work and the idea among some staff that children and young people don't want to participate or they feel that their voice won't be heard.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The PPFS Child and Youth Participation Programme of Work has been a significant driver in embedding children and young people's participation across Tusla.

There are still gaps which need to be addressed.

There needs to be more awareness about the PPFS Child and Youth Participation Programme of Work.

Finally, more long term research should be put in place to track progress and to measure the impact of this programme on children's lives.





About the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) is part of the Institute for Lifecourse and Society at the National University of Ireland, Galway. It was founded in 2007, through support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, Ireland and the Health Service 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.

List of Publications for the Children's Participation Work Package:

Tierney, E., Kennan, D., B. Brady and C. Forkan and Jackson, R. (2018). *Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making within Tusla: Children's Participation Work Package Final Report*. UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

Kennan, D., B. Brady and C. Forkan (2018). "Space, Voice, Audience and Influence: The Lundy Model of Participation (2007) in Child Welfare Practice." *Practice*: 1-14.

Kennan, D., B. Brady and C. Forkan (2018). "Supporting Children's Participation in Decision Making: A Systematic Literature Review Exploring the Effectiveness of Participatory Processes." *The British Journal of Social Work*: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx142>

Kennan, D., C. Forkan and B. Brady (2017). *Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making*

within Tusla: A Baseline Assessment Prior to the Implementation of the Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support. Galway, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

McGreal, B. and Kennan, D. (2017) *The Perspectives of Educational Welfare Officers on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making, prior to the Implementation of the Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support*. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre. NUI Galway.

Kennan, D., Brady, B., and Forkan, C. (2016) *Systematic Literature Review: Exploring the Effectiveness of Structures and Procedures Intended to Support Children's Participation in Child Welfare, Child Protection and Alternative Care Services: Key Findings Accessible Format*. Galway: The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

Further Information

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

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

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