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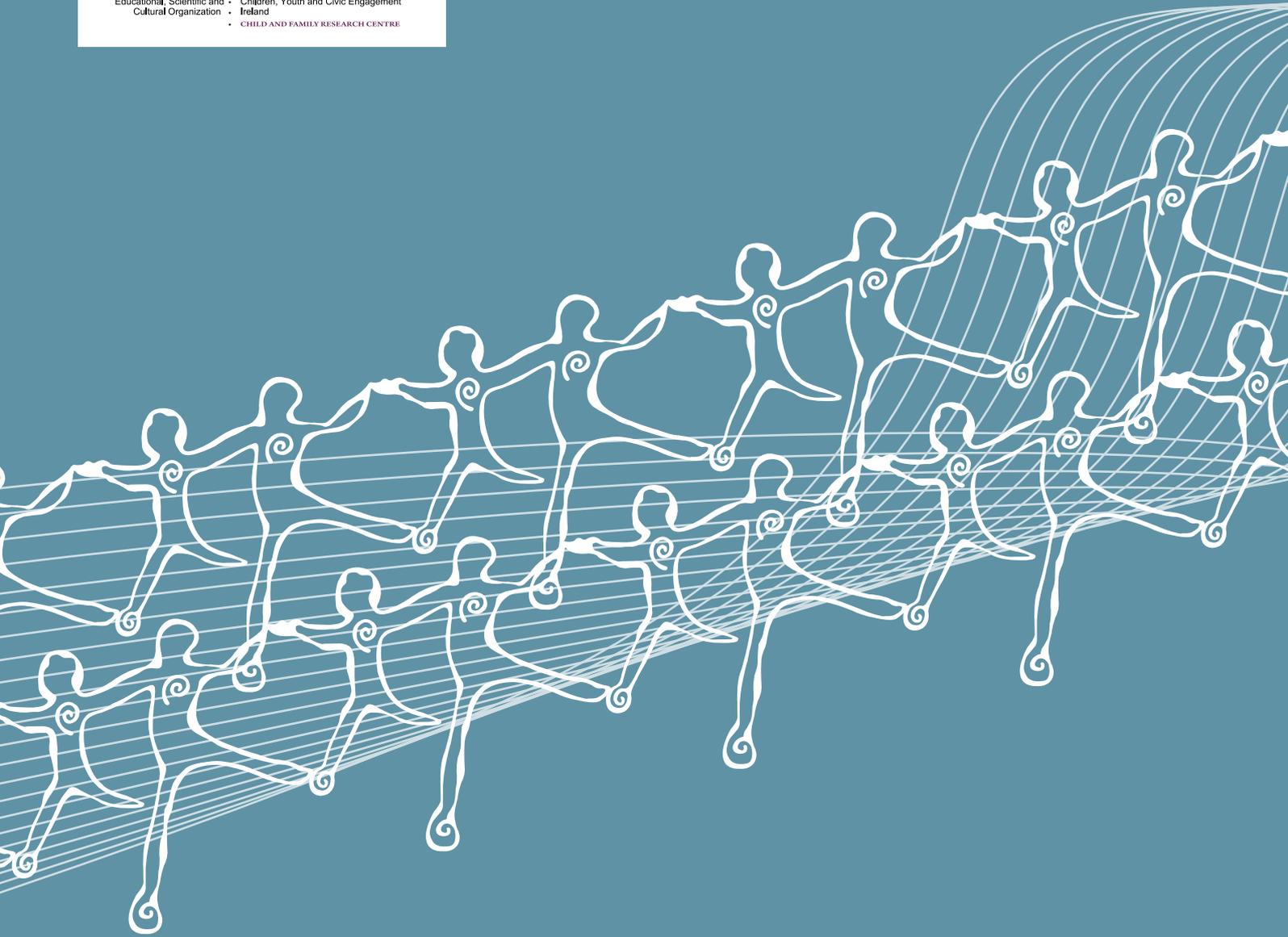


NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh

CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE



Institute for  
Lifecourse and Society



Tusla's Programme for Prevention, Partnership  
and Family Support:

## Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package Final Report

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SEPTEMBER 2018



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# Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support



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

The evaluation study has 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.

**This is the Final Report 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, 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.

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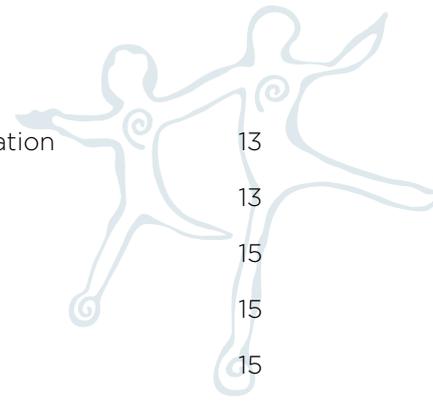
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# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the Overall Study

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

The evaluation study has 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 as contained in the report *Systems Change: Final Evaluation Report on Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme*.

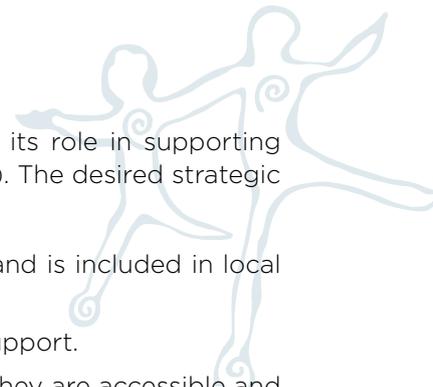
### 1.2 Background to Parenting Support and Parental Participation Programme of Work

Tusla is responsible for supporting and promoting the development, welfare and protection of children as well as the effective functioning of families under the Child and Family Agency Act (2013). The Department of Children and Youth Affairs' 'High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families' (2015) gives a policy platform for Tusla to strengthen and grow Parenting and Family Support as an effective prevention and early intervention measure to promote best possible outcomes for children. Supporting parents and parenting is a key action associated with Objective 1 of Tusla's Corporate Plan (2015–2017), which seeks to improve the quality and focus of the delivery of services for children and families by supporting parents through 'active interventions, cross-sectoral activities, and an integrated service delivery model'.<sup>1</sup> Enhancing parental participation in service delivery and policy formulation is a key action under Objective 3 of the Corporate Plan (2015–2017),<sup>2</sup> as is the development and implementation of a Parenting Support Strategy that seeks to empower children and families through the provision of high-quality services.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tusla (2014: 23).

<sup>2</sup> Tusla (2014: 8).

<sup>3</sup> Tusla (2014: 2).



Tusla's Parenting Support Strategy 'sets out the strategic direction of Tusla in its role in supporting parents to improve outcomes for children and young people' (Gillen et al., 2013:1). The desired strategic outcomes of the Parenting Support Strategy include:

1. Parenting support is integrated into the work of Tusla and partners and is included in local service planning and practice.
2. Tusla and partners are using evidence to inform effective parenting support.
3. A range of parenting supports are available across the lifecycle, and they are accessible and timely.
4. Parenting supports provided are engaging and participatory.

The strategy emphasises the mainstreaming of parenting supports through a continuum process from universal support to targeted and specialist services according to level of need. The engagement and participation of parents in developing such supports is increasingly acknowledged as an important issue for policymakers and service providers, both in recognising parents as having a right to participate in decisions affecting their families (Healy et al., 2011), and in contributing to better outcomes for children (Darlington et al., 2010). Participation is seen as important in voluntary and statutory service contexts (Corby et al., 1996) (see Connolly and Devaney, 2016). The aim of the Parenting Support Strategy is to drive a long-term, sustainable strategic approach to how management, staff, and services funded by Tusla support parenting and families. The goal is to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families in an effective and efficient way.

Tusla's continuing commitment to supporting parents is also evident in its 2018–2020 Corporate Plan, particularly in Objective 1: Integrated Supports and Services, which aims to 'implement integrated Agency-wide approaches to all Tusla supports and services, with clear responsive pathways to achieve better outcomes',<sup>4</sup> and Objective 4: Relationship, Collaboration, and Communication, which aims to develop collaborative relationships, participative practices, and effective communications with all key stakeholders to provide a coordinated approach to the delivery of services.<sup>5</sup> In terms of delivering on these objectives, Tusla's Business Plan (2018) lists a number of actions to be delivered.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.3 Parenting Support and Parental Participation Programme of Work

As part of the implementation of the Parenting Support Strategy, and in support of the mainstreaming of Parenting Support and Parental Participation, Tusla's programme of work in this area consists of five projects (Tusla, 2016). These are not stand-alone projects; they blend with and link to one another and include:

1. 50 Key Messages on Parenting, including Parenting24seven, which is an online resource offering evidence-based key messages
2. Parenting Conferences developed to help disseminate information
3. The Parenting Support Champions Project (PSC), a national initiative to develop system-wide approaches and practices to working with parents
4. The Parental Participation Project, which includes the development of the Parental Participation Tool Kit and seed funding for projects that address parental participation
5. The National Parenting Commissioning Framework, a guide to commissioning parenting support.

<sup>4</sup> Tusla (2018: 23).

<sup>5</sup> Tusla (2018: 23).

<sup>6</sup> Tusla (2018a: 55, 64).

The following table details the links between Tusla’s Parenting Support Strategy’s desired strategic outcomes and the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work.

**Table 1: Links between Strategic Outcomes and Programme of Work**

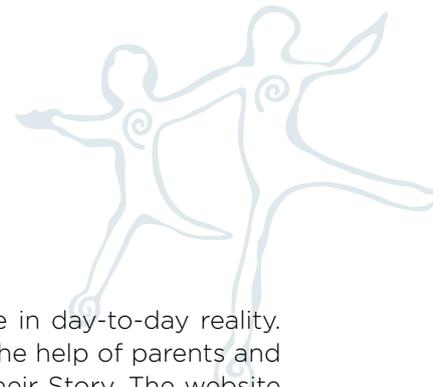
Strategic Outcomes	Programme of Work
Parenting support is integrated into the work of Tusla and partners and is included in local service planning and practice.	The Parenting Support Champions Project (PSC) is a national initiative to develop system-wide approaches and practices to working with parents.
Tusla and partners are using evidence to inform effective parenting support.	UCFRC research on the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work. Parenting Conferences developed to assist with the dissemination of information. 50 Key Messages on Parenting, including Parenting24seven.
A range of parenting supports are available across the lifecycle, and they are accessible and timely.	The National Parenting Commissioning Framework, a guide to commissioning parenting support. 50 Key Messages on Parenting, including Parenting24seven; an online resource offering evidence-based key messages.
The parenting supports provided are engaging and participatory.	The Parental Participation Project, which includes the development of the Parental Participation Toolkit and seed funding for projects that address parental participation. E-learning to enhance parental participation practices is in development.

### 1.3.1 50 Key Messages on Parenting and Parenting24seven

Part of the work of the Parenting Support Strategy is to look at evidence both nationally and internationally about what effective parenting looks like. This includes identifying what key messages are useful for parents to enable them to carry out their role, and exploring what messages are useful for practitioners who are working to support parents. A review of scientific research revealed 50 key messages for supporting parenting. These were divided into 31 messages that relate to parenting across the different ages and stages (lifecourse) of a child’s life. The remaining 19 messages are related to when parents have additional challenges in their lives (different contexts); for example: lone parenting, parenting children with additional needs, parenting when there is a drug or alcohol problem (Tusla, 2015).<sup>7</sup> Parenting24seven is the name of the campaign that promotes the 31 key messages relating to the different ages and stages of childhood (the lifecourse) to parents. It is designed as a support to parents who are looking for information and tips on parenting issues.

Parenting24seven promotes seven general messages that apply to parenting children of all ages, and 24 messages that are specific to the different stages, which include:

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the 50 key messages, see: [www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_50\\_Key\\_Messages\\_for\\_Parenting\\_Support.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_50_Key_Messages_for_Parenting_Support.pdf)



- Preparing for and becoming a parent
- Birth to 5 years
- 6 to 12 years
- 13 to 17 years.

These are messages and practical tips for parents on what parenting looks like in day-to-day reality. There are three videos included on the website that have been developed with the help of parents and young people: Attachment and Bonding; Positive Parenting; and A Teen Tells Their Story. The website also includes links to relevant partner agencies, organisations, and initiatives.

### 1.3.2 Parenting Conferences

A series of conferences on parenting was held annually over the duration of the project, 2015 through to 2018. The first parenting conference, at the end of 2015, was called 'Shaping Our Parenting Support through Participation'. Its aim was to encourage best practice in parental participation, including parents' participation in their own children's care and education, and to promote Parenting24seven, which reflected the workshops held. Keynote speakers included George Hosking OBE and Professor Pat Dolan, the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement. Their respective presentations focused on issues of child abuse and its causes, and relationship-based and reflective practice.

The second conference, in 2017, had as its theme 'Working Together towards Positive Parenting'. It brought together international experts, professionals, and some of Tusla's Parenting Support Champions (PSCs). Keynote speakers included Dr John Sharry, who spoke about using a strengths-based approach to empower parents to be positive parents; Professor Maria Jose Rodrigo, who presented initiatives being utilised in Spain to support positive parenting; and Dr Rosemary Crosse, who spoke about the UCFRC research of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work. PSCs also spoke about their work, and a parents' panel discussed positive parenting and positive parenting supports. Workshops showcased such supports and stemmed from a variety of areas.

The third conference, in 2018, was based on the theme of 'Strengthening Parenting Supports through Learning Together'. The aim of the parenting conferences was to encourage best practice in parenting-related issues, including parental participation, and to promote parenting initiatives, for example the Parenting24seven website, and key messages from research about 'what works' in parenting. The conference opened with a performance from Our Lady of Consolation national school choir and a keynote presentation by Dr Una Lynch, who spoke about 'connecting across generations to grow and flourish'. Dr David Tobis was also a keynote speaker and presented on 'parental participation in New York City's Child Welfare System'. In addition, PSCs spoke about their experiences of the role, and a parents' panel spoke about experiences of learning together. Learning together was the underlying theme of the various workshops available at the event.

### 1.3.3 The Parenting Support Champions Project

The PSC Project is a national initiative to develop system-wide approaches and practices to working with parents. PSCs are existing practitioners working with children and families, employed by Tusla and its partner organisations. There are currently approximately 105 PSCs across Tusla's 17 areas whose role it is to:

- promote the objectives of the Parenting Support Strategy within their area; part of this work is to support parental participation initiatives

- facilitate parents getting involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of services in partnership with related initiatives and networks
- promote the 50 key evidence-based parenting support messages to parents, including Parenting24seven
- participate in relevant planning and networking events in their area that are related to the implementation of supports for parenting, where possible.

The PSC Project plan consists of three phases over the lifetime of the PPFS Programme. It brought PSCs together in 2016 to provide networking opportunities and promote connections with relevant partners. Underpinning such gatherings was the provision of information to help PSCs promote the Parenting Support Strategy. While focusing on promotional work, particularly that of the Parenting24seven website, priority was given to the creation of the Regional Learning Groups (RLGs) in 2017. RLGs were set up by Tusla to specifically support PSCs in their role. Their aims are to:

- create opportunities for learning through peer engagement
- build the capacity of the PSCs to support parenting by recognising best practice in parenting support
- enhance parental participation practices, and develop reflective practice by sharing pertinent information and resources.

Currently in 2018 there is a continued focus, high on the agenda, on the promotion of Parenting24seven with parental participation and on the development of parent learning communities.

Parent learning communities are defined as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do', who in turn 'learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger, 2011: 1). Such communities build capacity, capacity is recognised as a complex blend of motivation, skills, positive learning, infrastructure and support (Stoll et al., 2006). Developing learning communities holds promise for capacity building for sustainable improvement according to Stoll et al., 2006 (p.221). Knowledge is created, shared, organised, revised, and passed on within and among these communities (Wenger, 1998: 5). Moreover, where there is also engagement in reflective practice, these communities also have real potential to spread learning (Ayas and Zeniuk, 2001: 62).

While some areas are using existing parenting communities and forums to progress the PSC Project, the development of specific learning communities is still in progress. Challenges to the implementation of the PSC Project, outlined in section 3.1 of this report, are thought to have impeded advancement in this area.

### 1.3.3.1 Reflective Learning Journals

As part of the PSC Project, PSCs were invited to document their journey as a PSC, with a view to sharing their experiences with other PSCs and stakeholders in the project. Maintaining a reflective learning journal is an optional part of the work of a Parent Support Champion. The learning journal documents the learning journey of the practitioner, supporting them to actively and reflectively engage with the materials they are studying. It supports the practitioner to think critically about their role as a PSC. Sharing this information supports the learning of others involved in the project. The aim is to give others the opportunity to learn from these experiences and practice, in line with the role of the PSC and the aims of the RLGs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Examples of PSCs' experiences and learning from reflective journaling are contained in the appendix one of this report.



### 1.3.4 The Parental Participation Project

Parental participation is a key objective of the Parenting Support Strategy and is an element of all of the projects. The aim of the Parental Participation Project is to encourage parents' participation in their own children's care and education, and to enable their participation in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of service. Tusla has focused on mainstreaming parental participation through the development of seed-funded projects, parental participation training for PSCs, and the development of online training for Tusla staff.<sup>9</sup> Parental Participation means providing opportunities for all parents to have a say in decisions affecting their lives and the lives of their children, including participation in all aspects of their care and education.

### 1.3.5 The National Parenting Commissioning Framework

The National Parenting Commissioning Framework is a guide to commissioning parenting support, which will, it is anticipated, assist Tusla and its partner agencies involved in the provision of parenting supports to commission supports that are based on local need and evidence. Moreover, it promotes cognisance of overlapping investment, ensuring that the whole system of parenting support is coherent and effective. The National Parenting Commissioning Framework Subgroup, which comprises both Tusla and non-Tusla members, is responsible for drafting the framework. The framework has been drafted using available evidence of best practice in this area. It is informed by empirical research conducted with both PPFS Managers and Area Managers. The four stages of the commissioning process are outlined in the document, as are specific areas that require consideration when commissioning parenting support. Such areas include the provision of parenting supports over the lifecourse, the provision of parenting supports according to level of need, and the provision of parenting supports for parents with additional challenges. Information on the principles of parenting support practice and evaluated, effective parenting support programmes are included in the document, as are templates and guides for developing a commissioning plan and conducting evaluations. The framework is in draft form at the time of writing.

## 1.4 Governance Structure

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway is responsible for the research and evaluation of the PPFS Programme, and this work focuses on the process, implementation, and outcomes of the programme over its lifetime. The UCFRC is a collaborative partner with Tusla in respect of the PPFS Programme of work, and collaboration in regard to the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package has taken many forms. The postdoctoral researcher responsible for this Work Package is a member of Tusla's Parenting Working Group, its National Parenting Commissioning Framework Subgroup, and its Parenting Conference Working Group. In addition, formative input has been provided in several areas, such as the PSC practitioner manuals, the commissioning framework, and the Parenting24seven website. In terms of Work Package outputs, Tusla has provided feedback on all reports and has assisted the postdoctoral researcher to ensure quality of outputs. Table 2 below outlines the details of the collaborative partnership between this Work Package and Tusla.

<sup>9</sup> See section 6.1.2 of this report for further details on the online training which is in process.

**Table 2: Research Partnership and Collaboration with Tusla**

Working Groups and Subgroup	Details of Working Groups	Outline of Engagement and Partnership Approach
Parenting Working Group	Mix of Tusla and Partner Organisation personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly Meetings</li> <li>• Progress reports delivered</li> <li>• Input into data collection tools</li> <li>• Feedback on outputs received.</li> </ul>
National Parenting Commissioning Framework Subgroup	Mix of Tusla and External Stakeholder Organisation	<p>Monthly meetings to develop the National Parenting Commissioning Framework – guide to commissioning parenting supports.</p> <p>Formative input for this guide included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated data on families in Ireland, with a specific focus on parents and children as well as trend analysis</li> <li>• Information piece on specific parenting programmes</li> <li>• Collation of evidence from different reports on parenting supports</li> <li>• Information piece on parenting supports across the continuum of care</li> <li>• Piece on intensive parenting supports at the highest level of need</li> <li>• Review of survey questions for Tusla Area Managers’ input into the commissioning framework</li> <li>• Collation of findings from Tusla Area Manager survey</li> <li>• Review of the draft frameworks.</li> </ul>
Parenting Conference Working Group	Mix of Tusla and Partner Organisation and External Stakeholder Organisation personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly meetings to plan parenting conferences</li> <li>• Delivery of parenting conferences</li> <li>• Keynote speaker 2017.</li> </ul>

## 1.5 Focus of the Report

At the time of writing, some elements of both the PSC project and the parental participation project are still in progress, the completion date for data collection (Q1 2018) has limited our capacity to include such elements within the scope of assessment. This has had an impact on the scale of research and evaluation activities undertaken, therefore it is notable that the research activities for this Work Package have been largely qualitative and formative in nature.

Particular activities where the Research Team has gathered empirical data for and can make a degree of assessment include:

- The PSC project in terms of; ascertaining views on the value of RLGs in shared learning and views on the overall process, implementation and outcomes of the project to date.
- The parental participation project in terms of; the usefulness, influence and sustainability of seed funding in developing parental participation practice. The extent to which parental participation is currently embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla is also assessed.

- Perceptions of the programme of work at an overall level from various stakeholders involved in the child and family services.



## 1.6 Layout of the Report

This report documents the findings of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package and contributes to addressing the overarching research question for this Work Package, namely to determine:

***Is there a strategic approach to parenting in place within Tusla?  
Is participation by parents embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla?***

Section 2 of this report outlines the methodological approach used in this study, specifically how the data was collected and analysed. It also considers ethical matters and the limitations of the methodological approach. Section 3 presents a collated account of the findings from the empirical data, presented under headings of the PSC Project, the Parental Participation Project, and the overall programme of work. Section 4 discusses the findings of the research across themes of; process and implementation, impact and outcomes, and embeddedness and sustainability. Section 5 offers some conclusions and focuses on answering the overarching research question for this Work Package. Based on the research findings, Section 6 provides several recommendations for policy in Tusla, for Tusla as an organisation, and for practice. Section 7 contains some final thoughts on the importance of supporting parents and the capacity of this programme of work to have positive impacts on families should it receive ongoing support at an organisational level.

# 2

## Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

The research methodology applied in this study was a mixed-method approach. As such, both qualitative and quantitative data collection processes were developed to address the overall aims and objectives of this study.

As previously stated, Tusla's Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work encompasses five streams. This section details the methodology for the main streams for which empirical data was collected, namely the Parenting Support Champions Project and Parental Participation.

### 2.2 Aims and Objectives

In consideration of the overarching research question (see Section 1.4), the aims and objectives of this Work Package are to:

1. explore the implementation of Tusla's programme of work in the area of parenting support
2. determine the impact of Tusla's programme of work in the area of parenting support on practice;
3. explore the implementation of Tusla's programme of work in the area of parental participation
4. determine the impact of Tusla's programme of work in the area of parental participation on practice.

Preceding reports on the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package are available on the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre's Development and Mainstreaming web page.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.3 Data Collection

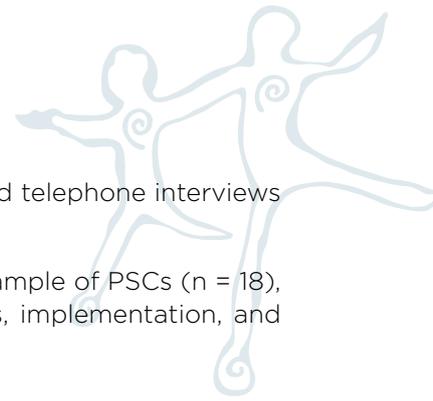
This section details the data collection methods for the streams for which data collection was carried out. Data collection details for both the PSC Project and the parental participation element of the Work Package are outlined.

#### 2.3.1 The Parenting Support Champions Project

In order to assess whether the aims of the PSC Project were met, a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used.

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<sup>10</sup> See: [www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/cfrc/mainstream/theworkpackageapproach/parentingsupportparentalparticipation/](http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/cfrc/mainstream/theworkpackageapproach/parentingsupportparentalparticipation/).



### 2.3.1.1 Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data collection for the PSC Project consisted of both face-to-face and telephone interviews with:

- PPFS Managers (n = 17) and a geographical representative random sample of PSCs (n = 18), 20% of the PSC population, to ascertain their views on the process, implementation, and outcomes of the project.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3.1.2 Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data collection methods for this project consisted of:

- two questionnaires at different points in time (May 2017 and December 2017) to all PSCs attending Regional Learning Groups (RLGs) to explore views on the value of RLGs in shared learning.<sup>12</sup>
- two more questionnaires at different points in time (December 2016 and February 2018), distributed to all PSCs nationwide to ascertain their views on process, implementation, and outcomes of the project generally.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 3: Parenting Support Champions Project Methods**

Methodology	Number of Respondents		Roles
<b>RLGs</b>		101	Mix of PPFS Managers, Regional Implementation Managers, and PSCs; CYPSC, CFSN, Meitheal Coordinators
Questionnaire One	62	total	
Questionnaire Two	39	respondents	
<b>Overall Project Questionnaires</b>		86	Mix of PSCs, PPFS Managers, CFSN, Meitheal Coordinators
Questionnaire One	29	total	
Questionnaire Two	57	respondents	
<b>Qualitative Interviews</b>		35	PSCs and PPFS Managers
20% of Regional PSC Population	18	total	
PPFS Managers	17	respondents	

### 2.3.2 Parental Participation

To assess whether the aims of the Parental Participation Project (outlined in section 1.3.4) have been met, this Work Package evaluated Tusla's seed-funded projects which were funded and developed by the agency to meet these aims. In addition, part of the remit of this Work Package is to determine if participation by parents is embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla as per the overarching research question. The methodological approach for these two elements, which primarily make up the parental participation programme of work, consisted of two strands: a qualitative strand exploring the parental participation seed-funded projects, and a quantitative strand examining the extent to which parental participation is currently embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla.

<sup>11</sup> For further detail see sections 1.1-1.4 of the methodology appendices developed to accompany this report, available online on the Development and Mainstreaming page of the UCFRC website.

<sup>12</sup> See methodology appendices, sections 1.9-1.12 for further detail.

<sup>13</sup> See methodology appendices, sections 1.5-1.8 for further detail.

### 2.3.2.1 Qualitative Data Collection

In relation to the parental participation seed-funded projects, Tusla allocated an overall budget of €340,000 to fund local projects that are focused on parental participation. In 2016 Tusla recorded 28 parental participation initiatives across 17 areas, amounting to 36 Parental Participation projects in total. Projects varied in duration, size, and amount of funding allocated, and had staggered start dates and differing progression rates.

Both face-to-face and telephone interviews were carried out with managers and practitioners who had secured seed funding for parental participation projects. Projects were selected on the basis of themes outlined in the Tusla application process and included:

- enhancing parenting skills to support parents' participation in their children's care and education
- parental participation in the planning of services
- parental participation in the delivery and evaluation of services
- parental participation when there are additional challenges (for example, family conflicts, lone parenting, teen parenting, parenting when there is a mental health issue)
- participation for others in a caring role (for example, grandparents, foster carers, childminders).

Approved projects had to address at least one of the five parental participation themes, but many addressed a number of the themes listed above. Table 4 below provides an overview of the type of work such projects were engaged in.

**Table 4: Descriptions of Seed Funded Projects**

Descriptions of Seed Funded Projects Nationwide	
Development of a Parenting Support Strategy which aims to engage parents and agencies to enhance parenting capacity in the area.	Build relationships with parents who have experienced Tusla services and up skilling staff around parental participation.
Facilitate parents to express, discuss and address issues of concern to the parents and their families.	Develop discussion forums for parents to air and identify issues that affect their lives.
Development of a step-by-step guide by parents for parents on the transition to secondary school.	Identify areas where fathers feel they need support and guidance and to support them with any issues in their parenting of their children.
Seeking the views of parents regarding service needs.	Delivering a specific programme with a group of parents that are not currently engaged.
Run a series of workshops for service users with a focus on parenting	Link children of attending parents to Rainbows support programme so all family members can avail of support.
One workshop/outing per month over a 10 month period. Focusing on linking new families with children under 5 years into their local community.	PSCs to undertake training and research around cyber safety before consulting with parents to seek their ideas on how best to approach this subject.
Home Visiting Programme for parents of children in Early Years settings and Junior Infant Classes.	To provide on-going support to parents who have completed the Strengthening Families Programme.



Descriptions of Seed Funded Projects Nationwide	
The provision of eight two hour talks to parents in order to generate awareness of Meitheal and the manner in which Meitheal can support parents and improve outcomes for children.	Increase awareness of parents of services in the area and enable increased access to relevant services.
Development of a technical guide for working with 'Seldom Heard' parents and families.	Community Hub for parents of children with ASD.
Parents/Others in a caring role involved in planning particular services and gain information to promote a positive family environment.	Initiative to support children and parents' language, literacy and learning in a fun environment.
Design of Family Support activity rooms.	What Parents Want - Needs Analysis.
Parents Support Plan. Voice of parents and guardians to be supported to voice the needs of their children and empowered through development of and access to information.	Facilitate the views of parents to influence and promote local development and service provision, based on need.
Parenting Hub to support, empower and give a voice to all parents including seldom heard parents.	Research to gather and analyse parents' experiences of parental support, their needs, what works and how accessible services are for them.
Informed planning for parenting support - provide opportunities for parents, to influence planning, delivery and evaluation of services and supports designed to meet their needs.	An advocacy service for parents of children who are in alternative care as well as for parents who are liaising with Child Protection services.
Establishment of a social media mechanism to gather parental feedback to review and develop their services for young people and their families.	The development of a Parental Participation Hub, to respond to local need.
An initiative to enhance parenting skills, achieved by the sharing of universal parenting messages and knowledge to parents with extra support offered to those in need.	To provide funding towards a coordinator for an existing Parenting Hub focused on Parenting, Parenting Support and Education.
To support the development of an App to assist parents to manage what services they're engaged with and what those services provide for each of their children.	The provision of universal information and advice to parents to enhance their parenting skills and to support their level of participation in their children's care and education.
To engage with parents of children in care to promote partnership in practice in order to support parents' participation in their child/ children's care and education.	To develop a coordinated strategy on parenting support across area in collaboration with parents and agencies/organisations.

Each seed-funded project was grouped according to the themes it addressed, and one project per theme was randomly selected from the lists generated. Data collection consisted of 12 semi-structured qualitative interviews representing six seed-funded projects across the five themes.<sup>14</sup> Six managers and six project staff were interviewed for the study; there were 11 telephone interviews and one face-to-face

<sup>14</sup> One Parental Participation seed fund was divided between two projects, hence six projects across five themes.

interview. The interviews specifically explored respondents' views on the usefulness of the seed funding in developing parental participation practice in their locality, its influence and sustainability going forward rather than the projects themselves, their implementation or outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3.2.2 Quantitative Data Collection

In order to examine the extent to which parental participation is currently embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla, this study conducted two surveys (baseline and follow-up) on parental participation practices in Tusla and its partner organisations.<sup>16</sup>

The surveys aimed to give a descriptive overview of changes in levels of awareness and understanding of the extent to which parental participation is currently embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla, and to learn if there were changes in the competencies of Tusla staff and Tusla-funded staff who are working with parents to engage in participatory practices. Both were online, nationwide surveys, with representation from all regions.

**Table 5: Parental Participation Project Methods**

Methodology	Number of Respondents	Roles
<b>Seed-Funded Projects</b>		
Management interviews	6	Managers
Project worker interviews	6	Project workers
<b>Parental Participation Surveys</b>		
Baseline	200	Mix of Tusla staff and partner organisation staff
Follow-up	250	

### 2.3.3 Common Data Collection – Parenting Support and Parental Participation

As referred to in the *Systems Change: Final Evaluation Report on Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme*, the evaluation of Tusla's DMP: PPFS Programme at an overall level involved the undertaking of semi-structured qualitative interviews with key stakeholders involved in child protection and welfare and family support services in Ireland. The qualitative interviews sought to explore the overall implementation, sustainability and outcomes of the PPFS Programme within the Child Protection and Welfare System. The interview schedule contained questions that related to each of the Work Package areas which include: Meitheal and the Child and Family Support Networks, Children's Participation, Parenting Support and Parental Participation (which relates to this report), Public Awareness, Commissioning and Systems Change. Due to the scope of this research study and the number of respondents required to be interviewed across all Work Package areas, a common data collection process was developed by the UCFRC. This 'Common Data Collection' process was adopted to reduce the time burden on interview participants and enhance efficiency in the data collection process.

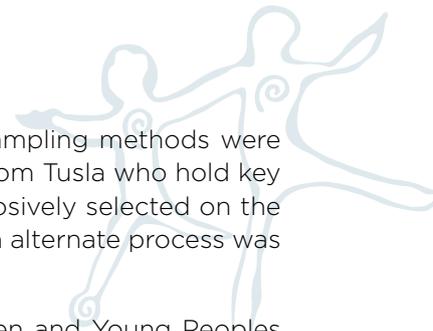
#### 2.3.3.1 Sample and Recruitment of Respondents

In sampling participants, the research team compiled a comprehensive list of relevant Tusla and non-Tusla personnel. The inclusion/exclusion of participants in this study was determined by their:

- In-depth knowledge of Tusla in terms of structures and operations;
- Knowledge of the PPFS Programme and its components;
- Willingness to participate in an interview.

<sup>15</sup> See methodology appendices, [online] sections 2.1 and 2.2 for further detail.

<sup>16</sup> See methodology appendices, [online] sections 2.3 and 2.4 for further detail. See also section 2.5 of the methodology appendices [online] for a list of partner organisations. See also Connolly, Devaney, and Crosse (2017) for further details.



In selecting research participants for this study, both purposive and random sampling methods were used. A purposive sampling method was used for the selection of participants from Tusla who hold key roles relevant to the PPFs Programme. Participants external to Tusla were purposively selected on the basis of their senior roles and level of engagement with the PPFs Programme. An alternate process was also facilitated in the event of selected interview participants being unavailable.

Due to the numbers in the key positions of Principal Social Worker and Children and Young Peoples Services Committees, and in avoiding any potential bias, we adopted a stratified random sampling approach to select participants from these areas. Additionally, this process also ensured geographical representation in the selection process. The RAND function on Microsoft Excel was used for this purpose.

Once the list of interview participants was reviewed and finalised by both the research team and Tusla personnel directly involved in the PPFs Programme, 11 researchers from the UCFRC were assigned a list of respondents to be interviewed. Each interview participant received a standardised invitation email to participate in the study. In the emails respondents were provided with a Participant Information Sheet, Participant Consent Form and the list of interview questions to be asked.<sup>17</sup> Research participants were given a two week period to consider and consent to the interview request and select a suitable date and time for the interview to take place. This timeframe was in line with ethical research practice and allowed participants the opportunity to consider the interview and discuss their participation with their employers/colleagues.

In total, 162 interview requests were issued to personnel in Tusla, external service providers and stakeholders. A response rate of 79% was generated from the sample and a total of 124 interviews were conducted, involving 128 participants, during the period September 2017 to February 2018.<sup>18</sup> Both face-to-face (n=13) and telephone interviews (n=111) were undertaken in this study. As Table 6 outlines, Tusla Participants accounted for 75% of the total sample interviewed, while 25% were non-Tusla participants.

**Table 6: Tusla and Non-Tusla Participants**

<b>Tusla Participants (75% of total sample interviewed)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National Office/ Tusla Senior Management (n=18)</li><li>• Tusla Operational Management (n=56)</li><li>• Tusla key Functionalist Specialists<sup>19</sup> (n=11)</li><li>• Tusla Work Package Specific Working Group Members (n=11)</li></ul>
<b>Non-Tusla Participants (25% of total sample interviewed)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Government Departments (n=7)</li><li>• Community and Voluntary Sector (n=10)</li><li>• Other External Stakeholder Organisations (n=15)</li></ul>

Interview recordings were distributed to transcribers with a track-record of working with the UCFRC and were subject to a standard confidentiality agreement regarding the management and disclosure of the data. Upon receipt, the transcripts were divided into sections relevant to each of the Work Packages while in Word document format. They were then distributed for analysis to each Work Package lead researcher. At this point, they were imported into the computer assisted software programme NVivo using already created individual files for each of the individual Work Packages. To ensure quality and

<sup>17</sup> See methodology appendices, appendix 3 for further details on the participant information sheet, consent forms and interview schedule.

<sup>18</sup> There were slightly more interview participants than interviews, four interviews were joint interviews. So 124 interviews = 128 participants.

<sup>19</sup> Key functional specialists are those with responsibility for key functional areas in Tusla. Functional areas pertinent to this Work Package include Finance, Human Resources, Communications, national data information and Workforce Learning and Development.

rigour in the data analysis process, each Work Package NVivo file also contained five standardised nodes pertaining to the other Work Packages in the study. This was to ensure that information relevant to all Work Packages was captured and recorded in the data analysis process.

From the 124 interviews which were undertaken as part of the Common Data Collection, 120 participants answered questions pertaining to the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package. The interview questions for this work package centred on the following areas: perception of the impact or influence of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work on the service delivery system in Tusla, perceptions on the embedment of this programme of work across the service delivery system, and sustainability moving forward.

### 2.3.4 Parenting24seven and Parenting Conferences

The data for both the Parenting24seven website and the parenting conferences was obtained directly from Tusla. Tusla's Communications department produced two internal reports detailing the number of visits to the Parenting24seven website at two points in time between 2015 and 2018, the contents of which was used in the findings of this report. With regard to the data from the parenting conferences, Tusla's Workforce Learning and Development (WLD)<sup>20</sup> department developed and collated evidence from standardised evaluation forms completed at Tusla's National Parenting Conferences 2015, 2017, and 2018. It is this data that forms the basis for the findings for this element of the project.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

This section details the methods of data analysis used for the qualitative interviews, surveys, and questionnaires used in the data collection throughout the lifetime of the Work Package.

### 2.4.1 Qualitative Interviews

All interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, a rigorous approach to data analysis. The researcher systematically extracts, analyses, and interprets themes and subthemes from their interview materials, which are subsequently examined in the context of the research question and the aims and objectives of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As such, the themes that are derived can be defined as emergent concepts that frame or capture the various types of discourses or narratives that appear frequently in the transcripts. Including and excluding particular themes depends on the research question and the prevalence that interviewees attribute to particular concepts and policy practices that are evident in the transcripts.

The computer-assisted software programme NVivo was used to help manage and code the primary data collected. In addition, it was used to derive the core themes from the data findings, which are pertinent to the overall research question and the aims and objectives of this study.

### 2.4.2 Quantitative Data

Analysis of questionnaires used in this Work Package mainly focused on frequency distributions and response patterns among sub-groups, e.g. Tusla and non-Tusla respondents. Survey Monkey and Excel were the main tools used. Additionally, as the questionnaires contained open-ended questions, qualitative data analysis was also required. This involved establishing response categories in the open-ended questions and some quantification of these.

<sup>20</sup> WLD has responsibility for training staff in Tusla.



## 2.5 Ethics

The research was guided by key ethical requirements of doing no harm and gaining informed, voluntary consent for participation in the research. Participants indicated their willingness to participate when they filled in the questionnaire and provided their consent for an interview. All those who took part in individual interviews were asked for and gave their consent. Anonymity was guaranteed for all participants, and therefore names and identifiable personal details throughout the report have been changed. Ethical approval for this research was granted by both the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee and the Tusla Research Ethics Review Group.

## 2.6 Limitations

While this research has been thorough in its aims and its achievements, there were certain methodological limitations to the study. Limitations pertain specifically to one part of the PSC research as well as the parental participation surveys conducted for this study.

In relation to the PSC Project: Process, Implementation and Outcomes study, of the 105 PSCs nationwide, 57 responded to the questionnaire; while this represents a good response rate of 53.2%, the sample size means that almost half of PSCs' views and opinions are not included in the findings of this element of the research.<sup>21</sup>

The profile of the respondents in the parental participation follow-up survey differs from that of the baseline study. In both cases Tusla respondents were contacted via the Tusla Newscast,<sup>22</sup> which contained a link to the online survey, and partner organisation respondents were contacted via email addresses publicly available on their websites. While such an approach had the desired effect of eliciting a large sample size that is geographically wide-ranging, it also resulted in differing respondent numbers and profiles at baseline and follow-up. Consequently, the research is unable to provide definitive comparisons between the two surveys conducted. However, based on the data gathered at baseline and follow-up, the research does provide an overview of changes over time, with the caveat that the overview is for illustrative purposes only and is therefore tentative in its conclusions.

<sup>21</sup> A point to note is that the majority of PSCs have participated in the research generally, evidenced in the other reports produced for this project. Namely: two reports on the PSC RLGs and two PSC questionnaire reports.

<sup>22</sup> The Tusla Newscast is an internal news communication aimed at Tusla staff.

# 3

## Findings

This section firstly details some findings from Tusla, which conducted research and analysis on Parenting24seven website views and on attendees' experiences of the parenting conferences. Secondly, it presents the findings from the empirical research undertaken for this Work Package. Empirical research was undertaken for both the Parenting Support Champions Project and the Parental Participation Project.

### 3.1 Parenting24seven

As outlined in section 1.2.1, Parenting24seven is the name of the campaign and the website that promotes 50 key messages relating to parenting. These are messages and practical tips for parents on what parenting looks like in day-to-day reality. There are three videos included on the website that have been developed with the help of parents and young people: Attachment and Bonding; Positive Parenting; and A Teen Tells Their Story. The website also includes links to relevant partner agencies, organisations, and initiatives.

Tusla's Communications department analysed the number of visits to the Parenting24seven website from August 2015 to January 2016 and from August 2017 to January 2018. The results show that there were 4,182 and 4,107 page views, respectively. Of the three main access pathways to Parenting24seven,<sup>23</sup> access occurred most often via the Family Support section on the Tusla website during both periods, with a total of 31.2% and 48.2% of the visits, respectively.

Of the three videos, the Attachment and Bonding video received more views at both points in time, and the promotional video for Parenting24seven had received almost 3,000 views at the time of analysis.

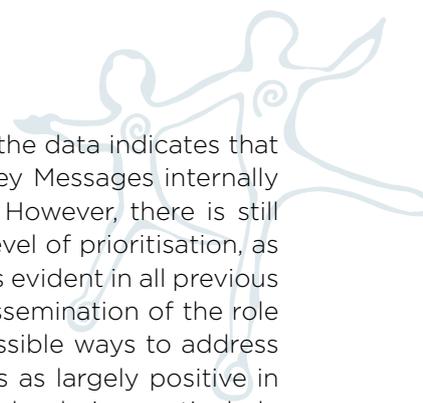
### 3.2 Parenting Conferences

Tusla held three parenting conferences annually throughout the Parenting Support and Parental Participation project, 2015 through to 2018. Data collected and collated by Workforce Learning and Development (WLD) from the standardised evaluation forms completed at Tusla's National Parenting Conferences 2015, 2017, and 2018 is generally very positive. There is a clear indication that the learning objectives of the conferences were met and that the overall organisation of the conferences was excellent. In addition, the data indicates that participants had a sense of increased positivity and an awareness of the importance of empowering parents and working in an integrated manner to promote positive parenting. Participants found that the conferences added to their learning and that the application of learning to practice was clear. They maintained that the conferences were important and valuable to their work.

### 3.3 Findings from the Parenting Support Champions Project

This section provides an overview of the key findings from the PSC Project. The information presented in this section stems from a collation of all empirical research from the PSC Project, which includes four reports pertaining to the PSC Project (Crosse and Devaney, 2017a; 2017b; forthcoming a; forthcoming b).

<sup>23</sup> Namely: Directly by entering with URL [www.parenting24seven.ie](http://www.parenting24seven.ie) or [www.tusla.ie/parenting24seven](http://www.tusla.ie/parenting24seven), via the 'Call to Action' on the Tusla website home screen, and via the Family Support section on the Tusla website.



The role of the PSC is conceived in a number of ways. The prominent view from the data indicates that the role of the PSC is to disseminate Tusla's Parenting Support Strategy's 50 Key Messages internally in PSCs' own organisations and externally to other organisations and parents. However, there is still ambiguity around the role of the PSC in terms of expectations for the role and level of prioritisation, as well as definite outcomes for the project, and expected impacts. Such ambiguity is evident in all previous reports published on the project. A national strategy around the programme, dissemination of the role to others, definitive outcomes, and an awareness campaign are identified as possible ways to address the ambiguity. Aside from this issue, PSC respondents identify their experiences as largely positive in all reports, with learning from peers, network meetings, and training all highlighted as being particularly positive. Indeed, there is a widespread view that support for parenting can be enhanced by the PSC Project.

Several sources of support were identified by PSCs as assisting in the development and implementation of the project: personnel support such as that received from other PSCs, local networks, Tusla's National Office, and different levels of Tusla management. Facilitation by some managers was identified as a positive source of support in terms of time allowed to attend networks and training, and in some cases flexibility and support to carry out the role. Conversely, a lack of management support was cited by others as a barrier to the development and implementation of the project, with the project not seen as a priority for PPFS. In addition, a lack of recognition of and engagement with the project by all levels of Tusla management was highlighted by some PSC respondents. Such views were to some extent validated by the responses of some of the PPFS Managers, who indicated that they have not engaged with the project, although it is important to note that other PPFS Managers view the project as being integral to their remit.

In addition to sources of personnel support, PSCs also identified the RLGs and training as significant sources of learning and peer support which have helped them develop their role. In fact, both are cited as improving the capacity of PSCs to fulfil their role. Resources in terms of materials received were also identified in all reports as being extremely useful to the development of the PSC role. There is a perceived need to increase the supply of such materials. PSCs identified a number of other resources needed to carry out the role effectively such as information on relevant organisations that work with parents, including lists of supports available. In relation to training, there is a view that the training received by PSCs should be made available to all practitioners who work with children and families, as should training manuals, if requested, and funding to help develop projects locally. The need for dedicated time for the role was overwhelmingly the most cited support required in all reports pertaining to the project; this was acknowledged and seen as an imperative by some PPFS Managers. Coordination was also identified in all reports as requiring focus, with the need for a lead coordinator at national level feeding into dedicated parenting support coordinators at regional and local levels. It is interesting to note that the couple of areas that do have a dedicated parenting support coordinator seem to have progressed well in the area of parenting support generally and the PSC Project in particular.

Reflecting the supports required, time, resources, and coordination were highlighted as challenges to the implementation of the project. All are identified in all reports pertaining to the project. Engagement management and other services, organisations, and the statutory sector was identified by several respondents as an additional challenge; linked to this is a perceived lack of leadership for the project. All of these are seen as impediments to the implementation of the project. Poor awareness is seen as contributing to the lack of engagement. Linked to poor awareness is the issue of ambiguity; ambiguities about the role of the PSC, particularly in terms of expectations and level of prioritisation, have been identified in all reports. Lack of consistency nationwide, in terms of areas working in different ways and at different stages, is thought to reflect the differing levels of support in each area. Reflecting issues of consistency, a lack of strategic planning in terms of a national plan, an annual work plan, and plans at local level, as well as a lack of clarity on the direction of the project, are all identified as problematic. Strategic planning was also identified as an issue in the PSC questionnaire report.

While the project is still in its infancy, there is a perception that participation has had positive impacts on the practice of PSCs, on the practice of their colleagues, and on parents in a number of cases. Findings from RLG reports and the follow-up questionnaire report show that participation in the project has added to the learning of the PSCs and has created more awareness about parenting support and parental participation generally. It has supported PSCs to develop their role, increased their confidence, and generated ideas to improve practice in areas of collaboration, evaluation, planning, and dissemination, for example. Moreover, findings show that participation in the project has enhanced the practice of the PSCs' colleagues, mainly through the sharing and use of information, leading to increases in confidence; such findings are highlighted in all reports on the project. As well as having an impact on the practice of PSCs and their colleagues, the findings show that the project was perceived by practitioners to have had an impact on parents in a variety of ways: parents are more informed and have more opportunities to participate, resulting in increased self-esteem, according to some respondents. PPFS Managers' views also indicate that the project has had positive impacts, particularly on the practice of the PSCs, with knowledge gained being implemented in practice and parenting issues being highlighted more at local level.

### 3.4 Findings from the Parental Participation Project

This section provides an overview of the key findings from the parental participation element of the project. The information presented in this section stems from all empirical research from the parental participation stream, which includes three reports pertaining to the parental participation project (Crosse, Devaney, and Connolly, 2017; Crosse and Devaney, forthcoming c; forthcoming d).

#### 3.4.1 Parental Participation Surveys

Findings from the parental participation baseline<sup>24</sup> and follow-up<sup>25</sup> surveys are outlined in this section. Given the differences in the respondent population at baseline and follow-up in terms of numbers and roles, it is important to note that the findings are tentative.

Tentative comparisons between the baseline data obtained in December 2016 and the follow-up data obtained in March 2018 suggest that levels of awareness about Tusla's programme of work in the area of parenting support and parental participation have increased. Exploration of levels of awareness of the different elements of Tusla's programme of work in parenting support and parental participation at baseline and follow-up suggests that awareness has increased across all elements; consequently, the number of respondents who are unaware of the different elements of the programme of work in this area has decreased. However, the findings also suggest that such awareness about Tusla's programme of work in this area is not universal, with comments indicating that respondents have full awareness, awareness of some elements but not all, or limited knowledge. The need for more dissemination was identified at both baseline (23.07%) and follow-up (6.25%).

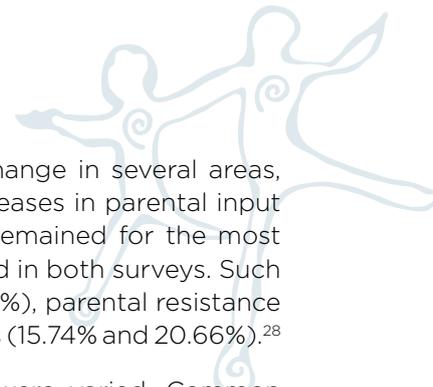
Moreover, indications are that opportunities for parental participation are mixed and organisation-dependent. In organisations that do use participatory practices, this approach seems to be expanding, evident in additional examples given in the follow-up survey in areas of service planning, reaching decisions, and review and evaluation of services. Signs of Safety (SOS)<sup>26</sup> and Meitheal were cited most often as the methods through which expansion in participatory practice have been accomplished, with SOS contributing to the development of parental participation practice in cases of higher level of need, in the area of Child Protection.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> 200 respondents answered the baseline survey.

<sup>25</sup> 250 respondents answered the follow-up survey.

<sup>26</sup> SOS is a national approach to child protection practice which is grounded in partnership and collaboration.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that SOS is not part of the remit of the PPFS Programme of work and therefore any analysis of such is beyond the scope of this study.



Such expansion in participatory practice seems to have resulted in tangible change in several areas, such as: services being tailored to the needs of clients, better listening, and increases in parental input into reviews and evaluations of services. Challenges to participatory practice remained for the most part unchanged between baseline and follow-up, with similar challenges identified in both surveys. Such challenges include parental unwillingness or inability to engage (31.48% and 9.09%), parental resistance towards Tusla/social work/child protection (20.37% and 18.18%), and parental issues (15.74% and 20.66%).<sup>28</sup>

Suggestions on how best to support participatory practice in organisations were varied. Common suggestions at both baseline and follow-up included, but are not limited to, the need for the mandatory roll-out of parental participation practice and policy in Tusla and across its partner organisations (32.67% and 5.6%), and the need for resources to effectively implement parental participation practice (9.9% and 10%). There were similar training and skill-development needs to support participatory practices in both surveys, although respondents identified additional needs in the follow-up survey. A prominent suggestion was that training was required in the area of parental participation, and that such training should replicate the child and youth participation training already rolled out. In addition, there was the view that parental participation practice should form part of monthly supervision.

### 3.4.2 Parental Participation Seed-Funded Projects

This section details the findings from the research on the parental participation seed-funded projects, which focused on capturing the participants' knowledge and expertise regarding parental participation, their views on the usefulness of the seed funding in developing parental participation practice in their locality, and their views on the challenges to engaging parents, the influence of the projects to date, and their sustainability into the future.

The findings of this study show that the parental participation seed-fund grants have led to the development of several worthwhile projects nationwide. The projects are varied, based on non-directional funding and on local needs. These projects, even at this early stage, have resulted in a number of positive impacts on parents, according to the respondents of the study. Respondents identified increases in parental confidence and in parental willingness to engage with services, leading to increases in social inclusion. In addition, respondents indicated possible reductions in the escalation of problems because of participation in seed-funded projects, and for many, the impacts on parents will have positive effects on children, in both the immediate and longer term.

Positive impacts are also being seen in practice areas, with improvements in interactions with parents in terms of including parents more in planning and decision-making and enhancing understanding of parenting in different cultures. Some respondents indicated that managing interagency work had improved because of being involved in the projects, with a realisation that collaborative working can have bigger benefits for both parents and practitioners.

While all respondents believe in and aspire to achieving best practice in participation, they identified a number of challenges to engaging parents with services. Services are constrained by the number of parents they can engage with in some localities, due to a lack of resources; issues of money, time, facilities, childcare, and transport were all seen as preventing engagement. In some instances, parents' engagement is hindered by difficult relationships between parents in group settings and between services in the community in terms of roles and responsibilities. Services being associated with the Tusla brand resulted in challenges in engaging parents, due to negative perceptions that parents may have about the organisation, some of whom have had negative experiences with Tusla. For those parents and for others, issues of poverty, addiction, and intellectual disability present real challenges to engagement

<sup>28</sup> 250 respondents answered the follow-up survey.

at a local level. However, the findings show that it is the relationships that practitioners have developed in the local community which seem to be the best way of negating some of the identified challenges across all groups of parents.

As well as challenges in engaging parents, this research found that there are challenges to the sustainability of the seed-funded projects. Resources were identified as the biggest challenge to sustainability, particularly in terms of funding, staffing levels, time, and facilities, all of which were highlighted as the biggest barriers to sustainability at this stage. Despite such challenges, respondents identified enablers that may assist with sustainability. Giving ownership of funding to local services and groups, and leadership at management level were highlighted as possible enablers in this regard. Findings from this study show that giving ownership of funding to groups in conjunction with parents fosters engagement in and support of such projects, thereby increasing the chances of sustainability.

Overall, the Parental Participation seed funds were seen as hugely positive and beneficial for parents, children, practitioners, and communities in general. However, it is going to take time for the ethos of parental participation to become embedded in practice.

### 3.5 Findings from the Common Data Collection

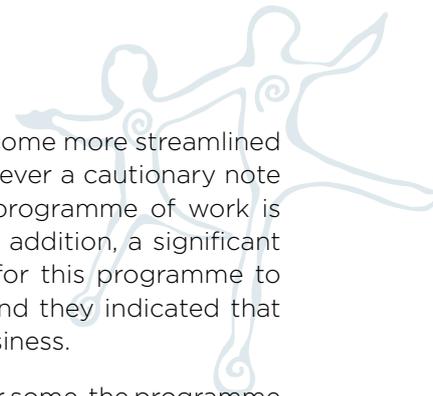
This section presents the findings from the Common Data Collection. The questions centred primarily on answering the overall research question for the study and focused on: perceptions of the impact or influence of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work on the service delivery system within Tusla, perceptions of the embedment of the programme of work across the service delivery system, and sustainability going forward (Crosse and Devaney, forthcoming e).

There was a mixed response to the question of the influence of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work on Tusla's service delivery system. Some respondents are of the view that the practice of supporting parents is long established and already well developed. Others believe that the programme is having no effect on Tusla's service delivery system. This lack of effect may be attributable to a lack of awareness linked to poor information. For others, a lack of operational plans and knitting the different elements of the programme together may be contributing to the lack of effect. For some respondents, engagement with the programme is minimal and knowledge sharing may be the key.

Others see the programme of work to be having an impact on the service delivery system in a number of ways. It has brought about changes in work practices. For those in child protection, greater priority is being given to the views and wishes of parents in individual cases, enabling staff to deal with identified difficulties - cited as being different to the traditional way of working. There is a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention, resulting in clearer information on pathways and services and therefore consequent options for Family Support interventions.

However, the programme is only starting to have an impact on the service delivery system in Tusla, with a dominant view that there is more to do in this area. Clear pathways for information and access to support services, standardisation of parenting support programmes nationwide, improved links from Child Protection services to Family Support services, and attention to the issue of internal disjointed services around parenting support are all cited as requiring responsiveness. Irrespective of such issues, the significance of parenting support and parental participation in supporting children was highlighted in a number of interviews.

There was also a mixed response to the question of the embeddedness of the programme both internally and externally to the organisation. For a number of respondents, the programme is embedded, as evidenced by the structures in place and the roles of those with responsibility for parenting, as well as the amount of work done in this area in recent times. For others it is embedded because parenting support and parental participation are seen as always being the core business of Tusla. However, while this type of



work has always been prevalent in the organisation, some maintain that it has become more streamlined as a result of PPFS, in terms of coordination and clarity in this area. There is however a cautionary note to some of the responses to this particular question. Some believe that this programme of work is embedded more particularly for those who are directly involved in the work. In addition, a significant number of respondents indicated that more work needs to be done in order for this programme to become fully embedded in and across the organisation, which will take time, and they indicated that awareness is needed to ensure that parenting is recognised as core to Tusla's business.

The question of sustainability into the future also elicited a very mixed response. For some, the programme of work is sustainable into the future, for a number of reasons. Working in partnership with voluntary and community sectors, the fact that this programme is seen by many to be a fundamental feature of the work carried out by Tusla and a priority for the agency, as well as the focus on prevention and early intervention which is anticipated to effect change at the higher level of need, are all cited as enablers of sustainability. There are a few respondents who are unsure of its sustainability, and there are those who maintain that it must be sustained. The central premise of Tusla's work is to support and protect young people, and the perception is that parenting plays a fundamental role in this.

Respondents identified gaps in particular areas that the programme has yet to bridge, such as: mapping services, cultural awareness, children in care, parental engagement and commitment, a focus on universal and one-to-one supports, and a need to focus on the familial environment. Recommendations that were made generally concentrated on overarching issues. Clarity, coordination, joined-up thinking, future planning, a clear picture of how all of the elements of the programme fit together, its applicability to the wider PPFS Programme, and the strategic objectives of the organisation as a whole were all identified as requiring attention. The need for dedicated staff, awareness, evidence, resources, and management engagement were cited most by respondents.

A significant number of interview respondents spoke about the need to have staff whose roles are specifically dedicated to parenting support and parental participation work. While the substantial amount of work done to date in this area and the need for every staff member to be cognisant of supporting parents are acknowledged, there is a perception that doing this type of work as an add-on to other duties has resulted in a loss of fidelity. The perception is that a dedicated 'parenting lead' in Tusla is needed. Respondents also identified the need for parenting coordinators in each area or region, who could liaise with Parenting Support Champions and feed into the national lead. This, according to many, would realise the full potential of the programme of work and have bigger impacts in the longer term.

Recommendations on the need for awareness centred on three areas: public awareness, awareness among Tusla management and staff, and awareness among community, voluntary, and statutory organisations and departments about the programme of work in process. In addition, there is a distinct need for communication on where this programme of work fits and its applicability to employee roles.

Resources were identified by some as a necessity for sustainability. There is a perception that this particular programme of work has not been as well funded as other programmes of work under the PPFS Programme, that a lot of the work to date has been funded locally out of existing resources, and that if supporting parents is a key element of Tusla's work, then resources are needed. It is worth noting that respondents pointed to the fact that much could be done with a little resourcing, referring to the work already complete. In addition, investment in increasing staff numbers along with streamlining existing services were identified as ways to improve the parenting programme of work. Evidence is needed to establish the effect on the service delivery system, which will assist with the issue of sustainability. As will increased management engagement, there is a perceived need to have parenting as a central feature on the management agenda.

Respondents' perceptions of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work were

generally very positive. This programme is, according to some, helping to dispel myths about Tusla. It is providing the impetus, time, and resources to focus on parenting. It has supported and encouraged collaborative working and sharing of information across organisations, and has provided good resources and information to improve both parenting support and parental participation practices, which are seen to be very valuable at local level. Moreover, the focus on prevention and early intervention is anticipated to positively influence higher-level-of-need cases into the future. For some, this programme of work will, if pitched correctly, position Tusla as an organisation committed to supporting all families, regardless of level of need, and not one that responds just to crisis.

Notwithstanding the positive perceptions of the programme, there is a general sense that there is more to do in this area, as outlined above: at the overall level, guidance in terms of leadership, information on what is happening in this specific programme of work, why and what the process is. At an overall PPFS level, clarity is required on what is happening in each specific work stream and how they fit together under the banner of PPFS. Overall, for this programme of work to have an impact on Tusla's service delivery system, to become embedded across the organisation, and to be sustainable into the future, account needs to be taken of all such suggestions.

# 4

## Discussion



This section of the report provides some overall discussion on the Parenting Support and Parental Participation project as a whole. Reflecting the overall research question and consequent aims and objectives, a number of subsections are presented on: the process and implementation of the project, the impact and outcomes of the project to date, and embeddedness and sustainability.

### 4.1 Process and Implementation

Regarding the level and quality of implementation, there is a clear remit for each of the projects in this Work Package. Coordination of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work is the responsibility of the National Parenting Lead,<sup>29</sup> with support from the National Support Officer for PPFS, PPFS Managers, RIMs, WLD, and the Parenting Working Group, which included representatives from partner organisations. However, findings from the research show that there are mixed views on the level of support for the project at management level within Tusla, with the project not seen as a priority for PPFS in some cases. Perceived lack of recognition of and engagement with the project by some, at all levels of Tusla management were highlighted by respondents, particularly the PSC Project, and while some PPFS Managers see the project as integral to their remit, others have professed not to have engaged with the project.

There is a perceived lack of consistency in implementation nationwide. Areas are working in different ways and are at different stages, which is thought to reflect the differing levels of support in each area. Reflecting issues of consistency, there is a perceived absence of strategic planning – in terms of a national plan, an annual work plan, and plans at local level – as well as a lack of clarity on the direction of the project, all of which are identified as problematic. Strategic planning was particularly identified as an issue in the findings on the PSC Project. However, it is important to note that the PSC Project is exceeding its original remit: there are currently 105 PSCs nationwide, from a variety of organisational backgrounds, which is 22 more than was originally anticipated.

Regarding parental participation, Tusla has focused on the mainstreaming of parental participation through the development of seed-funded projects. Parental participation seed-funded projects have been rolled out across the intended 17 areas and consist of projects that meet the thematic criteria set out by Tusla.<sup>30</sup> In addition, parental participation work is integral to the remit of the PSCs, in line with the stated role of the PSC. Awareness of the parental participation programme of work generally has increased over time, evidenced in the findings of the research, but the use of participatory approaches in practice is varied. Moreover, awareness of the different elements of the programme remains mixed, suggesting inconsistencies in implementation.

Findings from the research pertaining to the PSC Project suggest that personnel support such as that received from local networks, Tusla's National Office, and different levels of Tusla management is integral to the implementation of the project. In particular, facilitation by some managers was identified as a positive source of support in terms of time allowed to attend networks and training and in some cases flexibility and support to carry out the role. In addition to sources of personnel support, PSCs also

<sup>29</sup> The National Parenting Lead for this programme of work also holds the position of RIM.

<sup>30</sup> See the Report of the Parental Participation seed-funded projects for details, [online], available on the Development and Mainstreaming page of the UCFRC website.

identified the RLGs and training as significant sources of learning and peer support which have helped them develop their role. In fact, both are cited as improving the capacity of PSCs to fulfil their role. Resources in terms of materials received were also identified in all reports as being extremely useful to the development of the PSC role and fundamental to the implementation of the project.

In relation to parental participation, funding for seed-funded projects, materials available or received, training in this area (for PSCs), and the commitment of staff and PSCs are all seen as supporting the implementation of the project. In addition, practitioners' longstanding relationships with community groups, other agencies, and parents in local communities are seen as instrumental in the implementation of the parental participation project.

All elements of the different projects are up and running as per the remit of the programme of work. However, some elements have been delayed due to organisational issues. For example, the parent learning communities, which are part of the PSC Project are only developing. Wider challenges to the implementation of the PSC Project, outlined in section 3.1 of this report, are thought to have impeded progress in this area.

## 4.2 Impact and Outcomes

Given the number of projects, within this programme of work, the elements therein, and the different rates of progression (some are ongoing at the time of writing), it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions on impact or outcomes. However, tentative conclusions from the research suggest that the PSC Project has had perceived positive impacts on the practice of PSCs and their colleagues and on parents in several cases.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, findings from the parental participation research show a perceived positive impact on practice and parents.<sup>32</sup>

At an overall level there are mixed views on the effect on Tusla's service delivery system. Some believe that the programme is having no effect on Tusla's service delivery system. This lack of effect may be attributable to a lack of awareness linked to poor information. For others, a lack of operational plans and knitting the different elements of the programme together may be contributing to the lack of effect; one general view evident in the data is that engagement with the programme is minimal and knowledge sharing may be the key.

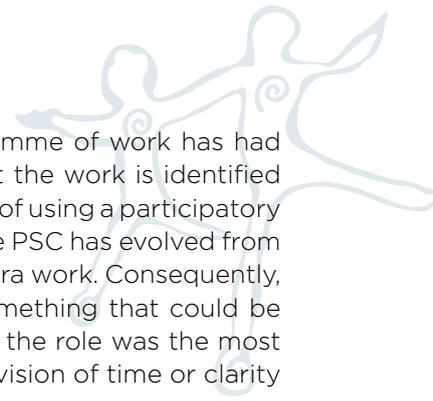
In contrast, others are of the view that the overall programme of work is having an impact on the service delivery system in a number of ways. It has brought about changes in work practices. For those in child protection, greater priority is being given to the views and wishes of parents in individual cases, enabling staff to deal with identified difficulties, which is cited as being different from the traditional way of working. There is an apparent stronger focus on prevention and early intervention, resulting in clearer information on pathways and services and therefore consequent options for Family Support interventions.

For others however, the programme is only beginning to have an impact on the service delivery system within Tusla, with a dominant view that there is more to do in this area. Clear pathways for information and access to support services, standardisation of parenting support programmes nationwide, improved links from child protection services to Family Support services, and attention to the issue of internal disjointed services in parenting support are all cited as requiring a response. Irrespective of such issues, the significance of parenting support and parental participation in supporting children was highlighted in a number of interviews.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See the report on the Parenting Support Champions Project: Process, Implementation and Outcomes, for further details, [online] available on the Development and Mainstreaming page of the UCFRC website.

<sup>32</sup> See the report of the Parental Participation Seed-Funded Projects and Parental Participation - Overall Survey Findings for further details, [online], available on the Development and Mainstreaming page of the UCFRC website.

<sup>33</sup> See Parenting Support and Parental Participation: Qualitative Interview Findings, for further details, [online], available on the Development and Mainstreaming page of the UCFRC website.



While it is evident that the parenting support and parental participation programme of work has had several perceived positive impacts, it is important to note that time to carry out the work is identified across the research as being prohibitive to successful impacts, particularly in terms of using a participatory approach to practice and progressing the role of the PSC. For many, the role of the PSC has evolved from what was initially envisaged and for some now involves a significant amount of extra work. Consequently, the work of the PSC is now seen by some as an additional role rather than something that could be subsumed into daily work practices. As a result, the need for dedicated time for the role was the most cited support required in all reports pertaining to the project, and the lack of provision of time or clarity on this issue may have consequences for future sustainability of the project.

### 4.3 Embeddedness and Sustainability

Respondents' perceptions of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work were generally very positive. This programme is, according to some, helping to challenge stereotypes about Tusla. It is providing the impetus, time, and resources to focus on parenting. It has supported and encouraged collaborative working and sharing of information across organisations, and has provided good resources and information to improve both parenting support and parental participation practices, which are seen to be very valuable at a local level. Moreover, it is anticipated that the focus on prevention and early intervention will have a positive influence on higher-level-of-need cases into the future. For some, this programme of work will, if targeted correctly, position Tusla as an organisation committed to supporting all families, regardless of level of need, and not one that responds just to crisis.

Notwithstanding the positive perceptions of the programme, there is a general sense that there is more to do in this area. Several suggestions were put forward by all respondents on what is needed to ensure the sustainability of the programme into the future. Respondents identified gaps in particular areas that the programme has yet to bridge, such as mapping services, cultural awareness, children in care, parental engagement and commitment, a focus on universal and one-to-one supports, and a need to focus on the familial environment. But recommendations that were made generally concentrated on overarching issues. Clarity, coordination, joined-up thinking, future planning, a clear picture of how all the elements of the programme fit together, its applicability to the wider PPFS Programme, and the strategic objectives of the organisation as a whole were all identified as requiring attention. In addition, recommendations perceived as necessary to ensure sustainability, impact, and programme embeddedness across all categories of respondents pertained to the need for dedicated staff, awareness, evidence, resources, and management engagement.

Such suggestions will not only assist with sustainability, but if actioned will also help embed the programme of work into the structures and culture of Tusla, and consequently will have a positive impact on the service delivery system.

# 5

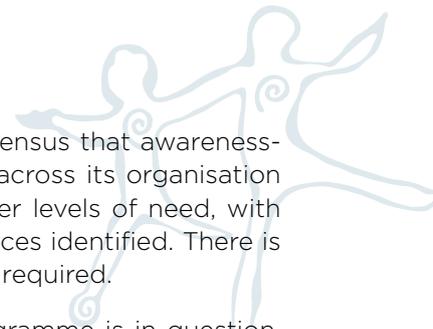
## Conclusion

The overarching research question for the Parenting Support and Parental Participation Work Package is to determine if there is a strategic approach to parenting in place within Tusla and to determine if participation by parents is embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla.

The findings from the research show that there is a strategic approach to parenting within Tusla. The approach taken is underpinned by the DCYA's 'High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families' (2015) and is evident in the objectives Tusla's Corporate Plans (2015–2017; 2018–2020), which lays out the vision of the organisation and the actions to be taken to achieve that vision. Stemming from the Corporate Plan is the development of Tusla's Parenting Support Strategy, which 'sets out the strategic direction of Tusla in its role in supporting parents to improve outcomes for children and young people', the aim of which is to drive a long-term, sustainable strategic approach to how management, staff, and services funded by Tusla support parenting and families (Gillen et al., 2013).

The implementation of the overall programme of work is supported by a dedicated budget and by a National Parenting Lead, the Parenting Working Group, the Parenting Conference Working Group, and the National Parenting Commissioning Framework Subgroup. The PSC Project is also supported by the Regional Learning Groups and WLD for training needs. Findings from the research pertaining to the programme suggest that supports such as that received from Tusla's National Office and from different levels of Tusla management are indications of the strategic approach in place in the organisation. The involvement of CYPSCs and CFSNs in the planning, delivery, and coordination of local parenting supports point to progress on the strategic outcomes of the Parenting Support Strategy, specifically that 'parenting support is integrated into the work of Tusla and partners and is included in local service planning and practice'. The National Parenting Commissioning Framework is further evidence of a strategic approach to parenting. It is anticipated that it will help Tusla and its partner agencies to commission parenting supports that are based on local need and evidence. It also promotes cognisance of overlapping investment, ensuring that the whole system of parenting support is coherent and effective. The aims of the parenting conferences also highlight a strategic approach encouraging best practice in parenting-related issues and promotion of parenting initiatives across organisations.

While there is evidently a strategic approach to parenting in place within Tusla which encompasses external partners and agencies, the findings from this research show that the effectiveness of the strategy in embedding the programme of work both internally and externally in partner organisations is in question. For some the programme is embedded, as evidenced by the structures in place and the roles of those with responsibility for parenting, as well as by the volume of work undertaken in this area in recent times. While this type of work has always been prevalent in the agency, some maintain that it has become more streamlined because of PPFS, in terms of coordination and clarity in this area. There is however a cautionary note to the question of embeddedness. There is a belief that this programme of work is embedded more particularly for those who are directly involved in the work. More work needs to be done in order for this programme to become fully embedded in and across the organisation, which will take time and energy, and awareness is needed to ensure that parenting is recognised as core to Tusla's business. While the parenting conferences and the PSCs in particular are assisting with this,



awareness is a key theme that emerged throughout the research. There is consensus that awareness-raising is required in the public sphere as well as within Tusla at all levels and across its organisation partners. There is a perceived necessity for more work to be done at the higher levels of need, with challenges around reorienting child protection services to parental support services identified. There is also a belief that the programme as a whole is disjointed and that some clarity is required.

It is clear that the embeddedness of parental participation element of the programme is in question. While parental participation is intrinsic in each of the five projects that make up the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work, and while the findings suggest that awareness of participation has increased, the findings also suggest that such awareness is not universal. Opportunities for the development of parental participation practices are mixed and organisation-dependent, although this approach to practice seems to be expanding where it is supported. Projects supported by seed funding are a good example of this. Early indications from the research suggest that practitioners view such projects as having a positive impact on practice and parents alike, with the non-directional nature of the funding important in this regard. Further research is needed to understand the specific factors that inhibit or support the successful implementation of seed-funded projects. In a similar vein, findings from the parental participation surveys undertaken as part of this research show that where participatory approaches are being used with parents as part of practice, they are having an impact.

Regardless of such impacts, parental participation generally has a way to go, and requires further development and thought if it is to be successfully embedded in and across the organisation. This is particularly true for those in child protection or in services aimed at the higher level of need, as capacity issues seem to be a barrier to participatory practices particularly in these areas. Signs of Safety was identified as contributing to the development of parental participation practice in this area, which may be a way to ensure the embeddedness of parental participation at this level. In addition, the research shows that at the preventative level, Meitheal is proving to be an effective means through which parental participation is being accomplished in practice.

Aside from the need for increased funding, which is a common theme that traverses the research findings, there is also a need for the mandatory roll-out of parental participation practice in Tusla and across its partner organisations. Such training should replicate the child and youth participation training already rolled out.<sup>34</sup>

Overall it is evident from the findings of this research that while there is a strategic approach to parenting support within Tusla, there is still work to be done on embedding it in the organisation and that of its partners. This applies particularly to the parental participation element of the programme.

<sup>34</sup> See the report of the Parental Participation Seed-Funded Projects and Parental Participation – Overall Survey Findings, for further details, [online], available on the Development and Mainstreaming page of the UCFRC website.

# 6

## Recommendations

This section presents overall recommendations from the research and is presented using themes of recommendations for policy within the agency, for Tusla at an organisational level, and for practice.

### 6.1 Recommendations for Policy

#### 6.1.1 Recognition

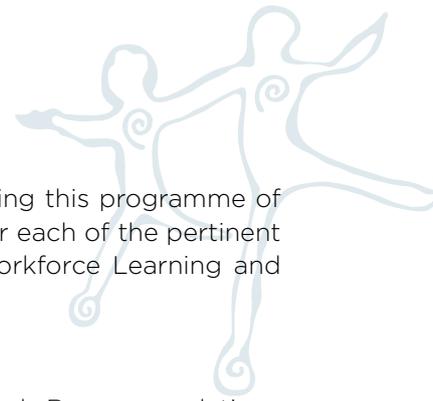
While Tusla's activities in parenting are direct, indirect, and broad-ranging, and are therefore rooted in a number of existing structures in the agency, such as Family Resource Centre (FRC) programmes,<sup>35</sup> the importance of the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work requires further recognition if it is to be firmly embedded in the structures and culture of Tusla. While acknowledging the substantial amount of work done to date in this area, a dedicated national 'parenting lead' in Tusla is needed. While there is a preference for dedicated parenting coordinators at regional level to support the embedding of this programme of work in Tusla and the wider system of service provision, a dedicated, named, strategic, and operational remit in relation to parenting support and parental participation may suffice at a PPFs Manager level. This would increase recognition and realise the full potential of the programme of work, resulting in bigger impacts in the longer term. Management engagement at all levels is required to ensure sustainability, having parenting as a central feature on the management agenda would assist with such engagement.

#### 6.1.2 Focus on Parental Participation

Beyond these structural changes, the ethos of parental participation will become embedded in practice only after it has become part of the culture of Tusla. There is a view that practitioners need to be supported for this to be achieved. The findings show that there needs to be increased recognition of the value of parental participation work, and that such work needs to be facilitated through the allotment of time and training. Training on parental participation was not rolled out to the same extent as training on children's participation; this is seen as a barrier to embedment. While SOS is seen as a way to embed parental participation practice in areas that deal with higher levels of need, and Meitheal has at its core an ethos of parental participation, the roll-out of training and materials developed as part of this programme of work would help develop skills in this area.

It is important to note that a Parental Participation E-learning Programme is in the initial stages of development by Tusla's WLD team and is expected to launch at the end of 2018. The programme aims to give participants guidance to support meaningful participation of parents, and will be available to all Tusla staff on their learning platform. It is envisaged that footage from the programme, or videos contained in the programme, will be available on the Tusla website going forward. While this e-learning programme will help develop skills in the area of parental participation, future evaluation will be needed to determine its impact on practice. If successful, consideration needs to be given to somehow making this programme fully available to Tusla's partners, in line with the collaborative ethos of the PPFs Programme.

<sup>35</sup> The FRC programmes deliver universal services to families in disadvantaged areas across the country based on a lifecycle approach.



## 6.2 Recommendations for Tusla as an Organisation

Several functional areas in Tusla have a role to play in embedding and maintaining this programme of work across the organisation. This section provides specific recommendations for each of the pertinent functional areas in Tusla: Communications, Finance, Human Resources, and Workforce Learning and Development.

### 6.2.1 Communications

Awareness is identified as a significant issue of constraint for this programme of work. Recommendations on the need for awareness about the programme of work in process centre on three areas: public awareness, awareness among Tusla management and staff, and awareness among community, voluntary, and statutory organisations and government departments. In addition, there is a distinct need for communication on where this programme of work fits within the PPFs Programme and the ethos of the agency. Information is also required on the programme's applicability to employee roles.

### 6.2.2 Finance

Funding for this programme of work is required to support the full implementation of the project, which will ensure its sustainability in the longer term. Once embedded to scale, the amount of funding required will decrease incrementally over time. In addition, confirmation of funding is required earlier to ensure that the programme of work can be more effectively planned in advance and over a longer term.

### 6.2.3 Human Resources

Taking account of issues around coordination, and the strong view that more coordination is required for this programme of work, the Human Resources department has a role to play in appointing a dedicated national parenting lead, as outlined in section 6.1.1, and, if desired, parenting coordinators at regional level. The need for dedicated time for practitioners to carry out this work is the most cited support required in all reports pertaining to the project, which may be an issue for consideration by Human Resources.

### 6.2.4 Workforce Learning and Development

Training has been identified as a significant requirement to support the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work. Training in relation to parental participation in particular is identified as being needed across the organisation. Training similar to that which was rolled out to support children and young people's participation was identified as necessary to embed this approach to practice. Methods to effectively engage with parents, particularly hard-to-reach parents, were also identified as a necessity to generate impact where it is most needed.

## 6.3 Recommendations for Practice

Tentative indications are that practice is changing as a result of the programme of work, in line with the objectives of the project. However, account needs to be taken of barriers and challenges in order for such changes to take effect throughout the organisation as a whole. Barriers and challenges in the main consist of time, funding, coordination, management engagement, strategic planning, and consistency across areas. Attention to such issues will provide clarification and help reduce the burden on practitioners, thus increasing sustainability into the future.

# 7

## Final Thoughts

A substantial amount of cross-jurisdictional, cross-disciplinary research verifies the importance of supporting parents. A rigorous body of published research reveals that children who grow up in stable, responsive, and nurturing households acquire a lifetime of benefits. From infancy to adolescence and across adulthood, these children are healthier, exhibit fewer behavioural problems, engage in less risk-taking behaviour, perform better in school and on the job, are less likely to be involved in criminality, and have more positive social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development (Davies and Ward, 2012; Heckman, 2011; Center on the Developing Child, 2010). Moreover, given the benefits to parents and to society, including better family relationships and reduced social costs (Ghate, 2009), the importance of supporting parents cannot be underestimated.

Tusla's Parenting Support Strategy maintains that supporting parents is the core business of the Child and Family Agency (Gillen et al., 2013). Tusla's programme of work in this area is upholding this ethos by supporting the mainstreaming of parenting support and parental participation throughout the agency and across external organisations.

While the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work is still in progress, the findings from this research study show tentative evidence of positive impacts on practice and anecdotally on parents. Although further research that includes parents' views is required in the future, to quantify impacts on practice and outcomes for families, the evidence in this Work Package is sufficient to justify building a sustainable structure to support the Parenting Support and Parental Participation programme of work going forward.

Section 6.2.3 of this report recommended that Human Resources consider the need for a dedicated national parenting support lead and parenting support regional coordinators, or a dedicated, named, strategic, and operational remit in relation to parenting support and parental participation at PPFs Manager level. This type of structure could help address the barriers and challenges to both implementation and sustainability identified in this research and ensure cohesion and progression of the project into the future.

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# Appendix 1

## PSCs' Reflective Journals

### PSC One



#### **1. How have you found the process of journalling?**

I found keeping a journal really excellent, albeit getting the time to do it when it was fresh in mind a bit of a challenge! I enjoyed keeping it and reflecting on my journey as the PSC initiative moved along.

#### **2. Was journal-keeping helpful to you in your role as a PSC? (Please provide examples)**

Yes, I found it very helpful. It helped me to focus on the role of PSC, and it also enabled me to identify my strengths and my weaknesses and allowed me to clarify some of the issues that needed to be addressed at a local level. As a result of keeping the journal, it gave me the confidence to bring these issues forward at a local level ... for example, the more I reflected on what the issues were, the more I recognised the need for a local strategy to be developed to ensure that the National Strategy in Supporting Parents was something that would reach and impact on parents locally and did not become another document that sits on a shelf! Keeping a journal also helped me to identify some of the gaps locally and enabled me to look at how we could begin to address these gaps.

#### **3. What if anything have you learned from keeping a reflective journal?**

I have learned the importance of reflecting on the work I have just completed and the learning and clarity that it can bring.

I have learned that different people and different organisations view parenting support very differently, and that there needs to be agreement and clarity at a local level on what we mean by Parenting Support.

I have learned that being a PSC means that I voluntarily took on to do extra work in my current role and I was happy to do that; however, not everyone who is a PSC has invested the same amount of time, thinking, or work into it.

I have learned that if this project is to succeed, there needs to be [a number of PSCs per county]! There needs to be at least one PSC in every organisation who will promote Parenting Support.

#### **4. What type of changes if any have occurred as a result of keeping a reflective journal?**

The biggest change locally has been to get agreement on the need to have a local parenting support strategy in place, and work has commenced on this. This was something that would not have happened without the PSC initiative.

#### **5. What are the positives and/or negatives (benefits/challenges) of reflective journalling, in your view?**

It helps you to focus on the process as well as the task. Sometimes we forget about the 'How', and very often the 'How' is the most important.

It gives you great clarity when you reflect on a piece of work and helps you identify needs more clearly.

It allows you to learn from the experience you've just had and gives you an opportunity to stop doing and take time to reflect.

The biggest challenge is giving yourself the time to do it!

**6. Would you recommend journalling? If yes, why?**

Yes, I would definitely recommend journalling for all the reasons I outlined in Question 5.

## PSC Two

**1. How have you found the process of journalling?**

Good to reflect and review, but need to be more disciplined about it. When you get back to the day job, it's very easy to let it slip your mind. Have to include it on to-do list.

**2. Was journal-keeping helpful to you in your role as a PSC? (Please provide examples)**

Yes - reminds me of the positives of engaging as PSC. Good also to justify time spent on PSC.

**3. What if anything have you learned from keeping a reflective journal?**

Good record for myself and Manager's report, useful log of benefits of collaboration. Keeping my reflective skills tuned up.

**4. What type of changes if any have occurred as a result of keeping a reflective journal?**

Reminds me to reflect on all my work and record of how I spend time as PSC.

**5. What are the positives and/or negatives (benefits/challenges) of reflective journalling, in your view?**

Reflective practice is a real-life opportunity to review what you have done and how something benefits or challenges and the impact on yourself, work, team, target groups, as well as your week/month/quarter.

**6. Would you recommend journalling? If yes, why?**

As above = good practice in work, taking time to record and review and learn from reflections, and make changes and adaptations as needed. Take time to reflect, and clarity comes on time spent.

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