



EVALUATION OF THE
EARLY YEARS
CHILD PROTECTION
PROGRAMME



A review of the first 3 years of the
Early Years Child Protection Programme –
an interagency programme implementing
Children First in Ireland’s early years sector

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COMPILED BY:

Susan Brocklesby External Consultant

COMMISSIONED BY:

The National Early Years Children First Committee

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



The National Early Years Children First (NEYCF) committee was established in 2012 by the newly established Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). The primary aim of the committee was to develop a plan for the early years sector to respond to the forthcoming Children First legislation.

The Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group includes representation from all Government Departments including an Garda Síochána and Tusla. This group ensures every government department provides a sectoral plan for the areas they are responsible for funding and delivering.

The NEYCF committee reports directly to the Early Years Department of the DCYA and was given the following remit in terms of developing a sectoral plan for the early years sector for the implementation of Children First:

- Child protection policies, procedures and practice guidance within the early years sector.
- A Children First communication strategy for the early years sector.
- A Children First training strategy.
- A quality assurance mechanism in relation to Children First.

The committee was established with representation from all organisations within the early years sector with a strong presence from the City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and is supported by Tusla.

The committee devised a sectoral plan for the early years sector which became the Early Years Child Protection (EYCP) programme.

This was a nationally coordinated standardised programme delivered locally through the CCCs and supported by national organisations:

- Barnardos.
- Early Childhood Ireland (ECI).
- Tusla.

Early Childhood Ireland and Barnardos, as key delivery partners, provided tutors to the programme whose role included: recruitment of trainers, delivery the training for trainers course and monitoring of trainers. The Children First Information and Advice Officers also played a key role in the recruitment and training of trainers. They adapted Tusla training materials and oversaw the core framework of the training programme, including the quality assurance process. Finally, the Early Years Inspectorate played a role in supporting the external quality assurance element through the inspection of child protection policies during their routine inspection of early years settings as set out by the Pre-School Regulations 2006.

The plan prioritised the:

- Delivery of foundation level training nationally through the development and implementation of a training infrastructure with built-in quality assurance measures,
- Supporting the development of service's child protection policies and procedures.

During the first 3 years, the programme has trained 66 trainers and has delivered training to 95% of all services. It has provided training for 4,019 services and over 13,016 training participants, specifically targeting those in a designated liaison person (DLP) or leadership role.

In addition, it has developed the following training and information resources:

- Publication of Developing a Child Protection and Welfare Policy: A Resource for Early Years Services.
- Establishment of child protection and welfare policy workshops.
- Development of a refresher level training programme.
- Development of an online 'moodle' for use by students or prior to attending a foundation level course.

Like many interagency programmes, this initiative has a complex governance structure as outlined within the main body of the full evaluation report. Additionally, it must navigate both the child protection and early years sectors. These sectors have both experienced considerable change from a policy and legislative perspective which are summarised in the report.

Two key legislative developments have impacted substantially on the work of the programme.

The launch of the revised Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 has had considerable implications for the EYCP Programme. These regulations no longer give pre-school inspectors the remit to review and inspect child protection policies as was previously the case under the 2006 Pre-School Regulations.

The launch of the Children First Act (2015) which is likely to become fully commenced before the end of 2017, will continue to have a considerable impact on the programme. This has a significant impact in that all staff working directly with children in early years services will become mandated reporters when the legislation is fully commenced.

OUR FIRST THREE YEARS IN NUMBERS

66

66 TRAINERS

95

TRAINING TO 95%
OF ALL SERVICES

4,019

PROVIDED TRAINING FOR 4,019 SERVICES

13,016

OVER 13,016 TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

In line with the programme's commitment to quality assurance an evaluation was commissioned with the following objectives:

1. To document the work of the EYCP Programme and delivery model.
2. To evaluate and document the impact of the national training programme on early years services using a representative sample.
3. To consult with the programme trainers to gather and document their views on the impact and effectiveness of the programme and its future direction.
4. To consult with the committee members, programme tutors and any other relevant stakeholders to gather and document their views of the impact and effectiveness of the programme and its future direction.
5. To make recommendations, in consultation with the committee and the coordinator, on the future direction of the programme and the next phase of delivery.

METHODOLOGY



A comprehensive mixed methods design was used. This included the following: qualitative (open ended questions/interviews/focus groups) and quantitative (closed and scored survey questions) methods:

- **Training participants:** online survey (piloted).
- **Services:** online survey.
- **Trainers:** online survey (piloted) and 2 focus groups.
- **CCCs:** online survey.
- **Committee (past and present), tutors, stakeholders:** semi structured interviews – 16 in total.

SAMPLING AND RESPONSE RATES

Training Participants: All training participants who gave their consent to be contacted having completed training between October 2016 and March 2017 were sampled.

The online survey was received by 424 individuals with a final response rate of 34%. Although not representative, it was deemed to be a considerable response rate and higher than other similar studies. There was a higher response from those with higher qualifications and those in management/leadership roles. Services: A link to the online survey was distributed to all services (4,377) through their local CCC by email. A response rate of 11% was secured with a representative sample size (n=466). There was a significantly higher response from community urban settings than the national average.

EYCF trainers: An online survey of 30 questions was sent by email to 48 EYCF trainers and the response rate of 98% was obtained along with a representative sample size. 29 trainers attended the 2 focus groups.

CCCs: An online survey was sent to all 33 CCCs and a 53% response rate (n=17) was obtained.

Committee members/tutors/stakeholders: 15 individual interviews were carried out and these included past committee members. A semi structured interview was used, and the results recorded and analysed for recurring themes and key phrases.

LIMITATIONS

- Low response rate from online surveys from training participants (34%), services (11%) and CCCs (53%). However, a detailed demographic profile of the training participants can help in the interpretation of results. Additionally, response rates were higher than other comparable research.
- Literature would advocate for a pre- and post-evaluation to capture the impact of child protection training with data collection at 3 time points. This was not possible given the timeframe and logistical restrictions.
- The design of the initial participant survey was overly complex to include the range of different roles of those who participated in the training. Despite being piloted by 11 training participants there was a completion rate of 80% indicating the survey was too long.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS



1

The EYCP programme is targeting those staff who have not had any or recent training and has been successful in reaching 95% of services. The evaluation identified the need to extend training to all early years staff, management and boards.

33% of training participants had no previous training

28% of training participants had no training in last 4–6 years

51% of training participants received training in college

40% of services report all staff have received training

95% of services report 2 members of staff have received training

10,745 staff will require training if it is offered to all early years staff

2

The early years sector has a significant role in responding to child protection concerns with evidence that there are high levels of child protection concerns reported.

11% of training participants responded to a concern in 6 month period

37% of services responded to concerns in 12 month period with an average of 2 per service (range: 1–20)

29% of EYCP trainers had a disclosure during a training session in 12 months (range: 1–5)

84% of EYCP trainers had participants with experience of child protection concerns in 12 months

Figure 1 Reaction to the training from training participants and services

95%

reported training content 'just right'

94%

reported training was 'relevant' or 'really relevant'

99%

reported they would recommend it to a colleague

3

EYCP training was found to be very effective in terms of participants' **reaction** to the training; their **learning** from the training and their self-reported **behavioural changes**.

The evaluation highlighted the need for more advanced training and greater integration with national quality development initiatives.

REACTION TO THE TRAINING FROM TRAINING PARTICIPANTS:

There was a very positive response from training participants and services when asked about the training. These findings are summarised in figure 1.

DLPs were less likely to rate it as '**really relevant**' when compared to non DLPs

76% of services reported that the training was useful

LEARNING GAINED FROM TRAINING:

This was assessed by how training participants responded to 2 objective exercises -outlined below.

1. Training participants were presented with 2 child protection scenarios and asked to select the 3 correct responses to each concern. The results are summarised in figure 2.
2. Training participants were asked to select 5 inappropriate staff behaviours from a list of both appropriate and inappropriate behaviours relative to the **code of behaviour** and **child-centred practice**.
 - 2.1. The findings indicated some learning gaps in relation to '**code of behaviour**' and '**child-centred practice**'. This was an expected finding as child protection training cannot address all areas of professional practice in the early years sector. It suggests there is a need for the programme to become more integrated within a national infrastructure addressing quality.

Figure 2 Services and training participants report on the behaviour impact of attending training

2 CHILD PROTECTION SCENARIOS

1. All training participants: Were asked to outline the correct 3 steps required to respond to a domestic violence child protection concern

79%
of all training participants answered correctly

24% of those in a DLP role answered incorrectly: they delayed making a report

2. DLP training participants only: Were asked to outline the correct 3 steps required to respond to a child welfare concern child protection concern

92%
answered correctly

BEHAVIOUR CHANGES AS A RESULT OF THE TRAINING:

A wide range of self reported practice changes were noted by both training participants and services. They are summarised in figure 3.

Figure 3 Services and training participants report on the behaviour impact of attending training



4

The current training programme would benefit from review and consideration of additional training and support needs which were identified.

CURRENT TRAINING PROVISION REQUIRES MINOR REVIEW

27% of services felt no changes should be made to the current training provision

76% of training participants* suggested changes e.g. greater use of video scenarios; practice using standard reporting form; training as whole staff team

Foundation level training should remain sector specific

It was felt that refresher training could have greater impact if reviewed

Child protection policy workshops were not well attended and required reconsideration

* DLP training participants were more likely to indicate that changes to training were necessary and this was statistically significant.

MORE TRAINING IN CHILD PROTECTION AND GAPS IN PROVISION

90% of training participants requested more training

79% of services requested more training

Training requests identified the need for more advanced management of child protection concerns e.g. DLP training

A small number of DCYA funded initiatives do not have access to child protection training through this programme e.g. ABC programmes; Parent and Toddler Groups

DLP TRAINING AS A HIGH PRIORITY

83% of EYCP trainers and 88% of CCCs highlighted this as a priority

This view was strongly advocated within focus group discussions

Committee members and stakeholders advocated for interagency DLP training

A HIGH LEVEL OF SUPPORT IS PROVIDED BY CCCS TO SERVICES

Services and training participants commented frequently on their reliance on CCCs for support in relation to child protection queries

Trainers/CCCs respond to a high number of phone queries

Phone support to services was rated as being an important support by CCCs

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

Training in **support and supervision and child-centred** practices were raised by all surveyed and interviewed but feedback suggested this was a wider national quality issue

Online information located in a single website was raised as a need.

Information needs in relation to family support practices e.g. Meitheal was also highlighted by training participants

5

There is a need to develop ongoing training evaluation mechanisms and an identification for ongoing programme evaluation.

39% of trainers felt current methods of evaluation were ineffective and this was supported in focus group discussion

Committee members identified the need for more effective methods of evaluation and ongoing programme evaluation

6

Overall, the programme infrastructure was deemed to be robust and effective with some findings highlighting resource gaps in capacity to meet local needs and ongoing professional development needs of trainers.

PROGRAMME INFRASTRUCTURE

93% of trainers are employed by CCCs

14% of trainers are in a leadership role

Trainers deliver on average 6 times a year

Average attendance at a training session is 18 participants

72% of reported training was not co-facilitated but 63% indicated they would like to co-facilitate

61% of trainers felt they had sufficient time to deliver the training but 35% reported that additional time would be beneficial

59% of CCCs felt it was difficult to meet current training needs locally

87% of CCCs indicated they would need more local resources to meet training needs if extended to all staff in EY services

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINERS

The recruitment process was found to be rigorous but necessary

33% of trainers had reservations about assuming their training role

92% of trainers rated the train the trainer experience positively

72% of trainers rated the quality assurance element as positive – some issues were raised regarding consistency of monitoring

86% found support days provided sufficient support

91% found the programme coordinator provided sufficient support

The need for peer support and support and supervision for trainers was identified

A majority indicated the need for ongoing learning and development in their roles

7

The programme was found to be positively regarded as a unique interagency model of national coordination with a strong local delivery infrastructure. However, findings identified needs in relation to governance and resources which could impact on the sustainability of the programme. These findings are outlined in figure 4 below. Additionally they include a number of current 'pressure points' for the programme. These 'pressure points' are outlined below in figure 5.

Figure 4 Findings relating to the governance and resourcing of the EYCP programme



Figure 5 'Pressure points' identified for the EYCP programme

Interagency DLP/ advanced training	Commencement of the Children First Act	Role of the Early Years Inspectorate in child protection
Child protection supports for Childminders	Ongoing support from Tusla Children First Office	Sustainability of programme infrastructure
Change and integration in the following sectors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child protection • early years • education 	Highest standards of quality assurance with limited resources	Ensuring that 'face to face' training remains a priority for the sector

RECOMMENDATIONS



There were a considerable number of findings from this evaluation as outlined above. The evaluation has highlighted the considerable impact of the training on early years services.

Some of the findings suggest the need for change to ensure the programme's ongoing sustainability in terms of quality assurance, governance and funding. These are addressed in the key recommendations below. A number of additional detailed recommendations are also outlined in the main document responding to the specific findings.

The key recommendations for the EYCP programme are to:

1. Continue to deliver the EYCP programme and to develop a 3-year strategic plan for the next stage of implementation of Children First in the early years sector. The plan should be fully costed and outline the role of all key delivery partners.
2. Include the following provisions in the design of the next phase of the training roll-out:
 - extension of training to all early years staff
 - the need for an advanced level of training e.g. DLP training;
 - integration of evaluation findings re into the current training modules;
 - the need to supplement training with ongoing support and information for services.
3. Ensure Children First training remains a priority for the sector by working with DCYA and delivery partners to:
 - include the requirement for a Child Protection and Welfare Policy in the Child Care Act, 2016 (Early Years Services) Regulations;
 - include attendance at Children First training as a funding contract requirement and;
 - provide a budget for each early years' service to support access to child protection training.
4. Promote the integration of the programme within both the early years and child protection sector and recognise the underlying role child protection training plays in wider early years quality practice developments. Additionally, build upon current links with the education sector, specifically in relation to qualifications and professional development.
5. Consider alternative methods of evaluation of all training and evaluate the programme in line with a 3-year plan. This is outlined in detailed recommendations and builds on current practice.
6. Secure adequate resources and consolidate the governance structure to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the interagency training infrastructure.

These recommendations are expanded upon in more detail in the full evaluation report under the following headings:

- Training
- Implementation of Children First, information dissemination and integration within Early Years Sector
- Training and support infrastructure
- Evaluation
- Resources
- Governance

CONCLUSION

The above findings outline the effectiveness of the programme in transferring knowledge and awareness of Children First to over 13,016 individuals and 95% of services. This outcome achieved in 3 years of delivery is extremely successful and reflects the efficiency of a model of local delivery, coordinated by national infrastructure and plan.

It was assessed as being significantly effective in the transfer of entry level knowledge for best practice in child protection using an objective rather than self-reported measure.

An unexpected finding was the high level of child protection concerns reported by training participants and services. This highlights the significant role that early years services have in protecting and safeguarding children and the need for the sector to continue to have a robust training and support programme.

Many recommendations as outlined above, which echo those made in similar UK studies, support this next phase of development.

The programme represents a unique way of working bringing together all the key agencies to deliver a programme within changing early years and child protection sectors. Securing considerable outcomes by working in this way has been a key success of the programme and the ongoing commitment of all relevant organisations involved will ensure the continued success and development of the programme in the future.



An Roinn Leanáí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of
Children and Youth Affairs

