

# ***Time to stop blaming parents:***

***A case study of parents' and children's  
experiences of family life and in  
marginalised communities with implications  
for parenting interventions, educational  
welfare policy and practice***

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*In fulfilment of the degree of Masters of Literature*

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October 2018

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## ***Acknowledgements***

Firstly, I would like to thank and acknowledge all the guidance and support I received from my supervisor Dr Catriona O'Toole. Her advice and support have helped me throughout the many ups and downs of this process and guided me to a final product! I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Dr Anthony Malone for his input and positive encouragement throughout.

Thank you to my family, close friends and work colleagues who have listened to me, helped out throughout the different stages of the process and have supported and encouraged me in this journey over the past number of years. They had their work cut out for them at times, but I will be forever grateful. A special thank you to Colette for the proof-reading and all the technical support!

This research would not have succeeded without the honesty and openness of the parents and children who generously agreed to take part. I feel honoured that they allowed me into their lives and to share their stories. The families included in this study are some of the most amazing, resilient and strong people I have had the pleasure of knowing and I hope I have done them, and their community, justice.

Finally, a special note of gratification to my parents, Aine and Felix, who I am truly blessed to call my mam and dad. With you by my side, I have been able to accomplish so much, knowing I was safe, loved and protected by you both. This is for you.

## ***Abstract***

The inclusion of the voices of parents and children from marginalised communities is quite a departure from traditional rigid assumptions in parenting research. This study sought to explore parents' experience of family life and participation in the universal roll-out of Parents Plus Children's Programme (PPCP), as well as children's perspectives on how they navigate the different settings of home, school and community in a Dublin urban area of low socio-economic status (SES). Applying a community psychology perspective and the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bio-ecological model, the primary research question posed was how can parents' and children's perspectives and experiences of family life and PPCP in marginalised communities inform formal educational welfare policy and practice through Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). Employing a case study approach, qualitative research methods were used to gather data from seven parents (via semi-structured interviews) and eight children (via mosaic-arts approach). This study found that their ability to parent effectively was either supported, hindered or disrupted by people, community influences (e.g. crime) and situations (e.g. adequate housing), often outside of their control. While PPCP was a support to the majority of parents, where isolation and marginalisation was felt most profoundly in the community, PPCP couldn't address the larger social issues impacting on parenting practices. For children, how their families were perceived in the school, especially Traveller families, influenced their school experiences. Compared to their settled peers, Traveller children stated that they did not like school, nor the school their parents, and that it would be one of the first places they would change in their community. The findings of this study has implications for how parenting interventions, educational welfare policy and practice, as well as all-of-government policy, can better support families in marginalised communities.

## ***Glossary***

ADHD	Attention Hyperactivity Deficit Disorder
AON	Assessment of Need
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CYPSC	Children and Young People's Services Committee
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DED	District Electoral Division
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EWS	Educational Welfare Services
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PPCP	Parents Plus Children's Programme
PPFS	Prevention, Partnership and Family Support
SCP	School Completion Project
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## **1. Introduction**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the influence of parents and their parenting styles on their children's development has come into increasingly sharper focus. Indeed, negative parenting practice has been noted as one of the single strongest risk factors for children's emotional development (Hiscock et al., 2012). Unsurprisingly, therefore, there has been much interest in identifying the characteristics of effective parenting and in the development of parenting programmes that teach or instil what are considered the most effective practices and techniques (Ross & Hammer, 2002). In the context of the current research, a notable finding from research is the correlation between poverty and 'inadequate' parenting (Gillies, 2009). Policy makers have responded by instigating the roll-out of standardised, evidence-based parenting programmes in marginalised communities. Marginalised communities are those categorised by having a low socio-economic status. In comparison to the Irish national average, features of marginalised communities include higher levels of unemployment, higher proportion of social housing and higher rates of poverty.

Bearing this in mind, this study seeks to explore parents' experiences of family life and participation in the universal roll-out of Parents Plus Children's Programme (PPCP), as well as children's perspectives on how they navigate the different settings of home, school and community in a marginalised urban area of Dublin. In Ireland, primary and post-primary schools in these areas receive additional funding from the Department of Education and Skills, through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). One of the key components of DEIS is the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme, where teachers work directly with parents to support their children's educational welfare. HSCL Coordinators provide parents with a number of supports, including educational courses and parenting supports and courses. PPCP is an eight-week evidence-based parenting course, which aims to promote confidence, learning and positive behaviours in children aged between 6 and 11 years of age. PPCP can be delivered in school, community and clinical settings. By supporting parents to communicate positively with their children, PPCP aims to help parents develop closer

relationships with their children, as well as solving discipline and other childhood problems (Sharry & Fitzpatrick, 1998).

While parenting programmes and interventions are often universally rolled out in marginalised communities, traditional parenting research has given little consideration to the realities faced by the families these programmes are aimed at. This is problematic because such research often fails to capture the nuances of parenting, especially in marginalised communities. With little, if any, consultation with the local community itself, government and policy makers often make assumptions about what life is like to live in marginalised communities, how families should parent and what supports and interventions they need. In critically analysing this prevailing approach and by drawing on theoretical insights from community psychology, Freirean anti-oppression approach, as well as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this study aims to privilege the voices of parents and children from marginalised communities, who are often the 'seldom heard' or the 'Othered' in research, and to deeply explore what it is really like to be a parent in this community (Koro-Ljunberg, 2008; Reyes-Cruz, 2011).

Furthermore, although it is recognised that children significantly influence parenting practices, their particular perspectives, are not a common feature of parenting research (James, 2003). Lundy (2007) argues that it is crucially important that children should have a say in matters directly affecting their lives, as well as having their views acted upon. Furthermore, they should be considered as 'credible informants' in understanding their own lives (Greene, 2006, p.9). Indeed, Landsdown et al. (2014) argue that including children's voices can have significant positive impact on their social and emotional development, as well as developing their understanding of decision-making and citizenship, complementing community psychology principles of empowerment and social connection, in particular (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Therefore, this study also aims to address this gap by listening to children, especially those who are 'seldom heard', and giving weight to their views to explore more closely their relationships across the settings of home, school and community and how they navigate between them.



The specific research questions posed by this study are:

1. What are the everyday challenges, concerns, strengths and supports experienced by a cohort of parents in this marginalised community?
2. What are the parents' experiences of participating in PPCP and how responsive is PPCP to the realities of parenting in this marginalised community?
3. How do the children of parents who have completed PPCP experience and navigate the varied contexts of home, school and community?
4. What can researchers, practitioners and policy makers learn from the experiences of parents and children for the future design and roll-out of parenting interventions and for formal educational welfare policy and practice more generally?

Chapter Two outlines the history of parenting research and how it has influenced our assumptions about effective parenting styles. With particular reference to marginalised communities, this chapter also examines the impact poverty, inequality, adversity and marginalisation has on parenting and families. The value systems and partnerships that exist between home and school are explored, within the context of how children navigate between these settings. How children themselves influence parenting and family life is considered, noting how important it is to seek their opinions and perspectives on issues that directly impact their lives. The chapter also explores the diverse contexts of the home, school and community, focusing on how parents and children navigate between the different value systems of home and school. Finally, the importance of listening to and including the voices of children themselves is discussed.

The research design and methodology used in the study are outlined in Chapter Three. A case study approach was taken as insider research was employed. As a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator, and previously a primary school teacher in a DEIS school, I have directly worked with families in this area for over ten years. In my role as a HSCL Coordinator, I had routinely run PPCP courses and had also helped families in accessing family support to address the issues and challenges they faced. This chapter discusses the process used for identifying and recruiting participants and why purposive sampling was employed.

Qualitative research methods were used to gather data, including semi-structured interviews with seven parents, an arts-based mosaic approach with eight children and field notes. To ensure children's voices were captured genuinely, the use of the arts-based approach was a deliberate research decision in attempting to uncover insights that may not have been possible through traditional, verbal-based research methods. Key ethical questions are considered in depth in this chapter, especially in relation to the anonymity of participants, as it impacted on all stages of the research from design, implementation and through to dissemination. This chapter also outlines how the data was analysed and the study's limitations.

The study's findings are outlined in Chapter Four and organised under four general themes. These themes are Community Challenges; PPCP Intervention in the Community; Educational Support Structures in the Community and Family Support Networks. These four themes are also further divided into sub-themes, with extracts from the parent interviews, children's focus groups and art-work from the children included. The voices of the parents, along with the children's voices and images, are privileged throughout this chapter.

Chapter Five summarises and discusses the findings, in light of the research questions posed. In seeking the voices of parents and children from this community, key findings emerge which allow us to have a more rounded understanding of the realities faced by them in their daily lives. The insights given by the parents and children from this marginalised community are explored, especially in relation to the role inequality and marginalisation plays in their lives. The importance of listening to the voice of the 'Other' is discussed, with a particular examination of the home-school-community partnership from the Traveller perspective included. This chapter also unmask a larger societal issue on how existing government and community structures can maintain the status quo, with little regard given to the voice of the 'Other'. Finally, this chapter concludes by outlining the recommendations that are made for how this study can inform parenting interventions, educational welfare policy and practice, in relation to DEIS schools and the HSCL scheme. However, more fundamental changes may be required and are discussed in light of this research, notably a more robust national review of DEIS and the recruitment and training of teachers

and HSCL Coordinators. I now work as an Integrated Services Manager with Tusla Educational Welfare Service. With operational responsibility for the HSCL scheme on a national basis, a key part of this role is in ensuring that families are receiving appropriate support to improve their children's educational outcomes within the school and community. Within this professional context, the knowledge gleaned from this study is important in terms of informing educational welfare policy and practice in DEIS schools around ways to better support these families. Furthermore, consideration is also given to whether parenting interventions, educational policy and practice changes alone are enough to help support families in marginalised communities. While Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014) has led to significant improvements in children and young people's outcomes, significant gaps remain to be addressed and suggestions for how this may be done are given. Recommendations for future research are also made.

## **2. Literature Review**

This chapter outlines a brief history of parenting research and how it has shaped and informed our understanding of parenting styles and parenting interventions to date. The idea of what it means to be an 'effective parent' is examined. It is argued that ideas around parenting need to be informed, not just by the discipline of developmental psychology, but by other scholarly fields and traditions as well. With this in mind, the current work draws on theoretical insights from community psychology, Freirean anti-oppression approach, as well as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. It is argued that these insights are crucial in order to more fully appreciate the realities of family life and to advance a more equitable and empowering approach to parenting interventions. These lenses are drawn upon to illuminate how parenting in marginalised communities can be impacted by poverty, inequality and adversity. The chapter also explores the diverse contexts of the home, school and community, focusing on how parents and children navigate between the different value systems of home and school. Finally, the importance of listening to and including the voices of children themselves is discussed.

### **2.1 Introduction**

Amongst other factors, the World Health Organisation (2012) identifies supportive parenting, a secure home life, a positive school environment and a neighbourhood with high social capital as critical factors in building and protecting mental health in children. Hiscock et al. (2012) argues that the single strongest risk factor in children's emotional development is negative parenting practices. Given the fact that parents are the first, and often most influential, people in their child's development, the traditional assumption is that there must be a right way to parent (O'Connor, 2002). This has led to a significant amount of time been spent historically and solely on researching parenting styles and practices. However, despite the fact that parenting has been extensively researched and is now regarded as being highly influential on children's development, a single all-encompassing theory is yet to emerge (O'Connor, 2002). Because of the lack of such a theory, the field of developmental psychology has arguably filled the void

and become the most dominant voice, providing a theoretical framework in which research can be carried out. Ramaekers & Suissa (2012) argue the tone of the language of developmental psychology appears to offer scientific clarity and precision to parenting research. This has led to now widely accepted and long-standing assumptions about what constitutes a good parent and what parenting should look like. However, is the field able to deliver on such a promise or should these assumptions be challenged and open to review?

To answer this question, it is essential to interrogate if a full understanding of parenting is possible solely through the lens of developmental psychology or whether we must look beyond the discipline to seek a better comprehension of it. Furthermore, there is a need to explore the very notion of an 'effective parent', and whether, given differing social contexts, if it is right to continue to search out and idolize a conforming view of one. The traditional focus of developmental psychology in parenting research has often led to the exclusion of other influences, such as those of the school, local neighbourhood and community on parenting practices and child development.

## **2.2 History of Parenting Research**

Parenting is considered an interactive complex parent-child process with numerous behaviours working individually and collectively to directly influence a child's psychological development (Sanders, 2008; Darling, 1999). Emerging from the cultural context of post-World War II and spearheaded by Bowlby (1969), attachment theory has remained a cornerstone of effective parenting throughout the subsequent decades. Love was assumed to be the resource that humans most thrived on (Kagan, 1998). Without a doubt, children need human contact and parents/carers who are responsive to their needs and provide a sense of safety. As a result, the importance of the child-parent relationship has been viewed as critical to a child's positive social and emotional development. Indeed, research has consistently shown that an absence of a positive parent-child relationship has increased negative behavioural and academic outcomes for children (Benoit, 2004). Traditionally, attachment theory has focused on the mother-child relationship, identifying the importance of the mother's care-giving and emotional support as being very significant to the child (Morrow, 1998; Bowlby, 1969).

However, the quality of the father-child relationship has also been shown to positively influence children (Burgess, 2009). Furthermore, Dunn et al. (2006) found that children cared for by their relatives followed a similar developmental trajectory as those cared for by their parents.

### **2.3 Parenting Styles**

Parenting research has consistently shown that parenting style is a key predictor in children's well-being (Morris et al., 2007; Hiscock et al., 2012). Maccoby & Martin (1983) have identified two key dimensions of an effective parenting style; parental responsiveness and parental demandingness. Parental responsiveness is defined as, 'the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands' (Baumrind, 1991, p.62). Parental demandingness is described as, 'the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys' (Baumrind, 1991, pp.61-62).

Variations in the two dimensions of parenting have given rise to the classification of four different parenting styles; indulgent, authoritarian, authoritative and uninvolved (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Traditionally, these four parenting styles have been researched through the lens of developmental psychology to explore their impact on children's emotional, social and academic development. Indulgent parents are characterised by high levels of responsiveness, but low levels of demandingness. They are non-directive, allowing for the child's own self-regulation and have a lenient discipline approach (Ross & Hammer, 2002; Baumrind, 1991). In contrast, authoritarian parents have low levels of responsiveness, demanding obedience in a very structured environment (Darling, 1999; Ross & Hammer, 2002). Uninvolved parents have low levels of both responsiveness and demandingness, with it leading to neglectful behaviour by parents in extreme cases (Darling, 1999). Authoritative parents are considered caring, open-minded and assertive in their parenting, providing direction in a supportive manner (Ross & Hammer, 2002).

With its equal balance between responsiveness and demandingness, and responding to the cultural norms of the Western world where parenting research

has largely taken place (Burman, 2008; Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012), an authoritative parenting style is now considered to be the most effective and the approach that should be adopted by parents. This is supported by the Growing Up in Ireland (2012) research, which found that children of parents who were classified as authoritarian or neglectful had more difficulties. Children of authoritative parents have been found to present with high levels of competency and lower problem behaviour levels in both genders and through all developmental stages (Darling, 1999). In contrast, children of uninvolved parents have been found to be the least socially, emotionally and academic competent (Darling, 1999). The children of indulgent parents have high levels of problem behaviour in school, perform less well academically but have good social skills and high levels of self-esteem (Zahedani et al., 2016). Children who have experienced an authoritarian parenting style perform better and have low levels of problem behaviour in school, but present with lower self-esteem, poorer social skills and higher levels of depression (Zahedani et al., 2016). In light of this, several parenting programmes have been developed, both nationally and internationally, with an authoritative parenting style at their core, as outlined in Table 2.1, below. Generally, parenting programmes have been shown to lead to improved developmental outcomes (e.g. prosocial behaviour, emotional development and peer relationships), as well as increasing parental responsiveness to their children (Enebrink et al., 2015; Hand et al., 2013; Sanders, 2014; Sanders, 2008; Menting et al., 2013; Barlow et al., 1996, Furlong et al., 1996; Carr et al., 2016).

**Table 2.1: Overview of three dominant evidence-based parenting programmes**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Incredible Years School Age Basic Parenting Programme</b> <i>(Webster-Stratton, 2006)</i>	<b>Group Triple P Programme</b> <i>(Sanders, 1999)</i>	<b>Parents Plus Children's Programme</b> <i>(Sharry &amp; Fitzpatrick, 1998)</i>
<b>Age range</b>	6-12 years	2-12 years	6-12 years
<b>Duration</b>	14-21 weeks	8 weeks	8 weeks
<b>Session Structure</b>	Group (with optional 1-1	Group (with optional 1-1	Group (with optional 1-1

	support)	support)	support)
<b>Content – Parental Responsiveness</b>	Play Positive attention, encouragement and praise Tangible rewards, incentives and celebrations Communicating and Problem solving	Parent-child relationship enhancement skills Create a safe and interesting environment Have a positive learning environment Take care of yourself as parents	Providing positive attention Play and special time Child-centred play Encouragement and praise Prevention plans Family listening and problem solving Parental self-care
<b>Content – Parental Demandingness</b>	Effective Limit Setting Ignore, Redirect, Distract Time Out Natural and logical consequences	Encouraging desirable behaviour Teaching new skills and behaviours Managing misbehaviour Anticipating and planning Have realistic expectations	Pressing the pause button Establishing routines Consequences Sanction systems Assertive parenting

## 2.4 Parenting, Poverty and Inequality

Universal parenting programme delivery has been found to be effective for parents, irrespective of socio-economic status and/ or severity of child's behaviour problems (Hand et al., 2013; Furlong et al., 1996). Success rates for parents participating in a parenting programme range from 70%-75% (Lucas, 2011; Scott & Dadds, 2009). However, by claiming that there is an effective way to parent, this also, rather provocatively, suggests that there is a limited way to parent. Ramaekers & Suissa (2012) argue, 'what is "generally the case" [in research findings] is illegitimately granted the status of a "norm"' (p.358). James et al. (1998) maintain that traditional research has been influenced by the 'standards of judgement relative to our world view' (p.27). In attempting to ensure conformity, these standards, as decided largely by middle-class stakeholders, are universally applied to and/or imposed on all, irrespective of



whether they clash with the norms, values and customs of community members (Jordan, 2001). This application of 'standards of judgement' can be problematic as it primarily reflects the views and opinions of the predominately middle to upper class stakeholders who have been to the forefront of parenting research, which has remained largely in the laboratory setting, focusing primarily on Western middle class families.

Universal delivery of parenting programmes has also increasingly been seen by policy makers as a way of addressing larger social issues in marginalised communities, as research has shown that there is a high correlation between poverty and 'inadequate' parenting and an overreliance on the authoritarian parenting style (Gillies, 2009; Katz et al., 2007). With particular reference to marginalised communities, Kaufman et al. (2007), point out that these standards of judgements lead to research which is normally focused on the community's problems, as perceived by the researchers, not their strengths. This leads to a deficit model often implied and applied to the community as a whole. As a result, Fondacaro & Weinberg (2002) argue that, 'the disadvantaged, and particularly their children, [are] seen as un-consenting participants in prevention programs that perpetuated rather than eliminated victim blaming' (p.481).

This is further exaggerated by the western culture's dominant view of individualism. Individualism is characterised by 'initiative, independence, personal responsibility and freedom of choice [which] can be transferred onto families [who] are expected to be self-sufficient entities and when problems arise they are attributed to poor choices or deficits within the family' (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005, pp.451-2). In an increasingly individualistic society, parents are viewed as being responsible for the success of their own families, with the responsibility for the functioning of the family considered to lie solely with the members of that family (Layard & Dunn, 2009; Parton, 1991). It is often assumed that families in marginalised communities are less likely than their peers from middle-class backgrounds to have positive adult role models. There is often a more prevalent use of an authoritarian parenting style within marginalised communities, for example as parents try to keep their children safe and protected from harm. However, the use of this style is viewed negatively, with little consideration given to why it may be needed, or might be deemed preferable to an authoritative style in certain circumstances, thereby perpetuating the belief that parents need

parenting advice and guidance (Visser et al., 2015; Katz et al., 2007). While the environment is somewhat acknowledged here as impacting on parenting styles and practices, the assumption is made that change lies almost exclusively with the family, where parents and their children are seen as the primary, and often only, agents of change. This is problematic as it places the burden for change on individual parents and families, whilst also diverting attention from inequitable social policies that keep families marginalised and impoverished.

To tackle this, therefore, community psychology argues for the need to listen to marginalised people to more fully understand behaviour in a larger framework. Marginalisation is a phenomenon present in deprived communities, but experienced in two ways. The entire community can be globally marginalised, but families and/ or individuals within the locality can also be marginalised, including for example families from ethnic minorities, such as Irish Travellers, and people with a disability (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Marginalisation leads to limited opportunities to contribute to society as a whole, resulting in low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem within the community. In communities with high levels of unemployment, the lack of work opportunities results in impaired social networks and little resources available to the community, culminating in people having little control over their lives (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Compared to their middle-class peers, marginalised families' quality of life is significantly lower. As parents attempt to deal with the challenges that poverty and inequality bring, positive parenting practices can be unintentionally disrupted. Household deprivation and dealing with stressful life events has been found to decrease maternal well-being (Growing Up in Ireland, 2012). Stress caused by poverty often results in parents experiencing higher levels of depression, irritability and anger, leading them to rely more heavily on an authoritarian or uninvolved parenting style, in comparison to middle-class parents (Katz et al., 2007). The prevalence of maternal depression has also been found to increase conflict between parents and children, as well as negatively impact the closeness of the parent-child relationship (Growing Up in Ireland, 2012). Although this is not a phenomenon confined to marginalised communities, several studies have found a clear link between poverty and the risk factors identified as impacting negatively on children's emotional well-being which include parental mental health problems, low income, inequality, deprivation, relationship conflict and substance abuse

(Hiscock et al., 2012, Healthy Ireland, 2013; Sanders, 2008). This is particularly relevant for parents in marginalised communities as their parenting style and practices operate in a more fluid manner, as they must respond to the challenges of living in a community where inequality is prevalent (Visser et al., 2015).

Going a step further, in attempting to understand how inequality impacts families and parenting, Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) state that the ability to function effectively in the bio-ecological system is often significantly compromised in disadvantaged families. Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) argue that this is due to the power inequality that is faced by such families. This inequality manifests itself through oppression, which is defined as, ‘a state of domination where the oppressed [disadvantaged families] suffer the consequences of deprivation, exclusion, discrimination, exploitation, control of culture, and sometimes even violence’ (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2002, p. 12). It becomes evident that families exposed to such circumstances can be significantly negatively impacted. Furthermore, factors of oppression can be imposed on marginalised communities by middle to upper-class stakeholders/ policy-makers through their ‘standards of judgment’, for example social housing policies. In contrast, liberation is how the marginalised community respond and mitigate against this oppression and how they make opportunities for themselves, often through resistance and social justice, to reclaim their power or become empowered (Orford, 2008; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Indeed, factors of oppression and liberation are evident in parenting practices, in particular the access, or lack of, to social networks (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). It is by exploring such factors, as listed in Table 2.2 below, that research can, ‘make visible the invisible issue of power inequality that categorises oppression’ (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005, p.40).

**Table 2.2: Factors of oppression and liberation which influence parenting practices**

<b>Factors of Oppression</b>	<b>Factors of Liberation</b>
Lack of social networks/ isolation	Social networks/ connection
Lack of Mobility	Mobility
Lack of choice	Choice
Powerless	Empowered
Lack of community structures	Adequate community structures

*(Adapted from Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005)*

Indeed, Smail (2009) argues that people are often asked to see the errors of their ways but are unaware of the influence power inequality has on their life choices. Smail (2009) argues that the idea of an 'autonomous self' is often an illusion, based 'upon the extent of powers available to the individual in social space time' (p.43). For instance, while a family's income levels are not directly correlated to parenting capacity, low income families are less likely to have access to health resources, leading to a proportionally higher level of psychological stress for children, which has knock-on effect on family relationships (Katz et al., 2007; WHO, 2010). Families in marginalised communities may also find it more difficult to access reliable transport, they may be unable to pay for recreational activities in the community, they are more likely to be socially isolated, to live in poorer conditions and be stigmatised for where they live (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). It is also important to note that access to such resources is not equally distributed across the community, but dependent on the level of marginalisation experienced by the individual, based on, for example, their gender and ethnicity (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). Yet, when parents in marginalised communities are asked to participate in parenting programmes, they can often feel disempowered as traditional programmes are not always reflective of their cultural or societal norms, nor do they acknowledge how much social capital a parent may or may not have at their disposal (Visser et al., 2015; Calzada et al., 2012). Social capital, with respect to parenting research, refers to 'actual and potential resources inherent in social networks' (as cited in Visser et al., 2015, p.114).

## **2.5 Dealing with Adversity**

Taking the above into consideration, Johnstone & Boyle (2018) argue that the negative operation of power through, for example biological, legal, economic, social or cultural threats, leads to an increased risk of exposure to adversities, that 'even the most loving and secure upbringing cannot provide protection against' (p.26). Adverse events are listed as poverty and debt; parental mental health; parental illness and disability; child abuse and neglect; parental substance abuse; family separation/ bereavement; offending and anti-social behaviour (Morgan et al., 2016, p.4). Furthermore, adversity is significantly more prevalent where inequality, discrimination, deprivation and marginalisation are all present, with

poverty itself often considered as a structural adversity (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018; Morgan et al., 2016). As clearly outlined here, it is important to note that adversities are not normally experienced independently by children and adults. Instead, they are often co-related to each other, with exposure to four or more adverse events correlated with very poor outcomes for children in later life (Anda, 2006; Morgan et al., 2016). Indeed, children have been found to experience higher levels of social and emotional difficulties if diagnosed with a chronic illness or developmental disability (Growing Up in Ireland, 2012). Undoubtedly, a single adverse event can have significant negative outcomes for a child. However, the cumulative effect of exposure to several adversities over the course of a childhood can have deep, wide-ranging and life-shaping consequences, depending on the frequency, severity of the event(s), their age at occurrence and the resources they and/or their family are able to access in response to it.

In dealing with the adversity faced by the people living in marginalised communities, Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) argue that community members should be able to access 'informal supports and strong community structures' to support their mental health (p.456). Indeed, Propper et al. (2007) found that the parenting styles were negatively impacted by poor maternal mental health and if parents had experienced difficult events in their early life. Resilience, developed through social networks and resources, has been identified as a key protective factor against adversity (Morgan et al., 2016). With particular reference to parenting, the disturbance in positive parenting practices can be mitigated against when a stable relationship exists among parents and when parents have the support of friends and neighbours (Katz et al., 2007; Layard & Dunne, 2007). Therefore, it becomes clear that a person's ability and capacity to parent is significantly influenced by their own health, the quality of their intimate relationships, their ability to access a support network and what survival strategies they are able to employ at the individual, family and group level (Johnstone & Boyle., 2018; Layard & Dunn, 2009; Visser et al., 2015; Katz et al., 2007; Ghate & Hazel, 2002). However, a person's ability to develop resilience can be significantly hindered by their 'exposure to poverty, disadvantage and social inequality' (Morgan et al., 2016, p. 12). Furthermore, Johnstone & Boyle (2018) argue an individual can be exposed to significantly higher levels of discrimination, compared to their peers, when they occupy several marginalised identities, with

females comprising 50% of all devalued identities. Applying this argument to the Irish context, a poor female Traveller could then be considered significantly more marginalised than a settled mother living in the same community .

## **2.6 An Innovative Way of Approaching Parenting Research and Programmes**

While the general effectiveness of parenting programmes is well documented, it becomes evident that the findings of traditional parenting research methods do not capture the nuances present in parenting, particularly in marginalised communities. Also, to date, much of the parenting programmes offered to families in marginalised communities has been done so by government and policy-makers, with little, if any, consultation with the local community. Although an educational scholar, Freire's views on education with marginalised groups can be translated to a critique of parenting programmes. Freire's (1971) banking model of education argues that the student is 'empty' of knowledge and are viewed as 'containers [needing] to be filled by the teacher' (p.72). As a result, education 'becomes an act of depositing' (p.72) as knowledge is viewed as something that is held by the teacher and bestowed on the student. As knowledge is simply reproduced and not open to discussion or critical analysis by the students, the status quo is maintained in society, but particularly in marginalised communities where the teacher is the oppressor and the student the oppressed (Freire, 1971). Linking this model to parenting programmes, students (i.e. parents) are then treated as subjects, needing to conform through learning a specific set of skills, while also supporting their oppression through curtailing their thoughts and actions. (Freire, 1971). This raises questions about how parents can be supported to become more empowered, connected and autonomous in their parenting, when parenting programmes, arguably, assume and convey that they lack certain crucial knowledge or skill-sets.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to look for innovative ways of approaching parenting interventions and research that offers possibilities for actually liberating the very people the intervention aims to help. To address this, the application of the principles of community psychology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Orford, 2008) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) bioecological model provides a framework, as well as a lens, to explore the impact of broader social and cultural influences on

the family unit and in turn their impact on children's psychological development. Moving away from the simple reproduction of parenting knowledge from the teacher to the student, Visser et al. (2015) argue that it is essential to take the 'situated nature of parenting' into account (p.119). It is not enough to just look at parenting itself in the research, but to look at the wider influences of the child's family network, school and local neighbourhood at play, through the ontogenic, micro, exo and macro systems (Byrnes & Miller, 2012; Katz et al., 2007). Parenting does not occur within a vacuum but is influenced by, for example, the support networks a parent has, how the family interact with their school and community and their ability to access community supports.

By approaching parenting research from this perspective, a better understanding of families' experiences of parenting can arguably emerge, which in turn can support the development of parenting programmes. Taking into consideration a community education approach and in light of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model, the emphasis shifts to a person-focused curriculum developed within and for the community (Tett & Fyfe, 2010). Challenging the banking model of education, Freirean community education instead emphasises the importance of learning through active exploration and engagement with the students. In doing so, the students are provided with the opportunity to, 'perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves' (Freire, 1971, p. 83). At the meso level, therefore, and by including families' voices in this interactive relationship, a parenting programme may be developed that is more responsive of and to the local community (Tett & Fyfe, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As discussed above, and in developing parenting supports in this way, the ability for community members to become more liberated may also be achieved, as they become more empowered in their own lives (Nelson & Prillentsky, 2005).

Furthermore, Holloway's (1998) phrase of the 'moral geography of mothering' is quite relevant here. This is defined as the 'localised discourse concerned with what is considered right and wrong in the raising of children' (p. 31). As becomes evident, parenting is heavily influenced by the physical location, social construction and defining characteristics of the community people live in (Visser et al., 2015; Philo, 1991). By taking into consideration this 'situated nature of parenting', we can begin to uncover the realities of parenting in marginalised

communities. In doing so, we can begin to unpack how family relationships, the school environment, neighbourhood dynamics and societal structures influence parenting.

Visser et al.'s (2015) study of parenting styles in a predominantly low-income, high unemployment area of Rotterdam, comprising a majority of non-Western residents offers an interesting insight into how this problem-posing concept can be applied. In interviewing both parents and children living in the area, Visser et al. (2015) found that there wasn't a consensus on what was an effective parenting style. In contrast to traditional research, parenting styles were not clearly categorised as authoritarian, authoritative, uninvolved or indulgent. Instead, the parenting style employed was dependent on parents' perception of their neighbourhood, level of neighbourhood engagement and their access to social networks. In response to the environment they were raising their family, Visser et al. (2005) identified how parents used three different parenting styles; protective, similarity-seeking and selective, based on their involvement in the community and the social networks they were able to access. A protective parenting style was categorised by children being limited to the home by their parents, due to the negative perceptions they had of the community. Parents maintained high levels of supervision of their children, categorised by isolating and monitoring them to ensure they were kept safe from risks in the community. Parents who used the protective style also had limited social networks beyond their own family unit. Parents who employed a similarity-seeking style were aware of the risks in the community but felt that they were able to overcome this by having good social networks and support. Rather than keeping the children away from the community, they found, 'appropriate people and places for their children through their social networks' (Visser et al., 2015, p.117). A selective parenting style differed from the protective and similarity-seeking in that parents were able to draw on resources and social support from outside, as well as inside, their community. Unlike the protective parenting style, it was also categorised by low levels of fear about the community and a much more individualistic approach was taken by the parents (Visser et al., 2015). This study highlights that there is more than just one way to categorise parenting styles, and challenges narrow assumptions of there being a right way to parent. Here the interconnection between Bronfenbrenner's four systems are clearly at play as parents choose



between different parenting styles, depending on the influences placed on them by their own family relationships, neighbourhoods, culture and social conditions. By taking account of a parent's socio-spatial context, a clearer understanding of the reality of parenting practices in differing settings can begin to emerge (Perrier, 2010, as cited in Visser et al., 2015, p.113). Rather than there being one rigid way to be an effective parent, the parent is in fact viewed as an active participant in their setting, reacting according to their situated reality (Newman & Newman, 2007). As Hallway (1998) argues, parenting is instead being influenced by what is the localised discourse for specific communities, rather than an overarching agreement across varying parts of society of what parenting should look like. Furthermore, by applying the principles of community psychology to parenting, the natural bias to focus on the individual is recognised. As discussed above, Orford (2008) argues that individuals and families are either empowered or disempowered by their income, work opportunities and sense of community. Moving away from the individual level, community psychology looks at ways people and communities can combat inequality and injustice (Orford, 2008). Critical attention should instead be given to examining the individual through their social context (Orford, 2008).

## **2.7 What about children in parenting research?**

As evident from the earlier discussions above, to exclusively focus on exploring the parent in the family unit is not enough to fully understand parenting practices and styles. Therefore, understanding the context in which the child is growing up in also becomes central. Hogan (2005) argues that as we move away from the traditional assumption of the context-free child from developmental psychology, that children should instead be explored through their own subjective experiences. Danzinger (1970) maintains that, 'the child is socialised by belonging to a particular culture at a certain stage in its history' (as cited in James & Prout, 1997, p.18). In light of this, therefore, the idea of the universal child is challenged, instead opening up our understanding to the many varied and differing childhoods experienced (James et al., 1998). This has particular relevance when wishing to explore the childhoods of children from marginalised communities, whose experiences often differ from the norm.

Children play a vital role in influencing parental practices, but their influence is often only measured in terms of behaviour outcomes in parenting programmes. The child is often viewed as a passive recipient of the programme delivery, rather than an active agent in the process. Therefore, a bi-directional relationship exists between both the child and the parent as they both influence each other (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Granic et al., 2007). Therefore, in attempting to explore the reality of parenting, children's experiences must also be understood (Katz et al., 2007). While Bowlby (1953) argues that the parent and child should both find satisfaction in their relationship with each other to optimise both their mental health, this is not always the case. As mentioned previously, parents of children with more challenging behaviour did not experience the same success rates as other parents after participating in a parenting programme. Bearing this in mind, research carried out by Williams et al. (2014) found that parents of children with un-medicated Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD) employed either a negative (emotional) or positive (cognitive) coping pathway when overcoming challenges, depending on the emotional, physical and knowledge resources available to them at that time. This suggests that the influence being placed on the parent by the child's behaviour is greater than their ability to employ positive parenting practices. In this case, children are shaping, as well as being shaped by parenting practices. This fluidity of parenting styles between the two pathways here illustrates how parents draw on different skills and practices depending on their family situation at any given time, leading to changes in their child's behaviour (Granic, 2007). Indeed, in tracking children aged 7-11 years with aggressive behaviour, Granic et al. (2007) found that rather than applying a rigid parenting style, they used 'moment-to-moment parenting' with their children. It is in these more flexible and positive responses to their child's aggressive behaviours that their child's behaviour improved. This suggests that effective parenting is not solely reliant on a parent's availability to their child, but instead on the quality of the dynamic relationship that emerges between them.

Despite the significant role children play in influencing parenting practices, their voices have often been noticeably absent in research, only emerging when parenting is considered to be failing (James, 2003). However, the inclusion of children's voices in research has been found to have a significant positive impact on the child's self-esteem, development and understanding of decision-making

and citizenship (Lansdown et al., 2014). Therefore, within the Irish context, participation is one of the five key work streams of Tusla's Prevention Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) programme. Children's participation is underpinned by and enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), under Article 12 which states that:

1. 'State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.
2. 'For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, wither directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law'.

When completing research with children, Article 12 can be facilitated through Lundy's Model of Participation (2007). This model comprises four elements to ensure children are included in decision-making in a way that echoes clearly their rights as laid out by the UNCRC. These elements are:

1. Space: Children must be given the opportunity to form and express a view
2. Voice: Children must be facilitated to express a view
3. Audience: The view must be listened to
4. Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate

*(Lundy, 2007, p.933)*

In practise, Lundy's model has significant implications for research with marginalised communities. Indeed, from a community psychology viewpoint, children's voices should be treated as an essential and integral part of the discourse as all other voices (Lundy, 2007). Indeed, they should be viewed as 'credible informants' in understanding their own lives (Greene, 2006, p.9). While children must be given the space to form a view, they must also be provided with an environment which enables them to do so, including time to understand the issues being discussed, access to information that is developmentally appropriate to them, capacity building activities and providing adults with appropriate training

(Lundy & McEvoy, 2011; UN, 2009, Article 20; Lundy, 2007). In facilitating children's views, it is also essential that a range of children's perspectives are sought. However, specific groups of children are often excluded from research about issues that directly impact them. Therefore, particular emphasis should also be placed on ensuring that 'seldom heard' children and young people are heard and included, for example Traveller children and those living in marginalised communities (Kelleher et al., 2014). As previously stated, marginalisation and inequality is not just experienced globally within a marginalised community, but also more profoundly by specific individuals and groups within the community. For this reason, therefore, it is extremely important that members of different groups within a marginalised community are included in parenting research.

With particular relevance to research in marginalised communities, Lundy (2007) emphasises the importance of ensuring all children participate, not just those who are achieving academically or those who are considered to be socially and emotionally competent. However, while it may be easy to listen to what children say, children also have the right to have what they say acted upon, where appropriate. They should be considered as an important contributor to our understanding of society (Lundy, 2007). It is by acknowledging the influence of children in this way that their voice can impact on educational and social policy in a meaningful and robust manner, while also empowering them in matters which directly affect their lives (Edwards & Alldred, 1999). Taking this into consideration, Kinlen & McDonald (2018) sought the views of children living in Finglas, Dublin, about their emotional health and well-being. In an area that has high rates of social disadvantage, the children spoke positively about their community and identified the importance of their social networks, which was made up of both their own and wider family, their friends and their teachers. It is important to note that children's friendships are recognised as a key protective factor as it gives them an opportunity to relate to others as well as increase their social capital (Growing Up in Ireland, 2012). When describing what made them unhappy, many of the children spoke about how vandalism and crime affected their play spaces, sometimes limiting their ability to use them. They also spoke about regularly witnessing stolen cars, joyriding, drugs and violence. The idea of self-protection and retaliation was also raised in the context of bullying that they were exposed to in the community (Kinlen & McDonald, 2018).

Reiterating Visser et al.'s (2015) argument that it is necessary to look at the situated nature of parenting, children, therefore, have an important contribution to make in our understanding of parenting in marginalised communities. Their influence cannot be underestimated. It is not enough to do research 'on' children but, instead, to do research 'with' them. In this way, children become the subject, rather than the object, of the research (Hogan, 2005). As a result, recent research has sought to include children's perspectives on parenting. DCYA (2010) found that children could clearly articulate their views on parenting. Nixon et al. (2015) noted, in qualitative interviews carried out with 38 children, aged 7-17 years in single-parent households, that they saw themselves as active contributors and agents in their own families, positioning themselves centrally in family negotiations. Children's sense of agency was also observed in Nixon et al. (2012) qualitative study with 27 children aged 8-17 years where children's relationships with their non-resident fathers were explored. Nixon et al. (2012) observed that the children accepted the relationship they had with their father but organised and negotiated it in a way which benefitted them, with the children viewing the relationship as voluntary if their needs were not being met by their fathers. These studies provide an insight into the processes at work on parenting within the family unit, with children clearly having a significant role in helping to determine the overall family experience. In relation to this study, the ways that children experience support from their parents, provides key insights into their family experiences, which in turn can help inform formal educational welfare practice and policy.

With both the home and school influencing children, the dynamic of Bronfenbrenner's exosystem becomes clear. Yet, it is important to note that when a friction exists between the home and the school, the child remains a key influencer on both. Vyverman & Vettenbug (2009) found that even from a young age, children influence their parents' participation in their school-life, with children from deprived backgrounds liking their parents' involvement in school more than their peers from more advantaged backgrounds. Children who perceived their parents as 'nice' had parents who were more involved, and interestingly, boys tended to prefer that their parents participate in field trips, but wanted them to help with homework rather than come to the school (Vyverman & Vettenbug, 2009).

While non-traditional family units often have standards of judgement imposed on them, these judgements were not typically vocalised by children in research. O'Brien & Alldred (1991) found that children's definition of their family unit did not conform to the traditional 2.4 family stereotype, but instead was actually shaped by their own experiences and realities and not restricted (Burman, 2008). Indeed, Nixon et al. (2015) found in their research with single-parent families, that despite their family structure being outside the norm and often considered problematic, the children's most common discourse was how normal they viewed their situation. In line with this, in qualitative research carried out with 14-20 year old youths from an American-Indian community, McMahon et al. (2013) noted that they had a positive orientation towards themselves and their community, despite it being considered marginalised.

## **2.8 How families navigate the value systems of home and school**

As discussed above, the neighbourhood that a family lives in has an impact on parenting styles and practices. However, within the neighbourhood exists another highly influential factor; that of the local school. With particular reference to marginalised communities, the standards of judgement mentioned previously become evident here in the education system where a clash of values, practices and cultures can exist between home and school. Despite the fact that the family and the school have broadly the same objective in ensuring the best outcomes for the children, how that looks to the school can often differ from the families of the community it serves. This can then lead to the application of a deficit model to disadvantaged families.

Souto-Manning (2010) argues that children's outcomes are improved when their school recognises and incorporates their pupils' home strengths, values and customs. However, when schools fail to do this, the child's home is in fact devalued in their eyes, leading to lower self-esteem and higher rates of early school leaving (Jordan, 2001). In the case of Traveller children, Jordan (2001) argues that the contrasting skills valued by parents and teachers actually negatively impact the children's outcomes. Here the standards of judgement of the school are what are adhered to, with this clash of values often leading to limited educational provision being made for Traveller children in helping them to

negotiate between the two environments (Jordan, 2001). Furthermore, Devine (2013) argues that when migrant children are valued differently, it actually perpetuates the normalisation of underachievement for them as they are only considered valuable when they conform to the norms set for them in their new society. This tension of values between home and school can also significantly impact their family's well-being as children straddle the school's value-laden system and their own ethnic values and influences (Devine, 2013).

Indeed, parents from marginalised communities are often perceived by educators to be unengaged and, indeed, uninvolved in their child's education (Vyverman & Vettenbug, 2009). However, Vyverman & Vettenbug (2009) argue that parents from marginalised communities generally engage just as much as their middle-class peers in school, but they do it in more non-traditional ways, such as helping out in their child's class or accompanying the class on an outing. Yet it is important to note that while inequality is not explicitly named, its effects can again be seen here. There is a clear difference between how marginalised communities engage with the school, compared to their middle-class peers. The reason for this difference may lie in how parents from marginalised communities may feel that they will be perceived by the school, their ability and capacity to engage due to their home situation, their own negative school experiences and the relationship between the parent and child (Vyverman & Vettenbug, 2009). However, a key principle of community psychology is the right for people to be different and not judged against a single standard (Rappaport, 1977). -

## **2.9 Supporting Parents through Home-School-Community Partnership**

Research has consistently found that home-school partnership has led to improved academic outcomes for their children, as well as increased social capital and social networks (Bower et al., 2011; Hill & Taylor 2004; Jung-Sook & Bowen, 2006). However, home-school partnership has been incorrectly perceived as 'parental involvement', which traditionally has had quite a narrow focus (Vincent, 2000). Parental involvement demands a great deal of investment from the parent, but not of the school itself, with parents considered uninvolved if they are unable to meet the school's demands, reflecting a power imbalance in favour of the school and its standards of judgement (Bower et al., 2011; Vincent, 2000). This

also often results in parents having little autonomy to act as an equal partner in their child's school, as it depends on how much social capital is available to them, how prepared they are to use it and how the school responds to these requests (Vincent, 2000). Furthermore, parents from marginalised communities consider themselves to have a less effective voice in bringing about change, compared to their middle-class peers (Vincent, 2000).

However, Epstein (2011) argues that parental involvement in their child's education should not be solely measured on their presence in the school building. Instead, to address this issue, Epstein (2011) states that a more appropriate term to use would be 'school, family and community partnership' which 'recognises that parents, educators and others in the community share responsibility for students' learning and development' (p.43). Complementing the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence illustrates that there are many paths to partnership, influenced by external forces and the internal actions of the home, school and community (Epstein, 2011). This is illustrated in a study of 171 teachers in inner city elementary and middle schools in Baltimore, USA, which found that when teachers believed that they shared similar beliefs to the parents, there was an increase in contact with parents and were less influenced by the disadvantaged status of the school population (Epstein, 2011). Interestingly, Epstein (2011) also found that parents too were more involved in the school if they perceived the schools were committed to parental involvement and also wanted to support the needs and requests of the parents.

Within the Irish context, the all-of-government policy, as outlined in 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020', prioritises the need to support families in their communities. It sets out five outcomes: Active and Healthy; Achieving; Safe; Economic Security; Connected and Respected. These are to be achieved by:

- Developing a high-level policy statement on Parenting and Family Support to guide the provision of universal evidence-informed parenting supports.
- Ensuring planning and coordination of parenting supports at local level through Children's Services Committees.



- Continuing to support parents financially with the costs of rearing children through the provision of Child Benefit.
- Evaluating current policy in relation to maternity and parental leave with a view to giving consideration to the introduction of paid paternity leave.

*(Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014, p.28)*

As a result of the Child and Family Agency Act (2013), Tusla was established on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 as the dedicated state agency responsible for improving well-being and outcomes for children. Amongst its services, it provides family and locally based community supports and educational welfare services. Additionally, a key work stream of Tusla is the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme, a comprehensive programme of early intervention and preventative work, which includes parenting support and the implementation of an area-based approach via the Meitheal model. However, while the frameworks established as a result of the Child and Family Agency Act (2013) are relatively new, the identification of the importance of supporting parents to support their children is not. The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme was established in 1990 by Dr. Concepta Conaty to bridge the gap between home and school and to tackle educational inequality in marginalised communities. The five goals of the scheme are:

- Supporting marginalised pupils
- Promoting co-operation between home, school and community
- Empowering parents
- Retaining young people in the education system
- Disseminating best practice

*(From Vision to Best Practice, 2006, p.8)*

In 2005, the Department of Education and Skills launched Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) and the HSCL scheme became a key component of the suite of interventions provided to these schools. In working towards developing a national integrated service to families, the HSCL scheme now operates under the remit of Tusla Educational Welfare Services (EWS) in the majority of DEIS schools nationwide, with its focus 'on developing the potential of

parents, teachers and the community through the process of partnership, in order to provide a seamless service to children' (From Vision to Best Practice, p.18).

As is evident, universal and targeted parenting interventions have been, and are increasingly, becoming a key component of the national support being offered to families by Tusla through the HSCL scheme and the PPFs programme. Indeed, a universal rollout of PPCP through a community and school-based approach in Ireland reported a decrease in their parental stress and their child's behaviour problems, with these improvements maintained by both parents and children at the six-month follow-up (Hand et al., 2013). However, it is important to note that the implied assumption still remains a deficit model, with the request for intervention coming from government and policy makers, rather than the community itself. In general, the universal roll-out of parenting interventions is based on quantitative studies that miss the everyday realities of families (Enebrink et al., 2015; Scott & Dadds, 2009). The standardised measures of parent and child behaviours used have a narrow scope, unable to capture the intricacies of family life and relationships. The voices and experiences of parents are not adequately captured. Instead, there is an overreliance on quantitative research methods, such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and Kansas Parenting Satisfaction Scale (Hand et al., 2013). While the inequality experienced by these families is recognised as they are given access to the scheme, the onus still remains, arguably unfairly, on the already marginalised family unit to change, with possibly no real attempt made by the government to address other factors impinging on a parent's ability and capacity to parent. Again, the stakeholder, that is government policy-makers, remains the dominant voice in the community it serves. The standard of judgement and agenda is set by the professional stakeholders, with the expectation that community members must meet these standards and fulfil the agenda set for them.

However, from Freirean and community psychology perspectives, it is essential that the voices of the community come to the forefront, providing an opportunity to identify how factors of liberation and/or oppression occur for them and how these factors impact parenting styles and practices (Reyes & Cruz, 2011). In terms of parenting research, community members' voices can then be included in

policymaking to better tailor local supports in ways that best meets the community's needs. Therefore, this present study, as discussed below, will privilege the voices of parents and children from an area of low SES, whose families have participated in PPCP.

### **2.10 The current study**

The inclusion of the voices of parents and children from marginalised communities is quite a departure from traditional rigid assumptions in parenting research. However, it is by privileging their voices can we begin to understand parenting in a more rounded way, giving a platform to the lived experiences and everyday realities of families. It is by asking parents and children in marginalised communities about their experiences of parenting programmes and their own family life that valuable insights into their parenting practices and styles may be uncovered. This will also help in more fully understanding how inequality manifests itself for them in their day-to-day lives. Therefore, the primary research question posed is how can parents' and children's' perspectives and experiences of parenting programmes and family life in marginalised communities inform parenting interventions, formal educational welfare policy and practice in DEIS schools.

### **3. Methodology**

Locating this research within an interpretivist epistemology and by applying a social constructivist viewpoint, this chapter outlines the methodology and research design that was used. The rationale for the use of a case study approach, insider research, and qualitative data collection is explained. A detailed description of the case site and participants is outlined, including how purposive sampling was used. The way in which the data was collected and analysed is described. Given the fact that the participants may be easily identifiable through the research, consideration of this key ethical issue was given significant attention throughout all stages of the research from design, implementation and through to dissemination. For example, in addition to living in a marginalised community, the majority of the families involved in this study had experienced other adversities, with many experiencing multiple adversities. These included addiction, domestic violence, homelessness, conflict with the law, mental health difficulties and relationship breakdowns. As discussed in detail below, it was not considered appropriate within the context of this study, to specifically probe parents on these issues, and in order to protect participants' anonymity, it was deemed inappropriate to identify which parents had experienced which adversities. Further ethical issues and the research limitations are also discussed.

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Using the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model, together with the principles and values of community psychology (Orford, 2008), this study seeks to explore parents' experiences of family life and participation in the universal roll-out of PPCP, as well as children's perspectives on how they navigate the different settings of home, school and community in a Dublin urban area of low socio-economic status. Ramaekers & Suissa (2012) argue that the majority of parenting research has been carried out with white middle-class families, leading to generalised assumptions about the parenting 'norms'. In light of this, therefore, this study will explore parent and children's experiences and examine what implications they may have on parenting interventions, as well as formal educational welfare policy and practice in DEIS schools.

### 3.2 Epistemological Stance

Historically, parenting has been researched from the traditional developmental approach, which is based on positivist assumptions. Spearheaded by Comte (1842), it argues that truth should be measured objectively and understood, irrespective of social contexts. However, as Ramaekers & Suissa (2012) argue, this has led to assumptions about what is the 'right' way to parent and be a parent. This approach implies the 'law of the excluded middle', inferring that there is a truth and what is not true must in fact be false (Schwandt, et al, 2007, p.28). In applying this law to parenting, it suggests that parenting styles are fixed, not fluid, and that a particular style of authoritative parenting is the only way to parent, as it has been shown to be the most effective for optimising children's outcomes (Zahedani et al., 2016).

This research is located within an interpretivist epistemology. By applying a social constructivist viewpoint, this research recognises that the social world is constructed, not discovered, by subjective human perceptions, values, interpretations and negotiated interactions (Mertens, 1999). By privileging the voices of the parents and children, and bearing in mind the importance often placed by policy-makers on parenting programmes in marginalised communities (Gillies, 2009), this research seeks to more fully understand what it is like to be a family member in this community. It explores the experiences and perceptions, be they positive, negative or neutral, that participation in PPCP has on their lives. The role of parenting programmes, coupled with their underlying assumptions, and, perhaps, unintended consequences for the families involved, will be viewed from the viewpoint of the very people they are aimed at. It is imperative that multiple realities, reflecting the different types of people who make up a community, are sought (Mertens, 2005). Lincoln (1998) argues for a commitment to diversity by ensuring all stakeholders are included in research. Applying this stance to this research, marginalised viewpoints are heard, thereby allowing for a more contextual-based understanding to emerge (Koro-Ljunberg, 2008; Mertens, 1999). Indeed, it is important to understand, rather than just try to standardise experiences (Mertens, 1999; Balbach, 1999).

While it would be wrong to dismiss pre-existing knowledge that has stood the test of scientific rigour, it is argued that knowledge can also be constructed through conscious engagement with the world around us (Crotty, 1998). Our uncovering of knowledge does not have to be confined to scientific laboratory settings, but knowledge, that is as equally valid, can also be revealed in social contexts. Going further, Westhorp (2014) argues that nothing works everywhere for everyone so there can, in fact, be no final truth or knowledge. Therefore, Denzin & Lincoln (2005) contend that any agreement about what is valid knowledge should arise from the relationships between the members of the community. However, the standards of judgement often applied in marginalised communities reflect mainly middle and upper-class stakeholders in the community, with little consideration given to other community members, in this instance parents and their children (James et al., 1998; Kaufman et al., 2007). Therefore, marginalised communities are often considered the 'Other' in traditional research (Koro-Ljunberg, 2008; Reyes-Cruz, 2011).

### **3.3 Research Design**

The research design employed was a case study approach, which explored the family experiences of parenting in a particular low SES community in Dublin. Given this focus on privileging the voices of the 'Other' in a marginalised community, the case study approach allows us, through purposive sampling, to enhance our knowledge of individuals, and its use has been influential in both educational and psychological research (Vlasiner, 1986; Mertens, 2005). The use of a case study approach was deemed appropriate as it provided a framework to explore the 'complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance' (Cohen et al., 2007, p.252). It allowed for experiences of an existing programme (PPCP) to be explored in depth in a unique setting, primarily through the use of interviews and an arts-based mosaic approach, that followed a specific protocol (Albright et al., 1998). Furthermore, this approach allows for everything to be rooted within its context. For this research, that means taking into consideration factors such as family structure, access to housing and community supports. Data can be traced to its source and logic can also be applied to how the data is interpreted, in light of the focused and detailed study undertaken of the case site (Mertens, 2005).

Furthermore, insider research was employed as I was a HSCL Coordinator delivering parenting programmes in some of primary schools in the case site. I had worked in this community for thirteen years. I had been one of the PPCP co-facilitators to most, but not all, of the parent participants involved in this study. All of the children would have known me prior to their involvement, in my capacity as a HSCL Coordinator. Having already forged trusting professional relationships with most of these parents and all of the children through my work, this helped me in recruiting those who took part, especially the Traveller families. Hitchcock & Hughes (1995) state that one of the characteristics of a case study is that the researcher herself is embedded in the case site. By being part of the research and in the world of the families, insider research 'benefits closer and more regular contact with the field, more detailed consideration of the social actions, quicker establishment of rapport and trust [and] more open and readily accessible lines of communication' (Taylor, 2011, p.6). By having pre-existing relationships with the participants and being able to draw on their previous knowledge of the field, insider researchers are more advantageous in their ability to track data to its source, and to interpret the data, particularly given this research's interpretivist epistemology (McConnell-Henry et al., 2010; Mertens, 2005). However, as Milligan (2016) argues, a researcher is never fully an insider, but in constant reflection on where to position themselves, based on socio-economic, linguistic and power dimensions at play (p.239). This is true given the difference between how I viewed myself in the community, compared to how the community viewed me (Milligan, 2016). Issues of insider/ outsider, the gatekeeper position and power dynamics will be explored in more detail in Section 3.7, Dealing with Objectivity and Subjectivity, and Section 3.8.1, Informed Consent.

Qualitative research methods were used to gather data, including semi-structured pair and individual interviews with parents and an arts-based mosaic approach with children. Field notes that I wrote during the research process were also analysed. Full details of data gathering methods are explained under Section 3.6, Research Methods. These methods were chosen to address the core research questions, which were as follows:

1. What are the everyday challenges, concerns, strengths and supports experienced by a cohort of parents in this marginalised community?
2. What are the parents' experiences of participating in PPCP and how responsive is PPCP to the realities of parenting in this marginalised community?
3. How do the children of parents who have completed PPCP experience and navigate the varied contexts of home, school and community?
4. What can researchers, practitioners and policy makers learn from the experiences of parents and children for the future design and roll-out of parenting interventions and for formal educational welfare policy and practice more generally?

### **3.4 Case Site**

It is important to note that the case site has been anonymised to protect the identity of the participants. Given that this case study was undertaken by an insider researcher, it is possible that the location of the site may be identifiable through my own identify. In order to maintain the anonymity of the particular community, certain information pertaining to the area has been withheld, for example local place names. Furthermore, every effort has been taken to ensure that the identity of the parents and children who took part in this study was not compromised. While some of the parents had previously opened up to me and spoken about, for example the impact of family imprisonment was having on family life, I consciously chose not to identify which parent had experience of which adversities See Section 2.8, Ethical Issues, for further details.

#### **3.4.1 Location & Population**

The case study site is a suburb of Dublin city. It was originally a rural area but developed into suburban housing estates to alleviate housing shortages in the city. Based on the 2016 census figures, the average Absolute Deprivation Index 2016 for the area places it in the disadvantaged category and a number of its district electoral divisions (DEDs) are amongst the most deprived DEDs in the Dublin region. Indeed, unemployment is four times the national average (CSO 2016). The Traveller population in the area is over twice the national average



(CSO, 2016). However, the majority of Traveller children living in the area only attend two of the seven local primary schools, resulting in high numbers of Traveller families being concentrated in a minority of schools. The relevance of this will be discussed in subsequent chapters, which will discuss Traveller experiences of living in and attending school in this community.

### **3.4.2 Families & Homes**

Almost half of all families are single parent households, and the area has a significantly higher proportion of mother and children household units compared to the Dublin region (CSO, 2016). The area is comprised of social housing and homes that were previously owned by Dublin City Council but have been bought privately by their tenants. The majority of homes in the area are two-bedroom parlour terraced homes and three-bed terraced homes. Nationally, homelessness is an increasing problem. In January 2018, Focus Ireland recorded 9807 people, including 1739 families as homeless. Between 2015 and 2018, the number of homeless children has risen significantly from 865 to 3755 (Focus Ireland, 2018). Approximately five per cent of this total are from the case site. There is significant anecdotal evidence in the case site that families are attempting to avoid homelessness by living with their extended family. Such families are considered the 'hidden homeless'. The impact that this has on family life will be explored in detail in subsequent chapters.

### **3.4.3 Educational & Family Support Services**

Two percent of the population over 15 years have received no formal education and 1 in 5 adults had left education by 15 years of age (CSO, 2011). There are a number of Early Start units, preschools and crèches, informal educational settings, primary schools, secondary schools and a college of further education.

All primary and secondary schools in the area are in receipt of DEIS funding. DEIS is part of the Department of Education and Skills' (DES) social inclusion strategy to provide additional support to children and young people who are at risk of or are experiencing educational disadvantage. DEIS supports, such as the HSCL scheme and the School Completion Programme (SCP), operate in all schools in the case site to promote the attendance, participation and retention of children and young people through the education system. SCP is a targeted intervention for children

at risk of early school leaving. The HSCL scheme allows for a teacher to work in a full-time capacity as a HSCL Coordinator to support the salient adult in a child's life to improve children's attendance, participation and retention through the education system. A key area of the work of the HSCL scheme is to empower parents through, for example, providing personal development, parenting, literacy and numeracy courses. While representations were sought from all local primary schools, the children and parents interviewed as part of this study came from four out of eight schools. The schools and their student population straddle several of the DEDs.

There are a variety of community and statutory support agencies operating in the area. Key supports offered include family support, family development, addiction services, individual and group parenting interventions, mental health supports and primary care supports. In the context of this research, parenting intervention has been delivered by several community and statutory agencies, as well as by some HSCL coordinators in the case site for a number of years. In many cases, this has been possible due to specific funding given to the area to offer universal parenting intervention. Targeted parenting intervention has been facilitated to a smaller extent in this way but also through the work-brief of specific organisations, for example the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

### **3.5 Participants**

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure a cross-section of the community was represented. This also ensured that participants had a variety of insights to contribute, which was valuable in addressing the research questions posed. Initial representatives were sought from a Traveller family; single mother family; married couple family; family with a history of addiction; cohabitating couple family; a family from Europe (excluding Ireland and UK); a family from Africa; parent(s) and child(ren) who are living with their extended family. The inclusion criteria used for selecting participants was:

The parents must have participated in PPCP in the last 24 months

Their children must attend school in the local community

The family must live in the local community

Because a case study approach was being taken, the families all had to live and attend school in this one community. Since a purposive sampling strategy was employed, it is important to note that this research does not claim to be fully representative of the general community. It was also decided not to include families who lived in a different community, but whose children attended the schools in the case site. This was because, in such cases, these families may have very different experiences of access to housing, community supports and social networks than those living in the case site.

### **3.5.1 Recruitment Process**

Firstly, I asked parents I had worked with previously, in my role as HSCL Coordinator, if they would be interested in taking part. Five parents were recruited in this way. At the same time, while attending local HSCL cluster meetings, I spoke to HSCL Coordinators in the community and asked them to identify any parents they thought would be willing to be interviewed and who fit the inclusion criteria listed above. I also asked the HSCL Coordinators to use their professional judgement to state whether they felt the parents they identified would be comfortable attending a focus group or individual interview. Two parents were recruited in this way. Each potential participant was first contacted by me (if their children attended the schools I worked in) or by their own HSCL Coordinator, through a phone call. If I did not know the parents, their contact details were passed to me by their HSCL Coordinator, once they had given verbal permission. I then made a phone call to these parents and invited them to participate in an individual or group interview.

Participants were recruited from a Traveller family; single mother family; married couple family; family with a history of addiction; cohabitating couple family; parent(s) and child(ren) who are living with their extended family. In total, seven parents and eight children participated in the research. Both parents and children were recruited as this study wished to capture a variety of experiences of family life, from a diverse range of family members. However, it was not possible to get representatives from a family from Europe (excluding Ireland and UK) and a family from Africa. I also attempted to recruit parents who had been offered a place on PPCP but who did not complete the course as I hoped to capture the voices of

possibly the most marginalised in the community. Again, however, this was not possible. From my knowledge of working with such families in the community, they can be fearful of what may happen to information they pass to the school. They are concerned that it may be given to other state services and used against them to remove their children from their care. For families living outside the EU, they can be concerned that any information they give to the school could be passed on to, for example, Immigration Officers.

As a result of this recruitment process, the parents who did participate were those who had successfully completed PPCP and had a positive experience of engagement with either myself or the HSCL Coordinator in their children’s school. While purposive sampling was considered useful in the context of this research, there is the criticism that this sampling strategy may lead to ‘cherry picking’ of parents (O’Reilly, 2012). This issue will be discussed later in the chapter in Section 3.9, Research Limitations.

### **3.5.2 Adult Participants**

The parents ranged in age from 27 - 41 years (mean age of 32 years). Each parent completed a parent questionnaire (Appendix 1) from which the information, in Table 3.1 below, was gathered. All except one parent had lived in the area for 10 or more years. Family size ranged from 1 child to 4 children, with three parents having 3 or more children. All had at least one child in primary education. All except one parent had completed second level education or higher. Three of the parents were stay-at-home parents. Some details, such as their marital status, employment status, their age, and age of their children have been withheld to protect their anonymity. All of the parents’ names have also been changed to protect anonymity.

**Table 3.1: Overview of parent participants**

<i>Parent Code</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Number of children</i>	<i>Family structure</i>	<i>Level of Education Completed</i>
Trish	White Irish	2	Co-parenting	Bachelor’s degree
Beth	White Irish	1	Single parent	Post-primary

Ruth	White Irish	4	Co-parenting	Post-primary
Marie	White Irish	4	Co-parenting	Some college credit, no degree
Debbie (Cara's mother)	White Irish Traveller	2	Single parent	Primary
Keith	White Irish	3	Co-parenting	Bachelor's degree
Linda (David's mother)	White Irish	2	Co-parenting	Trade/technical/vocational training

### 3.5.3 Child Participants

The children ranged in age from 7 - 10 years (mean age of 8 years). Three of the children had four or more siblings, and two children had no siblings. Five of the eight children were living with both parents and two of the children lived with their parent and grandparents. Two of the children's parents were part of the parent interviews. Again, some details, such as their age and the number of their siblings, have been withheld to protect their anonymity. All of the children's names have also been changed.

**Table 3.2: Overview of child participants**

<i>Child Code</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Birth Order</i>
Lisa	White Irish	Eldest
Martin	White Irish Traveller	Middle
Cara (Debbie's daughter)	White Irish Traveller	Eldest
Cian	White Irish	Only child
Jack	White Irish	Youngest
David (Linda's son)	White Irish	Eldest
Farrah	White Irish	Only child
Mandy	White Irish Traveller	Youngest

## **3.6 Research Methods**

### **3.6.1 Parent Interviews**

In line with a case study approach, I used a semi-structured interview format, following a list of pre-determined questions, as outlined in the parent interview layout document (Appendix 2). These questions were formulated around the first two research questions:

1. What are the everyday challenges, concerns, strengths and supports experienced by a cohort of parents in this marginalised community?
2. What are the parents' experiences of participating in PPCP and how responsive is PPCP to the realities of parenting in this marginalised community?

While I had a list of questions prepared (Appendix 2), the direction of each interview was influenced by how the parents responded and I followed their lead. Where questions allowed for them to speak about their specific circumstances, additional questions to ask were listed. For example, one of the first questions asked was, 'Who else supports you as a parent?' Depending on how the parent answered, more tailored questions were posed, as seen in Table 3.3 below.

**Table 3.3: Sample of initial and follow-up questions for parents**

<i>If they are supported by others:</i>	<i>If they are not supported by others:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who supports you?</li> <li>• Why do you think they help?</li> <li>• What kind of help do they give you?</li> <li>• How does it help you?</li> <li>• How do you feel about the support they give?</li> <li>• How does this support affect your decision-making as a parent?</li> <li>• Are there challenges when other people support you?</li> </ul>	<p>Would you like the support of others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you think having support could help you?</li> <li>- What do you think are the benefits and challenges of doing it on your own?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>If no:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why do you want to parent alone?</li> <li>- What do you think are the benefits and challenges of doing it on your own?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

A pilot interview was conducted with one parent. This parent was recruited as per the process outlined in Section 3.5.1. As it elicited the information required for this research, each subsequent interview followed the same interview format, with no changes made after the pilot interview. All interviews, including the pilot interview, were transcribed and analysed as they were viewed as being appropriate for inclusion.

Initially, it was hoped to conduct two group interviews with approximately 3-4 parents in each. I had initially wished to use this approach as it would have allowed me facilitate, rather than lead, the interviews. However, due to time constraints and other commitments, the participants of one focus group could not all attend at the same time. Instead, the three parents were interviewed separately. Another parent, a Traveller mother, wasn't included in the focus group because I decided to interview her on her own. I would consider this mother to be socially isolated and am aware that she is uncomfortable speaking in front of parents she does not know. I tried to recruit two other Traveller mothers but they did not wish to take part. The second focus group became a pair interview as one of the parents did not attend on the day and withdrew her consent to engage.

This parent was unknown to me prior to the study and was recruited through a local HSCL Coordinator. However, the HSCL Coordinator who had recruited her stated that the parent found it difficult at times to attend previously arranged appointments, due to her family circumstances.

As it was envisaged to hold focus groups, the Parents' Room was identified as the most suitable location, given the fact that I viewed it as a space that was comfortable to the parents. When asked where they would like to do the interview, all parents nominated the Parents' Room. It had sofas, soft furnishings and the parents had completed PPCP in it. The pair interview and one individual interview took place in the Parents' Room. However, the rest of the individual interviews took place in either the HSCL office or in a small room behind the Parents' Room. These rooms were chosen because they were a convenient location within the school and afforded privacy. Parents were welcomed and offered refreshments prior to the interview commencing. I allowed each parent to choose their own seat and then I sat facing them, in a relaxed position, but slightly to the side. I dressed in a casual way (jeans and jumper) on the day of the interviews to ensure I wasn't viewed by the parents as being too professional-looking (Mandall, 1991).

The individual interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes and the pair interview for approximately 40 minutes. While the interviews were relatively short, they elicited the information needed, as evidenced by the pilot interview. Most of the parents already knew me for at least two years in my professional capacity as HSCL Coordinator and I had built a trusting relationship with them. All the parents known to me had previously worked with me in supporting their children's education and had spoken to me in confidence about issues affecting their family life. Given that we had a prior established relationship, a once-off interview was deemed appropriate. For the two parents who did not know me, the pair interview was used instead.

The parent/ parents and I were the only people present in the room. This was necessary to ensure against interruptions from others and to allow the parent(s) to speak in confidence to me. Each interview was recorded on my iPhone and I



took notes during the interview, as needed. I also completed field notes on the layout of the room and initial thoughts following each interview. This was particularly relevant to identify if there were any power dynamics at play. Given my position as a HSCL Coordinator, I was aware that a power differential existed between the parent(s) and I. It was important to record this in my field notes if it became apparent, as it may have influenced what and how much a parent shared with me. Furthermore, parents may have felt that they had to give socially desirable answers.

I endeavoured to minimise this by, for example, using a relaxed interview style, encouraging parents to be as honest as possible and ensuring confidentiality would be maintained at all times, except in the case of child protection concerns. Given my prior relationships with parents, I anticipated that this may also support the participants to be as open as possible. However, while it may not be possible to eliminate these influences completely, the field notes helped me to ascertain if these factors, as well as the school environment, or the particular room used for the interview, might have affected how the parents interacted with me and/ or responded to the questions.

For example after Debbie's interview, I wrote,

*'She had been at a wedding the night before – very tired. Throughout the interview I felt there was a power dynamic at play and was unsure how comfortable she was with me in general and how honest she felt she could be. Answers were quite short and only disagreed with me once. Would she have felt comfortable saying no to me if she tried to cancel?'*

In this instance I had endeavoured to minimise the power dynamic. However, as argued by Milligan (2016) it is clear that it cannot be fully removed and may have had an impact on how authentic Debbie could be with me. However, in general, I felt that the parents were authentic and were not unduly negatively impacted by the power dynamics or by the need to give socially desirable answers. Indeed, during her interview, Debbie spoke about how she didn't feel supported by the school, although she was aware that I was a staff member of that school.

Furthermore, in a conversation after we concluded the interview, another parent shared an experience that illustrated how the power dynamics had been minimised. She spoke to me about a traumatic incident that occurred in her home. This was not something she had to share with me, yet she felt comfortable to do so. It is also important to note that this was not a parent I had known prior to the interview.

### **3.6.2 Children's Focus Groups**

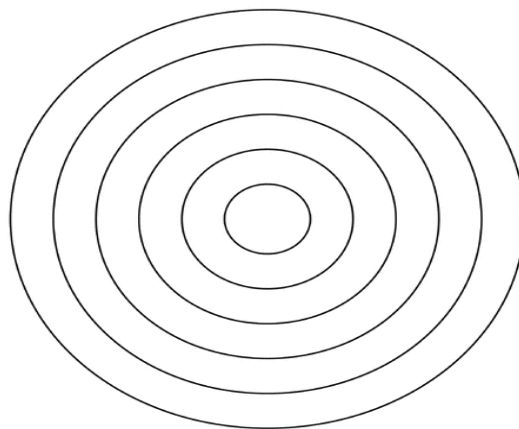
Taking into consideration the work of Christensen & James (2000), Leitch & Mitchell (2007) and Lundy & McEvoy (2011), an arts-based mosaic approach was chosen for use with the children as it allowed them to express their views in a way that was appropriate to their age and level of understanding, through the use of maps and drawings. Visual representations are considered better suited to younger children, while also allowing the children describe their own reality, without being limited by my agenda alone (Christensen & James, 2000). Rather than restricting the children to just answering the questions I posed to them, visual representations gave them a way of expressing their views, without relying solely on their communication skills. As argued by Leitch & Mitchell (2007), this can enhance the data collected from children, support a genuine process of engagement with them and can lead to insights being uncovered that may not have been possible through traditional, verbal-based research methods. This was important as at least three of the children included in the study had previously been referred for Speech and Language therapy. In line with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are considered 'experts' in their own lives with previous research on their experiences showing that they can articulate their views accurately and clearly, when freely allowed to do so in an enabling environment (Greene & Hogan, 2005; DCYA, 2010; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). It also promotes the development of a more just society, whereby children are active participants in democracy (Leitch & Mitchell, 2007).

Two children's focus groups were held in the Parents' Room of the children's school. The children included in the focus groups were those of parents who had taken part in PPCP. Two focus groups were held to get as many viewpoints as possible. From working with children, I deemed a group size of four children

appropriate. This allowed each child ample time and opportunity to participate if they wished. I felt that a smaller group may put too much pressure on the children to speak, while a larger group would have been more difficult to facilitate each child's contribution. One focus group included four children who were all from the same school and were familiar with each other. The other focus group had two children each from two different schools. This group was set up in such a way that the two children from the same school were in the same year group/class and therefore knew each other. This helped mitigate against nervousness. To ensure representation from both genders, each focus group had two boys and two girls.

The focus groups lasted for approximately 40 minutes, divided into two sections. The first section involved the children completing a concentric map of the important people in their lives. Each child was asked to place themselves at the centre of the concentric map and then add people who were important to them, with the most important people closest to them, as indicated in Image 3.4 below. The second section involved the children being invited to first stand in the middle of a blank flipchart page and to draw a map of the places they have been in the local community in the past week. This was used to ascertain how much mobility they had in their community. As previously discussed, maps and drawings were chosen as it was appropriate to the children's age and level of understanding.

***Image 3.4: Sample of concentric map***



During these activities, I posed pre-determined questions (Appendix 3) to the children as they completed them. The type of questions posed reflected themes that had emerged in the parents' interviews. For example, many parents had raised concerns about their children's safety when outside. Therefore, examples of questions posed to the children were, '*Are there places you go that you don't like to go?*' and '*What places would you like to change?*' Prompt questions for the first section were also based on an adaption of the 'Flower map of people who support children' (Save the Children, 2008, p.26). Prompt questions for the second section were adapted from 'Risk Mapping' (Save the Children, 2008, p.21). The children's answers to these questions were reflected back to them using the language they used. For example, when Cian was describing why his family were important to him, he said, '*They always look after me*'. I replied to this with, '*Ok, they look after you*'. The use of these active listening skills allowed me to affirm his contribution and acknowledge that I was listening and accepting what he was saying (Webster-Stratton, 1999). From my teaching experience, I probed a question a maximum of two times and then left if a child did not answer it.

The use of child-centred arts-based approach avoided putting undue burden on the children taking part, allowing them to share only what they were comfortable with (BPS, 2014). Given the power differential present between the children and I, as they knew I worked in their school, it was important to give them choice and agency in what they did and did not want to share. For example, if they excluded a person or place from their drawings, I would not be aware that they had done so. During the session with the children, a green and red disc was placed in front of them. If they wished to participate they turned it to green. If at any time they wished to stop, they turned it to red. Furthermore, I dressed casually in tracksuit bottoms and a T-shirt. This was an attempt to minimise the power differential as much as possible (Mandell, 1991). I also took field notes after each session, paying particular attention to any power dynamics I felt were present. However, I will explore this in more detail later in Section 3.7, Ethical Issues.

### **3.6.3 Field Notes**

Field notes were an important part of the data collection process as they provided context, background information and initial analysis of the interview materials. All

field notes were hand-written. I recorded how each parent interview was set up, how initial contact was made with parents and how consent was sought. I took notes, as necessary, during each of the parent and child interviews. I drew a map of the environment of each interview, with initial thoughts written down about how I felt the room set-up may have had an impact on the parent. After each interview, I also wrote down my initial thoughts, background information known to me about the family, power dynamics I was aware of and any impact I may have had on the interview process, when relevant.

After each parent interview, I drew a map of the environment and noted where we sat and the layout of the room. Where relevant, I recorded if this was a room the parent was familiar with. I also wrote down my initial thoughts and any background information I had on the parent after each interview. For example with Keith, I noted that,

*'He chose a seat and I sat down afterwards. I chose not to sit directly opposite him... offered a cup of tea before he sat down but didn't want one... he appeared comfortable and at ease'.*

I then transcribed each interview and noted any emerging themes in my field notes. Once all parent interviews were transcribed, I re-read all transcripts and field notes together and compiled a list of emerging common themes, with particular reference to Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) levels of oppression. I then used this list to help formulate the topics/ questions to cover with the children. Examples of this include:

- 1. How do their parents protect them? Do they feel (over) protected?*
- 2. If you wanted to go somewhere in the area, where would it be? Is there anywhere you'd like to go but can't?*
- 3. How do you think the school thinks of your family?*
- 4. Role of dad/ relationship with parents/ role of grandparent*

I used the same procedure of note-taking in the two focus groups with the children. I wrote down the group dynamics, emerging themes and other general observations. I analysed the concentric maps on their own, recording who was listed at which level on the map and if there were any omissions. For example,

Cian had his mother, grandmother and dog in the first level, his grandfather at the third level but his father was not listed. Further analysis of the field notes is outlined in Section 3.8, Approach to Data Analysis.

#### **3.6.4 Dealing with Objectivity and Subjectivity**

The words and idioms used by participants were transcribed as spoken. Factual notes of the room layout were taken. If I was unclear about a statement/ drawing, clarity was sought so that it could be interpreted appropriately. The authenticity of the data collected was corroborated by field notes and my insider knowledge of the area and families. I had worked in this area for over ten years, getting to know many of the parents and children in this study very well, as both a class teacher and HSCL Coordinator. However, I was not driven to find convergences between the parent and children, or between the parents themselves. This is due to the fact that, fundamental to its epistemology, this research recognised that there may have been different experiences. All views are valid but, importantly, one view should not invalidate another. Furthermore, I endeavoured to provide a balanced view, aiming to reflect the diversity of the participants in this research, (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The voices of both parents and children are privileged in this research, particularly those who may normally be silent and/ or marginalised (Mertens, 2005). In fact, diversity needs to be preserved to ensure the voices of the 'Other' is not lost (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Given the fact that this was insider research, it is acknowledged that it may not have always been possible for me to be completely objective. Yet, Schwandt et al. (2007) argues that the relationship between the researcher and research, which cannot be objective, should still be prized. However, I was still mindful at all times to be critically reflective of my own observations and analysis and how they were constructed and also to ensure that the voices of the parents and children, not mine, were to the forefront (Mertens, 2005). I endeavoured to be aware at all times of the bias I may have brought to the analysis and interpretation as I may have brought with me my own standards of judgement to the research; that of a middle-class professional who did not grow up in this community (James et al., 1998). I mitigated against this by always returning to the voices of the parents and children and challenging my own assumptions and conclusions through regular engagement with the interview material and with my co-supervisors.

### **3.7 Ethical Issues**

#### **3.7.1 Informed Consent**

The principle of proportionality was applied in gaining informed and valid consent (BPS, 2014). I arranged to meet with each parent after they had given verbal consent to participate, in a location chosen by them. In all cases, the parents chose their local primary school. Based on my knowledge of the parents, I sensitively approached the parents who I thought may have difficulty reading the information and consent form, for example saying, *'I can just run through what's on this form with you'*. Where the participants had literacy issues, they were happy for me to read the written forms to them. I gave them a copy of the information sheet (Appendix 4) prior to asking them to sign a consent form (Appendix 5).

A child's version of the information sheet was also given to the child participants (Appendix 6). Informed consent was sought from the parents for the child participants and the children signed the assent form also (Appendix 7). I used the same approach as outlined in the previous paragraph. Additionally, the children's assent was sought (BPS, 2014). Children were asked if they would like to talk about their experiences of the people in their lives from home and school. If a child answered 'no', I did not continue. If the child answered 'yes', I did continue. Before commencing the interviews with the children, I gave each child a small disc, coloured red on one side and green on the other. I asked each child to put it beside them. I explained that because they said 'yes', the green face of the disc should be facing upwards. However, I explained that if they wanted to stop at any time, they could turn the disc around to show the red face and they would not have to take part anymore. I explained that they then could take their drawings with them, if they wished. I role-played this process with the children. After the focus groups, I also contacted the parents and asked them to contact me if their child, at any time, told them they did not wish to be involved. If so, I would remove/ destroy their data (BPS, 2014).

As I was a HSCL coordinator and was also viewed as a teacher by some of the parents and children, I was particularly aware of the unequal relationship that may have been present between myself and the participants. I did not coerce

parents or children to participate (BPS, 2014). I arranged an individual meeting with the principal of each of the schools involved. I explained the rationale for my research and what I would be asking the children to do. I answered any questions or queries they had. I then obtained appropriate consent from the principals to carry out the research in their schools (BPS, 2014). All participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time, up until the research is published, and their data would then be destroyed and not included. Given the fact that young and vulnerable children were being interviewed, I continually monitored the group to identify any verbal and/or non-verbal signs that the children were withdrawing their assent (BPS, 2014). If a child did not volunteer an answer and I believed that they understood/ heard the question, I did not request that they answer. For example, in one of the focus groups, it became clear at one point, by Cara's body language, that she was uncomfortable answering one of the questions. She also asked for her contribution in that section not to be included in the transcript. I met with her after the focus group and reassured her that this specific piece of data would not be used. I asked her if she wanted to not be part of the focus group anymore but she stated that she was happy to still be part of it, once the specific section was removed. I also contacted her mother and asked her to get in touch with me if she wished to withdraw her consent at a later date.

### **3.7.2 Data Protection**

Interviews with the parents and children were recorded on my iPhone. The recordings were immediately uploaded to my PC after the interviews and then deleted from the iPhone. When transcribing the interviews, a pseudonym (e.g. Beth) was used instead of real names and all identifying factors (e.g. names of places, people, and schools) were anonymised. The names of all participants, their contact details and other identifiers, for example, information elicited from the questionnaire completed by the parents, was stored separately from the anonymised data in a locked filing cabinet in my home. All of the digital data was stored on a password protected computer (Data Protection Act, 1998; 2003; BPS, 2014).

### **3.7.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Participants in the study may have been concerned that their family could be identified by the data. As stated previously, this research was undertaken by me



as an insider researcher. As it may be possible to identify the area and the participants via the researcher, every effort was taken to ensure that the participants' identities were not compromised. The case study area was anonymised as far as possible. Code names were given to all participants. All identifiable factors in the parent and child interviews were removed during transcription and clearly marked with [] ... This involved removing all references to, for example, local shops, landmarks, schools etc. The parent interviews and children's concentric maps were also anonymised by removing the names of any people identified and replacing them with generic terms (for example, brother, class teacher). Further anonymising and/or retracting of data also occurred in all interviews. Where parents and/ or children spoke about specific family issues/ scenarios that could make them identifiable, these were removed or changed. While information was gathered from the participants about their age, marital status, family structure etc., these details were not listed in Table 3.1 or Table 3.2 above to ensure anonymity of individual families was maintained as they could be easily identified if a person reading the report was familiar with the case site location and/ or the researcher (BPS, 2014; Data Protection Act, 1998; 2003). Furthermore, although I recorded the background information I was aware of in my field notes, this was not linked to particular participants in the write-up of the findings, if I deemed that doing so might have jeopardised the participants' anonymity.

Also, given my role as a HSCL Coordinator in the case site, participants may have been worried that any information they gave me may have been passed on to school staff members or other statutory agencies. Parents and children were reassured that all data was anonymised and confidentiality would be maintained at all times, except in an incidence of a child protection concern which I would then be obliged to report to the relevant Designated Liaison Person (BPS, 2014; Children First, 2011). Child welfare and protection is discussed in further detail in Subsection 3.7.5 below.

#### **3.7.4 Safeguarding Participants**

Conversations about parenting can be quite sensitive and by participating in this research it may have elicited feelings of distress, shame or guilt, especially for parents who are stressed or dealing with complex family situations. Therefore, the

question posed to the parents in the interviews were framed from a non-judgemental standpoint. For example, in trying to ascertain the support networks that may or may not be available to parents, the question was posed in this way:

*'If you were having difficulties in your parenting, who would you turn to and why?'*

**Table 3.5: Sample of initial and follow up questions for parents**

<i>If they have someone to turn to:</i>	<i>If they do not have someone to turn to:</i>
<p><i>If they have someone to turn to:</i></p> <p>What type of help do they give you?</p> <p>How do you feel asking for their help?</p> <p>How do you feel with their help?</p>	<p><i>If they do not have someone to turn to:</i></p> <p>How do you sort out the difficulties on your own?</p> <p>How do you feel being on your own to deal with it?</p>

The research aimed to ensure parents felt supported, heard and validated during the process. Following participation in the interviews, parents were given an opportunity to meet me and discuss and respond to the findings (BPS, 2014). This helped to ensure that participants felt their contributions were an accurate reflection of their personal situations. All parents were also given the details of a community support service and encouraged to contact them if they illustrated signs of distress. However, I minimised the likelihood of distress occurring in how questions were posed and did not ask parents to expand on topics that I felt may make them distressed. For example, although aware of a parent's experience of domestic violence in the past, I did not deem this appropriate to probe or discuss with her during the interview.

Although the research involved discussion that may be sensitive for some participants, there were no risks associated with the study and any sensitivity or distress would not be more than that which would occur in everyday life. However, in order to reassure parents and children, an initial meeting was held

with parents to explain the informed consent process. I also spoke with parents informally at the end of each interview and asked how they found the process. Participants were made aware that additional support was available if they required (e.g. family support). Where applicable, participants were supported to refer to other family support agencies (BPS, 2014). No such referral occurred as a result of participation in this research.

### **3.7.5 Child Welfare and Protection**

This research was carried out in accordance with Maynooth University's Child Protection Policy. In line with Children First Guidelines (2011), all parents and children were informed prior to consenting to participate that I would be obliged to report an incidence of a child protection concern to the relevant Designated Liaison Person (BPS, 2014; Children First, 2011). No such incidents occurred.

However, as became evident throughout the interviews, most of the families had or were being exposed to high levels of adversity, which was impacting on both the parents' and children's welfare. Some of the families were already linked to community-based family support agencies and were on the SCP and HSCL target list. For many of these children, particularly Martin, they will need on-going support and I highlighted this in school care teams and meetings with his school principal. I also followed up with Cian's family following the focus group as they were on a waiting list for family support and I asked for their case to be prioritised. Their case was opened shortly after this and the family positively engaged with this service.

### **3.8 Approach to Data Analysis**

Braun & Clarke's (2006) six step approach to thematic analysis was used to identify patterns across the data. Firstly, as part of Braun & Clarke's (2006) first three steps, the data was analysed using a bottom-up approach to identify emerging themes. Then, an inductive or top-down approach was used, whereby pre-existing theoretical standpoints, namely Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) levels of oppression and Maccoby & Martin's (1983) parenting styles, were applied at the fourth step. This inductive approach allowed for a further analysis of the data, leading to an inductive-deductive model at the final stage, enabling a back-and-

forth process to arrive at the final identified themes (Cohen et al., 2007). This process is outlined in more detail below.

### *1. Familiarise with Data*

Following each interview/ focus group, I recorded, through field notes, the set-up of the interview, background information about the family (as known to me), noted any power dynamic, the level of openness of the parents/ children during the process or other factors influencing the interview/ focus group and also recorded initial thoughts on how the interview went.

Each interview and focus group was transcribed solely by me. Following completion of each transcription, I read through it, made notes and highlighted any notable quotes or segments. I also wrote down initial thoughts based on the transcript in the field notes. The children's concentric maps and maps of their local area were also examined and initial thoughts written down in the field notes.

### *2. Generating Initial Codes*

Once familiar with the parents' data, I listed the general themes which appeared to emerge for each parent interview and focus group. I then re-read the transcript and generated initial codes through the use of MAXQDA, adding any additional codes not generated previously.

In the first analysis of the children's data, I listed the people that the children had identified from 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> circle. I also listed the initial codes emerging from the concentric map section of the transcript and places in the community section separately. Transcripts were then re-read and maps examined again, with further field notes taken.

### *3. Search for Themes*

The parents' and children's data went through Step 1-3 independent of each other. Once all interviews, maps and focus groups were coded in this way, I revisited the initial codes and listed emerging common themes for both the parents and children separately. The initial codes from the children's transcripts were compared to identify any that overlapped. Initial codes generated from the children's data was then cross-referenced with the parents' data and

commonalities listed. Other initial codes only present within the children's data were also noted. Codes were placed into overarching general themes (e.g. support network) and sub-themes (e.g. grandparents, neighbours, and friends).

#### *4. Review Themes*

Once a hierarchy of themes was completed, the themes were reviewed from a bottom-up approach. They were compared against a theoretical standpoint, that of Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) levels of oppression and Maccoby & Martin (1983) parenting styles. Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) was chosen as it resonated with me from a community psychology framework and appeared to be particularly relevant in terms of the issues and situations raised by the parents and children in their interviews. The common emergent themes I had identified in the first stages of the analysis were grouped under the headings of 'Mobility Issues'; '(Lack of) Choice'; 'Community Structures'; 'Isolation'; 'Powerless' (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). For example, parents had spoken about the difficulties they faced with their housing situation. This then aligned with 'Lack of Choice'. Maccoby & Martin (1983) was selected as they had identified two key dimensions of an effective parenting style; parental responsiveness and parental demandingness. Similar to above, the themes in relation to parenting style, for example 'Parent-Child Relationship' and 'Rules and Routines' were grouped into 'Parental (Non) Responsiveness' and 'Parental Demandingness', respectively.

#### *5. Defining and Naming Themes*

In applying the inductive-deductive approach, I then placed the common themes that had emerged from the interviews under the seven headings of 'Mobility Issues'; '(Lack of) Choice'; 'Community Structures'; 'Isolation'; 'Powerless'. 'Parental (Non) Responsiveness' and 'Parental Demandingness'. However, not all themes identified by the parents fitted into these headings, for example mental health. From an epistemological stance, it was essential that the voices of the parents and children remained privileged and included, their/ 'Other' standard of judgement, not that of policy-makers (Koro-Ljunberg, 2008; Mertens, 1999, Reyes-Cruz, 2011; James et al., 1998). Therefore, the themes and subthemes were renamed to account for the inclusion of the diversity of the community's experiences.

The four main themes identified were::

- Community Challenges
- PPCP Intervention in the Community
- Educational Support structures in the Community
- Family Support Networks

#### *6. Producing the Report*

The report was then written, using the themes as guides for discussion.

### **3.9 Research Limitations**

Despite the many benefits of insider research, as discussed previously, this type of research has some drawbacks. While participants may trust me and be more open to my questions, the relationship between the participants and I could unduly influence my perception of the data and may also prevent me from challenging the participants' responses (Taylor, 2011; Mercer, 2007). Wolcott (1999) sums it up quite succinctly when he states, 'every view is a way of seeing, not **the** way of seeing' (p.6) (original emphasis).

Perhaps the most significant limitation of the use of insider research in this case is the power dynamic between the participants and I. With the exception of two parents, I knew all parents and children and they were familiar with me through my role as HSCL Coordinator in their child's school. While, a warm, trusting and friendly relationship existed between the parents and I, it is important to note that it was a relationship forged within a professional educational context and the parents' and children's openness to me may have been influenced in what they said based on my position within the school (Mercer, 2007). This also applied to the children, who although had not been taught previously by me, were also aware of the close relationship I had with their parents, teachers and principal.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge my role as 'gatekeeper' within this research. Taking into consideration the power dynamic that exists here, there is a risk that I could use my power and control to unduly influence the research (Lund et al., 2015). To mitigate against this risk, I privileged the direct voices of the

parents and children as much as possible. In line with Mertens (1999) and Crotty (1998), I remained consciously engaged with the research material to ensure any personal bias was minimised. I was led by the participants themselves and ensured that their views were heard, in a non-judgemental way. The questions posed to the children were framed based on issues the parents raised in their interviews, rather than predetermined by me. Similarly, the themes for discussion were not chosen by me, but emerged organically from the inductive-deductive approach used in the data analysis, as described in Section 3.8, Approach to Data Analysis.

However, while the knowledge gleaned from their contributions may have been impacted by the power dynamics present, Humphrey (2012) argues that by being aware of them and being able to anticipate them, can help to mitigate against them. The research may be somewhat impacted by this with the parents and children perhaps censoring what they may or may not have shared with me but Mercer (2007) states that it is not clear whether outsider research would be less prone to bias. The use of individual interviews may not have mitigated against the issue of the power dynamics, compared to a focus group. One focus group became 3 separate interviews as parents could not attend on the prearranged day and time. By their nature, 1:1 interviews very much place the interviewee central to the conversation with the interviewer. However, a focus group may have allowed me to be more of a facilitator to the conversation, rather than instigator, and granted the parents more ownership of the flow of the interview.

Additionally, while purposive sampling was employed, it was not possible to get representations from an African or European (outside Ireland and UK) family living in the community despite several attempts. Families who were approached did not agree to participate. Although no reason was given by these families, in my experience, this may have been due to fear and uncertainty of what was involved. Therefore, the data collected is not representative of all stakeholders in the community and, arguably, is unable to give a voice to two of the smaller but most marginalised groupings within this community. Furthermore, only one father was interviewed. Fathers generally do not participate in parenting programmes to the same extent as mothers. Yet, they are a central part to family life and their voice in how they are influenced and influence family life is not fully vocalised in this research. Therefore, the implications of this sampling method need to be

considered. While the research does not claim to be, it is important to note that, the participants who took part are not a representative sample of this community. The number of parents who took part in PPCP is a very small minority of the overall parent population in the community.

Finally and as previously mentioned, to protect the anonymity of the participants, some background and contextual information has not been identified with particular participants. Many of the families involved in this study had experiences of addiction, domestic violence, homelessness, conflict with the law, mental health difficulties and relationship breakdowns. It was deemed inappropriate to identify which family had these particular experiences. Thus, while I was cognisant of this information in the data analysis and took it into consideration, it was not overtly discussed in the findings. This may have impacted on the depth of the findings but was a necessary decision to protect the families involved.



## **4. Findings**

Following analysis of the parents' interviews, the children's focus groups and the children's artwork, this chapter outlines the study's key findings. Four main themes emerged from this study, namely Community Challenges; PPCP Intervention in the Community; Educational Support Structures in the Community and Family Support Networks. The voices of the parents and children are privileged throughout this chapter. Direct quotes from the parents and children are used, as well as images of the children's artwork.

### **4.1 Introduction**

Through the use of semi-structured interviews with parents and an arts-based mosaic approach with the children, it was possible to capture the reality of living as a family in this marginalised community at a specific time and place in their lives. All the parents spoke about the impact their own family, friends, local school and community had on their family life and the decisions they made as parents. The children also identified the influence their home, school and community had on their lives and what they could and couldn't do. Following analysis, the topics and issues raised could be categorised under four key themes, and then divided further into sub-themes:

1. Community Challenges
  - Community mobility
  - Community access to amenities
  - 'Fitting in' and 'being tough'
  - Housing choices
  - Financial pressures
  - Connecting with the community
2. PPCP Intervention in the Community
  - Combating isolation
  - Fostering the parent-child relationship
  - Implementing rules and routines
  - Reducing stress

3. Educational Support Structures in the Community
  - Accessibility of school to families
  - Families' perception of their school
4. Family Support Networks
  - Spousal/ partner relationship
  - Mother as primary decision-maker
  - Extended family and animal support

## **4.2 Community Challenges**

All the parents spoke about how where they lived impacted on whether or not they felt they could let their children play outside. All parents raised concerns about community violence, crime and speeding/ skidding cars. Despite many of the parents being positively disposed to living in this community, the restrictions they had to place on their children's movement, access to additional activities and supports for their children, as well as their housing and financial situation, meant that many families felt stuck and powerless in their present situation, with little control over their own destiny.

### **4.2.1 Community Mobility**

Five of the seven parents spoke positively about the community, with Trish commenting, *'I love it. I actually do love the area. It's what you make of it. Now I know it's rough and it can be hard for other people to grow up here, I know everyone'*. Living in a cul-de-sac with strong neighbourhood relationships, Trish and Beth felt they could let their child out to play on their cul-de-sac because, as Trish puts it,

*'They all the kids come out and play, it's safe, you know, the cars come in slow even though there's a lot of traffic on it you know'*.

However, Marie and Ruth, who live in a different area that would have higher rates of crime and violence, in comparison to the rest of the community, had a very different view. Marie says, *'It's a horrible area to bring up kids like'*, with this perception supported by Ruth when she says, *'You couldn't even bring them to the playground around the corner'* as it had been recently damaged by arson. Indeed,

there have been several deaths related to joyriding and shootings in this area, with her son being a witness to a shooting, also.

Where parents spoke about their children being able to play outside, it was always with supervision, either by the parents themselves, family members or their neighbours. However, it is important to note that, Linda, who had moved from a rural area, said that this wasn't unique to this community.

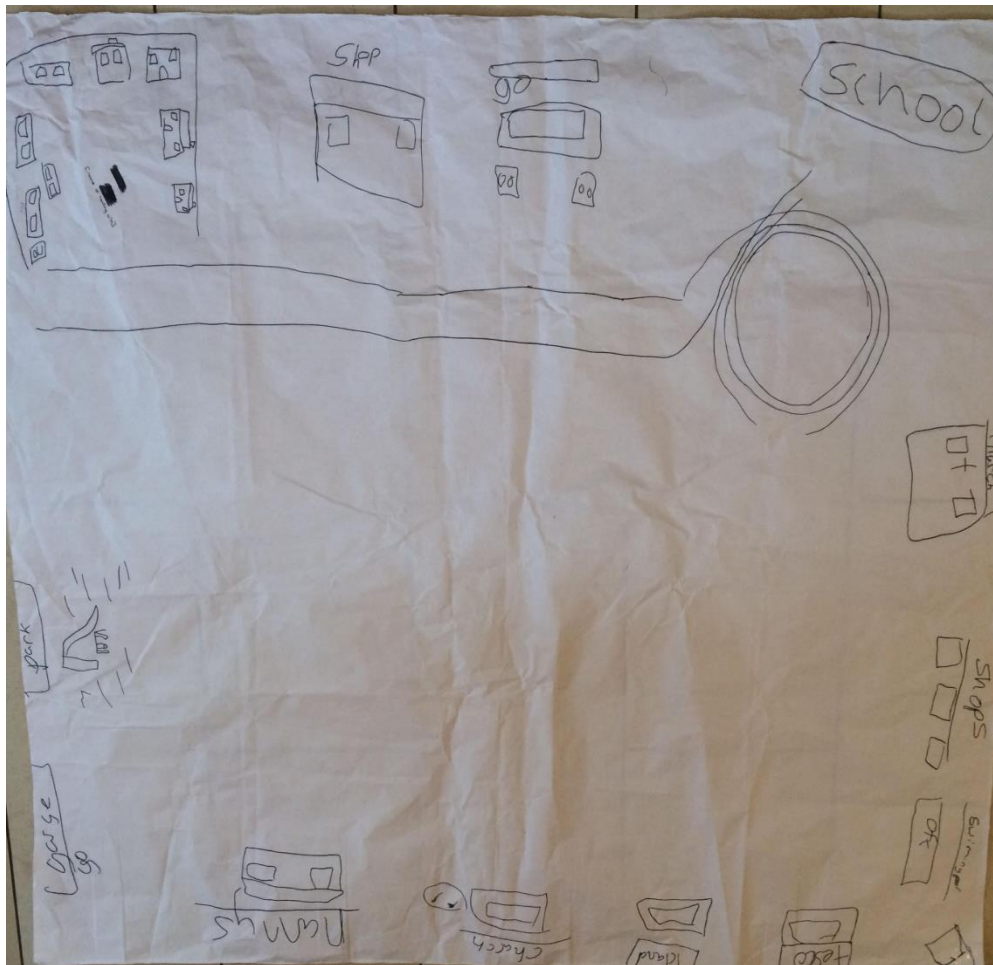
*'Where they used to live, we had big huge garden with gates. Now I still wouldn't let them out on their own, I'd sit and watch them running around you know'.*

In contrast, however, Traveller children spoke about being able to go certain places on their own and had unsupervised access within the halting site they lived in. Outside of the halting site, though, Debbie's children do not have the same amount of freedom. However, Martin was able to go to places outside the halting site with his brother, who was only two years older.

*'I'm allowed to go anywhere with [my older brother]'.*

This freedom of movement was reflected in his map of where he had been in the community in the past week. He was the child with the greatest number of places included on his map. Within the Traveller community, parents had previously told me that boys are given more freedom than girls and are considered 'men' once they reach 10 years of age. As a result, Martin has significantly more freedom than Traveller girls and his school peers when in the company of his brother who is 11 years old, as evidenced in Image 4.1 below.

**Image 4.1: Martin's map of places visited in local community in the past week**



Children's access to outside play space was not possible for many of the parents, including Linda, Marie and Ruth. They felt they had no choice but to restrict their children's movement to protect them. For Linda, as their house is on the main road, they are not allowed outside to play. Instead, she would '*rather bring them myself [to local playground]*'. Marie and Ruth were also concerned about the level of violence and crime their children have been and would be exposed to when playing outside. Ruth reports that although her son is bored at home, he does not want to go out and play. Ruth, quoting her son, states that;

*"How can I go out and play? There's robbed car or a robbed bike or something. There's gangs out there like". He's terrified of gangs and all he is'.*

Both mothers, in comparison to the other parents interviewed, were quite worried about the long-term impact this would have on their children's personal

development as it is not even possible for their children to play in their front garden or right outside their house. Marie sums it up;

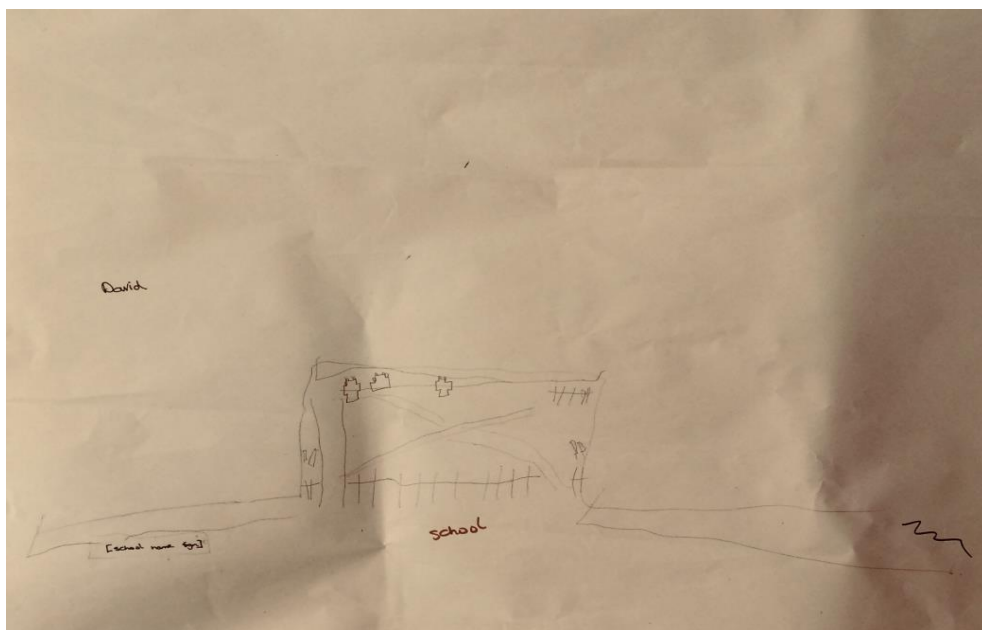
*'I think back to my childhood like where we were out playing. Like, I'm originally only from down the road as well, so I've always lived like but when you think of being out playing and on your bike, like. He has everything, like, bikes, everything but they're like relics 'cos he doesn't get to use them. He cycled to school for a few months and he stopped cycling to school because one of them out of the school smashed the lock off his bike and took his bike'.*

Ruth sums up the reality for her children as,

*'I was coming out at half 5 yesterday to bring my son to boxing 'cos he can't walk, 'cos there's a robbed car and two robbed mopeds out at half 5 with gangs out so the child couldn't walk like.... Then he can't play out because of these robbed bikes and cars and all is out so. I have no choice but to stay in... [and] he just won't walk anywhere on his own'.*

These concerns of the parents were evident in the children's maps they drew of the places they had been in the local community in the past week. The majority of their maps were primarily dominated with pictures of their home(s) or school, as seen in Images 4.2 and 4.3 below.

**Image 4.2: David's map of places visited in local community in the past week**

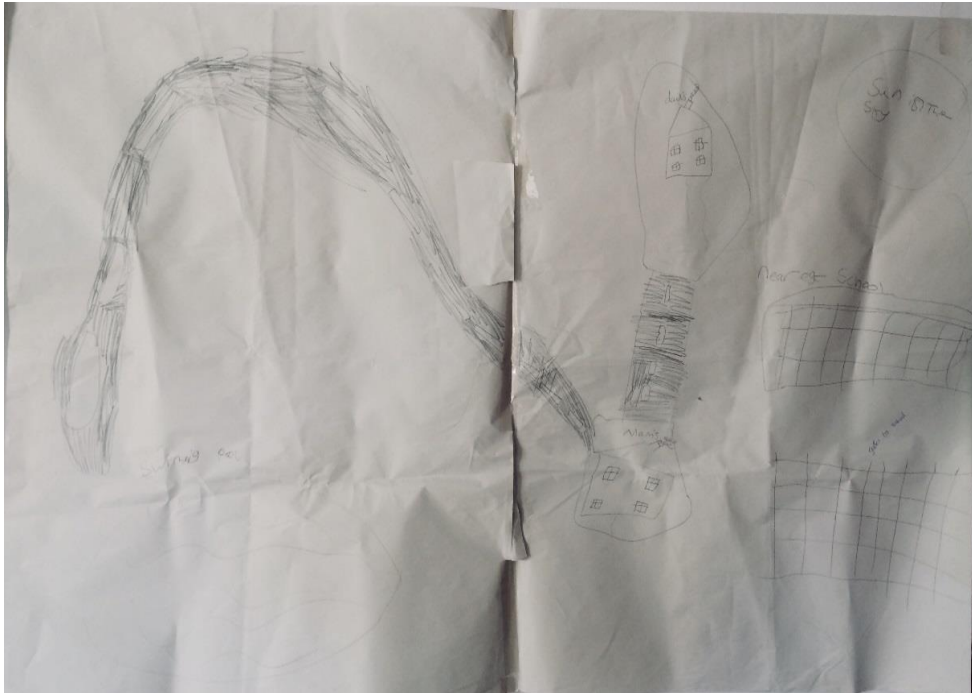


**Image 4.3: Farrah's map of places visited in local community in the past week**

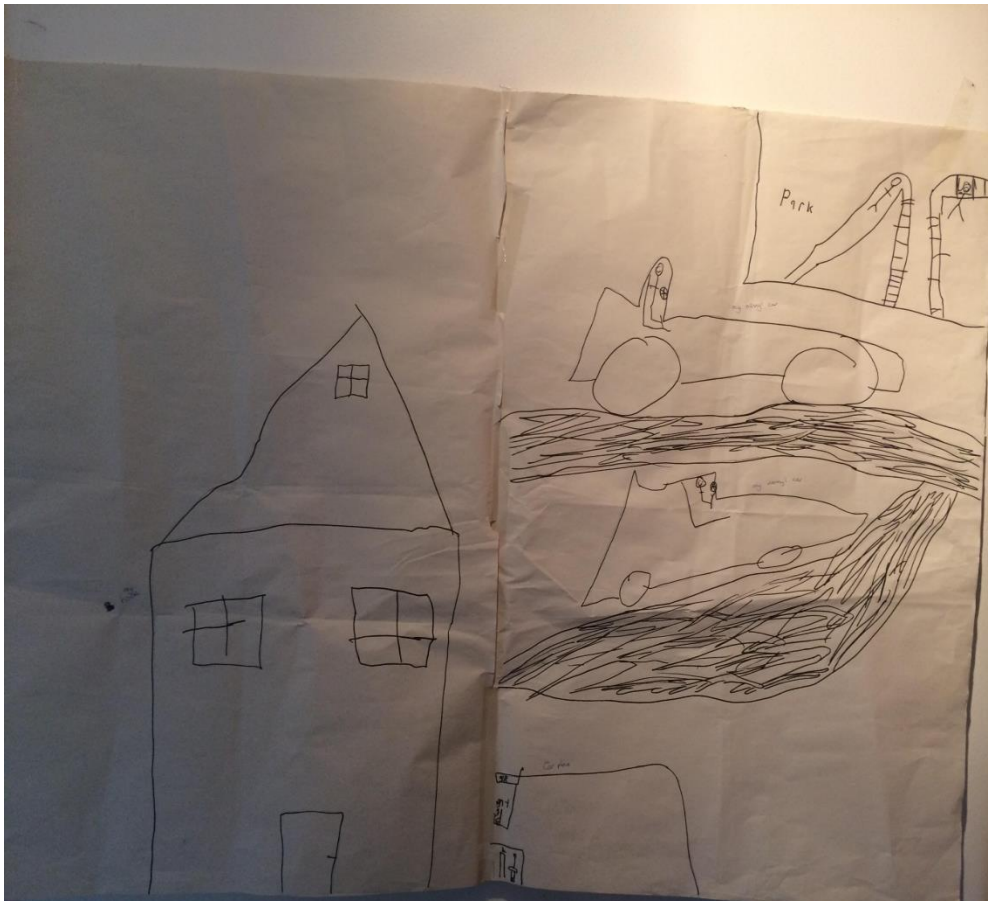


When interviewed, the children mainly listed places they visited with their parents, such as the library, shops and parks and stated it was their mother who chose where they went. A number of the maps also included the cars the children travel in on a daily basis. Cian's map, Image 4.5 below, has him placed in an adult's car as he travelled between places. Cian does not like walking outside, nor does he feel safe as, *'you might get runned over... 'cos they drive very fast'*. Furthermore, in Lisa's map, the only road is the road between school, her mother and her father's house.

**Image 4.4: Lisa's map of places visited in local community in the past week**



**Image 4.5: Cian's map of places visited in local community in the past week**



As David says,

*'I can't go anywhere,' cos my mam, like I'm not allowed down my road or anything like that either'.*

This is because, as Farrah puts it, *'you could get robbed'*. The fear of stolen and/ or speeding cars was common across the parents and children. All the parents spoke about how they supervised their children's play, such as Debbie who said,

*'I can go down to me mom's and they can play there. They've got a little field. I can see them from my mommy's house or they go to the park with me dad'.*

Interestingly, these concerns are reflected in the some of the children's experiences. Friends are a notable absence from the majority of the children's concentric maps, with David saying, *'I haven't really went to any of my friend's house'*. The only opportunity he gets to play outside is when he plays football with his dad. Farrah is not allowed to play outside anymore because other children were being mean to her. She also feels that, *'I'm not that good at playing outside'*. Mandy has friends and wants to be able to play with them but, *'wish[es] there were no roads'*. Marie compares the difference in interaction her son had when in Wexford over the summer, in contrast to when he is at home. Many families who live in Dublin spend their holiday time in holiday homes/ caravan parks in Wexford.

*'Yeah. I went down to Wexford for the summer and my god the difference in them! The kids could play out, they were just like, I think they were free!.... He comes home from school at half 2 and that it's it, he's done. He's done with interaction for the day like'.*

Out of everyone, Martin, a Traveller boy, was the only child who stated that he felt safe outside and anywhere in the community. He also did not verbalise any of the community safety fears or issues raised by either the parents or children interviewed.

#### **4.2.2 Community Access to Amenities**

Many of the parents spoke about the importance of having their children involved in activities in the community. This was especially true for Ruth who was



concerned about the impact of being stuck indoors on her son's development. Therefore, she attempted to find something for her eldest son to do, but was finding it very difficult. Despite the area having several youth and after-school programmes, they are largely targeted supports for the most at-risk children in the community. Although Ruth also spoke about the financial pressures of being a parent, her priority in this case was accessing activities for her son, in spite of the cost:

*'So I was on a mission last year to try and get him into stuff and I was everywhere. I was up in the equine centre, I was down in the [youth centre]. I was everywhere. This was going on for weeks and weeks and if he was a bold brat there's more for him to do....There's nothing. Nothing. I got him into an arts club on in the [youth centre] and he loves it. They do kinda drama, like art and stuff. He loves it, it's €2.50. I would have given like €30 for him to do something and that was all I got him, like Monday to Friday'.*

Marie and Beth also felt that there wasn't much to do for their children in the community and what was available had waiting lists or they were unable to access as they did not fit the criteria. Criteria for inclusion may comprise factors such as children at risk of early school leaving, children with emotional and behavioural problems and children where there are child welfare concerns. Many homework and after-school clubs in the area require a referral from a school or other community agency to access them. In Marie and Ruth's cases, their families have not been referred as the school do not consider them as meeting these criteria. Beth felt that she had to travel outside of the community to go to, for example, an indoor play area. Yet, this added financial pressure.

*'I know I kind of have to save. I definitely do something once a month with [my daughter] but that would cost a bit of money like'.*

However, Keith and Trish did not view the area as lacking in amenities. This is somewhat supported by the children. David spoke about how he, *'loved the playground'*, Farrah *'loves the library'*, while Lisa said she's *'been to the swimming pool and the park'*. However, Keith did note that there were certain parts, for example where Ruth and Marie live, lacking in infrastructure, compared to the rest of the community. Linda, who had recently moved to the community, found

that there were lots to do for the children compared to where she lived previously, such as the swimming pool, playground, gymnastics and Irish dancing. However, similar to Beth, financial constraints impacted on what the parents were able to access with Linda saying,

*'I'd like to get them involved in so many more clubs and stuff but financially, we can't afford it so, but if we could. Like, the girl was talking this morning about gymnastics, €50 a month, I would not be able to afford €50 a month to bring her to gymnastics. Otherwise, she'd be anything I could put her in. Like she goes to the Irish dancing in the school. That's a fiver a week, I don't mind paying that but I wouldn't be able to afford anything else'.*

Although some of the parents spoke about enrolling their children in boxing and karate, no child mentioned any additional activities they did outside of school during their focus groups.

#### **4.2.3 'Fitting In' and Being 'Tough'**

Several of the parents interviewed identified the pressure of making sure their children fit into the neighbourhood and how this impacted on their experiences. Firstly, despite the financial implications, the importance of their children having branded clothing was mentioned by Trish, Ruth, Keith and Marie. Ruth felt that she had no choice but to buy the latest branded clothes for her son because otherwise he would be bullied.

*'[His] runners for going back to school in September were €180... that's me month's rent like, you know what I mean [and if he didn't have that] he wouldn't go to school'.*

Trish's son also experienced this when he started in Junior Infants and was questioned by one of his peers about what type of runners he was wearing. Given his young age and possible learning difficulties that are yet to be diagnosed, it did not have the same impact on him as Ruth's son who is much older,

*'When he started school, his little friend came in and goes him, 'What shoes have you got on?' and this is how innocent he is, 'I've shoes on', and he goes, 'No what type of shoes have you got on? I have Kickers, what have you got?' He goes, 'Ma, I just have shoes on' (laughs). And I go, 'No,*

*you have Adidas pal, that's the name of your runner, that's what he wants to know'.*

Trish spoke about the worries she has for her child who is completing the Assessment of Need (AON) at present. The AON process is completed via Health Service Executive (HSE) to determine if children has special educational needs (SEN). Trish is concerned that her son may be diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). She predicts that her son may have difficulty fitting in as he gets older, based on the fact that her brother, who has ADHD, was bullied when he was younger. In Trish's view, the neighbourhood appears to want *'you know, you all have to be the same'*. Two boys of a similar age to her son were *'slagging him 'cos he had stabilisers [on his bike]'*.

Therefore, she feels that she needs to protect her son and has enrolled him in karate, which she feels is helping him. Having recently moved to the area, Linda feels that her son needs to be streetwise, with her husband, *'trying to make him toughen up you know'* as he is *'too soft'*. This sense of having to be tough to grow up in the community is also reiterated by Marie. Her son is also in a boxing class and, although not explicitly stated by her, it could be inferred that her decision to have him attend such a class is to toughen him, given how she describes her concerns for her son:

*'He would absolutely crap himself 'cos the noise of the motorbike he's terrified of like. Then he can't play out because of these robbed bikes and cars and all is out so. I have no choice but to stay in.....'*

*'....Yeah, like he's going to secondary school now next year and he doesn't have life skills that I would have had going to secondary school 'cos he doesn't actually know how to interact with people like.... Yeah, he doesn't get it you know what I mean.... Like, even down to having fights with other kids, you need them like, to build up, when you go off and get a job like so you know how to deal with conflict, you know. He's going to crumble if someone shouted at him when he went to a job like.'*

#### **4.2.4 Housing Choices**

Several of the parents spoke about the lack of choice they had in their living conditions. Trish had previously lived in their own rented accommodation as a

family unit. However, although still together as a couple, Trish is living with her parents in her childhood home and her partner is living in his parents' house. There is not enough space in either house for them to live together as a family and she now lives with her mother, three adult siblings and her two children. Her son's toys are stored in the shed at the end of the garden and he can only have a few items at a time in the house, due to space constraints. In Trish's bedroom, there is a *'double bed down the bottom for me and me son and my [sibling] is up top bunk, it's a double bed with a top bunk and then me baby is in the cot so'*. As she puts it,

*'It was hard to go from having your own routine and quietness to, back to the madness and total kinda, it knocked it off course of what I was doing with him [son], you know so'.*

Trish's situation is also echoed by Cian, who spoke about how he lives with his mother and his aunt's family in his grandmother's house. Cian and his mother had previously only lived with his grandmother. However, his cousin's family had to move in with them in the past six months after they were unable to stay in their rented accommodation. Neither that family nor Cian's are able to afford to rent another property and are effectively the 'hidden homeless'. Cian's mother is also pregnant. While Trish speaks of the *'madness'*, Cian identifies his house as the first place he would like to change. He also touches on the tensions that arise in such conditions, as he says his uncle who lives in his house, *'always shuts the door in my face'*.

However, despite their situation, both Trish and her partner work very hard to have their *'own little routine, even though it's, it's kinda interrupted, we still have our routine, but we know what goes where and what we have to do'*. Yet, other family members can and often do question how they are parenting. They try to have their meals together, although this is not always possible. However, homework is something they always do with their son at the kitchen table, either in Trish's parent's house or her partner's. Again, though, this is not always easy but they still do it, in spite of the difficulties.

*'We go back, we go to me partner's house and he has his sister there with two kids and his mam and dad. So then we're trying to do homework with three small children and it's hard like 'cos they're all like, 'Oh I didn't do*

*that' and they're in different schools and so they're like telling each other, 'that's that word' so I'm like, 'you can't tell him yet!'*

Both Marie and Ruth are living in social housing, with neither liking the area they are in but they are unable to move. In a conversation I had with the parents after their interview, they spoke about how they felt that had to accept the houses offered to them or otherwise they would have been removed from the housing waiting list.

Debbie is living in a temporary structure in the halting site. She has limited access to water, electricity and heating. She has been on the housing waiting list for a number of years and the halting site is due to be redeveloped with permanent housing. Linda lives in private rented accommodation. While she chose to move and live in her present home, her and her family are exposed to the risk of future rent rises and the security of her tenancy may be challenged at a later date. Only Beth and Keith own their own homes.

#### **4.2.5 Financial Pressures**

In addition to community and housing pressures, each parent's financial situation had a bearing on how they parented and the majority of parents named '*money*' as something that made parenting hard for them. It impacted their ability to connect with friends, what they could or couldn't buy for their children or themselves and what activities they could or couldn't access for them. For many of the parents, there was a perception that they were stuck in their financial situation, with little control over it. While Linda would like her children to be involved in more activities, she simply couldn't afford it. For Beth, her daughter's father does not contribute financially and it is then '*all down to me*'. She would like to earn more money, but she is unable to move from her current job as her working hours compliment the school hours and a change in employment may mean that she would have no-one to mind her daughter after school. Following the interviews, I became aware of two jobs that I thought Beth would be interested in. However, when I spoke to her about them, she was unable to apply for them due to the hours offered.

*'I'd love to be able to have, have be, be better, be in a better position. I'm kinda stuck with work that I can only do part-time because I have no-one*

*to collect [my daughter], you know that way... It would be more finances that kinda step in my way but I do manage. You know the bills get paid, [my daughter] gets what she wants, but it's at a struggle. I get nothing! (Beth laughs) But she gets a lot'.*

Keith, who works in the community and voluntary sector, describes his job as '24/7, 7 days a week near enough'. As his wife is in college, they can find it hard at times to access childcare, although he has some flexibility in his work. He tries to keep Sunday as a family day and to get involved with his son's football team, but due to his work commitments, he can find it hard to arrange this. He tries 'to make [himself] available but [he's] not always'.

For Trish, 'not having a job' also makes it hard for her and her partner as parents. While Trish would find it hard to leave her children and return to work, her partner has been actively seeking employment for over 12 months but, 'he's finding it so hard to get another job.... He did his school, he did his courses... He's trying, he tries so hard'. This then impacts on what they can and can't do as a family, 'cos it's when we need money to do something, he's like, he feels like he's not giving what I'm [referring to partner] supposed to be giving, you know'.

All parents spoke about wanting to make sure that their children were happy and had what they wanted. As mentioned previously, they wanted to ensure their children fitted in, but this had clear financial implications for them, often leaving them with little or no disposal income, or even able to pay the necessary bills. As Marie says,

*'Every penny I get, I'm borrowing money to buy food for the kids. That's how bad it is like, I'm actually borrowing money to go food shopping 'cos I want to be sure that the kids get what they want for Christmas'.*

Beth felt that she had to overcompensate for her child's father absence and Debbie's children often played her against their father. Debbie spoke about the pressure her son puts her under to buy a toy and how hard it is not to give in to him:

*[Addressing son] "I have to put the money into the rent today, pay for your electric". "Mammy, please, please". I often say, "Go on, fuck it". I'd use that extra €20 on my dole, but then I let myself short 'cos I have to*

*drive and pay for petrol. So, no sometimes I get it and sometimes I don't. It's very hard that way, moneywise'.*

In working together with his wife, Keith is trying to teach his son that he will not always be able to get everything he wants, because as Keith says, *'money always dictates'*. This is an approach supported by the entire family as he commented his older children are not *'into the latest stuff'* either. Similarly, Trish and her partner, who is unemployed, says their son *'understands if we don't have money to give him like'*. In the children's focus groups, Mandy said it's hard *'when I ask them [parents] to get me stuff, they say no'*, although Farrah replies saying, *'But you have to learn though'*. Cara, however, having already asked her mother, gets one of her grandparents to buy her a pair of Heelies. She had wanted them for Christmas, but at €80, *'I didn't get them 'cos I had too much things and he got them for me'*.

#### **4.2.6 Connecting with the Community**

The isolated nature of being a parent was a common feature for the majority of parents. For stay-at-home parents, they were often at home during the day, waiting to collect their children from school, with little, if any, social interaction. All of the parents mentioned that they rarely get a break from parenting and often struggle to get *'me time'*, with, as Marie put it, the *'kids are in your face 24/7'*. Given the fact that Marie and Ruth find it very difficult to get time away from their children, they did not see much of their friends as they aren't able to meet up with them. Ruth says that, *'I think my friends have just stopped asking me to go out'*. Instead, she has become isolated at weekends:

*'They'd [her friends] could go out [clubbing] all weekend and I'd be just sitting at home, in bed by 8 o'clock like 'cos there's nothing to do'.*

However, both Marie and Ruth are able to meet them in the mornings when the children are in school. The importance of this, especially when having a stressful time, was voiced by Marie who said,

*'Yeah because it's not, 'Mammmmm' and you can drink your tea and it's still warm!'*

However, moving to this community meant that Linda did not feel as isolated as she had previously. Now living in the middle of the main shopping area of the

community within walking distance of the school and local amenities, such as the library and swimming pool, she comments,

*'I'm much happier in myself since I moved [here] as a parent 'cos, I'm only kind of seeing it now. I was like depressed where I lived because I was in the middle of nowhere, I don't drive, so I was stuck in like 6 days a week.... I wasn't around any friends, I wasn't doing anything.... I'm in a better mood, I'm in a better place myself. Like I'm after losing so much weight already, I'm eating healthier and then they [her children] are too 'cos I'm buying so much more fruit for the house'.*

Friends and neighbours were an important source of support for some, but not all. Beth identified the support of her neighbours as being hugely important to her. *'I'd more so lean on me neighbours than me own family to be honest. 'Cos, I would see them obviously every day... [my daughter] is more comfortable with them as well'*. She spoke of being able to rely on them for parenting support and in times of difficulty also.

*'If one of us isn't out like, one of me neighbours would probably text over, "What's wrong? What happened? You're not out!"'*

This was a point reiterated by Trish. While Linda is new to the area, she identified her friends from her local church as being important to their family. Linda met her husband through her church over 10 years ago. Linda credits her church as being a key factor in supporting them through a difficult time in their life.

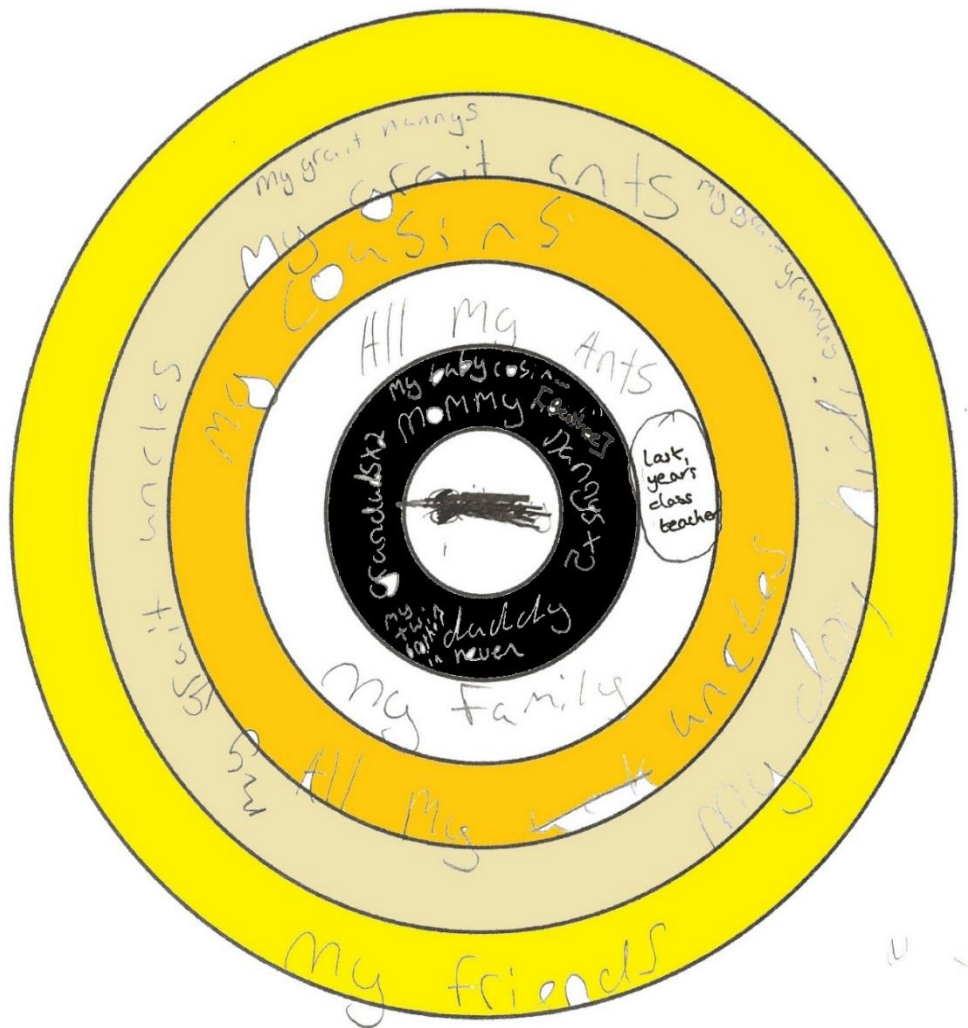
However, for Marie, Ruth and Debbie, they spoke about keeping separate from their neighbours. As a Traveller, outside of her own family unit, Debbie does not *'really mix with anyone else [on the halting site]'*. Marie and Ruth live in the same area of the community. Both areas are often considered no-go areas by the community themselves, as well as by emergency services. There are also significantly higher levels of crime, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and joyriding, compared to other areas of the community. Ruth spoke about how her neighbours,

*'Kill each other.... [and] would sit talking to you and then talking about you'.*



For the children, generally, friends only featured in half of the concentric maps and, with the exception of David, were quite far away from the centre. For the Traveller children, there was also an absence of friends mentioned, with the exception of Cara who listed them on the very outer circle, as seen in the Image 4.6 below.

**Image 4.6: Cara's concentric map**



Jack, who has been diagnosed with anxiety, spoke about how they can sometimes make life harder but they are also important to him.

*'We used to argue but now we don't. We're best friends. And then like the real reason [they are important to me] is because we play together and we, eh, and it's not like boring'.*

### 4.3 PPCP Intervention in the Community

Funding for PPCP in this community was accessed through a successful application made by a consortium of community and statutory agencies who wished to roll out universal parenting supports to families in the community. Locally, PPCP was identified as a way of helping parents deal with difficult behaviour that was being exhibited by their children at school and to responding to the needs of families that were being identified within the school community. Historically, parenting programmes had not been run in local schools. Anecdotally, HSCL Coordinators found that a significant number of parents they had referred to community-based parenting courses did not participate. They believed that parents would be more likely to take part in a parenting course if it was run in their child's school, a place they were familiar with.

As PPCP was run in the local schools in the community, PPCP acted as a way for many of the parents to connect in the community and many parents spoke about the how the techniques taught during the course reduced their stress levels. For the majority of the parents, they also felt that the course facilitators understood what it is like for them as a parent in this community and the ideas and strategies from PPCP fitted into their family life.

In the delivery of PPCP, each weekly session is divided into three themes: 'Review of the Week', 'Positive Parenting' and 'Positive Discipline'. The focus of the 'Positive Parenting' section is to improve parental responsiveness, while 'Positive Discipline' is based on parental demandingness, with both supporting parents to develop an authoritative parenting style.

The majority of the parents self-referred to take part in PPCP, with Marie commenting that the, *'parents who I done it with would kind, like the reason I done it like, I came to be a better parent'*. All parents, except Ruth, found the course largely beneficial, was relevant and applicable to their family life. Ruth did not find it beneficial as she believed it wasn't tailored to meet the needs of her son who has SEN. The parents implemented strategies from the course that they knew or felt would work. When asked what did not fit in, the majority of parents could only remember what did work and this was what they still used.

### 4.3.1 Combating Isolation

The fact that PPCP was run in their child's school was seen as an advantage as it was easier for parents to access, rather than somewhere else in the community where the parents would find hard to get there on time. For Keith and his wife, he felt that by doing the course, they realised they weren't alone in the difficulties they were having in their home:

*'We sat there thinking, this is not normal what's happening in our house and then all of a sudden you hear the lady beside us saying and such and such, that what happens in our house and you go, 'Thank god!' So it normalises it, that's, that's good. I think that makes you feel like you should be there'.*

Linda self-referred to PPCP after she moved to the area. Her children were due to start in the school running PPCP the following September and she felt that it was a good opportunity to connect with her new community. Joining PPCP allowed Linda to get to know people and led to her becoming involved in her children's new school through the HSCL scheme and her new community. In subsequent conversations I had with Linda, she noted PPCP as being the impetus for a change and improvement in her life, including her losing a significant amount of weight. Since taking part PPCP, Linda has also completed other courses delivered by the HSCL Coordinator in her children's school and joined the Parents Association. She is also in the process of completing a First Aid evening course and then hopes to train as a Special Needs Assistant. In comparison to where she used to live,

*'I have never experienced what I'm experiencing in this school, with the help that the parents get is unbelievable... I didn't know anybody when I moved to the area obviously and then doing the [courses], I've people I talk to every day from doing the Zumba, like and then anyone that are doing the other things, I always say hello to them'.*

Echoing Linda, Trish commented that she signed up for PPCP,

*'To make friends and kinda talk about and I think with the housing, and just talk about, having someone to talk to, going down and meet someone and ask their point of view'.*

While Ruth, Keith and Marie were already involved in the school prior to completing PPCP, the course appeared to act as a gateway for all the other parents, except Debbie, to continue and/ or increase their involvement in the school through volunteering, helping out in their child's class and doing other courses. It is important to note, however, that increased parental involvement was not an expectation or desired outcome of the school when they decided to run the course. Debbie's direct involvement in the school has not increased since completing PPCP. However, the relationship between us developed after she attended PPCP, where I was one of the facilitators. Following PPCP, she sought my help and advice in a way she had not previously done beforehand. For example, she approached me in my role as HSCL coordinator to help her with an assignment she was doing as part of a FETAC course on community development. She also got in touch with me to get help for a family member who wished to enrol her children in another local school.

It is also interesting to note that, with the exception of Linda, no parent spoke about any personal activities, hobbies or pastimes that they do outside of the home. The importance of parental self-care does not feature for the majority of parents. However, Beth does comment that, through completing PPCP, she does get more time to herself.

*'I do kinda get a little more freedom where she used to hang out of me... she can do a few things on her own, like go to the loo on her own, like let mammy go to the loo on her own! You know I couldn't move from one end of the room to the next. "Where you going?" You know, she was very clingy'.*

Yet, the feeling of isolation was compounded for Ruth by her participation in PPCP. In this community, it would be common practice for parents to be asked to participate in a parenting programme as part of the AON process for children who may or do have special educational needs. Indeed, if parents do not participate in any parenting course, this may exclude them from additional and/ or further support. It is often the first intervention offered to parents. For Ruth, this was the second parenting course she had been required to attend:

*'The whole point of me doing that course [PPCP] was to deal with him like 'cos it was done through the Assessment of Need. They sent me on that course'.*

Ruth did not find the course hugely beneficial as, *'it wasn't specialised on special needs kids'*. While there were some aspects of the course content that she knew wouldn't work for her family, she *'still tried it, just because they said to try it'*. She also felt, given the size of her family, that in trying to implement techniques such as time out, *'when [she] put one out the other one wants to go out and sit him with him. It just caused more hassle'*. She felt that she knew what would and wouldn't work for her son, but she would have liked *'more information on calming and relaxing and different techniques'*, which would have supported her more in dealing with his needs. Also, she attended a course in a different part of the community, but she felt she had less in common with them as they did not face the same issues as she did living in her area.

In comparison, however, Trish whose son is in the process of being diagnosed with special educational needs found that the course *'just kind of improved me parenting really'*, fitted into her family life and *'definitely'* understood her as a parent. Her motivation for participation differed from Ruth and her primary focus was not on her son's needs. Trish self-referred to PPCP, following encouragement from her partner to do so. Instead, she was hoping to connect with other parents and get general advice. She is, however, concerned about his attention and wanted help in how she *'wants him to kinda keep his cleverness'*. She is still waiting for the assessment process to be completed. However, this has been significantly delayed because of a backlog of cases. As a result, no additional SEN supports are available to Trish and her son at present.

#### **4.3.2 Fostering the Parent-Child Relationship**

In the delivery of PPCP, fostering the parent-child relationship is done through the 'Positive Parenting' session, through, for example, the introduction of regular 'Special Time' by the parent with their child. Ruth, as a parent of four children, staggers her children's bedtime, allowing her or her partner get some time with each child. This was something she did before completing PPCP but felt the course re-affirmed the importance of it for her.

*'She'll get her bedtime story and that's kind of her, she picks the story and it's all about her. That's her few minutes and by the time her story is finished and she settles down, then it's [other child]'s turn to go to bed and she's getting her few minutes'.*

Linda 'enjoys that time with [my daughter]', with Beth commenting that she 'feels an awful lot closer to her [daughter]'. In implementing a regular play-time with her daughter she saw how important it was to her. It also meant that her daughter wasn't as demanding of her attention at other times of the day. In comparing her own childhood to her daughter's, Beth says,

*'Me dad wouldn't have set down and played with me, like he gave me whatever I needed you know but he wouldn't have. I think I missed out on that and it's great to know that... It made me realise how important that time with your child is, you know. That hour and every night I ask [my daughter], 'What made you laugh today?' or 'Did anything mammy do make you laugh?' or you know'.*

However, it wasn't possible for all parents to do this, based on their own circumstances. Unlike Ruth, Marie found that when she tried to introduce 1-1 time with one child, the other three still wanted her attention and, therefore, it was hard to do. For Keith, his work commitments sometimes got in the way of being able to spend the time he would like with his son.

In the children's focus groups, the quality of their relationships with their parents appeared to have a correlation with how comfortable they felt in approaching them. All the children identified at least one of their parents as being very important to them and placed them, in most cases closest to them. Many spoke about how their parents look after them, including Jack who said they, 'help me with my homework... make all my food... I'm not homeless 'cos I have a home'. He described his parents as 'amazing'. The presence of the parent in their life correlated to how important they were to the child. As Cara described it,

*'She [mother] always there for us... I would tell my daddy but sometimes he's just never there so I just go to my mammy'.*

For Martin, who has a chronic illness that often leads to regular stays in hospital, his parents help him when he's sick or upset. His father is someone he identifies as able to help in a time of need.

*'If anything happened, I remember a time we went to a park with ... [my siblings] and my mommy. And we were playing football in the field but[sister] got kicked in the belly, in the stomach with a ball and she just stopped breathing, stopped breathing and my daddy had to pump her stomach and pump her stomach on the grass and he tapped her back and she started breathing up and breathing up and she started crying'.*

It is clear that he is very proud of his father in this moment and feels very connected to him, although he recounted it as though it was a very normal thing to happen on a trip to the park. However, his father is often absent in his life, due to regular imprisonments. It is evident that Martin is exposed to several adversities in his life.

Interestingly for Farrah, she knows that she's very much loved and wanted by her parents as, *'they raise me, meaning that they wanted me to be there with them'*. However, when it comes to getting support, she does say her father makes her life harder as *'he's a bit tough'* and she prefers asking for help from her mother.

*'I used to say I'd ask my dad for help but not, he just says, he's a bit busy and I'd be calling him and he has his earphones in'.*

This is a sentiment also echoed by Cara. Her parents are separated and her mother, Debbie, spoke about the unreliability of her former partner in the parenting role. When asked who she would go to for help Cara says that,

*'I would tell my daddy but sometimes he's just never there so I just go to my mammy... She's always there for us'.*

#### **4.3.3 Implementing Rules and Routines**

Development of strategies to implement rules and routines is addressed through the 'Positive Discipline' sessions of PPCP. Rules and routines were a key feature in all the parent interviews and they recognised the importance of establishing and adhering to them in their family life, with Marie saying, *'they respond better to rules and boundaries than the chaos'*. When Keith and his wife do not stick to

them, they find that *'when the routine breaks, no matter what it is, it interrupts everything, from stuff we do during the day to the night-time'*. All parents had well-defined routines in place around homework, morning-time and bedtime, with many of these in place in some form before participating in PPCP. Reflective of what other parents said, Marie describes her routines as,

*'Everything is my routine! (laughs) I'm like Sergeant Major around here, like everything, like. 'Cos there's 4 of them and I kept routine very strict because if you even let it slide a little bit you just, it falls down around you so everything would be... Now, like not everything, they're not around there like prisoners, but like stuff is, they actually, they feel more comfortable in it like. Like bedtime is like, would be very strict like and the same thing, they get into bed and the lights are off, and they're asleep..... There's none of this up and down the stairs or lying with them like..... So like everything would be strict like you know, like homework. They come in from school, they don't even need to be told 'cos they know..... Nothing changes like, do you know? They just come in, the bags opened, they sit at the table, they do their homework and it's done so. There doesn't be arguments about it because they know that's what they've always done'.*

Taking part in PPCP helped many of the parents, particularly Keith, Linda, Debbie and Beth in further structuring their routines. Trish, Linda and Keith all work together with their partners on maintaining the routine. Interestingly, Ruth and Marie had very well-established routines in place prior to participation in PPCP, with Marie commenting that it was necessary due to the size of her family. Beth's daughter noticed the change in their family's routines after her mother took part in PPCP. Beth recounted how her daughter spoke about this change.

*'[Quoting her daughter] "Jesus, ma, you never did this before. What's going on?" Now it's like a routine'.*

Furthermore, the when/then technique from PPCP, was of particular help to Beth. This technique teaches the parent to phrase a command to the child, followed by a natural reward, for example, 'When you finish your dinner, then you can watch TV'. Beth says of her daughter,



*'Now she knows her rules. Those rules are set and she's, like, they're not, she's not building it as crazy as she would have been or demanding'.*

In setting up new routines during PPCP, both Debbie and Linda mentioned how using a timer helped them. For Debbie, she used it to help her son develop independence from her, while Linda used it to regulate the amount of time her children played on the iPad. Debbie said, *'without the timer I was done'*.

A common theme throughout the parents' interviews was the influence the children had on their decision-making. As Keith put it, *'whatever happens, he rules the roost... it's all based on what he wants to do'*. All the parents spoke about how their children test the boundaries, try to negotiate with them and, in Debbie's case, play one parent against the other. This was something many of the parents identified as needing support with when they took part in PPCP. The majority of the parents felt that PPCP helped them with this issue, resulting in the parents being more confident and firm in their decision making. However, again, this was not an issue for Ruth and Marie as with four children each, they did not stray from their rules and routines, with their decisions being *'final'*.

Following participation in PPCP, many parents noted they were able to stick to their original decisions, despite their children's influence. Debbie commented that, *'At first I couldn't control them. Without that class, I swear it's brilliant'*. As Linda states,

*'Well, they [her children] do 'cos they're always trying to, they always try and test you, always, but it's up to you as a parent to stand your ground and say no, we're doing it this way'*.

For Keith and his wife, completing the course together meant that,

*'When we're doing it together, we can then walk out of the class, on the way home, 'that made sense, do you remember when we did that and we should have done it this way?' Whereas instead of her trying to tell me the situation, the answer or vice-versa, eh, then that can cause arguments as well!'*

#### 4.3.4 Reducing Stress

Where Beth would have previously doubted herself, she felt stronger as a parent after the course. Given the everyday stresses faced by the parents, the introduction of 'Press the Pause' button from PPCP into their family life helped significantly. 'Press the Pause' button asks parents to pause and not react negatively to a problem, think of a more positive way to react and then think ahead and plan a more appropriate response. By implementing this, all parents spoke about its benefit and how much calmer, generally, they were as a result. It was also something that Trish, Linda and Marie used when there was conflict with their partners and/ or extended family. For Marie, it was *'one of the biggest things that changed my family life like'*. As Debbie says,

*'I always use it. Even when, when, sometimes when I'm going to grab these two children and put them out the window, I don't like! I just go, "Stop, just calm down" and explain to them in a nice way and they're grand with it now. At first I didn't. I just screamed and shout, "Please listen to me! I'm your mommy" and they wouldn't'.*

However, aside from general family stresses, Trish and Debbie spoke about how they sometimes struggle to deal with the stress of their own individual situations. Trish is living in overcrowded conditions, without her partner and Debbie is parenting alone. Although not asked directly, 'Pressing the Pause' button was not mentioned by them as a way to deal with these situations. Both spoke about how the support of their partner and daughter, respectively, helped to reduce their stress levels. In reference to her partner, Trish says,

*'If I hadn't got him now I don't think I'd be dealing with it [housing situation] so well... He's so calm and he'd kinda, 'Don't worry about it. We're going to get our own house, we're going to, don't be letting anything get to you'.... Here'd I'd be, 'How are you so calm?!' You know, he tries to be the strong one then for me 'cos I'd hold it all together and then he'd hold it together for me... Even the kids like, he's just, he, he'd say like, "After school, today like we're going to go on a drive, we're going to the park and we'll look for conkers and you know we just, we'll clear our heads" you know, that's the way he does it and I'd say now, "'Yeah I feel better today"'.*

Debbie spoke about how her daughter, Cara, looks after her when she is having a particularly difficult day. In a form of role reversal, Debbie's daughter provides support to her.

*'I can't cope and there could be yoghurts and everything thrown around the floor. Two minutes it's wiped up. "Now Mammy, there's a cup of tea for you, go and have your cigarette outside and calm down". She's brilliant. I swear without her, I was done'.*

#### **4.4 Educational Support Structures in the Community**

Several of the parents mentioned that they felt supported by the school, in particular when they had concerns about their child's learning and development. The class teacher was a key person mentioned by many of the parents, as well as the HSCL Coordinator and the Special Education Needs Coordinator. Trish also recognised the school as a gateway for families to access more specialised support, such as further assessments:

*'She's [HSCL Coordinator] trying to push that [AON] now for me and she's like, if you need anything, come to me and she's after getting him extra support in the school'.*

##### **4.4.1 Accessibility of School to Families**

Many of the parents spoke about feeling comfortable approaching the school for support, for example Trish who says,

*'So even when we're out in the yard and even the way the principal goes around the yard in the morning and she's like, "Good morning, good morning". That's support that you can go to her if you have a problem. She's out in the yard in the morning, the teachers come to you, you can talk to them and even if I need to talk to [class teacher], she's like, oh yeah, she's there, she's willing to talk to me'.*

Again, the children identified with school staff as being important to them if they were nice to them and did not shout. Two of the Traveller children identified the importance of relationships with school staff. Mandy identified her teacher as the first person she would turn to if she needed help as,

*'She's really nice and she doesn't really shout at anybody... if something was really bad she would like give out to them but not like scream, she would just be like, "Could you say sorry, please" like that'.*

Martin's Special Needs Assistant (SNA), in particular is very important to him and also protects him from a teacher he has a difficult relationship with because,

*'If anything happens, if I don't do my homework, she [SNA] tells teacher, she tells the teacher that I did all my homework very well'.*

Beth noted how different this was to when she was in school and how her father wasn't supported after the death of her mother.

*'I was just thrown back in like. I was only 7 you know and I was lost, you know what I mean. For a while, a good few years, like. There was no kinda, there was nothing'.*

However, this was not the case for all parents. For Debbie, Ruth and Marie, they did not see the school as a support to them. Ruth and Marie both felt that their families had needs that were not being addressed by the school, for example access to a homework club. As Ruth put it,

*'The ones [children in son's school] who are bad, or the ones who are deprived or... [get to stay in school until 5.30 every day]... My kids never even got offered an after-school, football, Gaelic, music, like nothing'.*

This is supported by Marie who says,

*'One is now in 6<sup>th</sup> Class here and the other is in 1<sup>st</sup> Class and in Senior Infants. My kids have never been offered anything like'*

In this community, homework clubs are often part of a targeted intervention in DEIS schools run by SCP. Children are offered places as they are considered to be at risk of early school leaving. However, neither Ruth nor Marie's children have been identified as in need of this support. Debbie's children have previously accessed support through SCP but she did not identify this in her interview.

#### 4.4.2 Families' Perception of their School

All the parents and children vocalised how they thought the school viewed their families. While Ruth and Marie perceived that the school saw them as good parents *'because I'm involved'*. However, as Ruth put it, she felt this meant that,

*'They [school] think of us as good parents. They don't think we need anything, the kids are clean and in school on time. They are not dragged up'.*

This resulted in them feeling that they had to *'fight to get things'* for their children. However, they perceived that the school *'wastes all their time and energy on [other parents who] couldn't care less'*. As Ruth says,

*'They don't think that we need anything, the kids are clean and in school on time. They're not dragged up. They're not brats, they're good kids so they think, "Why would they need help?" You get penalised for being a good parent. You can't win either way. You'd get more thanks and more attention if you're a bad parent'.*

However, many of the parents felt that the school viewed them as good parents, were comfortable approaching the school for help and felt supported by them. As Keith put it,

*'I'm over the moon we chose this school. From everything, from Home School Liaison, even just to... the principal, but the support from the staff underneath is unbelievable'.*

When Linda was worried that her daughter may be struggling with the transition to primary school, she sought advice from me in my role as the HSCL Coordinator. By doing so, she felt supported in her decision as it,

*'Just kind of being reassured like 'cos I was thinking myself that she's ok, she is ok and then just to hear it from yous, makes it a bit better then'.*

This positive orientation of the family towards the school was also reflected in many of the children's comments. The majority of the children thought that the teachers liked seeing their parents in the school, with Cian saying, it was because *'sometimes the parents help'*. Cian also thought that the teachers *'appreciate them [his parents]'*. However, both Jack and Farrah mentioned that they would be

embarrassed, and in Jack's words it would, *'make me feel uncomfortable'* if they were to see their parents in school.

It is interesting, however that the Traveller children did not have the same view of the school's perception of their parents as the other children. All three Traveller children did not like to see their parents in school, unless, as Mandy says, *'it means you get collected early'*. They also stated that they did not think their teachers liked seeing their parents in the school, with Mandy stating that *'some teachers like mams and dads and some don't'*, with teachers not liking their parents in the school if, *'they don't like them. They might think they [parents] are bold or something'*. As Martin says, *'cos the teachers get very aggravating... over the mummies and daddies shouting'*. Furthermore, upon completing a map of the places they have been in the local community in the past week, two of the Traveller children, Cara and Martin, identified the school as the first place they would like to change, with Cara wanting *'more fun stuff in school'*.

This perception of school by the Traveller children was also replicated in Debbie's interview. Debbie, a Traveller mother, does not think the school supports her as a parent and she states that she likes to keep herself separate from the school. When she did approach the school for help with her son's behaviour at home, she felt that her concerns weren't believed as the teacher said he was *'an angel in school'*. She, therefore, distanced herself again from the school, thinking, *'it must be in my imagination'*. However, the school finally did take on board her concerns and linked her with a family support worker, which Debbie found very helpful. It is clear here that Debbie's isolation from the school is facilitated by the school structures which do not positively encourage or value her engagement. Interestingly, however, Debbie did feel understood and listened to when she took part in PPCP. The confidence she gained from the course meant that, *'now, I would like explain the way, I need help like'*. It also made it easier for her to come in the school afterwards, due to the relationships she built with the HSCL Coordinators who delivered the course.

## **4.5 Family Support Networks**

Both parents and children identified the need and the importance of social networks in supporting them in their day-to-day lives. The importance of social networks in helping and/ or hindering how they were able to parent effectively was a common theme for all parents. For the children, their social networks were comprised of the people who cared for and were good to them. The composition of the social networks differed between the parents and children and were reflective of their own realities.

Parents' decision making was also heavily influenced by their support networks. For the majority of parents, their confidence and ability to make decisions was improved by taking part in PPCP. In all cases, the mother was the primary decision-maker. However, where both parents were actively involved in their children's life, they co-parented together, with their decisions supported by their partner/ spouse.

As previously mentioned, Marie, Ruth and Debbie live in the areas of the community with the highest rates of crime and violence. In comparison to the other parents interviewed, they had significantly fewer support networks to draw from. Marie and Debbie only had the support of their own parents/ wider family, whereas Ruth did not identify anyone she could draw on for support.

### **4.5.1 Spousal/ Partner Relationship**

The majority of parents interviewed were living with their partner and were raising their children together. Trish, Keith and Linda spoke about the supportive nature of their relationships with their partners and noted how their presence made parenting and family life easier for them. Trish spoke about how it was *'all of us together'*. Linda spoke of the strength of her relationship with her husband, *'we're not ones for fighting. I can probably count on one hand the amount of times we have fought in 10 years like'*. In all three relationships, the importance of their partnership and working together was apparent, with Linda noting her husband trusts her as a parent, while Keith said that when he and his wife work together in parenting, it makes for an easier family life.

However, Ruth and Marie's partners perceived their partners to be more passive and not working in partnership with them, making the day-to-day of family life

more difficult for them. For Marie, while her partner agrees with what she wants to do,

*'When it comes to actually, like he likes the idea of it but it's just too much work for him. He would rather lie on the chair and breathe and that's enough for him'.*

Ruth, who was interviewed with Marie, was in agreement that this was the same with her partner and he does not help with any housework or child-rearing. When he is asked to mind his children, he views it as *'babysitting'*.

*'Remember me grandad was dying two weeks ago and he's ringing me, I'm in intensive care sitting up, 'Eh, the kids are hungry'. 'Feed them, like. I'm in the hospital, you're at home. What do you want me to do about it? Like, feed your kids'. 'So you want me to babysit these again?' I'm like, 'You don't babysit your own kids'.*

Both Debbie and Beth are single parents and spoke of their inability to trust their children's fathers. However, both mothers spoke about how this made it easier for them to manage family life without their presence in their lives. Given the strained relationship that had been present in Debbie and her husband's relationship, she says that, *'it's better for me'* that he does not see him and that he is also unreliable when minding the children. Interestingly, although Ruth clearly challenges the view of the father as a babysitter that is exactly how Debbie views her children's father when he is in the care-giving role.

*'No, you couldn't leave him to babysit, like, you'd have to keep ringing. I had to get, I had to buy [my daughter] a phone.... I could be going to the pictures with the girls. 'Mammy, Daddy is gone out'. So I had to stop and rush home. That way you couldn't trust him babysitting so I wouldn't leave him to babysit'.*

Similarly for Beth, she does not perceive her child's father as being active in her daughter's life, only taking her a few hours a week and *'he doesn't do what he is supposed to do'*. As a result, these four mothers spoke about how they are with *'the kids in your face 24/7'* when they do not have the support of their partner/child's father. They spoke about not getting any time to themselves, unless the children were in school. As Ruth put it,



*'It would be very rarely like that I'd get a chance to not be around the kids. Like the only break I get now is when they're in school'.*

While all four mothers spoke about the difficulties in their relationships, all noted that it was easier for them in several ways to do it on their own. Beth said, there's *'nobody looking over my shoulder'* and for Debbie it meant that, *'it's only me like telling like [the children] what to do'*. They also viewed themselves as the better parent and made the most of their situation. Marie said that,

*'I don't really pay attention to him because he's kinda just a little noise in the background!'*

#### **4.5.2 Mother as Primary Decision-Maker**

Many of the mothers perceived their partners in a passive role of father. As a result, whether by choice or circumstance, the mother was the primary and, sometimes, only decision-maker in the home. This was reflected in the children's conversation about who chooses where they can go in the area. During their focus group and when asked who chooses where they can go in the area, Jack, Mandy and Farrah all respond, *'my mammy'*. Martin is the only child in his group who also includes, *'my dad, my mom'*.

Several mothers spoke about how this actually made their lives easier, with Marie saying,

*'He doesn't influence my decisions like I'd be the main parent in the house and the kids have more respect for me than they would for him because they can see, like, why there's rules like'.*

While Linda identifies herself as the main decision-maker in relation to the children, she does so with the support of her husband. When it came to choosing a new school, she says, *'I came for the open day and I rang him and told him all about it while I was here and we agreed together'*. She does note that sometimes she would like him to do more but says, *'it's me own fault 'cos I want to do it all meself'*. This is echoed by Keith, who although he actively co-parents with his wife, says, *'she normally makes the right decision first time!'* Keith perceives that this may be due to the difference in their personalities as he would be stricter than his wife. However, Trish was the only parent interviewed that did not see

herself as the main decision-maker as she and her partner *'do it together...as a team'*.

Many of the mothers expressed their confidence in this role and as, Trish put it, *'I know I'm a good parent'*. However, for Beth as a single parent, she spoke about feeling that she was second-guessing her decisions and found that participating in PPCP helped her to,

*'Know whether I was doing the right thing for [her daughter].... I have loads of little things that I have learned from the courses like'*.

Further to taking part in PPCP, Debbie felt more confident in herself and in giving advice to a family member who was having parenting difficulties. Both Linda and Beth were also approached by their friends and neighbours, respectively, for advice when they were aware they were completing the course. When Beth first started the course, her neighbours joked that they did not want her coming back and telling them what to do. However, one of the neighbours did approach her for advice after seeing the positive change in Beth's daughter.

*'He'd sit and listen to you like. "I'm not preaching to you" and he'd be like, "No, I need to know it all you know"'*.

#### **4.5.3 Extended Family and Animal Support**

Linda, Debbie and Trish spoke of how they would turn to their own mother for advice. As a single parent, Debbie noted that family members helped her to stick to some of her decisions when she was struggling. Without the support of her sister, she noted she would have given in to her son.

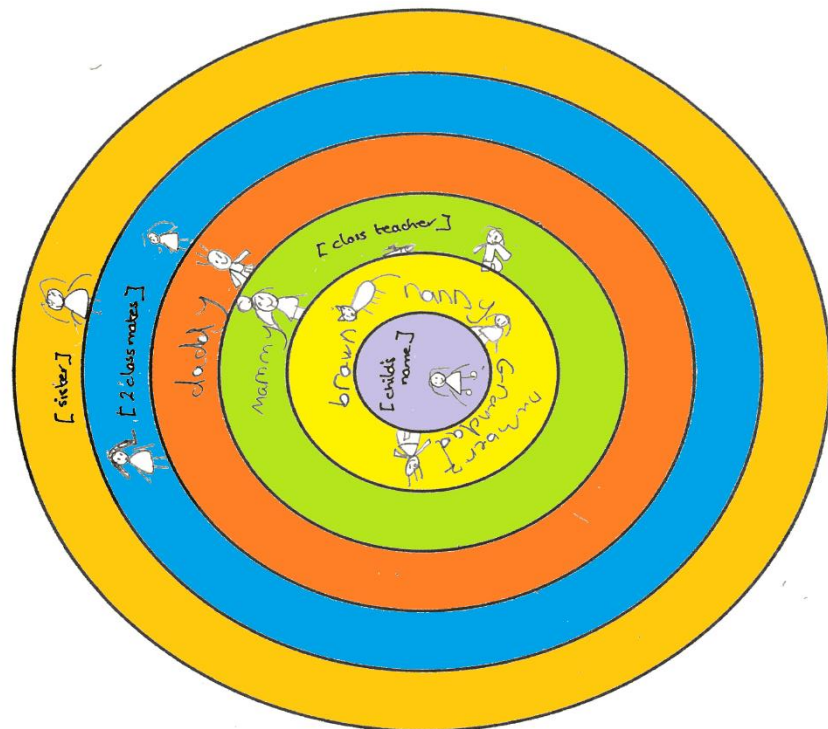
*'He'd sit on that step or he'd kick that door until he came back in but I wouldn't, until that timer went off, he wasn't allowed back in....It's not besting me. I even sat, [saying to sister] "Leave him in". "No", I was like, "Please let him" but [my sister] was like, "No..., you have to do it". Only for her I wasn't getting through either. "Come on... The timer's not up. The minute it beeps, just open the door and leave him in". But I just couldn't wait, I used to even wind it on a bit (laughs) so [my sister] didn't see me do it. "Come on in [son], you're grand"'*.

Interestingly, although Debbie remarks that she would be *'done'* without the support of her family, she notes that they can sometimes undermine and question her decisions. Since her parents moved further away from her, it is in some ways easier for her to parent her children. As she says,

*'Like when I'd tell me children one thing, they [her parents] would tell them another.... There was no control but now since they moved out of, I've the best control.... Yous [her parents] live up here and I live down here so you leave me to deal with me own children'.*

In interviewing the children, they were asked to complete a concentric map of the important people in their lives. All except one child identified at least one grandparent as being very important to them, with their grandparent positioned as being as important as their own parents. Indeed, in the case of Lisa (Image 4.7 below) and Jack, they placed them ahead of their own parents because, as Jack said, his grandmother *'took care of me'*. This is a sentiment echoed by Cian. He lives in a household of nine people, including his grandmother. Although he is close to his mother, he would chose the support of his grandmother before his mother. While his mother works, his grandmother is always in the home and *'my nanny does everything'*.

**Image 4.7: Lisa's concentric map**



Reiterating what the children stated, for the majority of the parents interviewed, support from their own parents was identified as something that could be a benefit for them, but its significance differed based on the relationships they had with their wider family, their wider family's priorities and how much they depended on them. Distance from their wider family was a factor in whether they were able to access support from their family. As a father, Keith's parents were quite a distance away and unable to help out with babysitting. For the majority of the parents interviewed they saw their wider families regularly, for example, once a week, if they lived nearby.

*'[Linda's family] are great, his side and my side.... My mam lives in town so she gets the bus out to us and like she knew like I was going to the first aid and she offered to come out today and help'.*

However, proximity to the wider family did not always equate to support. For Keith, although their older children still live with them, they are now both in their own relationships and unable to help out as much as they previously had done. In

Marie and Ruth's case, having a large family appeared to restrict their ability to access support from their wider family, *'even though [they] live, like literally 2 minutes away from me like'*. While Marie's parents mind her other siblings' children, they do not offer to mind hers as,

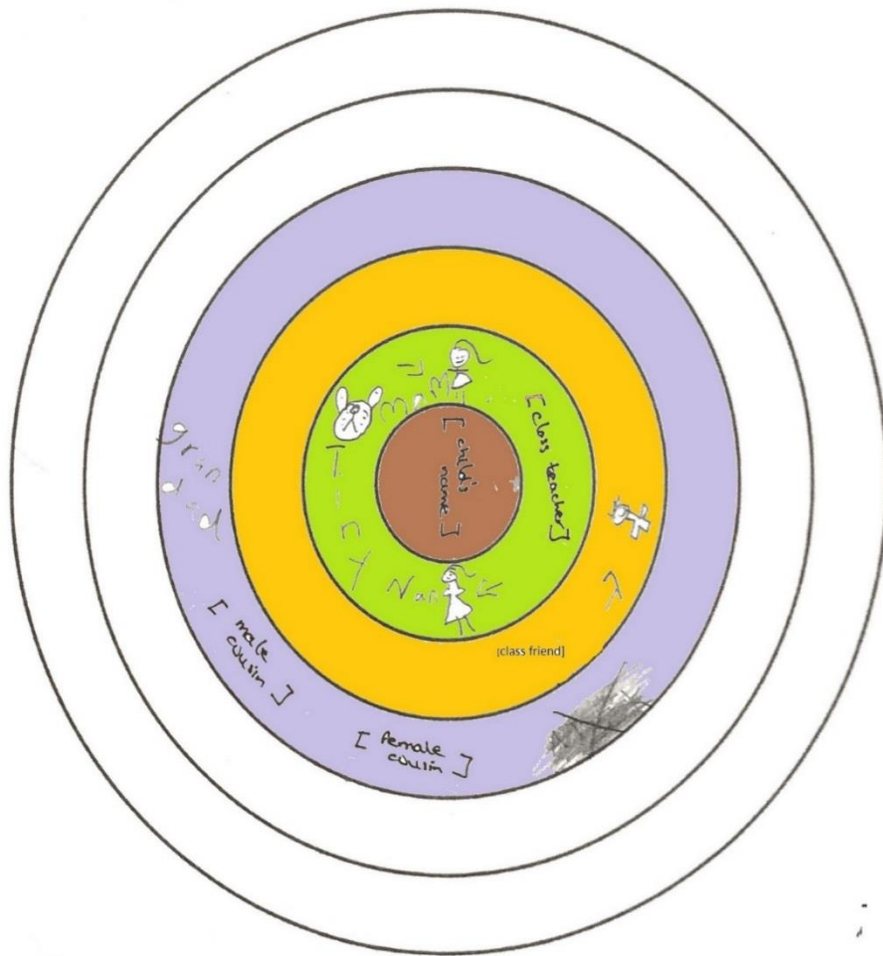
*'[Her family] can't look after 4 of them and all. I end up splitting the kids up to get a bit of me time. So I don't bother 'cos what's the point like. It's not worth the hassle'.*

The children's siblings were placed further away from them in the circle. Lisa, as evidenced in Image 4.7 above, summed up the sentiment that was echoed by other children about their siblings:

*My sister isn't that important to me because she literally doesn't like me. She hits me and bites me and kicks me and everything like that!*

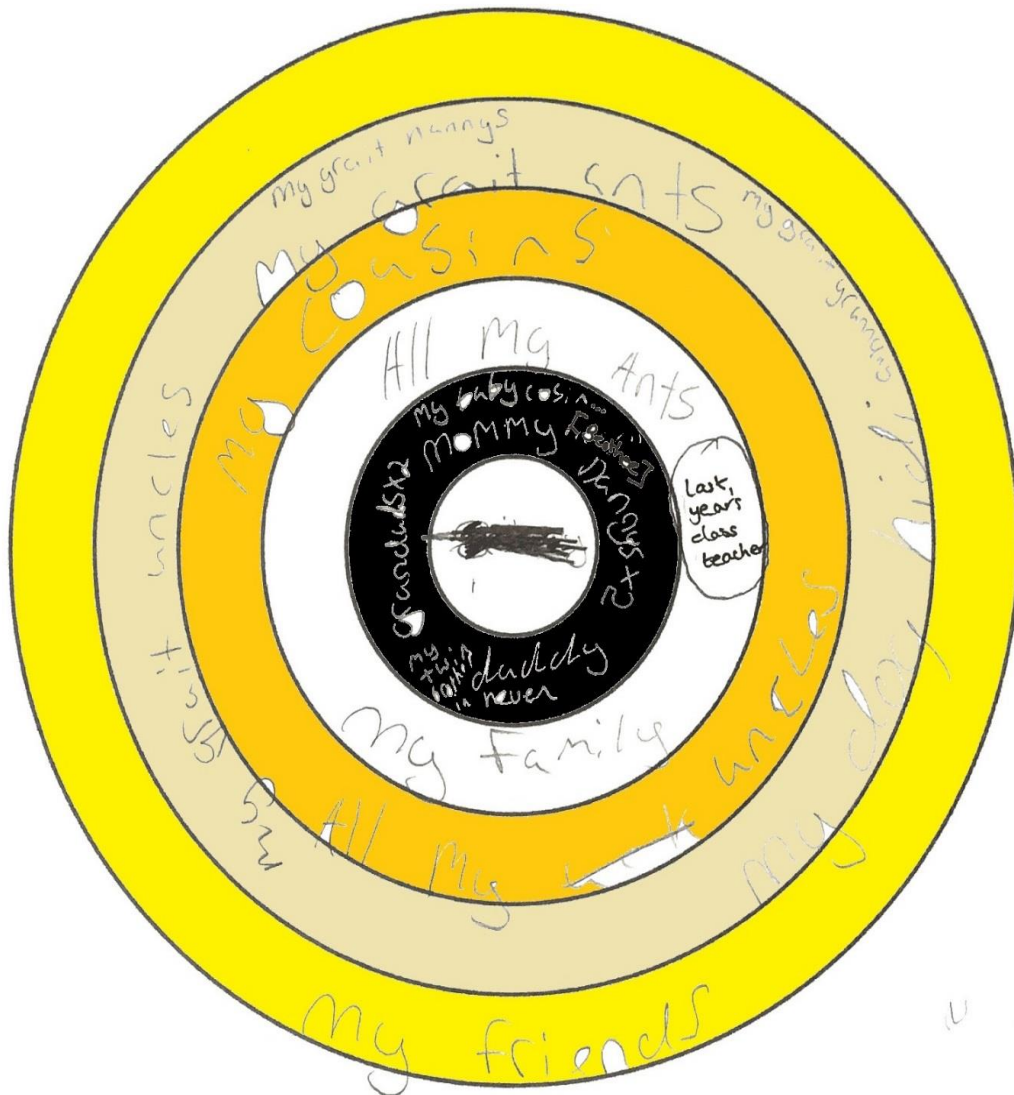
The importance of the extended family to the children differed from the parents and was based on how nice they were to them. While one of Martin's grandfather's was his favourite, he did not identify the other as a support to him as, *'he's just old and just because he shouts'*. In Cian's case, as seen in Image 4.8 below, he does not view either his cousin or his uncle as a support. Although well-behaved towards him in school, his cousin is not when they are at home. He originally included his uncle in his circle but then crossed him out as he said he wouldn't turn to him for support.

**Image 4.8: Cian's concentric map**



For both the Traveller children and the Traveller mother, the importance of a large wider family circle was a common theme and they were the dominant people mentioned in their social networks, often to the omission of anyone else, including friends, settled neighbours and professionals working within the community. They were important simply because, as Cara (child) put it, '*it's my family*', as seen in Image 4.9 below. Indeed, for the children, they also identified deceased family members as being of importance to them.

**Image 4.9: Cara's concentric map**



As a parent, Debbie gets a great deal of support from her wider family. Although, she does find it difficult to accept their support at times, she also relies on them very heavily. Speaking about her sister, she says,

*'I'm glad to have her there. Without her, I was done [as she would] 'help out now like if I was stuck for groceries, she'll buy if the children need anything, she'll get them'.*

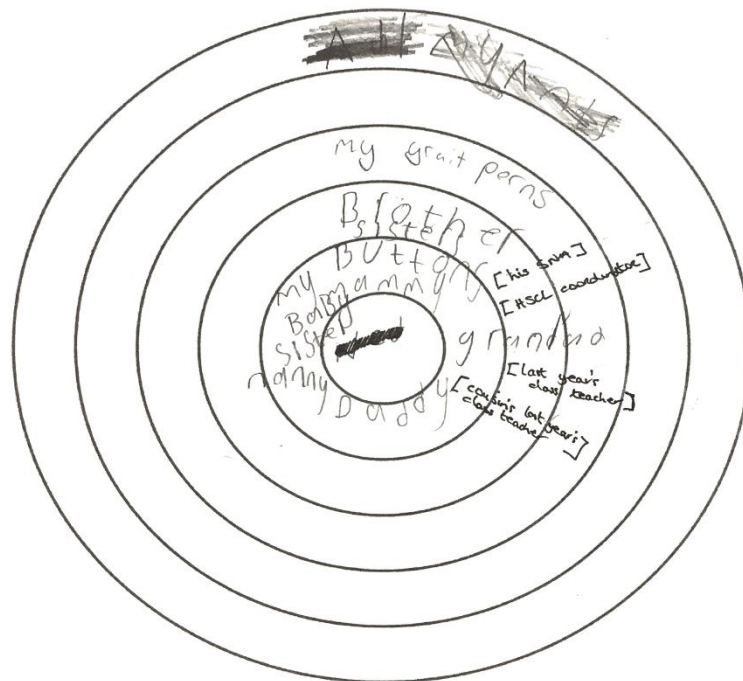
Similar to the settled children, two of the Traveller children spoke about the how their grandparents help them. Cara, identified the importance of her grandfather in her life, when agreeing with Martin (child) about his grandfather;

*'My granddad is the same ['cos he helps you and gives you money], he gives you everything you want. He's like my daddy'.*

For a number of the children, their pet dog or cat featured predominately in their circles and in three cases were in the first circle, closest to the child. Martin has placed his dog 'Button' in the same circle as his parents and two of his siblings, as evidenced in Image 4. 10 below. Given the fact that Martin's life is often unpredictable due to his ill-health and the periods of time his father is absent, the dog is seen as a constant in his life, 'because he's been there all my life'. When he had no-one else around him to play,

*'He's all I would ever play with is the dog'.*

**Image 4.10: Martin's concentric map**



Cian sees his dog as a 'guard dog' and that appears to be reflective of the difficulties he has at home with his certain family members living in the house. Living in overcrowded living conditions, Cian speaks about how his cousin is mean to him and his uncle is quite aggressive towards him. Cian's personality is generally quite timid, as is his mother's. From my own insider knowledge of the family and observations during the focus group, he is a quiet child who almost appears in fear of his uncle and seems quite troubled by the present situation. Cian's cousin's mother had approached me, in my capacity as a HSCL Coordinator to seek help for



her son's (Cian's cousin) anger issues at home. While there are no issues with the cousin's behaviour in school, his mother is becoming concerned that he is becoming increasingly angry and aggressive at home. She also spoke about the impact the cramped living conditions were having on the family and has requested the intervention of a family support key worker to work with Cian's cousin. While my concerns for Cian did not warrant a child protection concern, I did ask for the case to be prioritised with the family support agency as it was on a waiting list. I also asked that they include the wider family in any intervention. The entire family are now working with a family support agency and Cian also has access to additional supports in the school through SCP, as well as being prioritised for after-school activities.

## **5. Discussion**

Bearing in mind the primary research question posed by this study, how parents' and children's perspectives and experiences of family life and PPCP in marginalised communities, can inform parenting interventions, formal educational welfare policy and practice through DEIS, this chapter summarises and discusses the key findings. The insights provided by the parents and children into their lives are interpreted and explored in greater depth, with a particular emphasis on ways that inequality and marginalisation shape these experiences and the importance of listening to the voice of the 'Other'. In doing so, this chapter argues for social policy and interventions to be informed, co-designed and/or co-produced by the very people that they are aimed at.

### **5.1 Key Findings from the Research**

Throughout this research, the application of Bronfenbrenner (1979) bioecological model has provided a framework, as well as a lens, to explore the impact of broader social and cultural influences on the family unit and in turn their impact on children's psychological development. Through the use of a community psychology perspective, a critical viewpoint has been applied in an effort to challenge long-held assumptions about the need to standardise effective parenting through the universal roll-out of parenting interventions. This approach of privileging the voices of parents and children in marginalised communities, forefronting their own lived experiences, is quite a departure from traditional rigid assumptions in parenting research. Instead, a value has been placed on contextual understanding and diversity, which will then allow for reflexivity and critical analysis to occur (Moane & Quilty, 2012; Hill et al., 2000). In seeking the voices of parents and children from this community, key findings emerged which allow us to have a more rounded understanding of the realities faced by them in their daily lives.

Despite the high level of resilience and positive parenting practices demonstrated by the parents interviewed, this research found that the level of choice parents had in their parenting styles and their family life was dependent on a number of

factors, such as their exposure to inequality, adversity and connection to social networks. PPCP was found to act as a positive gateway for a majority of parents to become more connected to their community and to further develop their parenting skills. However, this research also found that PPCP helped to maintain the status quo, particularly for the most marginalised within this community, leading to them being further isolated by their participation in a parenting programme.

Although living in this community was a positive experience for many, a key finding of this research was how inequality and poverty impacted on the lives of the parents and children interviewed. For the children, in particular, this was reflected in their lack of access to play spaces. The role of social networks for both parents and children was another key finding of this research. Positive social networks, where available, supported parents in their parenting role. However, these were not always an option. Furthermore, friends were a notable absence from the children's social networks. Challenging the traditional assumption that an authoritative parenting style is the most appropriate, this research found this not always to be the case. The realities faced by this community, such as exposure to crime, meant that a more fluid parenting style response was necessary to ensure their children's safety and protection. Interestingly, the parenting style employed was influenced by the level of isolation and marginalisation experienced by the parents.

Finally, taking into consideration James et al. (1998) standards of judgement assumption, a key finding of this research was how schools were perceived significantly differently by Traveller parents and children, compared to their settled peers. Given that the Traveller community is one of the most marginalised in Ireland, their experiences of schools raises several questions about how best meaningful partnership can be supported between schools and the Traveller community.

## **5.2 Does the 'autonomous' parent really exist?**

The current findings raise questions about the level of autonomy families have, or can be expected to have, given the many constraints that they experience. Smail

(2009) argues that the freedom of choice we perceive we have over the decisions we make in our daily lives does not always take into account how we are, often sometimes unconsciously influenced, by external forces and powers. Bearing in mind the rise of individualism within Western culture, ideas around 'effective parenting' increasingly means that the blame is often placed on families when things go wrong, with little or no regard for the broader inequalities or constraints and pressures families may be under (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Layard & Dunn, 2009; Parton, 1991). The findings from this research clearly illustrate that there are many influences impacting directly on parenting practices, which in turn raises questions about the logic of focusing interventions solely on families.

While traditional research has assumed that change in families occur primarily through the family itself, this research identifies influences at play through all of Bronfenbrenner's (1971), four levels, ranging from the micro, meso, exo and through to the macro. At the micro level, the quality of support networks available to both parents and children was verbalised by both as either significantly supporting or hindering a parent and/ or child, with the relationship between parents hugely influential to the parents, while grandparents were a key feature of the children's support networks. At the meso level, ways that parents and children viewed and interacted with teachers directly influenced their perception of the school and determined how much, or little, they turned to it for support. Also, neighbourhood friendships and family connections were closely related to whether parents felt isolated or supported in their community. Moving to the exo level, it was evident how the availability, or lack, of work, school supports and access to community supports influenced both parents' mental health and children's social and emotional development. Finally, at the macro level, the contextual beliefs perceived by parents and children, as held by schools and community services, was clearly vocalised. Particularly in relation to the Traveller community, Traveller children perceived that school personnel disliked their parents. Compared to their settled peers, Traveller children unanimously declared that they did not like school and that it would be one of the first places they would change in their community.

### **5.3 Families' Experiences of PPCP Participation**

Belskey & Vondra (1989) argue that positive parenting practices are influenced by the parent's own psychological development, the level of stress and support experienced by the parent and the relationship between the parent(s) and the child. It is an important finding that all the parents in this study demonstrated awareness of and/ or had positive parenting practices in place prior to participating in PPCP. All parents demonstrated a commitment to their parenting role, as well as being warm, caring and responsive to their children's needs. Most parents felt supported in further developing their positive parenting and discipline practices following participation in PPCP. Furthermore, most parents noted a reduction in stress and an improved relationship with their child(ren).

However, a key finding of this research would seem to suggest that an authoritative parenting style was not always the best choice for parents in all contexts and situations. Echoing Visser et al. (2015) and Holloway (1998), more authoritarian parenting practices appeared to be more evident, particularly in relation to their children's safety and protection. However, this oversimplifies the issue. Parents reacted, quite intelligibly and sensibly, to the difficult situations and environments they were parenting in. Given the very real worries the parents had about their children's safety in the community, children were often not allowed to play outside or walk in the area on their own, irrespective of age. On face value, it would appear that parents were using an authoritarian, rather than an authoritative parenting style, as they required a high level of obedience from their children in these situations, with little, if any, room for negotiation (Baumrind 1991). However, this is based on assumptions based on standards of judgement, relative to our (i.e. researchers'/ stakeholders') world view (James et al., 1998). Instead, parents were acutely attuned to their children's safety and protection and often had to rely on what appeared a more authoritarian style when their children were exposed to clear threats of violence and criminality in their lives, particularly in the more deprived areas of the community.

Furthermore, the morality of what is the right or wrong way to parent was influenced by their own experiences and perspectives (Holloway, 1998). While parents indicated the need to have certain rules and structures in place, what these were differed for each individual family. Parenting practices were not

homogenous across the community but reflected their reality and the social capital (e.g. networks, relationships) available to different parents within the community, as found by Visser et al. (2015). Rather than there being one right way to parent, the mothers and father interviewed found a way to parent that reflected their own cultural norms. For example, the majority of the parents significantly curtailed their children's play spaces, Traveller parents gave boys more freedom than girls, while mothers took on more of an authoritarian role with their children when they perceived their partners to be passive. For many of the parents, their ability to parent effectively was often hindered and/ or disrupted by people, community influences and events outside of their control. Interestingly, the level to which a parent used an authoritarian style depended on how isolated and marginalised they were within the community. Parents who had limited social networks outside of their family unit were more likely to limit their children to their home and to have them under supervision, compared to other parents in the community who were more socially connected. As evident from this research, Visser et al. (2015) parenting styles of 'similarity seeking', 'protective' and 'selective' would be more appropriate and reflective of their reality. This may also help explain previous findings from traditional parenting research that demonstrates differing levels of success for parents participating in parenting programmes (Lucas, 20011; Scott & Dadds, 2009; Hand et al., 2012; Furlong et al., 1996). Success in parenting programmes should not be seen as a 'test' to pass, but what is realistic to achieve within the constraints of family life.

### **5.3.1 Parenting programmes as a mechanism to empower or disempower?**

Social isolation was felt by all parents, in differing levels of impact, irrespective of whether they had a partner or not in their lives. With parental mental health being directly correlated to positive parenting practices, a key finding of this research was that taking part in PPCP helped to combat isolation for most, but not all, of the parents. PPCP acted as a gateway for the majority of the parents to strengthen and develop their social connections through finding solidarity within the group. Increased social capital and empowerment emerged for many of the parents following participation. Many of the parents felt more confident in their parenting, more connected with the school and, in some cases, with the community. Linda, who had recently moved to the area, used PPCP as a gateway into the community, joined the Parents' Association, lost a significant amount of

weight and has since completed other courses, with the intention of now training as a SNA. Moving from a sense of being isolated and disempowered, the availability of PPCP gave many of the parents more choice as well as providing community structures to allow them to build social capital as well (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Through its delivery via the HSCL scheme in the community's DEIS schools, the relationship between the parent and facilitator/HSCL coordinator was noted as being a key factor in empowering the parents.

However, where isolation and marginalisation was felt more profoundly, PPCP in some instances helped to maintain the factors of oppression being felt by those community members, isolating them further (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). This is particularly relevant for Marie, who had a child with SEN and had been 'asked'/required to attend PPCP. In order for the AON to be completed with her child and for a decision to be made on the allocation of additional resources to him, she first had to complete a parenting programme. While not explicitly stated, the underlying assumption is that she is doing something wrong that must be first rectified before additional support will be given to her for her son. This assumption may be fraught with dangers. As the findings illustrate, Marie felt undermined and isolated as a parent, as she had to participate and complete the course with a group of parents she did not feel comfortable with, nor had anything in common with. While other parents felt empowered when they were able to organise and improve their pre-existing techniques, this was not the case here. As a result of her experience of, for example, being told to try out parenting practices that she knew would not work with her son or fit into family life, she became further disempowered as a parent. Because of her marginalised identity, it appears almost impossible for her to challenge the assumptions being imposed on her. This illustrates the consequence of the negative operation of power by dominant others (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

These research findings have clear implications for the nature, scope and delivery of parenting programmes. Moving away from the banking model of education to the problem-posing model (Freire, 1971), parenting programmes need to become more focused on how families can be liberated and empowered in their parenting, with the dialogue between the facilitators and parents crucial to uncovering, critically, the realities of parenting in marginalised communities. Indeed, as Freire states, 'problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling

of reality' (p.72). Affording parents choice and options is likely to be crucial. As illustrated, parents' experiences of and success in PPCP is impacted by how parents are recruited to the programme and the amount of choice they are given in that decision-making process. Undoubtedly, parenting programmes require adaption to meet the needs of the very families they are trying to help. Parents are arguably the experts on their own family and are the best people to consult with to help frame a parenting programme that would meet their specific needs.

#### **5.4 The realities for families living in marginalised communities**

As discussed above, it is assumed that parents in marginalised communities need parenting programmes as they are either lacking or unable to put positive parenting practices in place, with a high correlation found between poverty and 'inadequate' parenting found in research (Gillies, 2009; Katz et al., 2007). However, while there were no parent-child observations as part of this research, the parents, through their conversations, displayed an attentiveness and responsiveness to their children's needs, particularly having to go to great lengths to protect their children from exposure to violence and criminality. In other areas where these levels of violence do not exist, the parenting practices employed in this community may be viewed as restrictive and overtly authoritarian. Living in this community did significantly influence their family life and parents were acutely aware that their children's development was being impacted by growing up in this community by, for example, their lack of exposure to play-space and friendships. Yet, they were unable to give their children as much freedom to develop peer relationships in the community due to the safety risks attached with playing outside their own home.

Despite these concerns, however, this research found that both parents and children viewed their situations as normal, despite their particular individual circumstances, for example homelessness or living in one-parent families. Given the changing landscape of Irish life, the findings of this research reiterate O'Brien et al. (1996) who noted that children's definition of their family reflected their own experiences and realities, not the 'norm' as defined by the dominant Western culture and stereotype of what constitutes a normal family.



#### **5.4.1 Inequality, adversity and resilience**

Adversity was experienced in many ways and at differing levels by all parents and children interviewed. Experiences of adversity took the form of homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence, separation, parental mental health difficulties, disability, being from an ethnic minority group, unemployment and parental criminal behaviour. Yet, interestingly, families who were exposed to adversity did not always perceive it negatively. Instead, their resilience became apparent, particularly in the case of Trish. The majority of the parents and children spoke about the many positives present in their lives, how they liked living in the area and how they had well-developed levels of resilience to tackle the challenges they faced. This is in line with the findings of McMahon et al. (2013) and Nixon et al. (2015), who found that the children they interviewed from a marginalised community were generally positively disposed towards themselves, their families and communities.

Parents' levels of resilience in the face of adversity were developed when they had quality family relationships and social networks and were able to access informal supports and community structures, in a way that met their needs in a respectful way (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Morgan et al., 2016). For many of the parents, simply by being together on a weekly basis, participating in PPCP, meant they felt supported and connected with other parents and this helped to develop their social networks and increase social capital. In the absence of other community structures, the supports available to them in their children's schools via the HSCL scheme, funded through DEIS, were also identified by many of the parents as being crucial to helping them in their parenting role.

However, the fact that parents and children in this community are exposed to this level of adversity in the first place, needs to be addressed. It is also important to note that the parents involved in this research were not a representative sample and the majority of parents interviewed were those that the local schools and community would perceive as doing well and not in need of additional support. Again, the impact of individualism becomes clear as the underlying assumption is that it is expected that parents and children develop higher levels of resilience to compensate for their exposure to adversity. By not addressing the root cause of the adversity, the status quo is maintained, with families disempowered further

and for longer as the 'norm' remains unchallenged. Families are unable to escape the adversity and remain controlled by it, for example in the case of mothers and children being victims of domestic violence. In the children's artwork, the impact of this exposure to adversity is having on their present life is clear, through for example, the limited support networks they drew. Research has shown that exposure to four or more adverse events will negatively impact their development (Anda et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2016). Worryingly, though, the extent of this impact on their future lives and psychological development is yet to be seen, but will be undoubtedly be significant, especially if the social and structural inequalities are not adequately addressed.

A significant issue raised by many of the parents was the impact stress, often caused by inequality, had on their lives, and how this in turn affected their ability to parent effectively. This echoes *Growing Up in Ireland's* (2012) finding that maternal mental health is significantly impacted by deprivation and dealing with stressful situations, which also impacts on parent-child relationship. The factors of oppression, as outlined by Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005) were made visible in this research. Lack of mobility, choice and power in employment, housing and living conditions, as well as inadequate community structures to meet the needs of the community members were named clearly by both the parents and the children. However, the impact of inequality was felt at different levels, depending on how marginalised parents were in their identities and the parent's own exposure to adversity (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). For example, Keith is arguably the parent who is the most liberated. He is a married white Irish male, living in his own home, in full-time employment and seen as a respected and influential community leader. In contrast, Debbie and Marie are possibly the most oppressed, given the fact that they occupy several marginalised identities. Debbie is a female Irish Traveller, parenting alone and living in temporary accommodation while Marie is a white Irish female, whose child has a disability and living in one of the most deprived areas of the community. Neither mother is in a position to take up a full-time or part-time job. They have been exposed to numerous adverse events, namely poverty, parental substance abuse, anti-social behaviour and parental illness, notwithstanding the impact marginalisation has on them also (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018).

Amongst the children, the same phenomenon can also be found. Martin, a Traveller boy who lives in temporary accommodation and has a chronic illness, has also been exposed to the same adverse events as those listed above, as well as family separation. It is important to note that how inequality is experienced by the children appears to be as a result of the inequality faced by their parents. However, it is not a 'fait accompli' and parenting programmes, as well as access to additional school and community supports, for example in the case of Linda, can help mitigate against the impact of inequality on their children. Linda's son, David, has been exposed to several adverse experiences. However, his mother's own resilience and ability to access community and school supports for herself and her children, has led to her becoming more empowered in the short amount of time she is living in the area. It can then be argued that the effect of inequality is lessened for her children. Yet, given the clash of cultures perceived by Debbie, the impact of inequality on her and her children is not mitigated against to the same extent, but instead is actually compounded when she attempted to access community and school support. This supports Jordan's (2001) argument that when this clash of cultures exists and the school's standard of judgment is different to that of Traveller parents, it is in fact the Traveller children's outcomes that are negatively impacted. This will be explored again in more detail below.

#### **5.4.2 Affordance**

In terms of sufficiently addressing one of the many issues which emerged from this research, it is important to look at the level of affordance available to the community members from their environment and what it can and cannot offer them as a result (Nelson & Prilleltensky 2005). The limited space families had to be either a parent or a child emerged clearly through the research. This research echoed the findings of Kinlen & McDonald (2018), where the impact of limited play spaces, vandalised areas and the fear of crime and violence, directly impacted the amount of free outdoor play children could engage in. Furthermore, although many parents wanted their children to attend after-school and other community-based activities, they were often prevented from doing so because they lacked financial resources or were unable to access activities and clubs as their children did not qualify or because there were no places were available for

them. This resulted in children often stuck indoors, as they couldn't play outside. It also influenced their parenting practices through the pressures experienced by all trying to live in a small, confined and sometimes overcrowded space. With the exception of Martin, a Traveller boy, all children had their play supervised and did not have the freedom to move within their community without an adult. It is important to note, however, that this is not just a feature in marginalised communities but a trend present across all communities in Ireland (Growing Up in Ireland, 2012). However, this issue is exacerbated in marginalised communities and its impact felt much more profoundly due to higher rates of crime and violence, compared to middle-class communities.

It is also the lack of other available informal supports and safe play spaces that further compounds the issue in this community, meaning increased inequality felt by its members in general. This issue was also aggravated by the difficulties parents spoke about in finding appropriate work and/ or rearranging work to meet their family's needs. All of the parents spoke about the financial constraints they have had to deal with, with this then in turn impacting on, for example, what activities they could pay for their children or having a choice in where they live. Furthermore, in some cases, by being stuck in their home, homelessness, overcrowding and inadequate living conditions, led to increased tensions within the family. For instance, as argued by Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005), inequality is clearly manifesting itself in the violence Cian is now potentially being exposed to in his own home. With the tensions such overcrowded situations bring, an argument can be made that an emerging trend from the homelessness crisis could be that children may becoming more susceptible to being exposed to abuse. For example, with the possibility of strained relationships amongst family members, children may become exposed to more emotional abuse, such as criticism and hostility towards them (Children First, 2011, p.8). In light of this, the impact of the homelessness crisis on children's welfare and protection may need further exploration. However, if this is in fact borne out to be true, it has clear implications for how families, communities, and indeed policy-makers safeguard children, in line with Children First guidelines (2011) and the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014) policy document, which lists being protected from harm as one of its five national outcomes. While undoubtedly perpetrators hold responsibility for their actions, they do not operate in a vacuum and changes are

needed at the individual, family, community and general society level to ensure the safeguarding of children.

Resulting from the lack of opportunities to play outside, a noticeable absence from the children's social networks were friends. The implications of this may have significant consequences for their well-being, given that Kinlen & McDonald (2018) found that friendships are a key protective factor in supporting children to increase their social capital. While it can be argued that school provides a place for children to build friendships, this research found that the children interviewed seldom, if at all, included their friends in their social networks. Furthermore, children spend the vast majority of their time outside of school. Therefore, it is clear here that the lack of opportunities for children to socialise in their community are being severely hampered. It becomes evident that children are being disempowered, with factors of oppression facilitating the suppression of their voices now and into the future (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

An unexpected finding to emerge from this research, was the important role pets had in the lives of children. For children who were the most marginalised, for example by their ethnicity, a chronic illness or inadequate housing, the presence of a pet was significantly more important to them than to other children. In the absence of other social networks, it appears a pet can help mitigate against social isolation and help to reduce stress caused by exposure to several adverse situations (Mc Connell., 2011; Wagner, 2011). In many ways, with the trend emerging of children having less interactions with their friends, an argument could be made that pets may now be taking on the role traditionally reserved for childhood friends. Yet, as Wagner (2011) argues, despite the benefits of pets for children, human interaction is still the most beneficial.

#### **5.4.3 Isolation and Solidarity**

Parents and children had many different types of relationships, including family, neighbours, HSCL Coordinators and school staff. However, the majority of both parents and children did speak of a certain level of isolation, a feature often found in marginalised communities, leading to oppression of community members (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Layard & Dunn (2007) argue that levels of

depression among lone parents are more than double that of married parents. Bearing this in mind, the quality of the relationships mothers had with their partners was a significant finding, with many of the mothers perceiving their children's father in a passive role. Katz et al. (2007) state that the person supporting the parent can negatively impact on a child's development, a fact borne out by this research. Therefore, taking into consideration how unsupported many of the mothers felt by their partners, this identifies a significant risk factor to these mothers in how they are able to effectively parent in their own individual situation, as the quality of the intimate relationship between the mother and her partner has been found to significantly influence a mother's mental health, which in turn impacts their parenting capacity (Layard & Dunn, 2007). It is also interesting to note from a child's perspective, that where a father is perceived to be passive, the children in this research accepted this, but also negotiated and opted in or out of the relationship depending on how well their needs were met, a finding in line with research by Nixon et al. (2012).

With the exception of one contribution, a notable absence from both this research, and of parenting programmes generally, is that of the father. As found by this research, it was primarily mothers in the primary role of parent and those who attend parenting programmes. Linked to this issue is also the importance of the extended family unit, particularly grandparents, where a mother is parenting alone. Given the fact that many of the children still live with one or more grandparents due to the lack of alternative accommodation, they play a crucial role in the family unit, often perceived as just as important as their parents. For several parents, their own family were the only support network available to them. Therefore, their ability to access wider family support was extremely important to them as they provided emotional, financial and practical support. Where parents did not have wider family support, their feelings of isolation were further compounded and negatively impacted the quality of relationships they had with their family.

Reiterating Visser et al. (2015), neighbours and friends played a crucial role in supporting, but sometimes hampering, parents and their practices. When parents were well connected to their community, their social capital was increased as they were able to access both practical and emotional support from those around them. However, where family and neighbour connections were missing, their

social capital significantly decreased and they often further isolated themselves, in some cases almost as a form of protection. This is supported by Visser et al. (2015) findings in relation to parents who employ a protective parenting style, especially in the most marginalised areas of the community. Marie and Debbie, in particular, appeared isolated from their neighbours who they did not want to engage with. A clear implication of this reaction to their community leads to parents removing the option for themselves in being able to access social networks and community events, which could in fact, in an ideal world, have a positive influence on them, possibly leading to increased social capital for them. However, it is also important to acknowledge that sometimes this option is actually the most sensible and rational thing to do. Both mothers have made the decision to stay separate from their neighbours to ensure they and their families are safe. In contrast, where strong neighbourhood ties had been forged, as verbalised by Trish in this research, it was clear that the parents could draw on these relationships for support in their own parenting and it also allowed for their particular area to be a safe place for their children to play outside.

### **5.5 Home-School-Community partnership from the Traveller perspective**

In Traveller families, where the impact of adversity was experienced significantly more in comparison to other families, the clash of values between home and school was acutely felt. This phenomenon is made visible through the experiences shared by one Traveller parent and three Traveller children in this research and illustrates how occupying several marginalised identities both works to oppress and suppress the voices of these families (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). In line with Nelson & Prilleltensky (2005), Traveller families within this community have significantly fewer options to contribute and have their voices heard, leading to them being notably more disempowered within this community. Unlike settled parents who spoke about being listened to by school staff, Debbie's concerns about her child's behaviour were not received in the same way. Debbie's autonomy as a Traveller parent was undermined, with the power placed in favour of the school due to the standards of judgements it placed on the parent (Vincent, 2000; Bower et al., 2011). In this instance, Debbie perceived that the school judged her opinion to not be of equal importance as the teacher, who had not

seen her son behave in the way described by Debbie. Rather than the school accepting her concerns, they were dismissed with little regard for Debbie's beliefs. As a result of this, Debbie herself questioned her own judgement, initially thinking the school must be right and she wrong. It was only at a later date did the school accept that Debbie was in fact correct. Given how settled parents spoke about how their concerns were acknowledged by the school, it does challenge us to think would Debbie's scenario have happened if she was a settled parent? While Debbie cannot speak for the Traveller community unanimously, her views offer an interesting insight into her experiences and must be given adequate weight and consideration in understanding home-school-community partnership from the Traveller perspective. Furthermore, Debbie's experience is corroborated by the Traveller children interviewed. They vocalised unanimously how they did not believe teachers liked seeing their parents in the school, nor that they liked their parents.

In line with Epstein (2011), this research found that Traveller parents and children, in contrast to settled families, were less likely to perceive that the school was committed to parental involvement and Debbie was the only parent who did not increase her physical presence in the school following PPCP. Moving forward, vocalising this experience has implications for how schools work with and support meaningful partnership with parents from the most marginalised sections of society (Vincent, 2005). Rather than measuring involvement based on the traditional assumption of how often a parent is in the school building, consideration should instead be given to Epstein's (2011) model of overlapping spheres of influence and how marginalised parents can be supported to have their needs and requests met. However, it is not a one-way street. If we are to ensure that parents are included in a partnership based on equality between home and school, it is essential that schools tap into the wealth of knowledge and insights parents have, particularly those who are marginalised. Interestingly, despite working for several years with Traveller families in this community, developing good working relationships and perceiving there to be a good partnership between us, the findings from this research challenge my own assumptions. It has reminded me that I actually did not go to the Traveller community, in a meaningful way, to find out how best the school and community could support them. Instead, I went to them with my solutions. In realising this, it becomes clear



that if the status quo is to remain, home-school-community partnership between schools and marginalised members of the community almost becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, further reinforcing and imposing our [schools'] standards of judgement on Traveller families, despite our best of intentions.

### **5.6 How the voices of the 'Other' can influence government policy**

Taking into consideration the voices of the 'Other' as vocalised in this research, the imposition of social policies on marginalised communities can then be challenged as it questions the underlying assumption that the community itself has little to offer (Perkin et al. 2004, as cited in McMahon et al., 2013). Instead of victim blaming, the power imbalance between policymakers and community members can begin to be addressed as community members have a say in decision-making and are empowered in their communities to affect change (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002; Maton et al., 2006, Shinn, 2015). By doing this, interventions can then be framed to become more ecologically valid for the people and communities who participate in them. However, it goes a step further as it helps to understand, assess and jointly influence, in collaboration with the community, the processes at work in these communities (Shinn, 2015; Maton et al., 2006). By identifying the factors of oppression and/ or liberation at play in marginalised communities, government policy can be developed and expanded out from interventions at just one level of the ecosystem exclusively, but instead to all levels.

The vision of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014) is to 'make Ireland the best small country in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future' (p.4). Having privileged the voices of parents and children, and by applying the research question of how can parents' and children's perspectives and experiences of parenting programmes and family life in marginalised communities inform parenting interventions, formal educational welfare policy and practice, it has become evident that there is a clear gap between national policy and the reality for many families, especially those living in marginalised communities. As a government, the question must be posed

if enough is really being done to achieve the vision of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014) or are we simply papering over the cuts without addressing the root cause, that of poverty, adversity and inequality? In the mid-term review of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014), we are not on target to meet the goal of more than 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020 (DCYA, 2017).

## **5.7 Recommendations**

As is evident throughout this study, the voices of parents and children from this community have been privileged. Taking into consideration the research questions posed, this study sought to find out, based on the experiences of those interviewed, what it is like for them to be a parent and child in this community. It was important not to treat the community homogeneously, but seek as many diverse views and experiences as possible, especially the 'seldom heard'. Each view was valued. From the parents' perspective, by better understanding the strengths and challenges of parenting within this community, the study explored how their realities impacted on their experience and participation of a universal roll-out of PPCP in the community.

From the children's perspective, this study examined how they experienced their family, school and community, as well as exploring the challenges they faced in navigating these three different spheres. By exploring the relationships they had with the people around them, key insights into how they experienced their family, school and community networks provided a more rounded understanding of what it is like to grow up in this community. Finally, key recommendations are made on how parenting interventions, educational policy and practice can be influenced by the parents' and children's experiences. Yet, it is important to note that changes to parenting interventions as well as educational welfare policy and practice in DEIS schools cannot do it all. There is a role for all-of-government policy to better support families in marginalised communities, in a more strategic and systematic manner.

### **5.7.1 Research recommendations for educational welfare policy and practice in DEIS schools**

This research suggests that there is a role for parenting programmes being delivered universally within marginalised communities, especially in helping to combat social isolation. However, the voices and views of parents and children should be routinely sought and included in decision-making that impacts on service delivery of parenting programmes to them in their community. This should not be tokenistic but done so in a way that involves parents and children in all stages of planning from review, implementation, delivery and evaluation. By applying this bottom-up approach of privileging the voices of parents and children in developing supports for families, due consideration can then be given to all factors which influence family life and how liberation and/ or oppression impact on family life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). This also challenges the assumption that families must conform to learning a specific set of parenting skills (Freire, 1971). Instead, parenting programmes can be tailored to more specifically meet the needs of the very people they are aimed at and empowering them to make parenting decisions which are more reflective of their own realities. For example, many of the mothers interviewed spoke about the idea of being ‘stuck’ in their mother role. Applying the principles of Freire (1971), therefore, a more tailored parenting programme would work in partnership with the parents to address this. Through meaningful school, family and community partnership, a more appropriate parenting programme may then include a greater focus on, for example, parental self-care and the importance of fostering adult friendships to support parents in their family life. In contrast to the traditional student-teacher relationship, this approach allows for both the facilitators and parents to engage meaningfully with their situated reality, while also acknowledging the knowledge both bring to the process, but particularly the parents. Furthermore, a parenting programme designed like this would also confront how inequality and adversity is impacting on family life within the community (O’Toole, 2017). In doing so, a real school, family and community partnership could emerge as teachers/ HSCL coordinators work with parents in ensuring the best outcomes for the community’s children (Epstein, 2011).

Within marginalised communities, the findings of this research evidence how particular groups are significantly more marginalised than others, often leading to

further disempowerment when they access school and community support. In the universal roll-out of parenting programmes, such families should be able to access appropriate parenting programmes in a location comfortable and familiar to them, with programmes adapted to more fully reflect their lived experiences. As outlined above, this must be done in meaningful consultation with, for example, Traveller parents, families of children with SEN and families living in the most marginalised sections of the community. Furthermore, it should also be recognised that if parents choose not to attend, they should not be considered as 'failing' in their role. Instead, through the HSCL scheme, HSCL coordinators should become advocates for such families by recognising that they are actually being oppressed by individual, home, community and societal factors. These families/communities should be supported and prioritised to find ways to access other appropriate parenting support, if requested, through for example the Meitheal Practice Model and Parenting 24/7, run by Tusla PPFS. Coupled with this, participation in a parenting programmes should no longer be a pre-requisite for parents to access supports for children with SEN and/ or complex needs. By approaching parenting support in this way, the most marginalised parents can instead become more empowered.

While 'community' is mentioned within the title of HSCL, arguably, the focus has been on working directly with the parents to bring about change for children. By applying Bronfenbrenner (1979) bioecological model, this research clearly illustrates the need for the focus on the community to be restated, with HSCL coordinators and parents working in partnership to advocate for societal change to improve outcomes for families. This is not to say that parenting programmes do not have a place within the HSCL scheme, they do, but it cannot be at the expense of community partnership with parents.

Social isolation, especially with the most marginalised members of this community, was a recurring theme throughout this research. In consultation with the HSCL scheme in the community, parents and children should identify ways they would like to connect with their school and community to support the reduction in social isolation and to promote partnership between home and school, through Epstein's (2011) model of spheres of influences. Examples could include the development of a community project such as a Tidy Towns committee, St. Patrick's Day parade committee, painting a mural within the

community and advocating together through a Parents Association for the implementation of speed bumps in a particular area where joyriding has been an issue. This will allow the opportunity for school staff to work with families to challenge their own standards of judgements (James et al, 1998) and reduce the power differential present, particularly with its most marginalised families, for example Traveller families. Such projects would also showcase the community's strengths and the untapped resources available within it. However, it is important to note that schools are part of the community and there are already resources available to them that they may not have tapped into to date. Notably, Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) have been established nationally in all local 27 local authority areas and 'are vehicles for change in their local areas and ambassadors for interagency working', with the given remit to implement the actions of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (DCYA, 2019, p. 15). Working in collaboration with local CYPSC, this research recommends that schools support the implementation of actions which focus on the 'Connected, respected and contributing' outcome of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014). Links between schools and CYPSC committees should continue to be encouraged and developed.

As is clear from this research, families are faced with many adverse experiences which can affect several aspects of their lives and outcomes for their children. One of the five goals of the HSCL scheme is to empower parents. However, applying the lens of community psychology, an argument can be made that the HSCL scheme itself may be helping to re-enforce the marginalisation and oppression of parents, albeit unknowingly to itself, as it operates within a fixed societal structure of the school and the formal educational system (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). While HSCL coordinators are tasked with tackling educational inequality, it is a fair observation that the vast majority of teachers working in DEIS schools are middle-class and not originally from the areas the schools are based in. Furthermore, they may not have been exposed to the high level of adversity experienced by the families they work with, nor feel they have much in common with them (Epstein, 2011). Therefore, a key recommendation of this research would be for teachers and HSCL coordinators to be trained in trauma-informed practice and meaningful parental participation (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018; Vincent, 2005). Given Tusla PPFs's remit in this area, this could be

supported by a collaborative approach with Tusla Educational Welfare Service (EWS), which has operational responsibility for the HSCL scheme, and the Department of Education and Skills.

However, more fundamental changes may be required in light of this research. The DEIS 2017 Review was a welcome development in the area of educational disadvantage reform. More schools were granted DEIS status and afforded additional resources. However, significant gaps remain. A national review, based on a reformed DEIS identification model, is yet to be completed. Anecdotally, there are a significant number of schools nationally, particularly in new and expanding communities that are yet to access DEIS. Since 2000 a number of urban areas in Ireland have emerged and/or expanded significantly, dramatically changing in both population and area size, without, arguably the corresponding support infrastructure being put in place (CSO, 2016).

While the importance of collaboration with other stakeholders and parental engagement is noted, there is little acknowledgement of the importance of developing relationships between parents and schools. For example, Goal 3.9 refers to 'collaboration with Tusla and Traveller Representative Groups on measures to improve Traveller engagement with education in the context of the National Traveller & Roma Inclusion Strategy' (p.42). However, teachers and HSCL Coordinators may, even subconsciously, apply their own standards of judgement to working with families in marginalised communities. Bearing this in mind, it is recommended that initial teacher training and CPD should look at developing teachers' self-reflective practice to allow them to become more acutely aware of their standard of judgements and how it impacts on their work. Teachers should also complete work experience with community groups, particularly Traveller organisations, in marginalised communities to more fully understand the realities of families attending DEIS schools. As stated in DEIS 2017, it would be recommended to look at the recruitment and training undertaken in both initial teacher training and subsequent continuous professional development, in conjunction with the Teaching Council. Positive discrimination practices towards recruiting teachers from more disadvantaged communities and ethnic minorities should be developed and prioritised, similar to the Turn to Teaching initiative in Maynooth University. To ensure meaningful employment and retention of teachers from more disadvantaged communities and ethnic minorities in the

education system, appropriate supports may need to be put in place, led by DES and developed by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)

### **5.7.2 Research recommendations for all-of-government policy**

As is evident throughout this research, while educational welfare should be informed by the experiences of families, so too should an all-of-government policy. Educational policy and practice cannot fix the much larger issues of inequality, poverty and adversity faced by families in this community. The publication of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014-2020 heralded the first national policy to support children and young people. The mid-term review of it has found that there is now a solid structure implemented for cross-collaboration and interdepartmental working, with some key learning and innovative practices identified (DCYA, 2017). However, there are still significant gaps that need to be addressed and the review recommends that child poverty and child homelessness require prioritisation in its next phase of implementation from 2018-2020. It is not acceptable that families continue to be exposed to sustained and prolonged adversity. In addition to supportive parenting and a good school environment, WHO (2012) also states that children's mental health is best protected when they live in a secure home and in a community with high social capital. Therefore, it is essential that a comprehensive national programme of social housing to end family homelessness and the plight of the 'hidden homeless' is enacted, with haste. Furthermore, it should no longer be acceptable that Traveller families are living in sub-standard and temporary accommodation on halting sites. A national programme to redevelop Traveller-specific housing should also be started, with input from Traveller families on how best this can be achieved.

Safety and crime were recurring themes for both parents and children. In line with this research, the mid-term review of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures recommends that a greater focus on the 'Safe and protected from harm' outcome is needed. Children as young as 10 years old had reported feeling unsafe in their community due to the effects of crime and violence (DCYA, 2017). This research would argue that children at an even younger age are also experiencing the same effects. Through, for example local CYPSC, Local Community and Development Committees (LCDC) and Healthy Ireland Funding, there is a need to develop and maintain safe play places within the community, with priority given to the most

marginalised areas. Through consultation with community members, it is also essential to develop safe areas within the community to enable children to play without fear in their gardens, on their local roadsides, pavements or in their estates and to be able to travel between their homes and play spaces on foot. This may also include the introduction of car-free areas and an increase in traffic calming measures to be implemented in the community, as well as further increasing the presence of Community Gardaí in the area to promote community members feeling safe and the development of community initiatives to decrease anti-social behaviour, through for example, the Garda Youth Diversion programme. This consultation should also prioritise the inclusion of seldom heard children, as recommended in the mid-term review of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (DCYA, 2017).

Given the financial constraints that all parents spoke about in this research and the difficulty many had in accessing extra-curricular activities for their children, universal and affordable, or indeed free, after-school activities and clubs should be available to all families in marginalised communities. Finally, given how important pets were to children in this research, it would be recommended to also develop an after-school activity which would give children, especially the most marginalised, access to pets and/ or facilities to support pet care. Animals have been found to offer children a less complicated relationship, but one that nonetheless provides vital connection and a sense of safety and comfort (van der Kolk, 2004).

### **5.7.3 Recommendations for future research**

While this research focused on parents who took part in PPCP, the scope of future research should include those 'Other' voices that were not captured. While perceptions of fathers featured quite heavily in this research, it is important that more representations from fathers are sought in future research to further develop our understanding of family life in marginalised communities. As was evident from the findings, grandparents are often in the role of primary carer to their grandchildren, even though the children live with their own parents. Future research should seek to include the voices of grandparents to further explore the complexities these family relationships may bring to parenting. Furthermore, to truly apply a community psychology perspective, every effort should be made to



gather the views and experiences of all marginalised identities in this community, especially those of different ethnicities and nationalities.

Given the small size of participants interviewed in one case site in Dublin and that it cannot be considered a representative sample, further research could be conducted in other areas of low SES to identify any similar trends and/ or issues that pertain specifically to the community. In this way, it will be possible to challenge the idea of 'norms' across Irish society and the assumption of homogeneity in all marginalised communities.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

Supported by this research's findings, the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model and the community psychology perspective challenges the deficit model assumption that has applied to marginalised communities. Rather than imposing our [policy makers'] standards of judgement on how such communities and their families 'should be', it challenges the often-held preconception that marginalised communities are 'failing' in how they are raising their families. Instead, through critical analysis of the voiced experiences of parents and children in this community, it becomes evident that they are in actual fact responding in individualised, dynamic and open-ended ways to their own experiences, understandings and with the resources they have available to them, either supported or hindered by how oppressed or liberated they are within their community. While poverty and 'inadequate' parenting are correlated, this research indicates that it should not be about blaming the parent, but unravelling the complex reasons why certain parenting practices come about (Gillies, 2009; Katz et al., 2007; Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002). By taking this innovative approach to parenting research, families and children can then be supported in a way that respects and reflects their norms, customs and realities. Parenting interventions, educational welfare and government policy should then be informed and influenced by community members, in a bottom-up approach. In doing so, this will hopefully lead to real and meaningful supports for families and change reflective of the very people it is aiming to support.

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## ***Appendices***

### ***Appendix 1: Parent Questionnaire***

**Please take a moment to complete this short questionnaire. All information is strictly anonymous and confidential.**

Code (assigned by researcher)	
-------------------------------	--

***1. Please fill in the details below.***

What is your age?	
How many children do you have?	
The age(s) of your child(ren)	

**Please tick the most relevant box for each question.**

***2. What is your ethnic or cultural background?***

White	White Irish	
	Irish Traveller	
	Any other white background	
Black or Black Irish	African	
	Any other black background	
Asian or Asian Irish	Chinese	
	Any other Asian background	
Other, including mixed background  <i>Please write in description</i>		

**3. What is your marital status?**

Single	
In a relationship	
Married	
Re-married	
Separated	
Divorced	
Widowed	

**4. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?**

No schooling completed	
Primary school	
Secondary school	
Some college credit, no degree	
Trade/technical/vocational training	
Bachelor's degree	
Master's degree	
Doctorate degree	

**5. Employment Status: Are you currently...?**

Employed for wages	
Self-employed	
Out of work and looking for work	
Out of work but not currently looking for work	
Looking after home/family	
A student	
Retired	
Unable to work	



**6. How long have you lived in this area?**

I have always lived in this area	
I have lived in this area for 10 or more years.	
I have lived in this area for more than 5 years.	
I have lived in this area for less than 5 years.	
I have lived in this area for less than 1 year.	

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**

**Appendix 2: Parent Interview Layout**

I would like to hear your views on what it is like to parent in this community, who supports you, what worries and concerns you have and how you make decisions as a parent. As you all have completed a Parents Plus course, I'm interested in finding out about how it has fitted into your family and your community and also what parts of the course didn't work for you. The interview will be recorded on my phone and I will also take notes during it. I also want you to know that if, at any time, you do not want to take part in the interview, you can leave the interview and your information will not be used.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

- **Can I first ask you how many children you have and how old they are?**
- **Who lives with you in your home?**

<i><b>If a single parent:</b></i>	<i><b>If living with extended family (grandparents etc.)</b></i>	<i><b>If co-habiting/married:</b></i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is it like to parent alone?</li> <li>• Who supports you in parenting?</li> <li>• What is easy about parenting alone?</li> <li>• What is difficult about parenting alone?</li> <li>• How does your child's mother/father support/complicate parenting for you?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is it like to parent in your home?</li> <li>• What is easy about parenting in this situation?</li> <li>• What is difficult about parenting in this situation?</li> <li>• How do your extended family support/complicate parenting for you?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is it like to parent with your partner?</li> <li>• How does your partner support/complicate your parenting?</li> <li>• What is easy about parenting with your partner?</li> <li>• What is difficult about parenting with your partner?</li> </ul>

- **Who else supports you as a parent?**

<b><i>If they are supported by others:</i></b>	<b><i>If they are not supported by others:</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who supports you?</li> <li>• Why do you think they help?</li> <li>• What kind of help do they give you?</li> <li>• How does it help you?</li> <li>• How do you feel about the support they give?</li> <li>• How does this support affect your decision-making as a parent?</li> <li>• Are there challenges when other people support you?</li> </ul>	<p>Would you like the support of others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you think having support could help you?</li> <li>- What do you think are the benefits and challenges of doing it on your own?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>If no:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why do you want to parent alone?</li> <li>- What do you think are the benefits and challenges of doing it on your own?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- **What kind of routines do you have in your home and why?**
- **Do you make the decisions about bedtime, homework, out playing etc. in your home?**

<b><i>If yes</i></b>	<b><i>If no</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who, if anyone, do you ask for advice?</li> <li>• Tell me about those who influence your decision (e.g. partner, child, family, friends)</li> <li>• What do others think of your decisions?</li> <li>• How do you feel about the decisions you make?</li> <li>• Do you ever change your mind? If you do, why?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who makes the decisions?</li> <li>• How do you feel about their decisions?</li> <li>• Do you or others have influence over their decisions?</li> <li>• Do they ever change your mind? If they do, why/ what happens?</li> </ul>

- **Thinking about your own family, what things (e.g. family, friends, your home, your job, money, your road etc.) make it easy/ hard for you to be a parent?**

- If you were having difficulties in your parenting, who would you turn to

<b><i>If they have someone to turn to:</i></b>	<b><i>If they do not have someone to turn to:</i></b>
<p><i>If they have someone to turn to:</i>            What type of help do they give you?            How do you feel asking for their help?            How do you feel with their help?</p>	<p><i>If they do not have someone to turn to:</i>            How do you sort out the difficulties on your own?            How do you feel being on your own to deal with it?</p>

**and why?**

<b><i>Yes</i></b>	<b><i>No</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do they influence you?</li> <li>• Tell me about a time they influenced you.</li> <li>• How did you feel as a parent then?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you think they do not influence you?</li> </ul>

- Do you think your child(ren) influence how you parent?

- Do you think your child's school supports you as a parent?

<b><i>Yes</i></b>	<b><i>No</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me how the school supports you.</li> <li>• How do you think the school views you as a parent?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you feel when you have to deal with the school?</li> <li>• Why, do you think, the school is not supporting you?</li> <li>• How do you think the school views you as a parent?</li> </ul>

- Thinking about this community, what do you like about it?

- What is not so good about the community?

- **Do you think living in this area affects how you parent?**

<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What worries do you have about it?</li> <li>• Who/ what affects you in the area?</li> <li>• Tell me how you feel about it.</li> <li>• In what way does this area support/ challenge your views about parenting?</li> <li>• How does it make it easier or harder to parent?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me why you think it does not affect your parenting.</li> </ul>

- **Thinking back to when you did the Parents Plus course, what things do you remember and still use?**

- **Did Parents Plus fit into your family life?**

<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why, do you think, it fitted into your home?</li> <li>• How does it support you as a parent?</li> <li>• Tell me about how it helped.</li> <li>• Why, do you think, you still use those skills/ techniques?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why, do you think, it didn't fit into your home?</li> <li>• Why do you think, you do not use those skills/ techniques?</li> </ul>

- **Why do you use those parts of the course still?**
- **After taking part in Parents Plus, tell me did anything in your family change, e.g. routines?**
- **What did your friends/ family think about you doing a parenting course?**
- **Thinking back to when you did the Parents Plus course, did you find any part went against your views/ values as a parent?**
  - Why do you think that was?
  - How did it influence what you thought of the course?
- **Do you think the course understood what it was like to be a parent in this community?**

- How did/ did not understand you?
- How did this influence what you thought of the course?
  
- **How do you think Parents Plus fits into this community?**
  
- **If you could tell Parents Plus something about this community that only people who live here know (not even the school knows), what would it be?**
  
- **If you could change any part(s) of Parent Plus when it is being run in this area, what changes would you make?**

Thank you for taking part today. Is there anything else you would like to say? Do you have any questions about anything we have talked about today?

If you have been affected by anything we have talked about today, there is support available from the number on your information sheet.

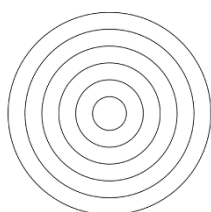
### **Appendix 3: Questions for Children's Focus Groups**

#### **The research questions relevant to the children's research:**

1. How do the children of parents who have completed PPCP experience and navigate the varied contexts of home, school and community?
2. What can researchers, practitioners and policy makers learn from the experiences of parents and children for the future design and roll-out of parenting interventions and for formal educational welfare policy and practice more generally?

#### **Interview Layout**

1. Fill out the diagram below with labels/ drawings for all the important people in the child's life, with the child at the centre. Children put the people that are most important to them closest.
2. Prompt questions for the children would include: (*adapted from the 'Flower map of people who support children' from Kit of Tools, p.26*)
  - a. How are they important to you?
  - b. Who do you go to most if you need support?
  - c. How do they help you?
  - d. What makes them a good support (e.g. kind, calm, available etc.?)
  - e. What kind of help do they give you?
  - f. How do they make your life easier/ harder?
  - g. Why do you go to some people more than others?
  - h. Is there any support you can't get from the people in your life?
  - i. Is there anyone in your life that you wouldn't ask for help? Why/ why not?



3. Children stand in the middle of a large sheet of white paper. They identify places in their community and child draws them on the page.
4. Prompt questions for the children would include: (*adapted from the 'Risk Mapping' from Kit of Tools, p.21*).
  - a. Where do your feet go in your community?
  - b. Where have you been this week in your community?
  - c. Where do you like to be/ go in the community?

- d. Where's your favourite places? Why?
- e. Who chooses where you go?
- f. Are there places you go but don't like to go? Why?
- g. Where do you feel safe/ unsafe?
- h. What places do you not like?
- i. How do you feel in places you don't like? (Possible use of body map – what do you hear/ see/ feel/ do?)
- j. Who decides where you go?
- k. Who goes with you to these places? Why?
- l. What places would you like to change? (up to 3) Why?
- m. Do you like when your parent is in the school? Why? Why not?
- n. Would you ask your parent to come to the school?



#### ***Appendix 4: Parent Information Sheet***

This research is being carried out by Anne-Marie McGovern, a research student from Maynooth University.

I am interested in hearing from parents living in your area who have taken part in a Parents Plus Children's Programme (PPCP). I am interested in finding out what it is like to parent in the community, who supports you as a parent, what worries and concerns you have as a parent, how you make decisions as a parent and how PPCP does or doesn't fit into your family and your community.

*What you need to do if you agree to take part:*

- Complete a short questionnaire about your family
- Take part in a group interview with other parents talking about your experiences as a parent in this community
- Meet with the researcher after the interview for a feedback session about the findings

#### *Voluntary Participation*

Your participation in this research is voluntary at all times. You may withdraw your consent at any time, during or after participation in the research. Your data will be immediately destroyed and not used as part of the research.

*What will happen to the information you provide:*

- All the information you give in the questionnaire and interview will be anonymous. For example, instead of your name, a code such as AA will replace it. No real names or places will be used at any time. I will keep your real name and contact information in a secure place separate from all the other data. I am the only one who will have access to it.
- The interviews will be recorded on my iPhone. I will upload them to my PC after the interview and delete the recording from my phone immediately. I will transcribe the interviews, but instead of real names, I will use your code (e.g. AA) and change any identifying factors (e.g. names of places, people, and schools).
- All of the data will be stored on a password protected PC. Only my supervisor and I will have access to it.
- You have access to your own data and may request to view it at any time.
- All data will be held for 10 years. After 10 years, all hard copies will be destroyed by confidential shredding and electronic data will be overwritten.
- Findings from the data may be published in the future. I will provide you with a summary of the findings and copies of any reports compiled based on your data, if you wish.

It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation, child protection concerns or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest extent.

#### *Available Support*

If, at any time during or after participation, you experience any stress or negative reactions, please contact Oasis Counselling on 01-6268519 for support.

#### *Contact Details*

If you have any questions/ concerns about the research, please contact Anne-Marie McGovern at [annemarie.mcGovern.2016@mumail.ie](mailto:annemarie.mcGovern.2016@mumail.ie) or her supervisor Dr. Catriona O'Toole at [catriona.a.otoole@nuim.ie](mailto:catriona.a.otoole@nuim.ie) or on 01 708 3445.

**Appendix 5: Adult Consent Form**

- I have read the information sheet about this study.
- I understand what is involved in this study and what I will be expected to do if I take part.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop taking part in the study at any time up until the research is published.
- I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded by the researcher.
- I understand that I have the right to access my personal data at my own discretion
- I understand that I do not have to answer any questions I am not comfortable with.
- I understand that the findings from the study will be published in the future, but no identifying details of those who participated will be included in any reports.
- I understand that my participation will be kept confidential, except in an incidence of a child protection concern which the researcher must report to the relevant Designated Liaison Person.
- I agree to my data being anonymised and securely stored by the researcher and Maynooth University and will be used only for the purposes of this study.

*If during your participation in this study you feel that the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at [research.ethics@nuim.ie](mailto:research.ethics@nuim.ie) or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be ensured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

**Please tick as appropriate:**

Yes, I agree to take part in this study.

No, I do not agree to take part in this study.

Your name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Researcher's Details</b>	<b>Supervisor's Details</b>
Anne-Marie McGovern	Dr Catriona O'Toole Reg. Psychol., Ps.S.I.; C Psychol BPS

<p><i>Address</i></p> <p>Education Department  Education House  National University of Ireland Maynooth  Maynooth  Co. Kildare</p> <p><i>Contact Details</i></p> <p>annemarie.mcGovern.2016@mumail.ie</p>	<p><i>Address</i></p> <p>Room 2.2.6  Education Department  Education House  National University of Ireland  Maynooth  Maynooth  Co. Kildare</p> <p><i>Contact Details</i></p> <p>catriona.a.otoole@nuim.ie  + 353 1 708 3445</p>
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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix 6: Child Information Sheet*

My name is Anne-Marie McGovern and I go to Maynooth University and I am doing a project.

I would like to talk to you about what it is like to be a child in your area. I think it is really important that children's ideas are heard as part of my project.

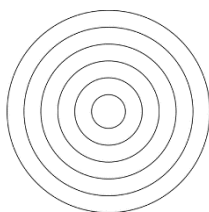
I want to find out who the important people are in your life.

I want to find out how you make decisions at home and in school.

I want to find out what you like about your school and your area.

*If you wish to take part, I will ask you to:*

- Fill out a diagram like this with labels for all the important people in your life. You are in the centre.



- Draw a picture about what you did last week and who decided what you were doing. I will talk to you about your picture when you're doing it. I will record what we say on my iPhone.

*What I will do with your work:*

- I will keep your diagram and your pictures in a safe place that only my supervisor and I are allowed to open.
- I will not put your name or other people's names on your picture. I will change the names of people on your diagram to parent, friend, neighbour, cousin etc.
- I will never use your real name when I am writing about your work.
- I will put the recording of what we say on to my computer and delete it from my phone.
- I will keep your work for 10 years.

After 10 years I will give your work back to you or I can destroy your work in a shredder. I will delete the recording from my computer.

- You or your parents/ guardians can look at your work at any time.
- If you don't want to be part of my study at any time, I will destroy your work immediately.
- I will give your parents/ guardians a copy of my project.

*If you need help:*

If you get upset or find taking part hard, a person you could tell (e.g. parent, teacher etc.) would be:

*Name of person:* \_\_\_\_\_ *(complete with child)*

I will let this person know that you would like to talk to them if you need to.

### *Contact Details*

If you have any questions you or your parents/ guardians can contact Anne-Marie McGovern at [annemarie.mcgovern.2016@mumail.ie](mailto:annemarie.mcgovern.2016@mumail.ie) or her supervisor Dr. Catriona O'Toole at [catriona.a.otoole@nuim.ie](mailto:catriona.a.otoole@nuim.ie) or on 01 708 3445.

*Appendix 7: Child Assent Form*

- I have read the information sheet about this study.
- I know what I am being asked to do.
- I know what the job of the researcher is.
- I know that I can stop taking part at any time.
- I know that I do not have to take part if I do not want to.
- I can tell my parent/ researcher that I don't want my pictures, diagrams or what I said to be used at any time after I have finished.
- I know that the researcher is going to record what I say.
- I know that I can look at my pictures and diagrams at any time.
- I know that the only people who will know that I am doing this are my parents/ guardians, my principal and the researcher.



- I am letting the researcher keep my pictures and diagrams in a safe place that only she and Maynooth University can get to and look at.
- I know that my name will not be on my pictures or diagrams.

**Please tick as appropriate:**

Yes, I want to take part in this study.

No, I do not want to take part in this study.

Your name:

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Your parent's signature:

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Date:

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*If during your participation in this study you feel that the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University*

*Ethics Committee at [research.ethics@nuim.ie](mailto:research.ethics@nuim.ie) or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be ensured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

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