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PROCESS EVALUATION OF
ABC Grangeegorman
2015-2017

By **Sarah Murphy, Independent Researcher**

Commissioned by the
ABC Grangeegorman Programme

The Area Based Childhood Programme 2013-2017

An Fionn Léaraí
ag an Ghréas Óige
Department of
Children and Youth Affairs

The
ATLANTIC
Philanthropies

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Glossary of abbreviations

ABC	Area Based Childhood Programme
CDETB	City of Dublin Education and Training Board
CDP	Community development project
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
IY	Incredible Years
NCI	National College of Ireland
PCHP	Parent Child Home Programme
PHN	Public Health Nurse
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires
TCM	Teacher Classroom Management

Executive summary

ABC Grangegorman: Vision Against Poverty was aimed at improving outcomes for 0-6 children and their families in the Grangegorman area that are experiencing poverty. The programme was delivered by a consortium of 27 organisations from the area and led by the DIT Access and Civic Engagement Office. Consortium organisations included local schools, pre-schools, crèches, community organisations, as well as statutory agencies including HSE, Tusla and the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb). ABC Grangegorman consisted of nine programmes, which included:

- Six interventions: Four Incredible Years (IY) programmes: IY Baby, IY Basic Parenting, IY Teacher Classroom Management, and IY Classroom Dina, Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) and Doodle Den
- Two upskilling initiatives: Level 6 Childcare Programme and Level 7 Aistear and Siolta Childcare Programme for pre-school and crèche staff in the area
- The Referral Pathways programme which aimed to improve interagency working in terms of referrals and transitions to different settings and provide non-formal upskilling

This evaluation includes primary research findings from consultations in the form of 27 one to one interviews and 9 focus groups with 55 participants. This included representatives from 21 of the 27 members of the consortium and 10 members of the Steering Group. Children were not included in the primary research. Secondary research was also carried out, including a review of available data and existing reviews of the programme as well as evaluations of other similar initiatives.

This executive summary covers satisfaction levels, impact, critical success factors, challenges and barriers to implementation before summarising key recommendations for the continuation of interagency work in the area.

Satisfaction levels

Satisfaction levels were high with 53 out of 55 participants stating that the programme as a whole had been a positive experience and had benefited themselves and the wider community. Participants referred to the programme as providing the area with a much-needed boost and that it had had an invigorating effect on them and their colleagues.

- All of the teachers (11) and principals (2) felt that the programmes had had positive benefits for the principals, teachers, parents, children and the school as a whole
- Childcare managers (5) and staff (5) also said that their participation had been a positive experience and had benefited them, the children they care for and the childcare setting in general
- All of the public health nurses and a public health nursing manager (3) felt that IY Baby had been a good programme which had benefited them and enhanced their ability to do their job, as well as having benefited the parents who took part and their children who showed early signs of improvements in terms of meeting their developmental milestones
- All of the parents (12) interviewed expressed high satisfaction levels and reported benefits for themselves and their children as a result of their participation with the programmes. Parents had participated in IY Baby, IY Basic Parenting, PCHP and Doodle Den
- Twelve out of 13 representatives from 11 community organisations said that while there had been challenges, the programme had benefited the local community
- Staff from other consortium organisations (4) all perceived benefits for their organisation and the wider community

- DIT staff members and consortium members who were involved in the delivery of the Level 7 module (2) both perceived benefits in the course for DIT, themselves as professionals and for the students involved and their childcare settings.

Impact

This evaluation has focused on the **process** of developing and implementing the ABC Grangegorman programme, rather than its outcomes, which are the subject of a national evaluation being carried out by the Centre for Effective Services. It has, however, been possible to discern a positive impact on a range of stakeholder groups, including children, parents, teachers, childcare managers and staff, managers and staff from community organisations, public health nurses (PHNs), and the community as a whole. It has been clear that this programme has provided a valuable boost to an area that has not experienced large-scale investment at local community level. It is important to note that the nine programmes had varying degrees of success and created varying levels of engagement in the community.

- **Children**

Positive results for children were reported by parents, principals, teachers, crèche and pre-school staff and community organisations. Children have benefited from directly participating in IY Baby, Doodle Den, IY Classroom Dina and PCHP, as well as benefiting from the participation of their parents, teachers and childcare staff in the other interventions. Benefits for children have included increased confidence and improvements in social, emotional and communication skills, increased literacy skills, improved oral language and greater enthusiasm for reading, improved development and meeting of developmental milestones. Positive improvements in relationships between children and their parents who participated in IY Basic Parenting, Doodle Den and PCHP were also reported. Positive results for children were reported in settings where staff had done upskilling Levels 6 and 7. Children have already been seen to benefit from improved transition to primary school and increased information sharing as part of the work of the Referral Pathways working group.

- **Parents**

Parents directly participated in IY Baby, IY Basic Parenting, Doodle Den and PCHP. Parents reported having gained knowledge and practical skills, improved experiences of bonding with their child and improved relationships with their children, reductions in their stress levels, increased personal development, confidence and wellbeing, improvements in their language and increased interest in reading with their child, increased social integration and improved relationships among parents and between parents and teachers, and improved engagement with local health services.

- **Teachers and principals**

All of the teachers and principals interviewed felt that the programmes had had tangible benefits in terms of their personal and professional development. Teachers and principals reported improved professional development and working relationships; additional skills, especially communication, facilitation and classroom management skills; improved management systems and working environment within schools; improved confidence and personal development; improved relationships with children; and improved relationships between parents and teachers.

- **Childcare managers and staff**

Childcare managers and staff reported that their participation in IY Classroom Dina, the upskilling strands, and Referral Pathways had been a positive experience and had benefited them, the children they care for and the childcare setting in general. These benefits have included additional skills and education, especially in the areas of regulations, record-keeping and standards for curriculum assessment; professional development, increased confidence of staff, improved child-led play and curriculum development; improved working relationships and management systems; increased personal development of staff; and increased knowledge from the seminars on speech and language and psychological services provided to staff as part of the work of the Referral Pathways working group.

- **Community workers and community organisations**

Community workers and organisations reported benefits and increased opportunities that had come with the ABC programme. These included the fact that new relationships had been formed and existing relationships strengthened through the ABC Grangegorman programme, increased information sharing among organisations, and increased professional development and additional skills learned through participation in IY Basic Parenting, IY Dina and Doodle Den programmes, as well as the seminars provided by Referral Pathways. The draft document outlining a standard framework for referral within ABC programmes was described by community groups as an important step in furthering interagency working and collaboration in the area.

- **Public health nurses**

Feedback from two public health nurses and one public health nursing manager regarding their involvement in the programme reported benefits including improved capacity to do their job, build relationships with other organisations and service providers in the area, and improved relationships and engagement with parents and other individuals accessing their services. Public Health nurses reported seeing improvements in the development of the children whose parents had completed IY Baby and that there has been a reduction in referrals.

- **Wider community**

In general, it was felt that the programme had had a positive effect on the community and had provided a much needed uplift and sense of optimism. While interagency cooperation was an area that could be improved, connections had been formed across agencies and organisations despite the fact that the two-year timeframe had been a relatively short time in which to develop relationships and embed collaborative working.

Critical success factors

Critical success factors included:

- The establishment of a consortium of diverse membership with a wide range of skills and expertise
- The contribution of the local community in terms of programme delivery and support
- The administration and coordination provided by DIT, which has been acknowledged as essential to the programme taking place.

Challenges and barriers to implementation

The evaluation identified the following challenges and barriers to implementation:

- Lack of an initial needs analysis to ensure that local needs were being met
- Operational issues and bureaucracy were reported as being at times unhelpful and there was a perceived culture clash whereby the more corporate culture and operational requirements of DIT as a large institution clashed with the expressed needs of the community for increased flexibility and responsiveness
- Lack of functioning of working groups which were designed to provide programme-specific governance, feedback and a forum for discussion of issues and sharing of learning
- Lack of sufficient interagency cooperation and collaboration and community voice

Challenges specifically related to the implementation and development of the programmes are outlined in Section 1 of this report.

Key recommendations

Having reviewed and analysed the issues and themes arising from the consultations with the 55 participants, there are ten key recommendations. These recommendations are intended to build on the learning from the process of developing and implementing the ABC Grangegorman programme and to progress and enhance it for future interagency cooperation and collaboration. The recommendations provide a framework for initiating and implementing further collaboration and initiatives going forward. The recommendations are elaborated in more detail in Section 4 of this evaluation report. Recommendations specific to the nine programmes are also included in Section 4.

1. Undertake a needs analysis and sustainability programme of work

Undertake a process of consultation with all consortium members and other relevant stakeholders in the area and complete a comprehensive needs analysis of the current local context with a view to developing a sustainable programme of work for the area. This should include the development of a strategy to reach the most marginalised children and families.

2. Consider changing the name of the future programme

Consider changing the name of the programme to reflect the preferences of the consortium representing the views of the wider community and to ensure people identify with the programme as far as possible.

3. Consider extending the age range of the target group

Given the needs and gaps in services that have been identified for older children, young people and parents in the area, the age range of the target group should be extended to young people up to 18 years and their families.

4. Review the governance structures and processes

- Review the consortium model and membership to ensure that is as inclusive and accessible as possible

- Redevelop the working groups which have not been functioning in order to provide a forum for discussion and information sharing regarding programme implementation and interagency working
- Redesign funding and resourcing processes to minimise bureaucracy and be as flexible as possible to enable the community to respond effectively, as without their support stakeholders are much less likely to sustain their engagement with the programme
- Improve risk management, data collection and monitoring and review processes to ensure effective project planning, implementation and sustainability.

5. Strengthen the anti-poverty focus

Ensure that the poverty alleviation aspect of the programme is central to the development of future activities and that the needs of children, young people and families experiencing poverty are considered at the planning stage of these activities.

6. Review mechanisms to ensure a stronger community voice

In consultation with the consortium, as well as potential future members, review processes and mechanisms to ensure community involvement, community voice, and ownership to achieve greater cohesion, accountability, transparency and accessibility. This may include greater participation on the Steering Group of those involved in programme implementation and direct communication with members of the community experiencing poverty and those working with them.

7. Consider the development of a community-based hub

Given the feedback that the base of the programme is an important element to participants, the development of a community based hub should be considered. The hub would be an opportunity to embed principles of community development in the form of a community based centre which could combine objectives of providing lifelong learning opportunities for staff with the provision of emotional support to children and young people and their parents. The fact that the community does not have the capacity to resource this would mean that it would need to be supported by national policy initiatives.

8. Develop the advocacy role of the programme and consortium

Consider the potential of the ABC programme and subsequent interagency work in the area to play a role in advocacy and highlighting deficiencies, gaps in service provision and policy opportunities.

9. Convene a forum to discuss evidence based and evidence informed programmes and potential complementary one-to-one support

In response to feedback, collectively discuss the benefits and any perceived limitations of evidence based and evidence informed programmes and potential complementary one-to-one supports which could help sustain engagement and address any individual issues which may arise during the programmes. This additional support would be especially important for the most marginalised families. The forum could also explore the capacity for more tailoring of the programmes to ensure that they are as culturally-attuned and as cost-effective as possible. This forum could facilitate a more holistic approach and a greater shared understanding of how to best meet the needs of children, young people and their families in the area.

10. Build in opportunities for reflection and strengthen communication processes

It is clear from the evaluation that there is a need for greater attention to issues regarding relationships and communications that have arisen in the course of the two years of the programme. It is essential that there be dialogue as there is a compelling need for improved communication whereby all issues can be carefully considered in a facilitated way in which all stakeholders can feel heard. There is a need for a reenvisioning that can build on the successes of the programme and address some of the challenges that arose.

Background

This section includes background context of the ABC programme, both the national overarching programme and the local ABC Grangegorman programme, including its aims, governance structures and an overview of its nine programmes.

National Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme

The Programme for Government in 2011 stated the intention to “adopt a new area based approach to child poverty, which draws on best international practice and existing services to tackle every aspect of child poverty”.

In April 2013, €30 million was allocated for the ABC programme. This was joint funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Atlantic Philanthropies. ABC’s primary objective is

“...breaking the cycle of child poverty within areas where it is most deeply entrenched and where children are most disadvantaged, through integrated and effective services and interventions in the following areas: child development, child wellbeing and parenting and educational disadvantage”.

ABC’s stated aims are to improve health, educational and social outcomes for children and their families by reducing child poverty and ensuring that children get the best start in life. It was intended that this objective would be achieved through evidence based programmes which have been proven to achieve positive results for parents and children.

ABC Grangegorman

ABC Grangegorman is one of 13 disadvantaged areas around Ireland in which the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is currently running. ABC Grangegorman has been in operation since September 2015, delivering a range of early intervention initiatives. The early interventions are focused on enhancing children’s literacy, upskilling early years practitioners, enhancing parenting skills, supporting children’s social and emotional development, and developing and strengthening referral pathways.

The aims of ABC Grangegorman are to:

- **Improve outcomes for children, young people and their families**, with particular emphasis on improving health, educational and social outcomes for children and young people, and on improving the effectiveness of existing services for them
- **Improve interagency collaboration and cooperation** in the Grangegorman area to ensure services being delivered make the most impact, are timely and accessible, and have the potential to become sustainable
- **Ensure effective governance** through the establishment of Working Groups around interventions, upskilling, referral pathways, sustainability and evaluation. Their role was to progress specific areas of work in line with the desired outcomes and work plan for the Grangegorman ABC programme
- **Build, consolidate and expand sustainable relationships, networks and cooperation** between statutory and non-statutory organisations in the area as a lasting footprint of the ABC programme in the local community
- **Listen to the community** by undertaking a community-based interagency approach, “listening to the voices of the community and of service providers, and working together to find solutions” (ABC Grangegorman, DIT Access and Civic Engagement Office, 2015).

Grangegorman ABC Consortium

The Grangegorman ABC Consortium is the overarching structure and is currently made up of 27 voluntary and statutory organisations working in the Grangegorman area. These include local schools, pre-schools, crèches, community organisations, as well as statutory agencies including HSE, Tusla and the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb). The DIT Access and Civic Engagement Office is the lead agency for the programme. A list of member organisations is included in the appendices. There are approximately 108 professionals involved to varying degrees in Grangegorman ABC. These organisations signed an agreement which detailed the structures and work plan of the Consortium up to September 2017. DIT has managed the budget of €940,000 and has employed 3 staff on behalf of the Steering Group. Many of the nine programmes were delivered on contract by members of the Consortium.

The role of the Consortium has been stated as including:

- Supporting the delivery of the ABC programme and its individual initiatives
- Communicating the work of Grangegorman ABC
- Contributing some of their own resources to support the programme, including time, staff, facilities and resources
- Upholding the values and principles of the Grangegorman ABC programme
- Working to ensure the sustainability of the programme when it ends in 2017.

Steering Group and working groups

Grangegorman ABC developed governance and organisational structures to support programme implementation and each structure had a terms of reference. The consortium appointed an independently chaired Steering Group to oversee the development, implementation and review of the Grangegorman ABC programme. The Steering Group was the overall decision-making body and was intended to provide direction and vision to the programme. Members of the Steering Group were intended to ensure that the interests of all Consortium members were represented and their voices heard. A list of members is included in the appendices.

Working groups were established around interventions, upskilling, and referral pathways. Two additional working groups have been established on evaluation and sustainability. The role of the working groups was to progress specific areas of work in line with the desired outcomes and work plan for the ABC programme.

Overview of the programmes

The following is an overview of the nine programmes implemented as part of ABC Grangegorman programme under the three headings of interventions, upskilling and referral pathways:

1. Interventions

Six interventions were delivered, including four Incredible Years (IY) programmes, as well as Doodle Den and the Parent Child Home Programme:

- **IY Baby**

This programme is aimed at supporting parents to support their babies' physical and emotional development and was delivered by public health nurses in the area. It is based on the premise that how a parent responds to their baby can support and enhance their baby's brain development and ensure that their baby meets their developmental milestones at the appropriate time. The course involved 8

Baby Parent Programme sessions and 5 Baby Massage sessions with parents of babies aged 0 to 12 months.

- **IY Basic Parenting**

This programme for parents of children aged 3 to 6 years runs for 14-18 sessions and covers topics such as strengthening children's social skills, emotional regulation and school regulation skills; using praise and incentives to encourage cooperative behaviour; positive discipline regarding rules, routines and effective limit-setting; and positive discipline in terms of handling challenging behaviour. IY Basic Parenting was delivered by teachers and staff from community organisations.

- **IY Teacher Classroom Management**

The Teacher Classroom Management (TCM) training programme comprises 6 full-day workshops running at 3-4 week intervals during the school year with time between each workshop so that teachers can practice the new skills they are learning. The programme is focused on strengthening teacher classroom management strategies, promoting children's pro-social behaviour, reducing classroom aggression and non-cooperation with other children and teachers, promoting enjoyment of school activities and working with parents to promote their school involvement and consistency between home and school. IY TCM training was delivered to teachers in the four primary schools in the consortium.

- **IY Classroom Dina**

The Incredible Years Classroom Dina Programme is a child training curriculum that targets 3 to 6 year olds to strengthen their social, emotional and academic competencies such as understanding and communicating feelings, managing anger, practising friendship and conversational skills, and appropriate classroom behaviours. This course was delivered by primary school teachers, pre-school and crèche staff and community workers in the area.

- **Parent Child Home Programme**

The aim of the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) is to prevent potential early school leaving by reaching out to children before they have started school. PCHP recognises that parents and the home environment are key to promoting school readiness and academic success. The programme focuses on strengthening parent-child verbal interaction, supporting reading and play activities in the home, building language and literacy in the home environment and providing children with the language, early literacy, and socio-emotional skills they need to start school. While it was intended that PCHP would be coordinated by Daughters of Charity who are a member of the consortium, the programme was coordinated by staff from the National College of Ireland.

- **Doodle Den**

Doodle Den is an after-school programme which uses an evidence-based curriculum featuring a balanced literacy framework. The programme focuses on improving children's literacy through a wide range of activities in an after-school setting using a mix of work, fun and games. It has a child, parent, and family component and places a strong emphasis on parental engagement. Doodle Den was coordinated by the School Completion Programme and took place in the participating primary schools in senior infant class.

2. Upskilling

The aim of the Upskilling Strand of the Grangegorman ABC Programme was to improve the quality and standard of service delivery in early years provider services in the Grangegorman area. It included:

- Developing and delivering a tailored Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme to upskill early childhood services staff to deliver Siolta (the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education) and Aistear (the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework)
- Building service capacity for evaluation
- Coordinating the delivery of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Levels 6 and 7 Childcare programmes in the Grangegorman area.

- **Level 6 Early Childhood Care and Education**

This course was aimed at participants with previous childcare training who wished to develop a career in childcare at Team Leader Level. Course participants already held a QQI Level 5 award in Childcare and were working at a suitable level in a childcare setting in the Grangegorman ABC Programme area. The course involves 8 modules and leads to a QQI award. Course modules include Early Childhood Curriculum; Child Development; Childhood Social, Legal and Health Studies; and Work Experience. Level 6 was delivered in the community by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB), in partnership with Gateway.

- **Level 7 Aistear and Siolta Childcare Programme**

This course was aimed at staff and managers who already held a Level 6 qualification and were working at a suitable level in the area. The course was designed to develop students' understanding of the National Curriculum Framework "Aistear", and the National Quality Framework "Siolta". The programme was delivered over 18 months from September 2015 and involved class contact, tutorials and a practice portfolio. Level 7 was delivered in the Grangegorman Campus by DIT, with a view to awarding students with a certificate from DIT and credits for future study. 24 local staff participated. A further 3-day management programme was offered to service managers. The focus was on evaluation methods, as well as support strategies for participating staff.

3. Referral Pathways

The Referral Pathways strand aimed to improve interagency working in terms of referrals and transitions to different settings and provide non-formal upskilling. Following research carried out by Grangegorman ABC which found gaps in referral pathways for 0-6 year olds in the Grangegorman area between the ages of 3 and 5 years after children leave the care of Public Health Nurses and before they start school, the strand has focused on:

4. Upskilling, supporting and building the capacity of early years' staff in the Grangegorman area to engage in and support referrals
5. Piloting a programme within the Grangegorman area to support the transition of children from early years services to primary schools
6. Ensuring that Grangegorman ABC implements best practice in terms of referral processes, interagency working and cooperation within ABC programme interventions to ensure that any referrals made into or out of the programme are appropriate, high quality and meet the needs of the children involved.

The Referral Pathways working group included representation from local schools, community organisations, Tusla, and the Grangegorman Labour and Learning Forum.

Introduction

This section discusses the aims of this evaluation, the research methodology used, the sample and response rate and details of the consultations.

Terms of reference

The ABC Grangegorman Steering Group commissioned this evaluation of the **process of developing and implementing** the Grangegorman ABC programme 2015-2017 to:

- Capture learning from Steering Group members, consortium members and stakeholders
- Develop recommendations for future collaboration and implementation of initiatives.

This evaluation has focused on evaluating the work of the programme over the last two years with a view to developing a sustainable plan for the development of services and supports for children and families in the North West Inner City. This is similar in scope to the Mulvey report, published in February 2017, which consisted of a consultative process with schools, community organisations and statutory agencies to develop a plan for the social and economic regeneration of the North East Inner City. The report states that:

“The involvement and cooperation of the community itself is central if we are to succeed in making it into a community proud to say that this is our home, we have pride in where we live and we are part of an inclusive Irish society” (Mulvey, 2017).

The Centre for Effective Services is currently completing an outcomes evaluation of all 13 ABC programmes around the country. As a result, the terms of reference for this evaluation called for a focus on qualitative data in evaluating the process of developing and implementing the Grangegorman ABC programme. Some quantitative data has also been considered where it has been available.

This evaluation was conducted between June and September 2017.

Methodology

This process evaluation has used a mixed methodology including primary and secondary research methods.

Qualitative primary research has been carried out in the form of semi-structured one-to-one interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups lasted approximately between 45 minutes and one hour. All participants were informed of the purpose of the evaluation and assured of its confidentiality through an information sheet provided with the consent form. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analysed to identify perceived benefits and challenges of each of the nine programmes as well as suggestions for future development that had been made by participants. Interviews and focus groups were also analysed in terms of more general key themes that were raised by participants in relation to the process of developing and implementing the ABC Grangegorman programme in light of its aims and objectives and with a view to future activities in the area. All interviews and focus groups were conducted and information stored in line with ethical and data protection standards. The information sheet and consent form is included in the appendices. There has been a concerted effort to include feedback in participants' own words wherever possible.

Secondary research has also been carried out in the form of a review of available relevant data concerning the programme and other similar initiatives:

- Reviewed information and data provided by ABC team and others delivering the programmes
- An unpublished interim review of the programme carried out by Barnardos

- Evaluations of similar initiatives
- Review of evaluations of models of community-based outreach in Ireland and Europe.

Sample

The potential sample consisted of the consortium members and stakeholders who had been impacted by the programme. Given that children were excluded from the scope of this evaluation, this included:

- Parents who had participated in the programmes or whose children had participated
- Teachers from participant schools who had taken part in training or facilitated programmes
- Pre-school managers and staff who had participated in the upskilling strand of the programme
- Staff from community organisations from the area who had coordinated or participated in the programmes
- DIT staff who had been involved in delivering Level 7 upskilling
- National College of Ireland (NCI) staff who had delivered the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP).

Response rate

There was an excellent response rate with 55 people participating in total. This implies that consortium partners and stakeholders have an appetite to share their views and experiences of ABC Grangegorman. Practitioners and participants were interviewed from each of the nine programmes within the ABC Grangegorman programme (outlined below). This included representatives from 21 of the 27 members of the consortium and 10 members of the Steering Group.

Interviews and focus groups

Twenty-seven one to one interviews were conducted with parents, principals, teachers, pre-school staff, managers and staff from community organisations and other consortium organisations, and 10 Steering Group members. At least 4 participants from each of the nine programmes were interviewed, including:

- 12 parents
- 11 teachers
- 2 principals
- 5 childcare managers
- 3 childcare staff
- 13 members of staff from 11 community organizations
- 4 other consortium member agencies and organizations
- 2 PHNs and one Public Health Nursing Manager
- National College of Ireland staff.

Nine focus groups were conducted in total with the following groups:

- Parents whose children had participated in Doodle Den
- Parents who had participated in Basic Parenting
- Staff working on PCHP, including a home visitor, the coordinator, and the manager
- Preschool and crèche staff and managers who had participated in the upskilling
- Teachers who had trained and facilitated Incredible Years Basic Parenting, Incredible Years Classroom Dina, Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management, and Doodle Den.

Section 1: Programme findings

This section outlines the programme content and discusses the findings in relation to the benefits and challenges of each of the programmes that formed the ABC Grangegorman Programme. This section also includes suggestions made by participants during the consultations for the potential future roll-out of the programmes. The programmes are discussed below under the three headings of interventions, upskilling and referral pathways.

Section 2 of this report discusses some general themes relating to the process of developing and implementing the ABC Grangegorman programme, which were raised during the consultations.

1.1 Interventions

Six interventions were delivered, these included four Incredible Years (IY) programmes: IY Baby, IY Basic Parenting, IY Teacher Classroom Management and IY Classroom Dina, as well as Doodle Den and Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP).

1.1.1 Incredible Years Baby

Overview

This programme is aimed at supporting parents to support their babies' physical and emotional development and was delivered by public health nurses in the area. It is based on the premise that how a parent responds to their baby can support and enhance their baby's brain development and ensure that their baby meets their developmental milestones at the appropriate time.

The IY Baby modules were supplemented with baby massage classes on alternate weeks, which public health nurses felt allowed the format to be more in sync with babies' development. The course involved 8 Baby Parent Programme sessions and 5 Baby Massage sessions with parents of babies aged 0 to 12 months. The topics covered included getting to know your baby; babies as intelligent learners; providing physical, tactile and visual stimulation; parents learning to interpret babies' communication and cues; gaining support; and babies' emerging sense of self.

Benefits

- **Increased confidence and wellbeing for parents**

Parents have reported an increase in confidence as a result of doing the course. Mothers who completed the course with their second or third babies said that they greatly benefited from it and that they regret not having had access to it with their first child. What parents valued most was that the course gave them back some normality and routine at the beginning when they were finding things difficult:

"It gives them drive to get out of bed at the start when they're struggling"

"I was so lost. I didn't have a clue. When you have a baby people tell you to trust your instincts but I felt like I didn't have any. The course gave me a lot more confidence. It really helped, there are so many things that you just don't know if you don't have kids"

"They made us all feel really welcome and valued, they always remembered my baby's name".

Public health nurses reported gaps in knowledge among mothers in the area in relation to caring for themselves and their children and that it had been possible to address this through the course sessions.

- **Improved bonding between parents and their babies**

Parents who completed the course said that it had helped them to bond with their babies:

"I had a very difficult time at the birth and afterwards. I couldn't breastfeed and I was worried that meant I wouldn't bond with her, the baby massage really helped with the bonding. It seemed a bit posh at first but the babies loved it, we still do it before bed to calm her down"

"I was really struggling and couldn't imagine it ever being fun, they teach you things you can do and now we have fun together".

- **Integration and social relationships between parents**

One of the most successful and valued outcomes of the course has been the creation of lasting relationships among mothers who participated. A whatsapp group is formed for participants by the end of each course to facilitate continued contact:

"We never end a group without setting up a date when they can meet afterwards just themselves, they generally keep it up and meet for coffee"

"Meeting with other mums who live nearby has been massive. You realise you're not the only one thinking and worrying about these things".

The groups have often consisted of a range of social backgrounds and ethnicities including mothers from England, Ireland, France, Malaysia, Pakistan and Slovakia.

"The groups have gelled extremely well together, which is very unusual"

"As the course is very practical, even parents who may not have much English have found it possible to understand and participate, it has worked very well"

"They're learning from other mothers, they're not just sitting there. Homeless mothers come too, no one knows they're homeless though"

"There is a lot of diversity in the group. The affluent mothers need it just as much as anyone, they've often worked all their lives and need support with the bonding"

"The whatsapp group became the mother that they don't have to call in the middle of the night to say 'he has a temperature, what do I do?'"

"We call it parent and baby, sometimes the fathers come too which is lovely".

- **Improved language of parents**

The course was also seen to have improved the English of non-national parents who participated and given that the course is very visual and practice-based, it has worked well for people for whom English is a second language:

"At the end they came out with a lot more words".

- **Improved development of children whose parents completed the course**

While it is still early to make a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the course on child development, public health nurses have noticed improvements in meeting milestones at the two-year developmental and a reduction in referrals which they attributed to the course:

"I am starting to see the toddlers and there are real benefits, they have much less speech and language problems. There would be high referral rates in this area, they're stimulated well and their parents are interested in their development"

"The parents are a lot more clued in to what they should be looking out for. They have a lot more insight".

- **Assists Public Health Nurses in their role**

Public health nurses and managers reported the course as something that had assisted them in their role and in forming lasting relationships with parents accessing their services:

"I really enjoyed being trained up and delivering this course. It really helps me in my role in the area"

"This is what we should be doing more of, the prevention rather than cure"

"It is about promoting parents' confidence rather than encouraging them to be dependent on a service"

"Before there was nothing for them, no mother and infant group whatsoever, it makes such a difference, you see it at the graduations, they're so phenomenal".

- **Improved engagement with the service**

Parents who have done the course engage well with the service and form lasting positive relationships with health care staff:

"These are often people who would not normally have signed up for a course and now they see the benefit and they want to come".

Challenges

- **Recruitment of parents**

The lack of childcare was said to have been the main barrier to the recruitment of parents. PHNs reported having to turn down women with newborns and toddlers due to a lack of childcare, with the result that the most isolated and the most in need of the course were often unable to access it:

"We couldn't let them bring their toddlers in and it was heart-breaking saying no to them, they were the most isolated".

Recruitment was reported as being difficult at the beginning but has quickly improved and there is now often a waiting list for places on the course. While initially it was reportedly difficult to engage mothers living in social housing in the area, once one mother participated, this was overcome by word of mouth:

"I've recommended it to my friends but they can only take so many. You feel really sorry for the ones who don't get to do it".

"At first, the mothers from the flats wouldn't have had the confidence; they said they didn't want to come and everyone would be looking at them. Then one mother came and she absolutely loved it. Suddenly they were all open to coming".

- **Time constraints**

Public health nurses reported it being difficult to complete the preparation, facilitation and supervision for the course along with their other work. There was a requirement to telephone every participant and

this has not always been possible due to their workload. They also mentioned that they are obliged to prioritise work associated with child protection cases. It was mentioned that once the PHNs have been accredited there may be less time pressure as supervision will no longer be necessary:

“You don’t get anything extra except the reward of seeing the difference it makes to the mothers, I love it but I’m realistic and I don’t think it’s sustainable. It takes two of us a day each a week. It should be one PHN and one Family Support Worker”

“I love it but it is a lot to put on a public health nurse, nobody helps you with it and we have to prioritise our child protection cases”.

Suggestions for future development

- **Training should be extended to other professional groups**

It was suggested that training be extended to other professionals such as physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and family support workers, both to take some pressure off PHNs and so that more courses could be run to reach bigger numbers.

- **Consider advocating for statutory obligation for IY Baby for parents of babies on protection lists**

It was felt by PHNs that the IY Baby training should be compulsory for parents of babies on the child protection lists, as is the case in Northern Ireland where this is a statutory obligation.

1.1.2 Incredible Years Basic Parenting

Overview

This programme for parents of children aged 3 to 6 years runs for 14-18 sessions and covers topics such as strengthening children’s social skills, emotional regulation and school regulation skills; using praise and incentives to encourage cooperative behaviour; positive discipline regarding rules, routines and effective limit-setting; and positive discipline in terms of handling challenging behaviour. IY Basic Parenting was delivered by teachers and staff from community organisations.

Benefits

- **Practical skills for parents**

Parents reported that the course had provided them with practical skills and techniques to deal with challenging situations with their child. They said that they have a greater understanding of discipline and positive affirmative strategies as a result of completing the course:

“They gave us loads of examples of how to deal with difficult situations”

“I understand much more now about how to punish, when to punish, and when not to. I give him 2 minutes less computer time now and it works really well”

“His behaviour did change, after 3 weeks it changed. I used everything I got, the information in this course is brilliant. He started getting his routine up, brushing his teeth, getting confidence in himself”

“I used to change my whole schedule around him, now I don’t, I’m the parent and he’s the child”

“Before I felt like I was always putting him down, now I praise him more”.

- **Facilitating and relationship skills for teachers and community workers**

Teachers spoke about the skills that they had learned with regard to facilitating adults, which they had never learned before. They reported increased confidence in how they interacted with parents and managed difficult situations:

“It was intimidating at first, we were never taught this, before this we’d had no training in working with adults”.

Teachers and staff from community organisations praised the training and structure and said that they had regular contact with the trainer who was very helpful. Those who had done more than one cycle of the course said that the second one was much easier. Teachers also spoke of benefits for themselves in terms of general relationship and ‘life’ skills. They said that they are using the techniques with the children in their classes and those who had not yet been infant teachers learned about early years:

“We’re using the techniques with the children, it’s become part of our day to day practice”.

Teachers with children spoke of an improvement in their own parenting skills:

“I’ve two kids and it has totally transformed my home life, I’m way more confident, I use play techniques all the time now, I’ve shared it with family and friends”

“It teaches good sound social techniques in general social interaction”.

- **Development of social relationships among parents**

Participation in the course also had the unintended consequence of forming and enhancing relationships and peer support among parents. These relationships have lasted beyond the timeframe of the course:

“It was an opportunity to have a release, to have a good influence from other parents. What was nice about the class was that everybody was open, they didn’t hide things, so I was not too shy to say what my son was doing. It was ok to say the bad things as well”

“At the start of the programme I felt like I was a terrible mother but then talking to others I felt like everyone was having problems and we could correct what we were doing”

“It was nice just talking to other parents, sometimes you’d talk about other things, it wasn’t always about the kids”

“Parents make friends and are more likely to lean on each other, they form a social group, they’re less isolated after the course. It’s opportunity to get to know each other, you see them chatting in the yard, even if it’s just one more person to say hello to in the morning”.

- **Improved relationships between parents and teachers**

Parents and teachers reported an improvement in the relationship between parents and teachers and in parents’ overall attitude towards their children’s school. Parents are more likely to approach teachers with their concerns earlier and in more of a spirit of collaboration than was the case before. Teachers and principals noted that they had found out information about children which parents previously had not felt comfortable enough to share with them. As a result of this improvement in relationships, teachers find it easier to have sensitive discussions with parents about their children, which may include discussing potential referral to specialists. Teachers also noted that parents were more involved in the school and more likely to volunteer:

"It was a natural prompt to discuss any referral or assessment issues. We learned things about children parents had been hiding for ages there's more trust now"

"The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) can follow up on the issues, it improves relationships with families. It's an extra bit of connection with the school, parents are more confident and if there is an issue they are more likely to informally pick your brain about it"

"It's a great leveller between parents and teachers and between classes. All parents, regardless of class, are having the same difficulties"

"Parents talking very honestly and openly with staff is more powerful than anything: those relationships continue"

"They're more confident coming to speak, not letting things fester, their whole body language has changed; they're making eye-contact with you now"

"Parents are getting more involved now; they're more likely to volunteer".

- **Improvements in parents' wellbeing, increased confidence and reduction in stress levels**

Parents reported that their stress levels had diminished and that their overall emotional wellbeing had improved as a result of doing the course. They said that the course had made them feel normal and less alone and had instilled a sense of solidarity among the parents and made them aware that everyone experiences problems from time to time:

"When I saw the video clips I realised I was not the only ones dealing with difficult situations, it's the age"

"Now I feel my child is normal".

Parents reported their personal confidence increasing in areas other than parenting. Teachers said that they had seen parents going on to pursue further education and that they credit their participation in the course with this positive development:

"I feel more confident"

"It's really empowering, it's all money in the bank for them, if they can be more in control of their home life they can manage anything, it enables them to be in control of their careers, it opens up a world of opportunity to them"

"You can see their lives are getting easier because of the course, they're less stressed, they've learned self-care"

"Parents' personal lives have improved as a result, they're doing further education"

"Parents are less stressed, they're not focusing on the little things that don't matter, they have the tools now".

- **Improvements in parents' language**

Teachers reported that participation in the course had improved the English of parents for whom it was a second language.

Challenges

- **Time available**

Teachers said that they found it difficult to fit in time for the facilitation and preparation of the course along with their other work. They also said that they found it challenging to deliver, that it could be difficult to go back to normal teaching afterwards and they often needed to debrief with their facilitation partner during the day to discuss issues that came up. Some teachers said that it was difficult to keep up with the paperwork and that they had not managed to do the mid-term Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) which are supposed to be completed half way through the course for national evaluative purposes:

"It was always a push to fit the session in, but it is very draining so I don't think it should be longer"

"It's the most exhausting thing I've ever done. It was very intense, one day a week including paperwork and recovery!"

"Supervision took time away from the programme".

Community organisations mentioned the amount of time that the programme took as being unsustainable:

"It was very time consuming and difficult to justify, it's a big commitment for a small team".

- **Recruitment and financial resources**

Teachers said that recruitment was the biggest challenge in delivering the course. It was difficult to recruit at an early stage in the year when they may not yet know the parents very well. **Language** was also an issue in recruiting as parents needed a level of language to be able to participate in the discussions and sometimes it only became clear that they did not have this level once the course had begun:

"You think they have enough but some of them didn't, when you start the course you find another layer of language that they don't have".

Teachers also said that it was difficult to get the right **mix of lower and higher needs** and the group dynamics were challenging at times. There were some difficulties in relationships between parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds and some of the courses had a high drop-out with parents with the highest needs dropping out. It was suggested that 14 weeks is a long time for some parents to commit to and that it could be an option to offer parenting interventions of varying lengths and detail. Cultural differences and gender imbalance within the groups were mentioned as problematic at times.

Community workers talked about the difficulty of trying to recruit parents in a small area.

"It was difficult to recruit. We were all looking at the same pot of parents"

"Parents had very different ways of communicating. There was definitely some snobbery from middle class parents. There was a huge drop-off, only 2 out of 14 left in the end, they were middle class, they stayed and benefited but they had the least problems"

"It was hard to get the right profile of people. I would put more time into recruiting next time. I'd look more at their background, have they done courses before, maybe give out a questionnaire to determine the needs and get the right balance"

"Our first course was a lot of high need people, the second time we had a mix, there was better parental peer support".

Childcare was the biggest issue with teachers feeling that often the target group that would have benefited most from the course could not attend due to lack of childcare and lack of financial resources to assist with this. One school looked into having a childcare worker come to the school to mind parents'

children in another room during the course but insurance requirements were prohibitive. While there was some budget to support parents with additional needs to attend this was not seen as sufficient:

“Childcare was a huge problem, a massive obstacle to recruitment”

“If we had childcare we could target the people who really need it, the most isolated. They’re the parents who need it most”

“One parent needed help paying for childcare but budget had already been put aside for a taxi for another parent who needed it”.

- **Cultural issues**

Cultural issues were mentioned as an issue for teachers in facilitating discussions as some parents from different cultural backgrounds had different perspectives on discipline and could become defensive:

“We were challenging cultural norms sometimes. You want them to be open, to make the environment comfortable, it was difficult when they mentioned corporal punishment”.

- **Lack of support for parents following the course**

Parents talked about missing the connectedness and social support of the course once it had finished:

“Coming up to the end of the programme I started getting nervous and asked the teacher what’s next, there was supposed to be a mothers’ support group but it never happened”.

- **Out-dated resources and lack of cultural attunement**

Parents and teachers mentioned that the resources were American, out of date and could be difficult to relate to:

“All the video clips are of toddlers throwing tantrums over something very small, not a blowout like in my house, they can bring the camera to my house!”

“The video clips are American and very old, in black and white, it would be better if they were Irish and modern”.

- **Overlap with teaching issues**

Teachers said that sometimes there was an overlap with teaching issues, with parents wanting to discuss their child’s academic performance or their issues with their child’s teacher during the course. In these situations, teachers had to be clear about the remit of the course and keep discussion focused on parenting:

“Some parents wanted to give out about their child’s teacher, they should bring that up at a parent teacher meeting”.

It was also mentioned that most of the teachers in the schools had not been trained in Basic Parenting and were not necessarily using the same rewards systems that the training encourages. Some parents found this frustrating:

“Class teachers are developing a rewards system for their whole class, the child should be no. 1 at home but this is not always appropriate at school. Sometimes parents don’t see that and feel their child isn’t being rewarded enough by the teacher”.

- **Training and accreditation**

Some teachers felt that the training should be more focused on practical issues of how to deliver the course and should include role plays and how to fill in the SDQs. Some teachers also said that they would welcome more information on their responsibilities and best practice with regard to referring parents on to services or supports following issues raised during the discussions in the course, including domestic violence.

“It was very focused on the content rather than the how of delivering”.

It was also mentioned by teachers and principals that the accreditation was difficult and took longer than was considered to be necessary:

“The accreditation process was onerous, I was told that facilitation was perfect and yet it seems that no-one passes first time”.

There were also concerns raised about the cost of training and accreditation. This is discussed in Sections 2 and 3.

Suggestions for future development

- **Consider extending the course**

Parents felt that the course should be extended to parents of older children as well as, in their experience, parenting challenges increase as the child gets older. Parents said that they had found the course to be so beneficial that they would like it to be available to them through primary school and into secondary school:

“All through the academic year would be great, every year there is another problem! So the class should continue!”

“It’s harder as they get older, you need more support later”.

- **Increased budget**

Teachers spoke of the importance of having more financial resources so that childcare could be provided for those parents who were in need of the course but could not pay for childcare. Teachers felt that the refreshments provided were definitely an incentive and should be continued:

“Tea, coffees, pastries are a draw to parents who don’t have much money, they may not have had breakfast. It’s a lot to ask them to sit for two and a half hours without something to eat and drink”.

- **Begin later in the year**

Some teachers suggested that recruitment could be made easier if the course started later in the year after the first term as they would know parents better and have more awareness of their needs and levels of English.

- **Parent support groups**

It was suggested that parent support groups should follow the training.

- **Develop Irish programme**

Some participants felt that it would be better for the community to develop an Irish or local programme rather than an American one. The issue of cultural attunement of programmes is discussed later in the report in Sections 2 and 3.

1.1.3 Incredible Years Classroom Dina

Overview

The Incredible Years Classroom Dina programme is a child training curriculum that targets 3 to 6 year olds to strengthen their social, emotional and academic competencies, such as understanding and communicating feelings, managing anger, practising friendship and conversational skills, and appropriate classroom behaviours. It consists of 20 to 30 minute circle time lessons and runs for 20 to 22 weeks. Suggestions for home activities parents can do with their children to reinforce the learning and promote parental involvement are also circulated.

IY Classroom Dina was delivered by teachers, pre-school and crèche childcare workers and staff from community organisations.

Benefits

- **Positive impact on children's emotional wellbeing, social and communication skills**

Teachers and childcare workers spoke about the positive effects on the children and its impact in terms of improving their social skills and ability to articulate their emotions. Children's language was also seen to improve:

"They're all naming feelings, even those with English as a second language. All their language has improved, they have all gone up a level and need less language support, it's driven their learning as they want to be part of it"

"They want to talk to Wally and their language has improved as a result"

"Children really respond to the puppets, even the older children who might say they are too old for puppets!"

- **Improved children's behaviour**

Teachers and childcare workers reported improvements in children's behaviour as a result of the programme and said that parents had noted similar improvements in their behaviour at home:

"The children loved it, you could see the messages really sinking in, communication skills, empathy, rules, settling"

"They speak really respectfully to each other, they're really articulate now, naming feelings and everything"

"Parents say they are bucket filling and being kind at home too"

"The other day a child was having a meltdown, then he listened to Wally and he stopped having a meltdown!"

“The children really listen to Wally, they want him to sit at their table. They respond better to the puppets telling them things than the adults”.

- **Personal and professional development of teachers**

Teachers praised the training and resources and said that they use the techniques throughout the day in the classroom and in their personal lives. Some said that the provision of backfill, funded by the ABC Grangegorman programme, was really important and they would not have been able to participate otherwise. Working in partnership with a colleague was also a very beneficial experience for teachers and community workers:

“I loved working with someone else, we both led at different times and supported each other”

“It addresses real life problems and its positive reminders benefit you and your life too”

“It was brilliant, easy to follow and the trainer was amazing. The personalised feedback was great in the small group”

“It’s excellent, it transfers to other subjects too: I’m teaching the Stay Safe programme the same way. It has really good activities to get them up and active”.

Teachers also said that it had helped them to get to know the children better and that some had confided in them as a result of Classroom Dina:

“It has really helped with expressing emotions and we have had some disclosures from children because of Dina”.

Challenges

- **Time constraints**

Teachers and community workers found it difficult to find enough time for the delivery of Classroom Dina and said that it was often difficult to prepare as preparation involved scheduling time with the co-facilitator:

“It ate into literacy, something had to give, you need 90 minutes a week to do it properly”

“It was hard to find time to prepare and to fit it in, it was difficult to timetable between the two of us”.

- **Late arrival of resources**

Most settings experienced significant delays in the arrival of puppets. Puppets and manuals had to be shared during training where they were available:

“We had no manuals or puppets when training, it was difficult to understand the manual when we finally got it and to see where it all would fit in”.

- **Appropriateness for preschool children**

Some preschool childcare workers questioned how appropriate the programme was for the children between 2 and 4 years. One early years setting said that they had not been using the puppets as one child was afraid of them.

“I think the children I look after, 3 to 4 year olds, are too young for it, they are so hyped up, jumping on the puppets, they don’t listen enough to get the messages”

"I feel like I should repeat some modules so they understand them but they don't want you to do that, they want you to work your way through all the modules. I would like to pluck ideas and tailor it but they don't like that because of the fidelity to the programme"

"The training focused on kids in primary school, in preschool it's too difficult even with two of you, the children are too easily distracted".

Other preschool childcare workers and managers said that children really liked the programme and were responding well to the puppets. Other staff from preschools felt that the material had worked for the age group but that they needed to adapt it slightly to bring it more to the level of 3-5 year olds.

- **Challenging to deliver**

Given that it was two people delivering the programme, some reported that where they had been trained separately, one person needed a refresher course by the time the other person had been trained:

"We had to train separately, by the time she trained too I had forgotten stuff and needed a refresher, you lose the buzz of it"

Some people who identified as being more introverted and less outgoing found it challenging at times to deliver:

"It's a bit daunting; I found it hard to think of voices and stories"

"You need energy, it needs to be at the right time to do it".

- **Value for money**

Concerns were raised by participants working in early years settings in relation to value for money. These staff members and managers felt that the course was too advanced for the children under 4 years and that their settings would benefit more from additional equipment and resources, given the expensiveness of the puppets.

"It was very commercial, I've heard that it's €4,000 per service for Dina. It's a lot of money to be spent wrong"

"In terms of the money that's been spent I don't know that it's been worthwhile. I am not really using my puppets that much and will give them to the local school within a year if it's not working".

Some early years staff felt that investment in training to teach children English as a second language would be more welcome and appropriate as this was seen as an increasing need for their setting.

It was widely reported that early years settings are under-resourced and in need of direct supports. Some settings did not have iPads or computers to show children the vignettes and staff were initially using their phones before it was approved by ABC Grangegorman that funding could be used to purchase this equipment.

These issues of the expensiveness of puppets for Classroom Dina and the costs involved in the interventions in general are further discussed in Sections 2 and 3.

Suggestions for future development

- **Begin earlier**

It was suggested that the course start earlier in future to allow more time for full delivery:

“If started in September, rather than January, there would be more time”.

- **Questionnaires about children’s progress**

Some teachers felt that there should be a continuum of 1-10 rather than options of true, somewhat true, and not true, as it was more difficult to show change that has occurred.

- **Timely arrival of puppets and manuals**

Many respondents reported delays in the arrival of materials and said that this meant that the delivery of the course did not run as smoothly as it might otherwise have.

1.1.4 Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management

Overview

The Teacher Classroom Management (TCM) training programme comprises 6 full-day workshops running at 3-4 week intervals during the school year with time between each workshop so that teachers can practice the new skills they are learning. The programme is focused on strengthening teacher classroom management strategies, promoting children’s pro-social behaviour, reducing classroom aggression and non-cooperation with other children and teachers, promoting enjoyment of school activities and working with parents to promote their school involvement and consistency between home and school. IY TCM training was delivered to teachers in the four primary schools in the consortium.

Benefits

- **Developed teachers’ communication skills**

Teachers reported having learned useful techniques about how to communicate effectively with parents, including the importance of contacting them with positive news and the awareness that they did not necessarily need to report everything:

“It was brilliant, I talk to parents more with positive news now and I realised that you don’t need to report everything that happens in school”.

Teachers said that the course had been especially useful for situations where parents may be distressed or angry:

“I’m much more comfortable about where I stand, I can say to parents that I can’t talk right now if class is about to start. It can be a very grey area. Before I felt like I was just expected to deal with it, being shouted at. Now I let them calm down and tell them I can talk to them later and I know I can bring someone else if I want”

“I’d never been taught how to talk to parents and kids from tough backgrounds. Some parents had a negative idea of school; we learned how to flip it over to the positive”.

- **Improved relationships between teachers and parents**

The programme improved relationships between teachers and parents and it was reported by principals and teachers that they now collaboratively deal with any issues which may arise concerning a child's behaviour or academic performance:

"We're working together as team with parents now, I call with updates and we decide what to do next"

"They used to back away from me in the yard, they used to avoid you, now they see you as a team, we can chat about it, these are long lasting changes".

- **Increased peer support among teachers**

Teachers spoke of having benefited from meeting with and learning from other teachers:

"It was lovely to see the enthusiasm of other teachers, I got a lot of great ideas and it was mainly from the other teachers"

"Other teachers on the course brought loads of great ideas, they were from all different levels and it was interesting to hear things from all points of view, there was a lot of trust"

- **Increased confidence among principals and teachers**

Principals and teachers reported an increase in their confidence as a result of the programme:

"It affirmed what I'd felt in my gut, the research was there".

- **Positive impact on classroom management and teaching practice**

Principals and teachers said that the course had had a positive impact on their classroom management and teaching practice:

"It was very helpful regarding the language we should be using around behavior, some teachers had different understandings of time-outs, now we have standardised time-outs"

"I would recommend it to everyone, you learn the importance of positive commentating"

"They are very user-friendly resources, there is a whole menu of things, if something doesn't work, you just try something else"

"It made me be creative and think of rewards for the children that you don't have to pay for"

"Because of what we learned, we don't talk about kids in staff room anymore because kids can get a reputation".

Challenges

The only challenge mentioned in relation to this programme was the difficulty in finding substitute teachers which was cited as a national issue for primary schools and early years settings.

Suggestions for future development

- **Course should be more condensed**

Some teachers felt that the training could be shorter and more condensed so that it would take less time and there would be less backfill required.

1.1.5 Doodle Den

Overview

Doodle Den is an after-school programme which uses an evidence-based curriculum featuring a balanced literacy framework. The programme focuses on improving children's literacy through a range of activities in an after-school setting using a mix of work, fun and games. It has a child, parent, and family component and places a strong emphasis on parental engagement. Doodle Den was coordinated by the School Completion Programme and took place in the participating primary schools in senior infant class.

Benefits

- **Increased children's confidence and communication skills**

Teachers and parents saw increases in children's confidence and communication skills as a result of their participation with the programme:

"We saw huge progress in the children's confidence"

"It's game based and they see it as fun"

"We've got positive feedback from parents who say the children are talking more at home"

"She is more confident, she used to stay with me and bawl if she was away from me. At Doodle Den she is getting out of the chair and walking up to the board to look at the words".

- **Increased enthusiasm for reading and improved language skills**

The programme was seen to have improved children's language skills and increased their enthusiasm for reading:

"The children absolutely loved it, every single one of them"

"My son keeps asking me to find him more things to read like cereal boxes, food packages, he's even reading publication information on all his books now"

"It works just as well for children with English as a second language".

An increase in attendance at the local library of parents with their children was also reported.

- **Improved children's social skills and relationships between children**

Teachers and parents saw an improvement in children's social skills and in the relationships and peer support between the children, especially through play, shared reading and lunch with their classmates:

"In the shared reading the children help each other without knowing they're helping, they find it easier to listen to another child reading than an adult telling them how to do it"

"It's social skills for children who might be shy"

"The lunch teaches them how to sit at a table, so then when you go out they know how to do it and interact with people. It's much more free, it's very social. Her siblings are all older so this was an opportunity to be with children her own age, she is in her element, they're all on her wavelength"

"It bonded the children together closer, the social side is as important as the reading"

- **Improves teaching practice**

Teachers said that the programme had improved their practice and that they were able to apply the learning to their other teaching:

"I'm able to apply the techniques, activities and games to my other teaching, it's simple, easy to follow, you don't need a lot of resources".

- **Improved parents' language and increased interest in reading with their children**

Parents for whom English is a second language reported having seen improvements in their own language through attendance at the sessions:

"I learned the word 'creativity' in Doodle Den"

"Now we read much more at home".

- **Improved relationships between parents and teachers and the school**

Good participation and attendance of parents was reported. Relationships between teachers and parents and parents' attitude toward the school were said to have positively changed as a result of the programme:

"It helped develop relationships with parents from an early stage, they get used to coming into the school for Doodle Den meetings, there's long-term benefits for their relationship with the school".

- **Improved relationships among parents**

Parents and teachers saw Doodle Den has having improved relationships between parents:

"Parents came together more after it".

Challenges

- **Organisational issues**

Organisational issues were mentioned as a significant challenge to the initial roll-out and coordination of Doodle Den. Some of these involved governance issues which are discussed in Section 2. The start of the programme was perceived as being too rushed with schools only being informed about the programme toward the end of the Summer term which is reportedly a very busy and stressful time for schools. In some cases, this caused distress and created a strain on relationships between stakeholders involved in the programme. There had been a long lead-in to the programme to discuss governance arrangements and some participants felt that this time would have been better spent focused on the details of implementation. The rushed nature of implementation also meant that there was less time to fully explain to participating sites what would be involved and how much time and work it would entail.

Problems obtaining and funding resources were also mentioned, including the late arrival of materials and the fact that these were not funded upfront by the Grangegorman ABC programme. It was necessary for the community organisation coordinating the programme to pay for the materials and then submit a claim for payment. The challenges arising from this process are discussed in Section 2.

There were also some issues raised about the **lack of role clarity** in the coordination of the programme and some confusion as to where responsibility lay. In some cases, schools decided that the work and time involved was not practical for their staff to take on and they brought in facilitators from outside

which was reported to have worked well. There were also some difficulties in **recruiting facilitators** as community organisations often could not spare the staff and other applicants from the area were limited in terms of eligibility criteria as Level 7 was required. These organisational issues decreased once the first course of Doodle Den had been completed.

“The first year was more difficult, it was new to everyone in Dublin 7, it ran much more smoothly the second year”

“There was miscommunication about resources”

“There was no flexibility on the start date, the programme needs 32 weeks so it had to start mid-September and schools were only informed about it towards the end of term, it was too rushed to explain what would be involved and how much time it would all take”

“We had no idea how much work it was going to be. Materials came in very slow. It worked a lot better with teachers from outside”.

“There is a lesson about timing in the future, this thing cannot be rushed”.

- **Recruitment of children**

Teachers said that it was difficult to pick 15 children and to get the right mix of abilities for the programme. While the course is clear about having a mix of low, moderate and high literacy needs, there was some confusion expressed on the part of teachers and at times literacy ability and behavioural problems were conflated. Parents were often disappointed if their child was not selected which was expressed as an added pressure on teachers when recruiting:

“The parents are disappointed if you don’t pick their child”

“In the first year, we picked children with behavioural difficulties, they hated school and extending their day wasn’t a positive thing for them, it disrupted Doodle Den. Then we changed it for the second year and had more of a balance which worked much better”.

- **Tiredness of the children**

Tiredness was mentioned by some parents and teachers as an issue with some saying it would be preferable if Doodle Den could form part of the teaching day:

“They were tired, conked out on the walk home, then they got more used to it, the snack was important for energy”

“The day is too long for the age, it’s not fair to the children, it’s the same day as secondary school students have”.

- **Time constraints**

Teachers and principals spoke of the difficulty in terms of the time required to facilitate Doodle Den and cover the course. It was reported that the time allowed for settling the children was too restrictive and that sometimes parents collected the children early if they were at the school collecting another child or for work reasons.

“It is difficult to squeeze everything in from the manual, it’s very rigid, there’s time to eat but no time to clean up or go to the toilet”

“The manual only allows 10 minutes for taking off coats, bags, transitioning from their other class and having a snack. The children have to go upstairs too”.

- **Repetition**

Teachers, community workers and other facilitators reported repetition in the course:

“There is a lot of repetition and some of it is too basic. Children get bored of the same stories, class teachers and Doodle Den should do different books”.

- **Value for money**

Some respondents felt that Doodle Den was not sustainable as it was too expensive. The issue of the cost of the programmes is further discussed in Sections 2 and 3.

Suggestions for future development

- **Avoid repetition**

It was suggested that class teachers and Doodle Den facilitators should do different books to avoid repetition.

- **Start the planning earlier**

It was suggested that in the future participation and implementation should be planned further in advance so that it is not rushed.

- **Should be mainstreamed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)**

It was felt that ideally the programme should be mainstreamed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and made to form part of the school day as this would resolve the issue of children being tired. However, teachers and principals felt that the curriculum was already full and that the capacity of schools to deliver it may also be an issue.

1.1.6 Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP)

Overview

The aim of the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) is to prevent potential early school leaving by reaching out to children before they have started school. PCHP recognises that parents and the home environment are key to promoting school readiness and academic success. The programme focuses on strengthening parent-child verbal interaction, supporting reading and play activities in the home, building language and literacy in the home environment and providing children with the language, early literacy, and socio-emotional skills they need to start school. The programme runs over two years. The home visitor meets the family twice a week for short visits of 30 minutes in their own home and brings suitable books and toys as part of the visits.

It was intended that PCHP would be coordinated by Daughters of Charity who are a member of the consortium but this was not possible and the programme was coordinated by staff from the Early Learning Initiative of the National College of Ireland (NCI). Five families completed the programme between 2015 and 2017. An additional eight families began the programme in 2016 and will finish in 2018.

Benefits

- **Positive impact on children**

Benefits for children were reported by participating parents, PCHP managers, and home visitors. One parent said that they were worried about their child's speech development and that they were on a waiting list to see a speech and language therapist. Crèches had told the parent that they would not take the child unless their speech improved. While they were awaiting the appointment, the visits with the home visitor and the subsequent reading that the parent was doing in the interim with the child was improving the child's communication skills.

"Now anytime he opens a book he can identify what's inside, even if his speech is not clear"

"Everyone should do it, it has really helped my child".

- **Positive impact on parents**

Benefits for parents were also reported. Parents reported having learned practical skills and techniques that they had not previously known about in relation to their children, including how to help their children progress their reading and communication skills and how to approach toilet training. They said that their relationship with the home visitor had reduced their stress levels as they could speak to them or call them with any concerns that they had about their child. Parents also said that that they had recommended PCHP to their friends:

"I found it good and helpful. She told me lots of stuff that I didn't know about"

"I'm really glad I did it, I've recommended it to all my friends".

Home visitors have cited improvements for the five initial families to participate in the programme. They have reported improvements in parents' responsiveness, affection, communication and consistency with their child (NCI, Early Learning Initiative, 2017).

Challenges

- **Organisational issues and provision of information**

The organisation of the PCHP was not developed as had been envisaged by the Steering Group. Initially the contract was awarded to Daughters of Charity to roll out the programme with initial training input from the NCI. Daughters of Charity were unable to fulfil this role due to a number of factors including limited capacity due to staff turnover and staff on extended leave. As a result, the Daughters of Charity subcontracted to the NCI and this programme has been fully implemented by the NCI.

Consortium members expressed concerns in relation to a perceived lack of reporting as it was not always possible for a representative from the Daughters of Charity to attend Steering Group meetings which meant that there were limited updates communicated to the group. There were several meetings between the Daughters of Charity, DIT and the NCI at which NCI submitted and presented updates. However some consortium members have said that they did not feel sufficiently informed about developments and decisions that were being made in relation to the programme. They also raised some concerns in relation to a perceived lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making about PCHP.

There was disappointment expressed in the roll-out of the programme in the area. A view was expressed that this programme lacked a champion within the ABC Grangegorman structure. Given the organisational issues and the delay in beginning the programme, there was an extension granted.

“PCHP hasn’t been developed the way it was planned. There have been a lot of delays, it’s a pity, it’s been a gap, there are parents who needed it here”

“There was a very bureaucratic approach that wasn’t appropriate for a community development programme that’s just getting up and running”.

- **Recruitment of families**

While it had been planned that Daughters of Charity would recruit participant families, this was carried out by NCI staff by going to early years settings and schools and making themselves known in the area which has worked well. One participating parent reported seeing the leaflet in their local GP surgery.

There has been a drop-off of families for a range of reasons. Some drop-off has been due to children getting preschool or crèche places until 3.30pm at which time families felt it was too late to be accepting home visitors. Other families were experiencing a lot of interventions and it was reported that it became too much for them. Many families self-referred to home visitors, having heard about the benefits of the programme via word of mouth.

It was reported that the lead-in time for this programme was not long enough to inform people about what would be involved and build the level of trust that was needed. Some respondents have noted that trust was especially important to recruit participants for this programme as it involves going into people’s homes. It was mentioned that there was a disconnect between the Steering Group and those implementing the programme and that this impacted on recruitment. The consortium for the Docklands PCHP acts as a mechanism for referral and recruitment of families whereas NCI did not receive any referrals from the Grangegorman consortium.

Eight families expressed an interest in participating after the programme had got underway. There were concerns that they would not get the proper ‘dosage’ required by the programme and the ABC Grangegorman programme allocated resources to extend the timeframe as a result.

- **Recruitment of home visitors**

Daughters of Charity recruited potential home visitors for training which was delivered by NCI. However, relatively few of those trained applied to be home visitors. Of those that did, one person lost contact with the programme and another two did not pass the interview as they did not have sufficient references. As a result, NCI home visitors from the Docklands took over management of the programme in Dublin 7. This was not ideal as one of the aspects of the programme which is said to contribute to its success is that home visitors are from the local area. NCI home visitors have reported good engagement with parents and families in Dublin 7 and feedback from parents and families has been positive.

- **Suitability of PCHP for Grangegorman/ Dublin 7**

A minority of consortium partners questioned whether PCHP is suitable for Grangegorman/ Dublin 7, citing as a reason the perceived lack of cohesiveness in Dublin 7 in contrast to the Docklands. They also questioned the model and whether 92 home visits was appropriate for families in crisis. However, most participants felt that there was no reason that PCHP would be unsuitable for the area.

Suggestions for future development

- **Strengthen link between consortium and the implementation of PCHP**

It was suggested by the majority of participants that there needed to be much stronger connection between the Steering Group and the wider consortium and the implementation of PCHP as there was a sense that communication about developments and decision-making relating to this programme needed to be improved. Appropriate representation of PCHP at Steering Group and consortium levels would have benefits in terms of referral into the programme, as in other PCHP sites, and in terms of feedback regarding implementation and development.

- **Future development of PCHP**

NCI have committed to supporting the programme in Dublin 7 into the future regardless of ABC Grangegorman funding. Daughters of Charity have reported increased capacity in the form of a family support worker and a community development worker and they have advised that they are anticipating that Daughters of Charity would likely be in a position to coordinate this programme in the future.

1.2 Upskilling

The aim of the Upskilling Strand of the Grangegorman ABC Programme was to improve the quality and standard of service delivery in early years provider services in the Grangegorman area. It included:

- Developing and delivering a tailored Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme to upskill early childhood services staff to deliver Siolta (the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education) and Aistear (the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) to a high standard
- Building service capacity for evaluation
- Coordinating the delivery of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Levels 6 and 7 Childcare programmes in the Grangegorman area.

1.2.1 Upskilling Level 6 Early Childhood Care and Education

Overview

This course was aimed at participants with previous childcare training who wished to develop a career in childcare at Team Leader Level. Course participants already held a QQI Level 5 award in Childcare and were working at a suitable level in a childcare setting in the Grangegorman ABC Programme area. The course involved 8 modules and leads to a QQI award. Course modules included Early Childhood Curriculum; Child Development; Childhood Social, Legal and Health Studies; and Work Experience. Level 6 was delivered by Gateway with the support of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb).

Benefits

- **Professional and personal development of staff**

Staff mentioned having gained professionally and personally from doing the course:

“The managerial one was very interesting, it helped me with the paperwork, it was very useful, am using it”

"Am very glad I did it, something I thought I'd never do, it was worth it in the end"

"You get stuck in a rut, the training refreshes you and encourages you to try new things".

- **Additional knowledge and skills**

The fact that childcare settings received additional education on how to refer children to speech and language services and how to best support them while they were waiting for appointments was very welcome:

"A nurse came in to give advice on how to refer, this was really needed".

Information on regulations was also seen as important:

"Some of the stuff about child regulations we didn't know before, how not to jump to conclusions, how to assess".

- **Community-based upskilling**

The advantage of having training based in the community was mentioned by several participants:

"Training like this is a great thing to have in a community setting, instead of having to send someone to Marino, this can be repeated all over the country".

- **Positive impact on the children**

Childcare workers felt that the training had had a positive effect on the children:

"I'm using it now with the kids".

Challenges

- **Difficulties for childcare workers in completing the course**

Childcare workers and managers spoke of the difficulty in doing the course on Tuesday evenings and managing the assignments along with full-time work, their home lives and other commitments:

"It was very stressful, really hard, very time consuming, when you leave the class on the Tuesday night you have homework all week, it was out of hours, we got no time back"

"It was really hard fitting homework in with the rest of your life, with kids at home, cooking, cleaning, housework"

"It was very stressful, it should be done as part of your work day, you've no quality time with your children, I had to stop my volunteer work, I had to organise babysitters, most times I had to pay".

For some of the students, this course marked returning to education after many years and involved learning to write essays, type and use a computer:

"Am no good at computers, I found it pretty hard, I had to learn how to use a laptop and download stuff at 39 years of age with two kids and fulltime work and I'm a lone parent"

"It wasn't easy, it was tough, these women had no educational background, they're good childcare workers"

"So many times I wanted to drop out of it only for the girls wouldn't let me".

Some staff expressed resentment that due to regulations, they did not get any pay increase or promotion in their position as a result of completing the course and felt forced to undertake the training to remain in their current positions:

“There was no pay rise which was very disheartening, you’re doing it to keep your job, you’ve a gun to your head”

“The training was to keep them in their jobs. There is a sense that they’re shifting the goalposts in changing requirements regarding qualifications”.

- **Recruitment**

Some settings found it difficult to recruit their own staff to do the training:

“It was said that playgroups would get support and it was assumed this would be financial support. Then there was a realisation that this would be training support, this was welcome for the younger people but not the older ones with less than ten years to go in the service”

“The older people thought: ‘why would I want to take on more?’”

- **Support role of the community and perceived lack of recognition**

It was reported that the community organisation Gateway provided a lot of additional support which participants needed in order to complete the course and that this contribution had not been sufficiently recognised by the Grangegorman ABC programme. This support came in the form of literacy tutors, use of equipment and space and general coaching and support. Stakeholders mentioned the fact that they had either under-priced the services they provided or not priced them at all, with the result that they felt their input had gone unnoticed as it did not appear in the budget and they were not compensated for it:

“We didn’t benefit from the backfill because the women did the training at night”

“Training was extremely beneficial to them but they did it kicking and screaming, some of them had to do it to stay on as managers, local women deserved a chance to do this and they did it, but not without a struggle”

“The tutor was brilliant, she had the patience of a saint”

“Level 6 was great for staff and for the services, there was a lot of support needed for the women, it wouldn’t have happened without the support system provided by the community, this was never acknowledged”.

- **Implementation**

Some of the early years managers spoke of challenges in terms of implementing the learning and suggested that more support was needed to assist settings with this:

“More support is needed to implement learning in early years providers, there is a real gap there”.

- **Perceived lack of cultural sensitivity of assessment process**

The assessment that formed part of the Level 6 training was perceived by some childcare managers and staff to have been overly critical and out of touch with the realities the setting, staff and children were facing. Staff and managers reported feeling criticised without their work with the children being validated and that they experienced a decrease in confidence as a result:

“We were observed for 10 weeks – she said she was there to observe but she was really critical, I’ve been here for 12-13 years and she made me not want to come here, she said I was nit-picking, I was nervous, you’re watching every little thing you say”

“She said she was there to observe but she only told us what we were doing wrong. She wouldn’t boost you, wouldn’t tell you what you were doing right”¹

“It’s made me less confident, more fearful of all the regulations”

“By no means did I feel more confident. It makes you question yourself, it’s not natural, instead of being there to nurture you think is that right? Should I say that? I’ll look it up. This is a community crèche. The children need to feel secure, this needs to be a happy, inviting environment, what they go home to is not. It’s made us question ourselves”.

Childcare staff reported dealing with crisis situations and that many of the children in their setting came from extremely troubled home situations with many of the parents reported to be living with acute substance abuse problems. There were very serious concerns expressed in relation to perceived neglect of the children in their home lives. The staff felt that some of the behavioural issues and the ways in which they worked with the children needed to be seen and understood contextually in light of the social issues present. Some staff expressed frustration that the training and subsequent assessment did not address the realities of working in a disadvantaged community setting like theirs. They said that it did not address the issues that they are facing, including how to deal with emotional attachment to children who may be in abusive situations.

Feedback mentioned a lack of positive affirmation or validation and that assessors were adopting a tick-box approach rather than a qualitative assessment on the relational needs of the children, some of whose basic needs were reportedly not being met at home. Staff spoke about feeling uninformed by Tusla in situations where they were concerned for children’s safety:

“How do you detach yourself from what you see? You bring your work home with you, that’s hard. There was nothing in the course about emotional detachment. When a child is referred to Tusla, we may have gone to Meitheal meetings for two years and then we get no updates. We send in reports with our concerns, they don’t respond to my emails, they say it’s none of our business, we’re seeing the child every day”

“They don’t understand these children and what their home lives are like. Children are being given clothes by the staff”

“The children run in that door and that’s the most important thing. You know they don’t get out again when they go home. We’re the consistent thing in their lives, they put their head on you and tell you about the monsters, when they have night terrors”

Staff carrying out observations or assessments may benefit from being made more aware of the cultural and social issues relating to the settings and the staff they are assessing in the same way that there is cultural competence training available for DEIS schools.

- **Bureaucracy**

Some participants involved with the coordination and delivery of this programme noted that the paperwork and financial reporting had been overly onerous. This is discussed in Section 2.

¹ It is not clear which member of staff carrying our observations or assessment this refers to

- **Perceived value of the training**

Some views were expressed that the training had either not taught them anything new or had taught them things that they felt they did not need to know and that the money would have been better spent on the childcare setting itself and facilities and resources for the children. There was some resentment expressed that regulations have been introduced that call for all room leaders to have at least a Level 6 qualification to remain in their position. Some staff (4) felt that they had been forced to do the training, at their own cost given that it took place on Tuesday evenings and some had to pay for childcare, and that it had not led to a promotion or any positive change in circumstances for them.

“None of us benefited, it was stuff that I didn’t really need to know”

“It was a waste of time, nothing new. They should put money into the crèche”.

More general issues on the subject of value for money are discussed in Section 2.

Suggestions for future development

- **More direct funding of childcare settings**

Feedback was given that childcare settings in the area are in need of direct funds to upgrade their equipment and toys:

“We need resources and that’s why we signed up to ABC, we didn’t know that all the funding was going to be spent on training”

“They should put money into the kids. I’d love to see them have a treehouse”

“Direct support is needed for early years settings, they are on their knees, they have small boards of management that are not equipped to deal with everything they are dealing with”.

- **Support to implement learning**

The majority of participants reported that there is a gap in terms of implementing the learning and that early years providers need to be supported in doing this. This is further discussed in Section 3.

The Level 6 upskilling is currently being mainstreamed through a partnership between CDETB and Gateway.

1.2.2 Upskilling Level 7 Aistear and Siolta Childcare Programme

Overview

This course was aimed at staff and managers who already had a Level 6 qualification and were working at a suitable level in the area. The course was designed to develop students’ understanding of the National Curriculum Framework “Aistear”, and the National Quality Framework “Siolta”. The programme was delivered over 18 months from September 2015 and involved class contact, tutorials and a practice portfolio.

Level 7 was delivered in the Grangegorman Campus by DIT, with a view to awarding students with a certificate from DIT and credits for future study. 24 local staff participated. A further 3-day management

programme was offered to service managers. The focus was on evaluation methods, as well as support strategies for participating staff.

Benefits

- **Additional knowledge and skills**

Additional skills were reported by participants in terms of record-keeping and standards for curriculum assessment:

“I finally understood what to do regarding record-keeping”

“We had our first curriculum assessment and we did well – 3 goods and 1 very good – because of the Level 7 module. It made younger ones who had done the training feel really good, they felt really confident about it. And the attitude changed among the older ones, it was really affirming, sharing the knowledge. If we hadn’t done the Aistear and Siolta module I dread where we would have been. All the work on plans, observations, collating documents in child’s folder, all that work really came out”.

- **Increased confidence of staff and better working relationships**

Participants and their managers reported increased confidence and better working relationships:

“It rejuvenated us, the staff are more enthusiastic, we’re working together more”

“It gave me assurance that what we’re doing is right. I’ve been doing it for years but it’s good to get confirmation”

“They really enjoyed Level 7”

“It’s not all about educating them, it’s about giving them an understanding of what they’re giving to the children, about looking at what’s best for the children and how they can help”.

- **Positive impact on children**

Positive impact on the children was reported as a result of the increased confidence and skills of staff. It was also mentioned that in the absence of assessments or while children are waiting for assessments, staff are better equipped to support them:

“We give the children more free time, more creative playtime which has benefited them, they get more into it, we use smaller groups more now for activities”

“We’re better at giving them less structured stuff now. We’re more tuned into them, more led by stuff they say rather than working off the list of stuff we always did”

“Children are not being assessed in the inner city but because of the girls’ training they’re seeing things earlier, children have a head start going to school”.

Challenges

- **Insufficient administrative support**

There was reportedly insufficient administrative support for this course which resulted in significant delays for the registration, certification and graduation of students.

The delivery of the module began before the validation was completed which was reported to have taken considerable time. There were administrative issues regarding the registration of students involved and this took almost the full 18 months which the module ran for. The students did not receive student cards until their last three weeks. This meant that they did not have access to the library or DIT's computer facilities. There were also issues scanning in and out of rooms due to the lack of cards. It was felt that in addition to the practical issues mentioned, the delay in registration had a negative impact on the motivation of the students and on the relationship between those delivering the module and the students as they were repeatedly promising that registration would happen and this did not come to pass. Some felt that this had impeded the delivery of the course, given that most of the students had not been to university, student cards and the use of DIT facilities would have been important and would likely have led to increased enthusiasm in the module and their assignments.

Delays were also reported in relation to the certification of students on completion of the module due to the fact that the correct information about the students had not been collected prior to the delivery of the course and there were difficulties obtaining this information afterwards. A graduation ceremony has been delayed and is planned to take place in October 2017.

- **Length of module**

The module consisted of 10 ECTS spread over three semesters over 18 months which was felt to have been too spread out as it was reportedly difficult to maintain momentum and interest, especially in the third semester.

- **Appropriateness for the students**

It was mentioned that some students benefited more from the module than others. It was reported that some students had lower literacy levels which made understanding the material more challenging. Some students were in the process of completing their Level 5 but had not yet completed it:

"It was a stretch; there were lower literacy levels and some students benefited more than others. Some of the students didn't have a Level 5".

- **Implementation**

It was reported that the majority of students had difficulties implementing the learning in their sites. Only some of the staff in each site had done the module and there was significant reluctance reported on the part of managers and other more senior staff to take suggested changes on board. One preschool manager spoke of their disappointment that the staff member had not been able to implement more of what they learned on the module. They said that there had been a lot of resistance to change and that the staff member who did the module had not been the room leader which had caused issues with more senior staff.

Some students reported that their managers who had not done Level 7 refused to allow them to implement changes while some prohibited them taking their notebooks into DIT for assignments despite the fact that names of the children were not used to comply with data protection. This was essential for some of the participative tasks within the module and limited the extent to which the students could complete the required activities. While an attempt was made to engage managers, this was done after the delivery of the module and only one manager from the settings attended.

"Only some of the staff did it so it was difficult to implement"

"It can be hard to implement things, it can be younger versus older"

“Some of the managers wouldn’t have had the knowledge about Aistear and Siolta and they felt threatened and excluded the students that had done the module, this impeded implementation”.

- **Sustainability**

Staff turnover was seen as a barrier to sustainability:

“People that do Level 7 leave to go to other better jobs which is great for them but inner city people wanting to stay in their environment should be prioritised. It’s rewarding for them to know that they’re at the highest level and giving as much back to the children as they can”.

Suggestions for future development

It was felt that a lot of the issues that arose in relation to validation and registration would likely not arise again if the module was to be repeated.

- **Engage managers earlier**

It was suggested that there should be a workshop with the managers before the delivery of the module to ensure their buy-in and support.

- **Extend the training**

Participants called for the training to be extended to cover more modules:

“The staff need part-time and low budget training”

“Community playgroups will not get higher capitation without higher skills, community workers can’t afford to pay for their training, they would love to go on further but they can’t because they can’t afford training”.

- **Suitability of DIT to deliver this module**

Some felt that DIT was not the most appropriate place to deliver this module and that vocational colleges may be more appropriate for its delivery.

1.3 Referral Pathways

Overview

The Referral Pathways strand of the programme aimed to improve interagency working in terms of referrals and transitions to different settings and provide non-formal upskilling. Referrals include speech and language therapy, psychological services, physiotherapy, and a variety of education and development-related services. Following research carried out by Grangegorman ABC which found gaps in referral pathways for 0-6 year olds in the Grangegorman area between the ages of 3 and 5 years after children leave the care of public health nurses and before they start school, the strand has focused on:

- Upskilling, supporting and building the capacity of early years staff in the Grangegorman area to engage in and support referrals

- Piloting a programme within the Grangegorman area to support the transition of children from early years' services to primary schools
- Ensuring that Grangegorman ABC implements best practice in terms of referral processes, interagency working and cooperation within ABC programme interventions to ensure that any referrals made into or out of the programme are appropriate, high quality and meet the needs of the children involved.

The Referral Pathways working group included representation from local schools, community organisations, Tusla, and the Grangegorman Development Agency.

Benefits

- **Development of the Transitions programme and Stepping Up document**

It was noted that the practice of pre-school settings linking with primary schools was something that had been happening in the community for some years and that this had been formalised and extended as part of the referral pathways work of the ABC programme. The programme funded backfill for staff to visit preschool and primary school settings and to go on an outing so that they could get to know the children. While preschools had been going to primary schools it was a new development for primary school staff to visit preschools. Stakeholders said that it is especially important in the context of children with additional needs or who may be from difficult home situations that schools know what to look out for and can get the required supports in place ahead of time. It was also useful for early years staff to be briefed on the national primary school curriculum.

"The backfill to have a day to meet the junior infants teachers has been very helpful"

"There is a woman who comes here to collect her child and three days out of five she is too drunk for me to give her the child. The school needs to know what to look out for. There are families you would be concerned about"

"This has been the most cost-effective work within ABC in my opinion and it is delivering".

- **Non-formal upskilling**

Two seminars on speech and language and psychological services were provided to staff and were well received.

- **Preparation of a draft document outlining an overall framework for referral within the ABC programme**

This document was described as a very important step in terms of furthering interagency working and collaboration in the area.

- **Provision of a forum to discuss interventions**

Given the fact that the Interventions working group did not function, the Referral Pathways working group was described as having provided a space to share learning and experience from the interventions as they were being implemented:

"It was filling the gap left by the Interventions working group".

Challenges

- **Difficulties obtaining budget to support parents**

It was reported that it had been difficult to obtain approval for additional budget for childcare which would enable parents to attend a workshop to share learning from the 2016 pilot before the 2017 roll-out of the Transitions programme. The requirements were perceived as unduly onerous. It was essential that parents used registered childcare which was acceptable, however, it was also required that they prove the need for childcare in the first place and this was seen as overly burdensome and impractical.

- **Time constraints and lack of responses from parents**

Some preschools reported that that the Stepping Up document was time-consuming to fill in and that the paperwork often did not come back filled in from parents, especially from parents for whom English is a second language or who may be dealing with problems in their home lives. Some felt that parents tended to exclude any information about their child that might be perceived as negative.

- **Staff turnover**

Another challenge mentioned was that teachers can leave and move around and in some cases the teacher that children met on the visit to the school in June was not the teacher who took their class due to changes in staff.

Suggestions for future development

- **Link with other schools**

The view was expressed that there was a need to link with other schools, given that an increasing number of parents were choosing to send their children to schools other than their local feeder 'stepping up' schools. Some staff felt that the fact that other schools were not included meant that the children were not all benefitting from the Transitions programme in the same way.

"Five out of eleven children are going to schools we link with, the rest of them are going to schools we don't. We need to link with other schools, all of the children deserve the same service and we need to ask why children are not going to their local schools?"

Section 2: Thematic findings

Having looked in depth at the programme-specific feedback in relation to the nine programmes, this section discusses some general themes relating to the process of developing and implementing the ABC Grangegorman programme which were raised during the consultations. These have been organised in terms of perceived benefits and challenges. It is particularly useful to frame this discussion in terms of the stated aims of the ABC programme nationally and the ABC Grangegorman programme more specifically, as stated in the Background section at the beginning of this report. To recap, these aims include to:

- Improve outcomes for children, young people and their families experiencing poverty, with particular emphasis on improving health, educational and social outcomes for children and young people, and on improving the effectiveness of existing services for them
- Establish effective governance structures and processes to progress specific areas of work in line with the desired outcomes and work plan for the ABC programme
- Improve interagency collaboration and cooperation
- Build, consolidate and expand sustainable relationships, networks and cooperation between statutory and non-statutory organisations in the area
- Listen to the voices of the community and of service providers and work together to find solutions.

Findings discussed in Sections 1 and 2 are summarised in Section 3 on Key Learning. Recommendations for future development are discussed in Section 4.

2.1 Benefits

This section discusses the perceived benefits of the programme under the following headings:

- Positive impact for stakeholders
- Consortium model and membership
- Contribution of DIT
- Relationships formed in the community
- Information sharing.

- **Positive impact on stakeholders**

In addition to the detailed positive feedback on the programmes discussed in the previous section, there were general views and comments citing the positive impact that the ABC Grangegorman programme has had on the stakeholders including the children, parents, teachers, childcare staff and community organisations in the area. Satisfaction levels were high among interviewees and participants in focus groups with 53 out of 55 participants saying that the programme as a whole had been a worthwhile experience that had benefited themselves, their colleagues, the children they teach and care for and the wider community:

- All of the teachers (11) and principals (2) felt that the programmes had had positive benefits for teachers, parents, children and the school as a whole
- Childcare managers (5) and staff (5) also said that their participation had been a positive experience and had benefited them, the children and the childcare setting in general

- Two public health nurses and one public health manager (3) felt that IY Baby had been a good programme which had benefited them and enhanced their ability to do their job, as well as having benefited the parents who took part and their children who showed early signs of improvements in terms of meeting their developmental milestones
- All of the parents (12) interviewed had high satisfaction levels and reported benefits for themselves and their children from their participation with the programmes. Parents had participated in IY Baby, IY Basic Parenting, PCHP and Doodle Den
- Twelve representatives from 11 community organisations said that while there had been challenges, the programme had benefited the local community.

“Under the circumstances it was a good programme, it has benefited the community. The funding has brought opportunity into the area”

“Children are getting interventions that they weren’t getting before”

“The North West is often seen as the poor relation, this was important as a boost for the area and for capacity-building for the organisations”.

- **Consortium model and membership**

The consortium model was mentioned as a strength in that it was considered to be a very inclusive model which facilitated accessibility and involvement at a number of levels in the community. The fact that the membership of the consortium included a wide range of sectors and expertise was also considered a significant asset and a factor in the success of the programme.

- **Contribution of DIT**

The contribution of DIT was acknowledged to have been central in terms of the capacity to undertake the requisite administration related to programme management that would not have been possible within existing community organisations. The DIT Ethics Committee was mentioned as a benefit for the ABC programme in Grangegorman as it provided an ethical oversight for the work:

“Without DIT, this wouldn’t have happened, I think everyone accepts this”

“It had to be DIT, there was no partnership in Dublin 7 and it was too big a job for any community organisation in the area”

“DIT should remain as a strong partner, it’s a national education centre of excellence that is evolving and developing, it needs to be a part of it but not necessarily the lead”.

- **Relationships formed in the community**

While there have been weaknesses reported in the area of community engagement which are discussed below, it was also stated that there had been connections made and that given the short timeframe of the programme it had made progress which could be built on:

“The general experience in the community has been a good one, the work has begun to make connections and there are enough people willing to go to the next phase”.

- **Information sharing**

It was felt by most participants that the programme has been successful in terms of enabling better sharing of information in the community and has added a sense of coherence to the range of activities undertaken and services provided by the various organisations and agencies:

“Before it was always difficult to know who was doing what and this wide group has worked together quite effectively”

“We now know what’s going on and what’s happening in schools for example, and we can tell families when we’re calling around”

“You can copycat, you don’t have to reinvent the wheel. People are learning from you too”.

2.2 Challenges

This section discusses challenges and barriers to the implementation of the programme under the headings of governance, programme implementation, anti-poverty focus, value for money, community voice, and interagency cooperation and collaboration.

2.2.1 Governance

It would appear that many of the issues and challenges around governance were as a result of a clash of cultures whereby the more corporate culture and operational requirements of DIT as a large institution clashed with the expressed needs of the community for increased flexibility and responsiveness. It is important to note that the initial work involved in putting the application and proposal together to obtain funding, as well as the subsequent reporting requirements to Pobal, meant that the involvement of DIT as the lead to take on administration and coordination was essential as all participants said that the community did not have the capacity to assume this role. This issue of the lack of capacity of local groups to obtain funding is a significant barrier in terms of development at local level. There were several challenges reported in relation to the area of governance, including the initial developmental process, governance structures, reporting processes and sustainability.

- **Initial developmental process**

Participants reported finding the process to develop the governance structures **time-consuming and challenging**. Some felt that the amount of time spent on this stage had impeded the development and implementation of the programme. It was also stated that there had been an excessive focus on governance which had taken away from a potential focus on sustainability and strategic planning regarding what the intended outcomes of the programme and its legacy would be. Some participants felt ill-equipped to discuss governance structures and were not interested in this aspect of the programme:

“Year 1 was all about developing governance and legal structures; it bored a lot of people, and intimidated and alienated them”

“There were three hour meetings on governance, it took a full year, it was a drain on our time”

“Service delivery took up the least amount of time, governance took most of my time and energy”.

Some consortium members and stakeholders felt that governance processes were hindered by a **lack of previously established relationships and different ways of working**. The corporate structure of DIT was experienced as inflexible in contrast to more flexible community structures:

“DIT had an inflexible corporate structure whereas community structure is more responsive and flexible”

“Before ABC, there was no working relationship, there had been some projects but they weren’t very successful, they didn’t really lead to much integration”.

- **Governance structures**

In general, the **consortium model** was seen to have worked well and was praised for its inclusiveness. Some felt that involvement in the model had been overly demanding of their time:

“The model was inclusive, the issue was inclusion versus accessibility, people were included but sometimes didn’t feel knowledgeable enough for the conversations at the development of governance stage”.

Challenges discussed relating to the **Steering Group** were mainly concerned with its make-up, which was seen to under-represent the community and not be sufficiently linked to programme implementation. This seems to have been compounded by the fact the working groups were not developed as had been planned:

“Very few on the Steering Group have anything to do with the programmes”.

Some members of the Steering Group felt that there was a lack of transparency or a lack of sufficient explanation of the issues discussed at meetings. It was reported that there was a lack of clarity in relation to decision-making procedures, in particular relating to spending of budget:

“We’d be told in meetings that there was money left over but it seemed like it wasn’t necessarily getting to the community”.

It was intended that there would be five **working groups** set up to discuss issues relating to **interventions, upskilling, referral pathways, sustainability and evaluation**. This did not happen and the only working group that was reported to have functioned well was the working group on **referral pathways**, which benefited from having a member of staff seconded from the Grangegorman Development Agency to do some of its scoping research. An opinion was expressed in relation to the **interventions working group** that it was not required following the appointment of the Project Coordinator, however the majority of participants felt that there was a need for this working group as a forum to discuss the implementation of the programmes and any issues that were arising. In the absence of this, matters were referred to the Steering Group which was reported to have caused delays in resolving issues relating to the implementation of the programmes.

In one case, the Chair of a Working Group opted not to accept a position on the Steering Group to report back as was intended in the reporting model. This was carried out by another member of the group who was also a member of the Steering Group and some felt that this confused the role of the Chair and had implications for effective communication between the working group and the Steering Group. Another reported issue relating to the non-functioning of the working groups was that the DIT ABC team had not been in a position to service them due to being understaffed and that had more secretarial or project development resources been available it may have been an improvement. This issue of staffing and the workload of ABC staff is also addressed below under programme implementation issues:

“There was no forum to discuss any of the issues”

“The interventions working group had five pages of terms of reference and it met once, there was a gap. There was no forum to share learning, experience, or to raise issues. The referral pathways working group became a space for people to bring stuff to while the Interventions working group fell by the wayside”

“There was no way the Steering Group could deal with the nitty gritty of the programmes, it wasn’t practical”.

In terms of the **number and content of the meetings**, it was felt that there had been a requirement to attend an excessive number of meetings and that there were varying levels of capacity and engagement, with some people feeling that they were not suited or qualified for the content of discussion at these meetings:

“There were too many meetings, we didn’t have the time to go”

“DIT don’t know the reality of how under-resourced community organisations are”

“The ABC meetings were a little over my head, when it comes to running the ABC programme, I don’t know what I can bring to it. I’m only seeing what I can gain for the community. We don’t have expertise to talk about the organisation of the ABC programme, all we can say is what we need for our community”.

- **Reporting processes**

Reporting requirements and due diligence were seen by participants as overly onerous:

“It was very onerous, there was a lot of paperwork”

“I was unprepared for the due diligence, it was always a scramble to get documents into DIT, and we got no support from them with this”

“I was anxious about liability and legal issues, we were answerable, Pobal were going to audit at some stage”

“Interventions were no hassle to us but the due diligence was very difficult”.

Bureaucracy was repeatedly mentioned as an issue which had been challenging in terms of the development and governance of the programme. Some felt that the bureaucracy of governance structures and its requirements had impeded the delivery of the programme. Others pointed out that DIT also had to comply with Pobal’s governance and reporting processes as well as their own requirements and that this was time-consuming:

“The process to set up governance structures at the start may have been painful for some but was necessary. If you don’t set guidelines you are open to criticism. Pobal puts a challenge to whoever is delivering the programme and DIT as a large organisation had their own processes and procedures”

“DIT was very rigid and bureaucratic, the governance structures put pressure on delivery”.

“It’s not sustainable, the volume of governance work, the Pobal requirements are over-cumbersome, they should be simplified”.

- **Sustainability and integrating learning**

It was reported that there had been a lack of reflective practices and that programmes were rolled out without sufficient focus on monitoring or reviewing how they were developing and what was or was not working. It was felt that plans around implementation were often not regularly reviewed and revised. The perception that sustainability had not been appropriately incorporated into the initial governance process and decision-making about the remit and focus of the programme was raised as an issue. It was also felt that work plans to deliver programmes should have also included a focus on what the intended outcomes might be and what changes might be implemented in the community through the consortium following the two year delivery of the programmes:

“I’m sceptical about two year programmes coming into an area, there’s always a flurry at the end – how are we going to sustain this? Sustainability work should have been built into the programme as part of a wider strategy for the area. It should have been part and parcel of the ABC from the beginning”

“We haven’t asked ourselves if it’s working. This isn’t straightforward, the nuts and bolts of implementing programmes in a different place and context”.

There was also a perceived gap in terms of identifying and integrating learning. In November 2016, Barnardos conducted an **interim review of consortium members who were not members of the Steering Group**, which focused on communications processes and views on sustainability. The review found that communication processes were poor and inconsistent and should be improved. The findings also cited the perception of consortium members that the workload was challenging and that this would be an issue for the sustainability of the work. The review also highlighted criticism among consortium members in relation to governance, particularly the leadership provided by DIT, the support provided by ABC staff and the perceived lack of transparency in decision-making and allocation of funding. A perceived lack of recognition of the contribution of the community also featured in the findings. A lack of trust was reported and interagency cooperation was identified as an area that needed to be improved on. Most participants reported as a matter of concern that there were no any actions following this review:

“I’m not sure that anything changed after the Barnardos report, I don’t think it’s been used at all”.

2.2.2 Programme implementation

This section discusses the various challenges that were reported in relation to the development and implementation of the programme. Challenges are discussed under the headings of choice of programmes and age range, bureaucracy, support and forum to discuss issues, financial management and budgets, human resources, and communications and data management.

- **Choice of programmes and age range**

Feedback was given that in the absence of any needs analysis exercise having been carried out prior to the selection of programmes, the programmes had not been sufficiently tailored to the needs of the area. Others commented that had they known enough about the programmes at the beginning they may not have selected them. The age range was also seen as inappropriate, given the lack of supports for older children:

“We may not have picked all of them in hindsight”

“There wasn’t enough hands-on work with parents and children”

“The 0-6 range was very short-sighted”.

Issues were raised by participants in the consultations in relation to **evidence based and evidence informed programmes**. The aforementioned lack of a needs analysis raised concerns that the programmes were not necessarily selected in response to identified local needs. Other issues raised related to their cost, effectiveness, sustainability, inflexibility, appropriateness for the local and national contexts and the fact that they were perceived as not acknowledging the role of community workers as practitioners. The cost of evidence based programmes was criticised, especially the costs incurred in supervision and accreditation. One community organisation stated that their board of management had

decided not to pursue the option of accreditation for their staff who were doing the training once they learned of the additional fees as they did not consider it ethical:

"I wonder why we are buying in expensive programmes from America when there are Irish ones we could have used"

"It should have been demand-led, organic as it is elsewhere in Ireland, people would have participated more"

"We took the programmes we had to take, maybe we wouldn't have gone with the 'off the shelf' programmes except that that's what the funders wanted".

Some respondents questioned the effectiveness of the programmes, highlighting the fact that they are not delivered in isolation and that other factors should be included in evaluating their success, including the social and economic context of the person or child, whether or not they are in receipt of other services or interventions, and whether or not the training is delivered by someone that they have a relationship with already, such as in a community setting. Some also felt that the content and structure of the SDQs was not appropriate to the situations of some of the parents they worked with or their relationships with their children. Frustration was expressed that there had not been a forum in which these concerns could be raised and discussed:

"The SDQs are not an accurate reflection of the person's relationship with their child. We had a mother who was only out of prison a few weeks and the SDQ asked how she felt about her children after a long and difficult day at work, this didn't relate to her situation"

It was felt that the role of a known and trusted person such as a community worker as practitioner was not acknowledged as having any impact on the success of the intervention:

"It's as if you're being told to forget the relationship you have with the parents that has got them into that room, it's very patronising"

"The relationship with the person is what gets them to sit in the room and take part in the first place, that shows progress in itself".

The extent of fidelity to the programmes which was required was frustrating to many respondents who felt that they could have developed a more nuanced programme to address the specific needs of their target group. Issues relating to inflexibility and sustainability were also raised in terms of staff turnover in schools and within community organisations:

"We're not allowed train other staff"

"It is very cult-like, fidelity to the programme, they told us we had to spend €40 on their posters, we made our own and did it better. We've been taking programmes from all over the world and adapting them to our needs for years".

The lack of longitudinal research of programmes was mentioned with some participants suggesting that American programmes were being chosen because they were in English rather than because they met national or local needs:

"We're picking stuff from the US because they speak English, I'm not sure if it is suited to our own needs"

"We should look at places other than English speaking for inspiration".

Feedback about the programmes' content and resources included some criticism that they were inappropriate to the local and national context and background of participants:

"At the end of the days, it's an American programme, I think programmes have to be tailored to the clientele"

“We should develop Ireland-specific models”.

As mentioned in the Section 1, parents’ feedback also cited out-dated and culturally inappropriate resources, particularly relating to IY Basic Parenting, which did not always speak to their experience.

- **Support and a forum to discuss issues**

As mentioned above, the fact that the working groups on interventions, upskilling and sustainability were not considered to have functioned well was raised as a major challenge in relation to programme implementation and impeded capacity to share learning. It was also reported that more support and mentorship from the DIT ABC team would have been welcomed by some of those involved in programme implementation.

- **Bureaucracy**

Bureaucracy was also mentioned as an issue in terms of programme development and implementation. In particular, a lack of flexibility, slow response rate to issues and the late arrival of resources were cited as barriers to the smooth running of the programmes. Bureaucracy was also mentioned in relation to financial management of the programmes which is discussed below:

“Everything very slow, they had to get sign-off from the Steering Group before going to Pobal, there was no picking up the phone and sorting the problem out”

“There was no flexibility on start date, this caused problems, and there was a lot of tension”.

- **Financial management and budgets**

Frustrations were expressed with the DIT’s financial management processes and requirements. Participants from community organisations were critical of the way in which some resources and costs were expected to be pre-funded by community organisations and then funded by DIT once payment had been recorded and claimed. This was an issue for under-funded organisations, some of which did not have extensive petty cash facilities or have the use of a credit card. In one case, the personal credit card of a staff member were used to purchase resources and this was reported to have caused considerable stress. The issue of funding childcare for parents was a particular challenge in that DIT sought to register parents as suppliers which was perceived as time-consuming and impractical.

“It took them nine months to get puppets from America”

“Materials came in very slowly, we had to make financial projections and the funding didn’t come through until ages after the resources were bought. It was very stressful”

“It was difficult to get funding promised through ABC, there was a delay in resources, people had to buy their own resources”

“They wanted to register parents as suppliers, DIT is a huge financial system, it doesn’t do flexibility”.

- **Time pressure and workload**

Most participants in the consultations felt that the time allocated for setting up governance structures had negatively impacted on programme development and implementation as there was limited time and it was a rush to get things up and running:

“Governance took so long that there was almost no time to explain to schools what the programme was about, there was lots of confusion. It was a lot more work than they had envisaged. It was May before calls went out for involvement in the programmes”

“It was so rushed, there was a lot of time pressure. They had to sign up the last day of term”

“Funding was so tight and timeframes so squeezed, it was too tight to do things properly, there were unrealistic expectations”

“What I would say about ABC is rush, rush, rush. It was a rush to get the application in, a rush to get interventions started, it caused a lot of problems, people felt railroaded”

“There was pressure to get people on courses without looking enough at whether they were the right people or children”.

Participants reported that the aspirations and required workload for the ABC programme had been unrealistic:

“There is no point pretending that we knew what we were about, we were doing something new and we didn’t have a sense at the beginning that it was unrealistic”

“There was a lack of understanding of how much work would be required; it was a lot of work coordinating and this had been difficult to gauge at the beginning”

“ABC aspirations were too high, there is a deficit of community infrastructure in Grangegorman, community organisations are paralysed, there is no time to do strategic work”.

Human resources were cited as problematic in terms of programme coordination. There were initially three members of staff employed within DIT and this has been reduced to two. There has been a high turnover of staff, with recruitment and retention stated as having been challenging.²The administration role has remained vacant for long periods over the two years of the programme. There had been requests for more staff to be employed and this was not possible. Inconsistency in ABC staff was a recurring theme mentioned by consortium organisations that saw it as halting progress and bringing about a stop-start approach to implementation:

“There was a high turnover of staff in DIT which meant a lot of inconsistency”

“I think it was problematic to extend contracts so retention of staff has been a problem”

“It can take 3-4 months to recruit someone, they don’t do fast turnaround in DIT”

“It took a long time to replace someone, this meant they stopped and started things and it made DIT seem distant from it all and caught up with the red tape”.

There were reports that administration had been under-resourced and that this had limited capacity to carry out more strategic work.

“The administration support hasn’t been filled consistently, they are understaffed, all their time goes into governance rules”.

- **Communications and data management**

Most participants felt that **communications to consortium members** could be improved to ensure that correspondence and updates are more tailored for the recipient:

“I feel informed but normally the emails are not relevant”.

² Lack of clarity relates to roles, not funding

The interim review carried out by Barnardos in 2016 found a need to further develop poor and inconsistent communication processes to ensure they are consistent and balance the timely provision of updates with reducing the amount of emails or communications. Principals and preschool and crèche managers have reported that it is difficult to answer emails or take calls during working hours, many of whom do not have any email access during the working day. A lack of capacity was also reported in relation to ability to attend meetings among early years settings and staff from community organisations.

Views expressed on the subject of **promotional communication of the Grangegorman ABC programme** were varied, with some feeling that there should have been more promotion activities and others seeing this as taking away from resources that would be better spent directly on children and their families in the community. It was felt by some that more developed promotion of the work of the programme and the gaps it has highlighted would feed into an advocacy strategy to alert policymakers to the needs of the area:

“There was no communications strategy at first, no logo and a sense that it doesn’t matter if anyone knows who’s doing this”

“We could sell the benefits more, in terms of what the wins are for end users, this has been a weakness”.

Data management is an area that could be improved on. There is a lack of data in terms of the numbers of engagements that have been made with stakeholders in the area and the monitoring and reporting of the engagement that has been achieved through the programmes. It has been reported that it was difficult to address this issue of data collection and data management due to a lack of adequate staffing.

2.2.3 Anti-poverty focus

ABC Grangegorman: Vision Beyond Poverty is the official name of the programme and it was a common theme among participants that the **anti-poverty focus** had at times been lost and the programme had not been perceived as sufficiently focused on targeting the most vulnerable and marginalised groups within the area and on alleviating the negative effects of poverty and inequality:

“ABC became more aimed at school services rather than community services”

“There wasn’t enough consultation at the beginning asking what would be the most helpful. ABC is part of an anti-poverty programme and is meant to involve the most vulnerable children”

“There was a lack of a clear rationale for who should benefit, who should be recruited”.

Some felt that the programme’s focus on training initiatives had reinforced some existing unequal dynamics and relationships:

“We were working to break down the barriers but funneling all this money to professionals and only a drop getting down to the people who need it most”

“ABC was supposed to reduce the effect of poverty, instead it was oriented toward spending a huge part of its funding on professional training and accreditation”.

2.2.4 Value for money

Concerns were raised about the issue of value for money, with many participants feeling that money was not put to its best use in terms of addressing poverty and making an impact on children and families in the community. The cost of training and accreditation was also mentioned in relation to cost effectiveness.

"I would have liked more money for the programmes, it would have went a lot further to help more people, a lot of it was soaked up in employing people"

"The money could have been spent wiser and better, it's not reaching large numbers".

Some reservations were voiced with regard to the costs incurred in DIT's role as lead and coordinator of the Level 7 upskilling:

"Level 7 which was provided by DIT came in a lot more expensive, it's frustrating".

A significant element in the discussion of value for money was concern regarding the expense of the evidence based programmes discussed above.

2.2.5 Community voice

The perceived lack of **community voice** was a repeated theme among participants in the consultations. 'Community voice' in this context is taken to refer to the incorporation of the values and views of members of the local community and those that work with community-led organisations or services. Participants who perceived a lack of community voice were members of community organisations and staff from agencies providing community-led services in the area.

The decision to use 'Grangegorman' in the title of the programme was criticised by a number of participants:

"It shouldn't have been called 'Grangegorman', it's not a residential area as such, very few people live there"

"There's nothing there, people from Dublin 7 have no reason to go up the hill, people don't identify with the programme".

Some participants also criticised the fact the programme was based in DIT:

"It should be moved so ABC is based in the community, while still led by DIT, rather than being seen to be part of an institution".

Other views from staff of community organisations expressed a sense of a lack of ownership and input:

"The community don't feel ownership of it. They're told that it has to be this way because of DIT or Pobal requirements"

"We felt ignored"

"There is a lack of transparency, a lack of community voice. DIT don't speak the language of community development, they don't understand it".

The lack of a needs analysis or consultation process about the needs and preferences of the community was felt to be a significant factor in the lack of community voice and the perception that local needs were not being met:

"There wasn't enough consultation at the start and the liaison with the community has been weak".

It was felt by many participants from community organisations that the extent of the work carried out by the community had largely gone unnoticed and unrecognised:

"A hell of a lot of credit needs to go to the community sector, they gave a lot of extra support that was needed and this wasn't acknowledged"

"In the community sector, we were giving our time free. I gave a lot of hours, I don't begrudge them for a second but we under-estimated the cost".

2.2.6 Interagency working

The extent to which the ABC programme has achieved its aim of improving interagency cooperation and collaboration was questioned. Many participants felt that poor relationships had had an impact on service delivery, largely due to a clash in ways of working and a perceived lack of trust. The processes that DIT operates under were perceived as overly bureaucratic, compared with the more flexible and responsive ways of working in the community. This was especially so when it came to governance procedures and financial reporting which were perceived as overly onerous. It was also felt that DIT were not as familiar with community development and what was happening on the ground. Some felt that due to the lack of a needs analysis, the ABC programme had not been sufficiently informed about activities which were already taking place and that there was some duplication as a result:

“We have ignored the interagency work”

“What ABC has successfully done is brought together diverse expertise but there is still a lot of tension within the group”

“DIT are unaware of how things work on the ground in the community”

“It was always going to be difficult with DIT and the community, when it came to budgets, returns, the bureaucracy of a big institution kicked in, we had very different ways of working”.

It was felt that the lack of trust should be addressed by the consortium:

“Trust has not been built up, the fault lines are showing, there is an urgent need to address issues of trust”.

Section 3: Key learning

This section discusses the key learning, firstly from feedback from the consultations specifically concerned with the programmes outlined in Section 1 and secondly from the thematic areas identified in Section 2.

3.1 Programmes

This section discusses the learning in relation to the programmes, including interventions, upskilling and referral pathways, in terms of benefits and challenges.

3.1.1 Benefits

There have been many benefits from the programmes which have impacted on the range of target groups and stakeholders outlined below.

Children

Positive results for children were reported by parents, principals, teachers, crèche and pre-school staff and community organisations. Children have benefited from directly participating in IY Baby, Doodle Den, IY Classroom Dina and PCHP, as well as benefiting from the participation of their parents, teachers and childcare staff in the other interventions.

- **Increased confidence and improvements in social, emotional and communication skills**

Teachers and childcare workers spoke about IY Classroom Dina's positive effect on the children and its impact in terms of improving their social skills and ability to articulate their emotions. Children's language was also seen to improve. Teachers and childcare workers reported improvements in children's behaviour as a result of the programme and said that parents had noted similar improvements in their behaviour at home.

Teachers and parents reported that Doodle Den has benefited children in terms of their increased confidence and communication skills, increased enthusiasm for reading and improved language skills, and improved social skills and relationships between children.

- **Improved development of children**

Public health nurses reported improvements for children that they feel can be attributed to their parents' participation in IY Baby. They have reported these children having less speech and language problems and lower referral rates, that they are better stimulated at home as their parents are more interested and knowledgeable in their development and as such they are meeting their developmental milestones more successfully than children whose parents have not completed the course.

Parents who participated in the PCHP programme reported improvements in their children's communication and language skills as a result of the home visits and the reading exercises that they had learned to do with their child between visits.

- **Positive results for children in settings where staff had done upskilling Levels 6 and 7**

Positive impact on the children was reported as a result of the increased confidence and skills of staff who completed the Level 6 and Level 7 courses. Staff reported that they now give children more free

creative time, use smaller groups for activities and are more led by the children in terms of selecting activities.

The fact that childcare settings received additional education on how to assess and refer children to speech and language services and how to best support them while they were waiting for appointments was very beneficial. In a context where there are waiting lists for assessments, it was reported by managers that children are benefiting from staff members' enhanced skills to prepare them for school.

- **Benefits from improved transition to primary school and increased information sharing**

Childcare staff and representatives from community organisations reported seeing benefits for children as a result of the Referral Pathways working group's Transitions programme and 'Stepping Up' document which works to ease the transition to primary school and increase information sharing between parents, pre-school staff and primary school teachers. Many of the participants interviewed felt that this had been the most effective and least expensive of all of the initiatives under the ABC Grangegorman programme. It is anticipated that children will benefit soon from the working group's activities regarding referral pathways and improving local interagency cooperation in this area.

- **Improved relationships between children and their parents**

Children's relationships with their parents were reported as having improved by parents and teachers. Improved bonding experiences were brought about by IY Baby and improved parent-child relationships through IY Basic Parenting, PCHP and Doodle Den.

Parents

All of the parents (12) interviewed had high satisfaction levels and reported benefits for themselves and their children from their participation with the programmes.

- **Increased knowledge and practical skills**

Parents who participated in the IY Baby and PCHP programmes reported having learned a lot in relation to their children, including how to communicate with and care for their baby, how to help their children progress their reading and communication skills and how to toilet train their children. Parents who completed the IY Basic Parenting course reported that the course had provided them with practical skills and techniques to deal with difficult situations with their child. They said that they have a greater understanding of discipline and positive affirmation strategies.

- **Increased personal development, confidence and wellbeing**

Parents who completed the IY Baby course reported an increase in confidence as a result of doing the course. Mothers who completed the course with their second or third babies said that they greatly benefited from it and that they regretted not having access to the course with their first child. What parents valued most was that the course gave them back some normality and routine at the beginning when they were finding things most difficult.

Parents reported that their overall emotional wellbeing had improved as a result of doing the IY Basic Parenting course. They said that the course had made them feel normal and less alone and had instilled a sense of solidarity among the group of parents and made them aware that everyone experiences problems from time to time. Parents who completed the IY Basic Parenting course reported their

personal confidence increasing in areas other than parenting. Teachers said that they had seen parents going on to pursue further education and that they credit their participation in the course with this positive development. Parents who participated in the PCHP programme also reported increased confidence in how they cared for their child.

- **Reduction in parents' stress levels**

Parents who participated in the PCHP programme reported that their relationship with the home visitor had reduced their stress levels as they could speak to them or call them with any concerns that they had about their child. Parents also reported that their stress levels had diminished as a result of the IY Basic Parenting and IY Baby courses.

- **Improved relationships between parents and their children**

Parents who completed the IY Baby course said that it had helped them to bond with their babies. Parents who participated in IY Basic Parenting and Doodle Den reported that it had improved their relationships with their children and that they now read more with them. Parents who participated in PCHP also reported improvements in their relationships with their children.

- **Improvements in parents' language and increased interest in reading with their child**

Parents and teachers who participated in Doodle Den reported improvements in parents' language and increased interest in reading with their children.

Participation in the IY Basic Parenting course improved the English of parents for whom it was a second language. IY Baby was also seen to have improved the English levels of participating parents.

Research has shown that participation in initiatives in schools can raise the literacy and education levels of parents, while their participation also has a positive effect on their children and the wider community:

“Educational initiatives based in schools can raise the educational level of the adults involved, and result in a general sense of empowerment in the local community. Parental involvement, especially in areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children and the school – it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning.” (OECD, 1997).

- **Social integration and improved relationships between parents**

One of the most significant unintended positive consequences of the interventions for parents has been the social integration and enhanced social relationships between parents as a result of participation. This has been especially true for IY Baby where as part of every course a social group has been formed through a whatsapp group which has outlasted the course itself and provided parents with much-needed local support and social cohesion and interaction. The groups have often consisted of a range of social backgrounds and ethnicities.

In the first delivery of the IY Baby course, an observing ABC Grangegorman staff member noticed that some of the mothers could not afford to buy coffee and that this created a divide at break times when other mothers went to buy coffee. To address this issue, it was arranged that the venue, the Elbow Room, would provide the coffee. The Elbow Room no longer has a kitchen and so is currently just providing hot water for tea and instant coffee. A view was expressed that a new venue needs to be sourced that can provide refreshments. Some of the participating mothers reported being barely able to afford the bus fare to attend the course.

The social embarrassment of not being able to afford to buy coffee could cause people to drop out of a course. It is important to note the importance of this food and drink element as part of the background conditions in which programmes are delivered and which can play a key role in their success. The possibility and benefits of a national checklist for facilities which would include a kitchen to provide refreshments should be considered.

Participants in IY Baby, IY Basic Parenting and Doodle Den also reported similar benefits of meeting other parents who they may not otherwise have spoken to, forming lasting connections and realising that the problems they may be experiencing with their child are universal ones and do not make them or their child 'abnormal'. Parents and teachers saw Doodle Den has having improved relationships between parents. Participants in the IY Basic Parenting course spoke of the enhanced relationships and peer support between parents, which have lasted beyond the timeframe of the course.

- **Improved engagement with local health services**

Parents who participated in IY Baby were more engaged with the service and had formed lasting positive relationships with community healthcare staff in the area.

Teachers and principals

All of the teachers (11) and principals (2) interviewed felt that the programmes had had positive benefits for the teachers in terms of their personal and professional development. They reported an improvement in the relationships between teachers, principals and parents. Teachers and principals also reported improvements in the management and working environment of the school as a result of their participation in the interventions.

- **Improved professional development and working relationships**

Teachers who delivered the IY Basic Parenting course spoke about the skills that they had learned with regard to facilitating adults, which they had never learned before. They reported increased confidence in how they interacted with parents and managed difficult situations. They said that they are using the techniques with the children in their classes and for those that had not yet been infant teachers they learned about early child development.

Teachers praised the IY Classroom Dina training and resources and said that they use the techniques throughout the day in the classroom. Working in partnership with a colleague was also a very beneficial experience.

Teachers said that IY Teacher Classroom Management had had a positive impact on their classroom management and teaching practice and had resulted in an increase in their confidence. They also reported increased teacher peer support and spoke of the benefits of meeting with and learning from other teachers. Teachers said that this course had given them useful techniques about how to communicate effectively with parents, including the importance of contacting them with positive news. Teachers said it had been especially useful in terms of situations where parents may be distressed or angry.

Teachers said that Doodle Den had improved their practice and that they were able to apply the learning and games techniques to their other work in the classroom.

- **Improved personal development**

Teachers who delivered IY Basic Parenting spoke of benefits for themselves in terms of general relationship and 'life' skills. Teachers with children spoke of an improvement in their own parenting skills

and home lives. Teachers who delivered IY Classroom Dina said that they use the techniques in their personal lives as well.

- **Improved relationships with children**

Teachers said that IY Classroom Dina had helped them get to know the children better and that some had confided in them as a result of the course.

- **Improved relationships between parents and teachers**

The improvement of relationships between parents and teachers has significant benefits for parents as well but was most often mentioned in the consultations by teachers and principals.

Parents and teachers involved in the IY Basic Parenting course reported an improvement in the relationship between parents and teachers and in parents' overall attitude towards their children's school. Parents are more likely to approach teachers with their concerns earlier and in more of a spirit of collaboration than was the case before. Teachers and principals noted that they had found out information about children which parents previously had not felt comfortable enough to share with them. As a result of this improvement in relationships, teachers find it easier to have sensitive discussions with parents about the children, which may include referrals to specialists. Parents were also more likely to volunteer with the school following the course.

Relationships between teachers and parents and parents' attitude toward the school were said to have changed for the better as a result of Doodle Den, which was seen to have normalised the relationship as parents got used to coming into the school for Doodle Den meetings.

Teachers said that IY Teacher Classroom Management had improved relationships between teachers and parents and that they now collaboratively deal with any issues which may arise concerning a child's behaviour or academic performance.

Childcare managers and staff

Childcare managers (5) and staff (5) have reported that their participation has been a positive experience and has benefited them, the children and the childcare setting in general.

- **Additional knowledge and skills**

Additional skills were a reported benefit of the upskilling strand of the programme. Information on regulations as part of the Level 6 course was seen as especially important for staff. Participants in the Level 7 course reported additional skills in the areas of record-keeping and standards for curriculum assessment.

The advantage of having training based in the community was mentioned by several participants.

- **Professional development, increased confidence of staff and improved working relationships**

Participants in both courses reported an increased sense of enthusiasm as a result of doing the courses and said that their teams were working better together and inspired to try new techniques. Participants in the Level 7 course and their managers reported increased confidence and better working relationships.

- **Increased personal development of staff**

Staff reported personal gains from doing the Level 6 course as for some it marked a return to formal education after some time and was a significant personal achievement.

- **Non-formal upskilling**

Staff and their managers reported having reaped benefits from seminars on speech and language and psychological services which were provided to staff as part of Referral Pathways strand of the programme.

Public health nurses

Public health nurses and a public health nursing manager (3) felt that IY Baby had been a very worthwhile programme which had benefited them and those accessing their service.

- **Enhanced capacity to do their job**

Public health nurses and a public health nursing manager felt that IY Baby had enhanced their ability to do their job. They reported improvements in childrens' development mentioned above.

- **Improved relationships with clients**

Public health nurses and a public health nursing manager reported that the IY Baby course had assisted them in forming lasting relationships with parents accessing their service.

Community organisations

Twelve out of 13 representatives from 11 community organisations said that while there had been challenges, overall the programme had benefited the local community.

- **Relationships formed in the community**

Representatives from community organisations spoke of the importance of new relationships that had been formed and existing relationships that had been strengthened through the ABC Grangegormán programme. While there were some challenges associated with these relationships, it was accepted that they had been a positive development.

- **Information sharing**

Information sharing was praised as an achievement of the ABC Grangegormán programme and an integral beginning to interagency working and the avoidance of duplication. Participants spoke of knowing much more about the nature and extent of activities that were happening in the area as a result of the programme.

- **Professional development and additional skills**

Representatives from community organisations spoke of having benefited from the skills learned as part of their participation in the IY Basic Parenting, IY Classroom Dina and Doodle Den programmes. Community workers and their managers also reported having benefited from seminars on speech and

language and psychological services that were provided to staff as part of the work of the Referral Pathways strand.

- **Draft document outlining a standard framework for referral within ABC programmes**

This document was described by community groups as a very important step in terms of furthering interagency working and collaboration in the area.

3.1.2 Challenges

The following were highlighted as challenges for the programmes:

- **Lack of childcare**

Lack of childcare was considered a significant challenge in ensuring that the programmes reached those most in need of support. Practitioners of IY Baby and IY Basic Parenting reported that the most isolated parents had not been able to benefit from the courses due to a lack of childcare and a lack of resources to support them with this. While there was some budget to support parents with additional needs to attend IY Basic Parenting, this was considered sufficient. It will be important going forward for it to be acknowledged that support with or provision of childcare may be essential to enable parents' participation and this should be put into the budget at planning stages. This was also an issue for the work of the Referral Pathways working group when they were organising workshops for parents.

The childcare workers who did the Level 6 upskilling in the evenings reported difficulties in paying for childcare and that this had caused them financial strain. This was especially true for lone parents. The Level 7 upskilling took place during the working day. To facilitate participation in future community based upskilling initiatives, it will be essential that training be appropriately resourced with adequate backfill.

- **Time constraints**

Public health nurses reported it being difficult to fulfil the requirements of IY Baby with their other work. There was a requirement to phone every participant and this was not always possible. Practitioners of IY Basic Parenting also mentioned the difficulty of finding time for the facilitation, preparation and paperwork along with their other work. In terms of sustainability, it will be important that practitioners not feel overworked and to agree a viable model for delivery.

Practitioners of IY Classroom Dina and Doodle Den spoke of the importance of timing and beginning earlier in the year to ensure that the course could be finished. This was in contrast to the suggestion from IY Basic Parenting practitioners that the course should begin in the second term of the year so that they would have a chance to get to know the parents better and have more awareness of their needs.

- **Recruitment**

Teachers and staff from community organisations who delivered IY Basic Parenting said that recruitment of **parents** was the biggest challenge in delivering the course. It was difficult to recruit at an early stage in the year when they may not yet know the parents very well. Language was also an issue in recruiting as parents needed a level of language to be able to participate in the discussions and sometimes it only became clear that they did not have this level once the course had begun.

Teachers also said that it was difficult to get the right mix of parents with lower and higher needs and the group dynamics were challenging at times. There were some relationship issues between parents

from different socioeconomic backgrounds and some of the courses had a high drop-out with parents with the highest needs dropping out. It was suggested that 14 weeks is a long time for some parents to commit to and that it could be an option to offer different parenting interventions of varying lengths and detail. Cultural differences and gender imbalance within the group were mentioned as being challenging at times.

Community workers talked about the difficulty of trying to recruit parents in a small area where several organisations in the consortium were also trying to recruit.

Practitioners of Doodle Den spoke of it being difficult to get **children** with the right mix of ability.

Recruitment of **home visitors and families** was also initially a challenge for the PCHP programme.

- **Tiredness of children during Doodle Den**

Tiredness was mentioned by some parents and teachers as an issue, with some saying it would be preferable if Doodle Den could form part of the teaching day. This was especially a problem for children with behavioural issues. Some teachers and principals also commented that they thought it unlikely that Doodle Den could be mainstreamed to form part of the teaching day given that the curriculum was full. This merits further exploration.

- **Late provision of materials**

The late provision of materials caused operational problems in IY Classroom Dina as puppets and manuals had to be shared during training where they were available.

- **Lack of parental support following the course**

Parents spoke about missing the connectedness and support of the IY Basic Parenting course once it had finished. They also called for the course to be extended to parents of older children as they felt that parenting was more challenging with older children. Parents said that they had found the course to be so beneficial that they would like it to be available to them through primary school and into secondary school.

- **Out-dated resources**

Parents and teachers mentioned that the resources for IY Basic Parenting were American and out of date and could be difficult to relate to. This is discussed in the next section.

- **Training and accreditation**

Some teachers felt that the training should be more focused on practical issues of how to deliver the course and should include role plays and how to fill in the SDQs. Some teachers also said that they would welcome more information on their responsibilities and best practice with regard to referring parents on to services or supports following issues raised during the discussions in the course, including domestic violence.

It was also mentioned that the accreditation was overly difficult and there were also concerns raised about the cost of training and accreditation. These issues relating to evidence based and evidence informed programmes are discussed in the next section.

- **Difficulties for childcare workers in completing the Level 6 course**

Preschool and crèche staff reported difficulties in terms of managing the requirements of the Level 6 course along with the demands of their full-time work and home lives. For many of them, this marked a return to education after some time and learning new skills such as typing and using a computer. Some mentioned difficulties in paying for childcare as the course took place outside of the working day. Many participants said that the support of the community had been essential and that without it their sustained engagement and completion of the course would not have been possible.

- **Operational issues relating to insufficient administrative support for the Level 7 course**

The delivery of the Level 7 course was impeded by operational issues within DIT which produced delays in terms of validation, registration, certification and graduation. One of the consequences of this delay was that students were not fully registered as students until three weeks before the end of the course and were not able to access DIT facilities such as the library to assist them in their coursework.

- **Length of the Level 7 course**

The length of the course was seen as a challenge. It consisted of 10 ECTs spread over three semesters over 18 months which was felt to have been too spread out as it was difficult to maintain momentum and interest, especially in the third semester.

- **Appropriateness of the Level 7 course for the students**

It was mentioned that some students benefited more from the course than others. Some students had not completed their Level 5 qualification and it was reported that some students had lower literacy levels which made understanding the material more challenging.

- **Implementation and assessment of the upskilling**

It was reported that many students had difficulties implementing the learning in their sites and that there had been a lot of resistance to change on the part of other staff members and managers who had not done the training. While an attempt was made to engage managers around the Level 7 course, this was done after the delivery of the module and only one manager from the crèches attended. In relation to the assessment for Level 6, there was a perceived lack of validation and cultural sensitivity to the realities in which the community childcare workers were working in.

3.2 Thematic areas for further development

While the specific operational challenges relating to the nine programmes have been outlined in Section 3.1, the main area for learning and development identified as part of this process evaluation has been the importance of developing the capacity for interagency working.

There have been problems associated with relationships and often there has been a perceived lack of trust between the lead agency and the community as well as different values and approaches. Any future work should be based on the identification of shared values and approaches so that the consortium can form a mutually respectful partnership. One way to do this would be to apply community development principles which will include having appropriate regard for empowerment,

participation, inclusion, self-determination and partnership. The coordination and management provided by DIT was at times overly inflexible and did not facilitate creativity or responsiveness by its community partners. If management is unduly rigid it will stifle any innovation and new learning. There was not sufficient attention paid to minimising bureaucracy and understanding the position of under-funded community groups. If communities are empowered and enabled to play a meaningful role they are in a unique position to reach marginalised groups and can bring with them the credibility of already being seen as trusted individuals by many young people and families experiencing poverty in the area.

While significant time was spent on designing governance and oversight structures and processes, the beginning of the programme was very rushed and there has been inadequate time spent on the monitoring of the implementation of the programmes and regular review of what was working and what needed to be improved on. Regular, interactive review sessions involving those directly involved in service delivery and programme implementation needs to form an essential component of future work. This would be facilitated by a functioning working group to discuss issues arising for the interventions.

Multi-agency working is not simple. It is a complex process that requires commitment, time and appropriate infrastructures. Many of the consortium partners had not previously worked together and there is a need to put more time into developing relationships and trust, both in the consortium and in the Steering Group and working groups once these are re-established. A recent review of the Parent Support Initiative (PSI) has said that:

“Collaboration doesn’t just happen. It requires leadership, clarity of vision and a whole lot of drive and energy. When it works well, collaboration is rich, productive and effective. Resources need to be available to promote, co-ordinate and ensure the crucial contribution of collaborative working, thereby, realising the enormous potential to get the best from partners and improved outcomes for children and families” (Carroll, 2017).

The following issues have been identified through the consultations as important in terms of building on the learning from this programme and developing the future of interagency work in Grangegorman:

- Change of name for the programme
- Review model and governance structures
- Needs analysis and sustainability programme of work to review of age range, programme content and management
- Explore alternatives to evidence based programmes
- Community voice, increased collaboration and mutual learning
- Advocacy role and promotion of the programme.

1. Change of name for the programme

Given that respondents reported not identifying their community with the name Grangegorman, a change of name should be considered and discussed with consortium partners to ensure that the programme is as accessible as possible to the local community. This may include Dublin 7, though there may be issues with this choice as Dublin 7 extends as far as Cabra. North West Inner City may also be an option to be considered. This choice should be made by all members of the consortium if possible and include any other relevant stakeholders.

2. Review model and governance structures and processes

The model and governance structures should be reviewed to ensure that they reflect the preferences of the consortium partners and provide the most appropriate governance and operational support to the programme and future collaborative initiatives. **Decision-making processes within the Steering Group** may need to be clarified and **voting procedures** should be considered as an option where there are differing perspectives.

It will be important to get the best out of consortium members in terms of membership of the Steering Group and working groups and to allow enough **flexibility in terms of the roles members can play**, tailoring their contribution to their strengths and interests. While the majority of participants felt that community organisations did not have the capacity to play an administrative role, it should be explored to what extent consortium partners wish to take on coordination roles to feel more involved in the operational side of the programme or future work.

Funding mechanisms have put pressure on community organisations that did not have the capacity to fund upfront. In one case, an individual staff member put resources on their own personal credit cards for some time until the payment had been back-paid. The requirements to obtain **funding for childcare**, which was necessary for some parents and childcare workers to participate were overly onerous. It is essential that these mechanisms be redesigned to enable the community to nurture relationships and provide the support that is often essential to sustained engagement. **Future upskilling initiatives need to be appropriately resourced** to take place during the working day to facilitate staff participation.

In terms of **effective communication**, given the limited access of consortium partners to email and the limited capacity of many to attend meetings, one-to-one visits from ABC staff worked best to keep partners informed and deal with any issues that may be arising. This needs to be resourced as part of the overall programme as human resources have been limited during the programme.

3. Needs analysis and review of age range, programme content and management

Many respondents were critical of the fact that a needs analysis had not been undertaken prior to the development of the ABC Grangegorman programme. It was suggested that there be such a needs analysis exercise conducted, that the programme should focus its activities more and that the age range should be extended up to 18 years. Many participants felt that there was a significant gap in service provision and supports for older children and that secondary school was often the most challenging time for young people. Parents of older children also reported finding parenting more challenging as children got older and that they were more in need of support at this stage.

The needs analysis exercise should incorporate the issue of sustainability and the development of a sustainability strategy for the area. **This strategy needs to include a strategy for reaching the most marginalised in the community.** Participants also felt that perceptions of people in the community should be given greater attention and that all activities should have an **anti-poverty focus** and work to target the most vulnerable children and families in the area. It was felt that the work should be child-centred, rather than adopting a paternalistic approach where children are seen as recipients of services but are not necessarily meaningfully consulted with.

In terms of programme management, there were differing views in relation to **staffing** requirements of the programme. While some felt that too much money had been spent on employing staff, others felt that the ABC team had been under-resourced and that given the administrative requirements of the programme the outreach and communications to the community had been curtailed. There is some merit in the argument that the team was under-resourced from a staffing perspective. It is essential that human resources are sufficient to properly support the implementation of the work, appropriately communicate developments to the consortium members, as well as the wider community, and engage in appropriate outreach to monitor and review implementation progress.

Risk management was identified as an area that could be improved, as evidenced by the organisational challenges encountered as part of the roll-out of the PCHP programme. Data collection is another area which could be focused on, including information regarding the number of engagements with parents, teachers. Comprehensive data collection, monitoring and reporting processes, as well as regular review and revision of implementation plans, will be essential for effective sustainability and future project planning.

Identified priorities for future focus

The following are identified priorities for future activities in the area which were raised by consortium members during the consultations. These may be useful to consider in light of future needs analysis and sustainability planning.

- **Homelessness**

Homelessness was seen as one of the major challenges for families in the area. It was reported that there have been several temporary services set up in the form of “hubs” and that there is a lack of coordination and information about which agencies are delivering which services and supports to children, young people and families experiencing homelessness. Tusla organised a meeting in September 2017 with a view to enhancing coordination and information in this area for service providers.

It was also reported that it is important to consider the damage that the threat of homelessness can exert on children and families. Service providers working with families spoke of the huge pressure on parents and guardians to avoid losing their home and the constant fear that if they do it will be very difficult to recover. This pressure was reported to have negative effects on children as their parents were less able to respond to their needs while experiencing this stress.

It was reported that there needs to be a greater understanding of the cumulative effects of homelessness and the threat of homelessness, that it is about more than accommodation and should be addressed in a way that is cognisant of the range of effects and after-effects of this experience on families. The damage that homelessness does to people’s sense of self and their confidence was also mentioned as an issue, as well as the trauma and anxiety that people often experience who have been homeless and housed in emergency accommodation, even where they now have more permanent accommodation. Parents were reported to have significant guilt and a sense that they have let their children down, as well as anxiety that they will become homeless again in the future. Family relationships were reported to also come under significant strain as people are forced to move in with relatives to avoid homelessness.

- **More social supports and support for mental health issues**

It was reported that social isolation is an issue for many parents, including parents from ethnic minority groups in the area. There is a perceived lack of social connectivity and people reported having lost a sense of community. There was a perceived need for this sense of community to be recreated within a diverse population.

It was reported that financial strain is leading to mental health problems in parents and that this is exacerbated in areas of social and economic disadvantage within Dublin 7. More needs to be done to support parents and children before they reach a crisis. The largest group of children taken into care in the area is 0-6 years and the primary reasons are addiction, mental health and neglect (Tusla, 2017). This year Tusla has launched the Creative Community Alternatives Initiative in six pilot sites, one of which is the North West Inner City:

“These areas have been assigned additional budget to introduce innovative high prevention initiatives that are aimed at children who are either on the edge of alternative care or currently in alternative care due to complex factors that may include neglect, parental separation, attachment issues, alcohol and/or drug misuse, mental health and economic disadvantage with a view to keeping these children in their community” (Tusla, 2017).

- **Domestic violence**

More support for women, children and families experiencing domestic violence was called for. A gap was reported to have been left since the closure of the community development project (CDP) devoted to domestic violence in the area. This was one of eleven projects that were part of the North West Inner City Women’s Network and was centrally based on Manor Street. It was a place where women could go for general information and support on a range of areas. This general nature was important as it meant that women who were experiencing domestic violence could discreetly drop in and access information without it being publicly obvious. The closure has left a vacuum in terms of local support for women and there is a need for a local project in the area to replace it. This could mean a new organisation with a remit for domestic violence or an existing organisation resourced to have a specific brief on domestic violence.

There was also a need for more training on domestic violence for service providers and community workers on how to be aware of the issues for children and young people and how to work with families experiencing this. This training is currently provided through Tusla’s working group on children at risk, in partnership with Women’s Aid.

- **More education opportunities and support for parents**

It was reported that there was no funding available for part-time education and that very few parents could afford to go into full-time education. Literacy was seen by participants to be key in transforming personal and social development for adults, as well as for children and young people.

- **More hands on work with parents and children**

More hands on work with parents and children was seen as being needed, such as parenting courses and homework supports for parents and children. Further roll-out of PCHP was also suggested. It was mentioned that some parents were referred to parenting courses due to their child’s perceived behavioural problems in the classroom and that maybe there could be a focus on the relationships in school as well as the parent-child relationship.

- **More support to implement learning in early years providers**

More support to implement learning was perceived as a need and it was suggested that this could take the form of a practice development support worker who could act as mentor, rather than an inspector, to guide settings in ways to implement learning from the upskilling. More support for early years staff in the area of skills to work with children with special needs was also called for.

- **More direct support for early years providers**

It was reported that many early years settings are struggling and need more direct support, including support for equipment and operational costs. Some of the early settings did not have the facilities to

show the vignettes as part of Classroom Dina. It was reported that some staff were showing the vignettes to children on their phones. ABC Grangegorman permitted some of the budget to be spent on TVs and computers to remedy this. At least one community crèche closed in 2016 as it was run by volunteers and did not have the capacity to continue operating.

4. Explore issues relating to evidence based and evidence informed programmes and potential complementary one-to-one supports

Given the feedback, it will be important to collectively discuss the benefits and any perceived limitations of evidence based and evidence informed programmes and **potential complementary one-to-one supports** which could help sustain engagement and address any individual issues which may arise. This additional support may be especially important for the most marginalised families. Wrap-around supports may provide a more holistic approach to meeting families' needs. There was an appetite for a move away from the view of the programmes as an end in and of themselves, toward a more contextualised conceptualisation of the setting and circumstances in which the programmes are being delivered and the parallel experiences which parents may be having. This could enable more successful delivery of the programmes and positive outcomes for parents and families.

Participants felt that it was important to discuss some of the perceived limitations of the evidence based programmes and explore whether or not there are ways in which they could be tailored to better suit their local and cultural context. It should be explored whether materials could be made **more culturally adaptive and attuned**.

Regarding concerns about the **cost-effectiveness of the evidence based programmes**, it was reported that the **accreditation** was unreasonably difficult and practitioners were required to get 100%. There were also concerns raised about the cost of training and accreditation, given that payment was required every time and the view was expressed by several participants that a business model was being used that may not be appropriate for a community context. While ABC Grangegorman has advised all practitioners that accreditation and certification are not mandatory to deliver any of the IY programmes, there is a sense among practitioners that this is best practice and it is encouraged when supervisors are reviewing their delivery of the programme.

To address some of the concerns regarding cost of mentoring, ABC Grangegorman has sourced free mentoring from the Genesis Project in Louth on the implementation of IY Classroom Dina. Mentors from the Genesis Project are to facilitate a full day workshop in September 2017 with both early years providers and primary schools. Direct support for facilities in implementation has also been arranged through the Genesis Project at a reduced cost. The focus of these visits is on implementation of the programme, as well as planning and adaptation of the programme to suit the facility's needs. There has also been successful cooperation and sharing of resources across ABC programmes with a view to reducing costs relating to training and supervision. Youngballymun (ABC) and Blueskies Initiative (ABC) have had mentors trained to become Basic Parenting mentors and ABC Grangegorman has secured the provision of mentoring free of charge between September and December 2017.

In relation to the cost of the puppets, to deliver Classroom Dina with fidelity it is prescribed that practitioners use the puppets supplied by Incredible Years (Inc.) through Archways. These puppets range in price from €595 to €638 per puppet. Due to delays in delivering the puppets and funding deadlines, ABC Grangegorman contacted Incredible Years (Inc.) and was advised to obtain the puppets through 'Living Puppets' to guarantee earlier delivery. These puppets cost €93.30 each and are the same quality.

5. Community voice, interagency collaboration and mutual learning

The need for a stronger sense of community voice and ownership of the programme, increased and more effective interagency collaboration and greater mutual learning was emphasised by participants. It was also acknowledged that relationships can take some time to form and function well and that the two years that the ABC programme has been in operation is a relatively short timeframe in which to establish lasting connections. Mutual learning was highlighted as an opportunity brought about by the ABC Grangegorman consortium and it was also suggested that while DIT had a lot to offer the community in terms of its expertise, it could also learn more about community development from its community partners in the consortium.

Examples of interagency work within other ABC programmes

There are some examples of interagency work within other ABC programmes that may also be insightful in terms of future work of the consortium that could involve interdisciplinary working and service delivery:

- The wrap-around model that has been developed in Limerick and in use in ABC Start Right Limerick has brought together all community partners and uses the Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) structure to coordinate this. It was reported that some women were not attending their maternity appointments because they could not afford to pay for parking and through working with Limerick City Council it was possible to stop them from clamping cars during clinic hours to remove this barrier to attending
- In the Ballyfermot ABC, public health nursing clinics have been re-established in the Labray Park Traveller halting site and work on mental health has involved using a wide range of approaches with a focus on youth engagement and engaging Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and HSE Psychology services with community and education services
- The Clondalkin Blue Skies ABC initiative has engaged with a Direct Provision centre to provide supports
- ABC Docklands have linked with libraries and homeless services to identify families in need of support and to provide safe places for reading and educational play activities for families living in emergency accommodation in the inner city.

Finally, the creation of the ABC National Forum meetings for early years settings and primary schools have been reported to be very helpful in terms of sharing learning and information about best practice.

6. Advocacy role and promotion of the programme

Some participants felt that there was scope and rationale for the programme to do more in terms of promotion and disseminating information about the findings of the programme, as well as the benefits and impact it has had. Others objected to resources being spent on promotion but were in favour of utilising the findings of the ABC Grangegorman programme to play an advocacy role. The potential of the ABC programme to play an advocacy role represents a significant opportunity for future development to identify and spread awareness of gaps and deficiencies in service provision, waiting lists and evidence of inequalities for young people and their families in the area.

3.3 Explore the possibility of developing a community-based hub

There is a strong interest amongst stakeholders in progressing the development of a community based hub as a way of building on the many positive developments of the ABC Grangegorman programme, while also addressing the issues that have been raised. Such a proposal has considerable merit if the

learning of the last number of years is taken into account. Given the feedback that the base of the programme is an important element to participants, that the management of the programme was perceived as overly bureaucratic and not sufficiently espousing the principles of community development, that it was perceived as lacking an anti-poverty focus and community voice, and that there were criticisms of the extent to which interagency working was successful, the development of a community based hub should be considered as a way to provide a solution to these challenges. There is a strong rationale for the development of a community hub as it would address the perceived lack of a **community development focus** and would ensure **sustainability** in that it would represent a sustained resource for Dublin 7 and could take a long-term approach to social change.

Rather than a temporary and finite programme, this would be a **coherent and sustained response to addressing disadvantage** experienced by young people and their families through social and educational interventions and crisis support. The hub would be an opportunity to embed principles of community development and have a community based centre which could combine objectives of providing lifelong learning opportunities for staff with the provision of emotional support to children and young people and their parents. It could also maintain the valuable links with DIT as a local centre of excellence in education and could form a centre for conducting research on the work and its outcomes. In particular, the hub could maintain strong links with the DIT Access and Civic Engagement Office and the DIT Students Learning with Communities programme and could form an integral part of DIT's community outreach activities. It has been decided that a new primary care centre is to be situated in the grounds of DIT Grangegorman campus and it would be a positive development if there could also be a link between this centre and the community hub so that health outreach could occur alongside education and emotional development interventions. The fact that the community does not have the capacity to resource this would mean that it would need to be supported by national policy.

Through the process of the ABC Grangegorman programme, some acute needs have been highlighted. In particular, homelessness, domestic violence, social and emotional supports for parents and speech and language needs of children have been mentioned by participants in the consultations as outlined above. The hub could provide some interdisciplinary crisis support for children, young people and families, with a drop-in element to its offering to provide somewhere for families to spend time and get support that they need. In addition to addressing the acute needs in this way, the hub could also provide supports for moderate risk groups through its interventions and activities. This model is one that has been realised in the form of Familibase (formerly Familiscope) in Ballyfermot and has been proven to be a successful way to provide a community-based interdisciplinary approach to improving children's and young people's welfare and enhancing the capacity of those that live and work with children and young people, including parents, teachers and childcare staff from local preschools and crèches. Familibase services are delivered by an interdisciplinary team, are carried out in the community-based centre and on site in primary and secondary schools, and include services in the areas of speech and language, parenting support, family support, emotional support and behavioural support. While it is generally acknowledged that cross-sectoral work is more difficult to evaluate and that it can take some time for measurable outcomes to present, evaluations of Familibase have found an increase in school attendance as well as improvements in children's oral language skills (Familiscope, 2011).

There is an increasing acceptance among academics and policymakers that **cross-sectoral strategies** are best suited to meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups and can best address and remedy the challenges and complexities of poverty, vulnerability and social and economic exclusion. In 2013, the European Commission's Recommendation 'Investing in Children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage' acknowledged that: "Children that grow up in poverty are more likely to suffer from social exclusion and health problems in the future, and also less likely to develop to their full potential later in life". To break the cycle of disadvantage, the Commission called for a more holistic and integrated approach to bring about multi-dimensional action against disadvantage and stressed the importance of early intervention and preventative approaches (European Commission, 2013). A community hub would also facilitate a

balance of universal supports with appropriate and responsive provision for the most marginalised children, young people and their families. This is in line with the aims of ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’ to support parents, listen to children and young people and promote effective transitions and interagency collaboration and coordination, as well as the policy’s commitment to:

“Provide and commission both universal and targeted evidence-informed parenting supports and early identification of ‘at risk’ children and families to strength families and reduce the incidence of children coming into, and remaining in, care” (Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014).

The hub would ideally be located in a **neutral space** in Dublin 7. Smithfield was mentioned by some participants as a location that would be ideal for a community hub as it was somewhere that was a place where people from all areas and communities of Dublin 7 would go.

Section 4: Conclusion

This section includes recommendations for the future activities of the consortium and concluding remarks.

4.1 Recommendations

Recommendations are divided into two sections. The first looks at recommendations that are specific to the implementation and development of the nine programmes that made up ABC Grangegorman, while the second looks at more general key recommendations focused on future activities of the consortium.

4.1.1 Programme-specific recommendations

While some of the programmes have ended as of September 2017, others have been granted extensions. It is as yet unclear whether all or any of the programmes will continue to be funded as part of ABC Grangegorman into the future. In the event that the programmes are to continue, the following are recommendations relating specifically to the operation of the nine programmes, how challenges voiced in the feedback might be overcome and how the delivery and outcomes of the programmes might be improved on:

1. Increase budget available for direct services to children, parents and families

Teachers and community organisations spoke of the importance of having more financial resources so that childcare could be provided for those parents who were in need of the course but could not pay for childcare. It will be important going forward for it to be acknowledged that support with or provision of childcare may be essential to enable parents' participation and this should be put into the budget at planning stages. Refreshments provided were an incentive to participation and should be continued.

2. Develop parent support groups

Self-sustaining parent support groups should follow the IY Basic Parenting programme. The same model as the IY Baby programme could be used whereby the practitioner establishes a whatsapp group toward the end of the course which can facilitate post-course peer support for parents.

3. Consider extending some courses to parents of older children

Extending the availability of IY Basic Parenting to parents of older children should be considered given feedback from participants that parenting challenges increased as children get older and that they would appreciate supports through primary and into secondary school.

4. Ensure that practitioners have enough time available to deliver the course

In terms of sustainability, it will be important to agree a viable model for the delivery of the programmes and ensure that practitioners not feel overstretched. This could be done through delegation where appropriate. IY Baby training for example could be extended to other professional groups, including physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and family support workers to take some pressure off PHNs and so that more courses could be run to reach bigger numbers. This may also involve beginning interventions earlier in the year so that courses could be finished more easily.

5. Ensure that materials are available for the commencement of programmes

It is important to ensure that materials are available for the commencement of the programmes to facilitate the smooth running of the courses.

6. Explore ways to deliver Doodle Den as part of the school day

Given that tiredness of children has been reported as an issue, it should be considered whether or not it would be feasible for Doodle Den to be mainstreamed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs so that it could be delivered as part of regular school hours.

7. Provide appropriate resourcing for future upskilling initiatives

Upskilling needs to be appropriately resourced so that adult learners such as the Level 6 students are able to complete training during their working day with the provision of adequate backfill. Given the finding that students had limited capacity to pay for childcare that was necessary for them to attend evening courses this will be important in order to facilitate participation in future community-based upskilling initiatives.

8. Consider extending the Level 7 module

It was highlighted by the majority of the participants that childcare staff need subsidised part-time training as they cannot afford to go back to full-time education and that additional modules would be welcome.

9. Cultural competence training for Level 6 observers and assessors

Staff carrying out observations and assessments would likely benefit from being made more aware of the cultural and social issues relating to the settings and the staff they are assessing in the same way that there is cultural competence training available for DEIS schools.

10. Provide additional support for implementation following the upskilling programmes

A gap was identified in terms of support to monitor progress and guide staff and childcare settings with implementation of the learning in the programmes. It was suggested that this could be done in the form of a practice development worker for the area to provide mentorship and guidance.

11. Engage managers of childcare settings earlier

Timely engagement with managers of childcare settings where staff are taking part in upskilling programmes is important to ensure their buy-in and understanding when it comes to the implementation of the learning.

12. Link Transitions programme with other schools

It was reported that parents are increasingly opting to send their children to schools outside of the area and that as such there is a need for the Transitions programme to link with those schools to ensure that all children receive the same service.

4.2.2 Key recommendations

The following are the key recommendations for the future development of the programme and future collaborative initiatives of the consortium:

1. Needs analysis and sustainability

Undertake a process of consultation with all relevant stakeholders in the area with a view to completing a needs analysis and sustainability programme of work for the area. This should include the development of a strategy to reach the most marginalised children and families.

2. Consider changing the name of the programme

Consider changing the name of the programme to reflect the preferences of the consortium representing the views of the wider community and to ensure people identify with the programme as far as possible.

3. Consider extending the age range of the target group

Given the needs and gaps in services that have been identified for older children, young people and parents in the area, the age range of the target group should be extended to young people up 18 years and their families.

4. Review governance structures and processes

- Review the consortium model and membership to ensure that is as inclusive and accessible as possible
- Redevelop the working groups which have not been functioning in order to provide a forum for discussion and information sharing regarding programme implementation and interagency working
- Redesign funding and resourcing processes to minimise bureaucracy and be as flexible as possible to enable the community to respond effectively, as without their support stakeholders are much less likely to sustain their engagement with the programme
- Improve risk management, data collection and monitoring and review processes to ensure effective project planning, implementation and sustainability.

5. Anti-poverty focus

Ensure that the poverty alleviation aspect of the programme is central to the development of future activities and that the needs of children, young people and families experiencing poverty are considered at the planning stage of these activities

6. Review mechanisms to ensure stronger community voice

In consultation with the consortium, as well as potential future members, review processes and mechanisms to ensure community involvement, community voice, and ownership to achieve greater cohesion, accountability, transparency and accessibility. This may include greater participation on the Steering Group of those involved in programme implementation and direct communication with members of the community experiencing poverty and those working with them.

7. Consider the development of a community-based hub

Given the feedback that the base of the programme is an important element to participants, the development of a community based hub should be considered. The hub would be an opportunity to embed principles of community development in the form of a community based centre which could combine objectives of providing lifelong learning opportunities for staff with the provision of emotional support to children and young people and their parents. The fact that the community does not have the capacity to resource this would mean that it would need to be supported by national policy initiatives.

8. Develop advocacy role of the programme and consortium

Consider the potential of the promotion of the Grangegorman ABC programme and subsequent interagency work in the area to play a role in advocacy and to highlight deficiencies, gaps in service provision and policy opportunities.

9. Convene a forum to discuss evidence based and evidence informed programmes and potential complementary one-to-one support

In response to feedback, collectively discuss the benefits and any perceived limitations of evidence based and evidence informed programmes and potential complementary one-to-one supports which could help sustain engagement and address any individual issues which may arise during the programmes. This additional support would be especially important for the most marginalised families. The forum could also explore the capacity for more tailoring of the programmes to ensure that they are as culturally-attuned and cost-effective as possible. This forum could facilitate a more holistic approach and a greater shared understanding of how to best meet the needs of children, young people and families in the area.

10. Reflection and communication

There is a need for greater attention to be paid to the relationship issues that have occurred due to different ways of working between DIT and the community. There is a lot at stake and it is essential that the successes of the programme not be threatened by tensions that have arisen over the last two years. There is a compelling need for dialogue and improved communication whereby all issues can be carefully considered in a facilitated way in which all stakeholders can feel heard. There is a need for a re-imagining that can build on the successes of the programme and address some of the challenges that arose. This process should provide a space for all members of the consortium to reflect on what worked and have an open discussion regarding what could be improved on, with a view to improving interagency working based on mutual understanding, respect and learning. Communications processes should also be improved so that consortium members and members of the wider community are provided with appropriate and timely information in relation to future activities.

4.2 Concluding remarks

To return to the vision, ABC Grangegorman: Vision Against Poverty was aimed at improving outcomes for children aged 0-6 years and their families in the Grangegorman area experiencing poverty. The process to develop and implement the programme has been successful and has impacted positively on all stakeholders, including children, parents, teachers, childcare staff, public health nurses, community organisations and the wider community. Tangible benefits are evident in terms of improved literacy and communication skills for children, improved parenting skills, social cohesion and wellbeing for parents, enhanced skills for teachers, childcare workers and public health nurses, and increased capacity of

community organisations to work with children and families experiencing poverty. It is clear that this programme has provided a valuable boost to an area that has not experienced large-scale investment at community level. It is important to note also that the nine programmes have achieved varying levels of success and engagement and that there have been challenges reported in the area of leadership, governance, operational issues, community voice, interagency cooperation and the anti-poverty focus of the programme.

As mentioned in Section 3, the development of a community-based hub would work towards providing a solution to the challenges that were evident in the area of community voice and interagency work and the perceived lack of a community development focus and capacity to reach the most marginalised groups. In the context of poverty alleviation, cross-sector strategies are key in ensuring that services are reaching and benefiting the most vulnerable groups in society. The rate of child poverty surged between 2008 and 2011 in 21 EU Member States, with Ireland experiencing the largest increase to 11% (Survey of Income and Living Standards, 2015). The number of homeless children in Ireland rose by 29% between August 2016 and August 2017. There are currently 3,048 homeless children, with children up to four years now being the largest age group experiencing homelessness in Ireland (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2017). In this context, time is of the essence. New approaches are necessary to meet these alarming levels of poverty and disadvantage. The ABC Grangegorman consortium is uniquely placed to rise to the challenge and find new innovative ways of collaborative working to ensure that children, young people and their families are supported and facilitated to reach their potential.

Many of the challenges that have been faced by the programme are common to nascent multi-stakeholder initiatives and the process of bedding down. New relationships take time to form and given the diverse nature of the 27 organisations in the consortium, there have been different approaches and ways of working evident. It will be important to address these issues and pay greater attention to the relationships between DIT and all stakeholders in the community, as well as relationships among community organisations themselves, in order to establish and enhance functioning working relationships that will facilitate effective collaborative working into the future. The two years that the programme has been in existence is a relatively short timeframe and there have been lasting connections made that can be built upon for future collaborative working in the area. The ABC Grangegorman programme has been a significant and positive addition to the North West Inner City and has laid solid foundations for future work to improve the lives of children, young people and their families.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Grangegorman ABC Consortium Members

An Síol Community Development Project

Aosóg Child and Family Project

City of Dublin Education and Training Board

Creative Kids & Co.

Constitution Hill Crèche

Daughters of Charity Community Services

Dublin 1 & 7 Schools Completion Project

Dublin City Council Library

Dublin Institute of Technology (*lead agency*)

Gateway Project - Manor Street

Grangegorman Development Agency

Grangegorman Labour and Learning Forum

HSE Dublin North East

Little Stars Community Crèche

North West Inner City Network (NWICN)

Pitter Patter Crèche

Presentation Primary School, George's Hill

Rainbows/Kent Playgroup

St. Mary's Primary School

Seven Dwarfs Playschool

Silverspoon Montessori & Preschool

St. Gabriel's National School

Stanhope Street Convent Primary School

Step-by-Step Child and Family Project

Tiny Toes Community Crèche

Tusla Child and Family Agency

Appendix 2: Steering Group members

Paul Downes (Chair)	St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University
Bernadette Sproule	City of Dublin Education Training Board
Conor Casby	School Completion Project
Éadaoin Kelly	St. Mary's Primary School
Grainne Foy	North West Inner City Network
Julie Bernard/	
Catherine Bates	Access and Civic Engagement, DIT
Kathleen McCann	Grangegorman Labour and Learning Forum
Kevin Lalor	DIT
Marianne Healy	HSE
Noel O Connor	Director of Student Services, DIT
Nora Rahill	Grangegorman Development Agency
Owen Binchy	An Síol
Sheila Carroll	Daughters of Charity Community Services
Teresa Nyland	Tusla

In attendance:

Mick Cowman	Grangegorman ABC
Petra Hanlon	Grangegorman ABC, DIT
Ríona Fitzgerald	Engagement Outreach Manager, DIT

Appendix 3: Consent form and information sheet

Consent form

ABC Grangegorman

PROCESS EVALUATION OF ABC GRANGEGORMAN SERVICE PROVIDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

(Lead: DIT Access and Civic Engagement Office)

This consent form is to be signed by participants in the consultations that take place under the process evaluation of ABC Grangegorman service providers and stakeholders. The evaluation is being carried out by independent researcher, Sarah Murphy.

Consultations will consist of interviews and focus groups and will be carried out in line with research ethics of confidentiality, anonymity and respect. With the consent of participants, the consultations will be used to inform the final evaluation report and all responses will be confidential. The length of interviews and focus groups will depend on participants' availability.

All record of the interviews and focus groups will be stored securely. Transcripts will be destroyed once the evaluation has been completed.

I have been fully informed about the aims of the evaluation.

I consent to participate in the consultations and understand that all information provided will be confidential.

Name.....

Job title/ ABC programme.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Many thanks for your participation.

For further information please contact:

Sarah Murphy

Email: sarahclairemurphy@gmail.com

Information Sheet

PROCESS EVALUATION OF ABC GRANGEGORMAN SERVICE PROVIDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

(Lead: DIT Access and Civic Engagement Office)

What are the objectives of the evaluation?

- To evaluate the process of implementation of ABC Grangegorman
- To assess its impact on service providers and stakeholders
- To guide future activities to improve the outcomes for children aged 0 – 6 years and their families living in the Grangegorman area

What will be covered in the evaluation?

- What has been the benefit for you of your participation with ABC programmes? (and for your children/ students/ clients as appropriate to the individual stakeholder being interviewed)
- What has worked well? What have been the main enabling factors?
- What have been the challenges? Were there any barriers to implementation?
- What could be improved on for the future? What has been the main learning?

How will the evaluation be carried out?

The evaluation will be carried out by an independent evaluator, Sarah Murphy, between June and September 2017.

In each programme, service providers and stakeholders will be asked to participate in interviews and/or focus groups as appropriate. A final evaluation report will be completed by the end of September 2017 when findings will be presented to the ABC Grangegorman Steering Group.



The **A**rea **B**ased **C**hildhood Programme 2013–2017

