

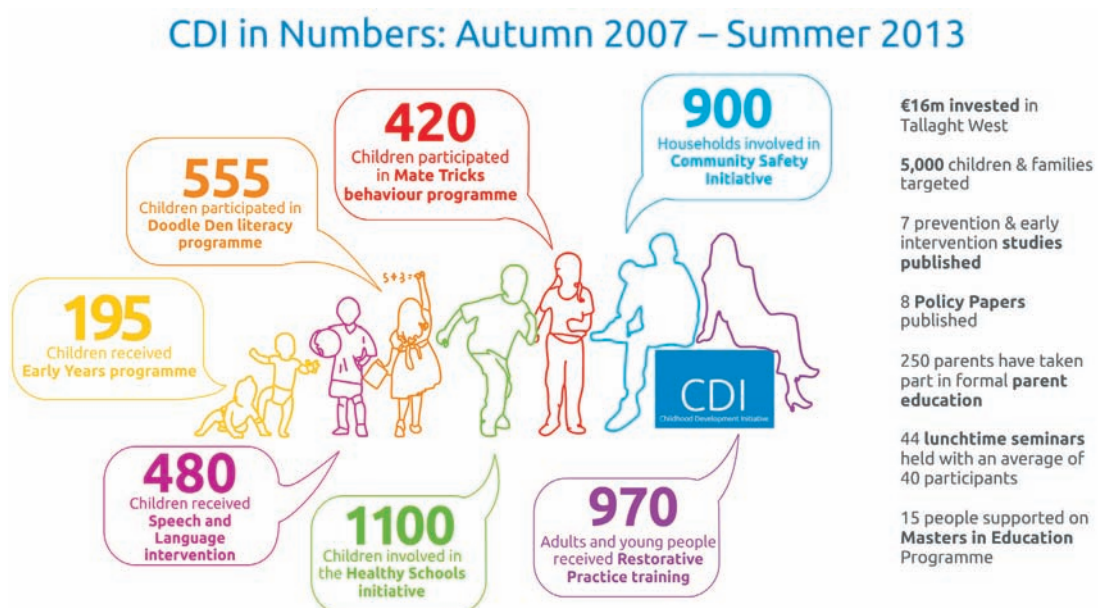


Meeting needs, making changes, improving outcomes

## Leading Community Change: Lessons for Public Reform

### Policy Brief

This policy brief draws on the final process evaluation, *Leading Community Change: Delivering Better Outcomes in an Irish Community* (Canavan *et al*, 2014), of the work of the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI). Since 2007, CDI has designed, delivered and evaluated a suite of interventions aimed at improving outcomes for children and families. Information on the overall outputs of Phase 1 of CDI’s work in Tallaght West from 2007–2013 are set out in the following diagram.



Whilst each of these services has been independently evaluated, this overarching cross-programme process evaluation considers the structures, processes and activities that supported the implementation of CDI’s strategy. It also sets out to identify the challenges, strengths and weaknesses in this approach, and to extract the key aspects that supported positive developments. This Policy Brief sets out the core elements of a process evaluation and summarises the lessons arising from the report, particularly those relating to public reform.

## Benefits of Process Evaluations      CDI's Process Evaluation

A process evaluation differs from an outcomes evaluation in that the latter focuses on whether a programme achieved its goals, while the former sets out to explain why and how the results were achieved. Ideally, evaluations will include both elements in order to maximise understanding not only of what has changed, but also of what enabled the change. As James Bell Associates (2007, p. 4) comment:

*'If outcome data indicate that change took place, process data can be used to demonstrate whether this change took place as a result of the intervention or other contextual factors. By delineating pathways of change, the program logic model, or theory of change, enables process data to be linked to program outcomes.'*

Importantly, process data can also identify factors that may help or hinder the achievement of anticipated outcomes. These may include

- **Programme fidelity**, or whether the programme was delivered as intended. For example, if elements of the programme were omitted or staff were not appropriately trained.
- **Poor programme reach**, or low numbers impacted by the intervention, perhaps due to insufficient referrals being received or where there were higher levels of attrition than expected.
- **Changes in need**, whereby the logic underpinning the programme was no longer relevant due to changes in external factors, such as population profile or local levels of service delivery.

It has been argued that process evaluations are of particular importance to the not-for-profit sector because they allow examination of how the organisation *'develops itself, its structures, its supporting programmes like communication and marketing, and even fund development to get to the outcomes everyone wants'* (Linnell, 2012). Without these elements, it is not possible to capture the full implementation implications in terms of human and social capital and investment in staff training and capacity-building – elements which are explored in process evaluations.

The overall objective of this Final Process Evaluation Report, *Leading Community Change*, was to *'examine and critically assess the working processes of CDI in implementing its programme of work to improve outcomes for children and families'* (Canavan *et al*, 2014, p. 2). A primarily qualitative evaluation, the report draws on the seven service evaluation reports\*, as well as field-work that included significant observation and interviews. Cross-cutting themes are considered in relation to the following areas: origins and development of the CDI strategy; interagency working and service integration; training and support; community; organisation; and mainstreaming, sustainability and dissemination.

*Leading Community Change* characterises CDI as a 'Comprehensive Community Initiative' (Kubisch *et al*, 2010), (CCI). A CCI is defined by processes which are seen as central to the development and implementation of effective community responses such as:

- A detailed, sophisticated and inclusive strategic planning process at the outset.
- Local, national and international experts are included who can contribute to the implementation process at different stages.
- Training and support infrastructures to support quality provision, particularly Communities of Practice (CoPs).
- Any significant involvement of community residents is supported through detailed planning, attention to process issues, resourcing, time and persistence.
- Interagency working and service integration is planned for, and underpinned by clarity regarding what is to be achieved.
- Generating and disseminating robust evidence is planned and resourced and effective engagement with Government is established.



\* The seven service evaluation reports are (full details in References): Biggart *et al*, 2012; Comiskey *et al*, 2012; Fives *et al*, 2013; Hayes *et al*, 2012a; Hayes *et al*, 2012b; Kearns *et al*, 2013; O'Hare *et al*, 2012.

## Findings

The following conclusions are identified in Leading Community Change:

- That a commitment to interagency working underpins all of CDI's activities, structures and processes.
- CDI has contributed to the enhancement of quality services in Tallaght West.
- Communities of Practice (CoPs), in which practitioners are supported to reflect on and improve how they deliver services, were central to both programme delivery and as a mechanism to support collaboration. Coupled with training, these formal supports were enhanced and underpinned by informal, relationship focused supports.
- CDI has demonstrated an ability to adapt and respond to changing need, which is a critical aspect of any community-based initiative.
- CDI was effective in its engagement with professionals and service providers, but the participation of residents, children and young people was more challenging. Being community-based, while also developing and implementing evidence-based programmes, created tensions.
- Strong leadership, an emphasis on team development, functioning and support, and effective governance were key to the responsiveness of the organisation, the quality of relationships developed and the effective management of a large-scale, complex intervention.
- Implementing a CCI is enabled through constant focus and attention, persistence, patience, realism and adaptation.
- Capacity-building for the resident and professional community, as well as the Initiative's Executive, is a specific aspect of the implementation process.

## The Public Reform Agenda

Recent years have seen the growing centrality of a public reform agenda, largely resulting from the need for austerity measures, but increasingly underpinned by a recognition that decision-making processes, performance monitoring and policy development have not been sufficiently grounded in evidence, outcomes or quality.

The *Public Service Reform Plan, 2014–2016* (DPER, 2014) notes a renewed focus on service users, efficiency and openness, with an emphasis on leadership, capability and delivery. Four key principles are named, three of which are directly relevant to CDI's work and the findings of this evaluation. These are:

- **Delivery of improved outcomes**, which will be achieved through '*alternative models of service delivery ... and service delivery improvements at sectoral and organisational levels*'.
- **Reform dividend**, whereby the efficiencies and savings resulting from the reform process to date will be utilised to support new or improved services.
- **Openness and accountability**, to support improved trust in Government and public services through the delivery of these principles as an underpinning methodology.

Each of these principles has inherent implications for how we recruit, support, train and develop our staff and how we engage with our partners and service users. Introducing new or revised approaches to services; stopping those interventions that are demonstrated not to be effective or do not offer value for money; driving change across and within organisations; making outcomes and evidence central to procurement, commissioning and monitoring processes; and creating an ethos that values and understands meaningful public engagement – all these are change management processes. Leadership and an ability to balance scrutiny with support will be central; skills and strategies to engage different audiences and establish and maintain a rapport will be critical; and structures and governance that facilitate responsiveness and flexibility, alongside focus and target setting, will be core requirements in delivering the objectives of the public reform agenda. CDI's experience, albeit at a community level, offers insights and learning which mirror these principles.





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## Recommendations

Drawing on both this report and those of the service evaluations, the following recommendations have been identified:

1. Training and support should be provided to policy-makers and influencers to enable the interpretation and utilisation of research knowledge to inform planning and resourcing decisions.
2. Services should be incentivised to re-align delivery and resources towards evidence-informed models. Acknowledging limited or no outcomes, and introducing change as a result of this should be seen as positive rather than a failure.
3. A national framework should be developed, to which all Government departments and agencies sign up, that provides the protocols and policies for interagency collaboration, including referral processes and information-sharing in order to maximise the effective utilisation of resources to support children's well-being. Some Children's Services Committees (CSCs) have developed such protocols and CDI recommends that a national information-sharing protocol is agreed, building on the CSC protocols. These elements should be included in the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People.
4. Interdisciplinary and cross-agency training should be seen as the default position, unless contra-indicated.
5. Those with line management responsibilities in the child and family sector should be provided with training in relation to mentoring, enabling reflective practice, effective needs assessment and planning processes.
6. Senior staff should be supported in developing a positive organisational culture, in diffusing leadership across structures, in assessing team requirements and in logic modelling (a framework that focuses on the achievement of agreed outcomes), utilising evidence to inform planning and assessing impact.
7. The commitment to using evidence to inform planning and service delivery, should underpin decisions across all Government departments and agencies and this principle should underpin the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, in order to ensure the best return on investment in prevention and early intervention services.
8. Departments should commit to giving serious consideration to the implications of the CDI and other evaluations, for professional training, service planning and service integration.

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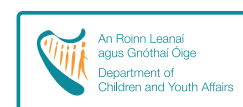
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