It is estimated that 20% of children experience psychological problems at any one time. One in five children have mental health services (CMH) in Ireland are under-recruited. Recent economic downturn has hindered the possibility of increased funding to alleviate these deficits. It is now imperative that mental health professionals create innovative and cost effective solutions to promote positive mental health. Recent literature has focused on the benefits of self-delivered parenting programmes, with minimal costs incurred. Based on the developing evidence supporting self-delivered approaches, the Lucena Foundation has initiated a series of parent information evenings. These evenings are offered proactively building support networks and reference frames for parents. Frequent attendances at groups may reduce the need for more expensive intensive clinician delivered treatments. For those families awaiting child mental health services, offering practical advice on parenting and mental health issues can set the scene for subsequent and necessary change. In children who already have an established mental health difficulty, parent psychoeducation is considered a standard part of effective treatment, either delivered individually or in a group setting. Parent education not only empowers parents with necessary skills and knowledge, but also assists in normalising the challenges and difficulties inherent in parenting. Frequent attendances at groups may reduce the need for more expensive intensive clinician delivered treatments. For those families awaiting child mental health services, offering practical advice on parenting and mental health issues can set the scene for subsequent and necessary change. In children who already have an established mental health difficulty, parent psychoeducation is considered a standard part of effective treatment, either delivered individually or in a group setting.

Evidence Base for Parent Education Programmes

Investing in parent education provides parents with skills and confidence to parent in an optimum way, specific to each child's developmental trajectory, and increasing the likelihood of achieving positive mental health outcomes, both in their children and in themselves. Programs incorporating parent education are based on the premise that the promotion of caring, understanding, and positive parenting are central to creating safe and supportive environments for children. Parent education not only empowers parents with necessary skills and knowledge, but also assists in normalising the challenges and difficulties inherent in parenting. Frequent attendances at groups may reduce the need for more expensive intensive clinician delivered treatments. For those families awaiting child mental health services, offering practical advice on parenting and mental health issues can set the scene for subsequent and necessary change. In children who already have an established mental health difficulty, parent psychoeducation is considered a standard part of effective treatment, either delivered individually or in a group setting.

Parenting information sessions, such as those associated with the Incredible Years (IY) parenting programmes for conduct disorder or ADHD specific parenting programs have a particularly strong evidence base.

Lucena Foundation Parent Information Evenings

Parent information evenings are held in the school Hall of St Peters School, which is sited in Lucena Clinic, Rathgar. The evening begins with a 45 minute key note presentation (45 minutes), followed by a 10 minute break during which questions are encouraged via written submission to ensure confidentiality and to encourage questions from less confident parents. The evening ends with a question and answer session (60 minutes).

Parent Information Evenings: Progress to date

The Lucena Foundation began the parent information evenings in 2006, and have offered 21 talks on topics such as Autism, ADHD; anger management; issues in adolescence; anxiety; depression; eating disorders; exam stress; selective mutism; speech and language problems and psychosis. By June 2009, 1,583 parents had attended. Feedback forms were completed anonymously after each session. 807 parents returned evaluation forms. Most of the parents reported hearing about the parent evenings in the health supplement of the Irish Times (44%); 81% of parents found the evenings proactively useful. Only 15% parents answered questions relating directly to their own child, the majority (36%) had a child already attending a CAMHS, of which 60% were satisfied with the service received, 6% had a child on a CAMHS waiting list, 23% had a child referred but not accepted, 9% had a child on a waiting list for a different area, 6% had sought help elsewhere but had to wait too long. In qualitative comments on the feedback forms, two major themes emerged: parents want to improve their parenting skills and knowledge, but also assist in normalising the challenges and difficulties inherent in parenting. Frequent attendances at groups may reduce the need for more expensive intensive clinician delivered treatments. For those families awaiting child mental health services, offering practical advice on parenting and mental health issues can set the scene for subsequent and necessary change. In children who already have an established mental health difficulty, parent psychoeducation is considered a standard part of effective treatment, either delivered individually or in a group setting.

Parent information evenings are held in the school Hall of St Peters School, which is sited in Lucena Clinic, Rathgar. Further longitudinal research into these initiatives is required to examine possible long term effects on subsequent mental health outcomes.

In Ireland one in every five euro of public money is spent on health. Despite an increase in Budget 2009, bringing the overall spending to 15.8 billion, we are still behind our international counterparts. Of this, only 7.8% is spent on Mental Health and despite almost 23% of the population aged 15 and under, 7% of all mental health services is spent on children and adolescents. A Vision for Change strategy commits to the development of child and adolescent community mental health teams (CAMHT) and recommends two teams per 100,000 populations by 2013. Currently, there are only 47 CMHTs in operation, many without the full complement of staff. There are over 3,600 children on CAMHT waiting lists.