

Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) Submission to Public Consultation on Improving the Lives of Children and Young People

July 2012



The
ATLANTIC
Philanthropies

**CDI Submission to National Children's Strategy Framework;
Children under 6, aged 6 to 12, aged 13 to 17 and Young people over 18;**

1. In your opinion, what are a) the 3 best things and b) the 3 worse things about life for children and young people in Ireland?

Based on an extensive survey in Tallaght West "How are our Families", which was divided into two surveys; 1) Household Survey (141 families) and; 2) Youth Survey (208 young people). CDI found that the three best things about life for children and young people in Ireland are:

1. Parental relations and educational opportunities;
2. Social support and sense of community and safety;
3. General health and well-being.

In regard to parental relations and educational opportunities:

- For children under 18, family, and particularly parents are the primary champions for children. A caring and informed parent is the primary resource in the healthy development, support and wellbeing of a child. It is essential for any strategy for children and young people to proactively support parents and families. In addition to this the investment in quality educational opportunities for children aged 0 – 18 is essential;
- The CDI household study found that 45% of parents reported that they wanted their child to go to college or to have a good education and 8% wanted their child to get a good job and 16% wanted their child to be happy. Parental expectations for children in Tallaght West have increased with 81% reporting that they believe their child has a happy future ahead of them, which should result in positive outcomes for children in the future;
- In general, young people in Tallaght West aged 12 to 17 years, reported having a positive relationship with their parents (or primary caregivers);
- 62% of parents in our household survey believed their child was achieving their potential at nursery / school;
- In the household survey parents reported that 52% of children were involved in after school activities, the most frequently reported categories being music, dance and drama 30% and sports 26%;
- 35% of young people aged 12 to 17 years often or always attended an after schools club.

In regard to social support and sense of community:

- The communities that children live in, their friends and their sense of belonging are critical to their overall development and well-being;
- 76% of respondents aged 12 – 17 years of age reported having a very or extremely enjoyable life;
- Friendships and peer support are very important for children and young people growing up. 86% of young people aged 12 to 17, stated that they and their friends very often or always helped each other and the majority of respondents reported having very positive relationships with their friends;
- 67% of families in Tallaght West reported that they felt a sense of community with other people in their area, with 93% reporting that they knew at least one of their neighbours;
- 90% of parents reported that their child/children feel a sense of community with other children in the area.

In regard to general health and well-being:

- Children's health and well-being needs to be nurtured and access to supports and services to ensure children's overall good health and well-being are essential;
- 67% of young people aged 12 to 17 years in Tallaght West, believed that their health was very good or excellent.

CDI found that the three worst things about life for children and young people in Ireland are:

1. Financial insecurity;
2. Family Difficulties and Domestic Violence;
3. Community Safety / Crime/ Anti-social behaviour / Bullying;

In relation to financial insecurity:

- 18.6% of children in Ireland are at risk of poverty. The most vulnerable group in society are people living in one parent households, experiencing the highest at risk of poverty at 35.5%; (CSO, 2009) in comparison to 40% one parent households in Tallaght West (CDI 2012);
- There are serious financial demands on families in Tallaght West, with 67% of household survey respondents currently renting their property, 76% have a medical card and 43% reported that state benefits are the household's only source of income. Families are seeking support where possible and are accessing local services, 33% St. Vincent de Paul, 29% Credit Union and 7% MABS. Less than half of households, 46% in Tallaght West indicated that they were getting by financially, however 33% reported having financial worries almost all of the time;
- In the youth survey 71% of participants aged 12 – 17 years reported very often or always having enough money to do the same things as their friends;
- While many families in Tallaght West, and perhaps in similar communities face many financial challenges on a day to day basis, and indeed a significant minority experience multiple and major challenges, there is strong evidence of resilience and coping within the community.

In relation to family difficulties and domestic violence:

- No child should be at risk due to family difficulties or domestic violence and supports in this area need to be addressed;
- 21% of respondents to our household survey reported experiencing difficulties with former partners, while 16% reported having regular fights with their partner;
- 16% of respondents in our household survey stated that they felt unsafe in their home, with 8% reporting that their child felt unsafe in the home;
- 27% of the household survey participants self-reported difficulties with anxiety or depression, while 16% reported anxiety and depression in their partners;
- 35% of parents reported that their child had difficulties with emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get on with other people to some extent;
- In the household survey, in terms of school absenteeism, almost one third reported their child being absent for 5 – 20 days. The most common reason being illness 55%, with fewer participants reporting the reason as appointments 16%, holidays 11%, truancy 3% or temporary exclusion 1%.

In relation to community safety / crime/ anti-social behaviour / bullying:

- Each child is entitled to live in a safe community, free of bullying, violence and crime.
- 34% of young people aged 12 to 17 years in Tallaght West report that they have been bullied at least once or more.
- In the household survey there was a high reporting of crime 87%, anti-social behaviour 79% and environmental issues 77% by adults in Tallaght West. However the extent to which the problems impact on respondents own households was lower.
- In terms of incidence of anti-social behaviour, 50% of the participants in our youth survey indicated that there was a problem in their neighbourhood with 13% indicating that they were directly affected. 49% reported that crime was an issue in their neighbourhood, whilst 10% reported that they were affected by it. These findings suggest that parents and / or schools maybe mediating the effects of negative experiences of crime, anti-social behaviour and environmental problems.

2. What can be done so that children and young people are safe and protected?

Families:

- Engage with family support from the earliest age and throughout the life course of the child. Parental engagement with family supports and services for all age categories is essential. The forthcoming CDI Evaluation reports on Mate Tricks, Doodle Den, Early Years and the Healthy Schools programme all highlight the significant positive impact on outcomes for children, when parents engage in supports and services. This will apply for children aged 0 – 18 years.

By Communities:

- All adults understand their duty to care in relation to children aged 0 - 18.

By Government:

0- 12 age category

- In terms of safety the forthcoming CDI Doodle Den Literacy programme evaluation report from Queen's University Belfast has demonstrated a reduction in bullying and improved pro-social behavior. Both are closely connected to safety and protection, therefore we recommend the replication of the Doodle Den Programme;
- The forthcoming CDI Healthy Schools Programme evaluation report from Trinity College Dublin found that leadership is required in enabling better connections between schools and health services to improve referral mechanisms and access to services including child protection services and to improve interagency collaboration and communication;
- The evaluation of the CDI Mate Tricks programme (report pending from Queen's University Belfast) found no impact on children's pro-social behavior, despite being evidence informed and having significant investment and resources, therefore existing and future initiatives aimed at children's safety and protection should be delivered with caution and alongside rigorous evaluation;
- In targeting children's academic skills, CDI's literacy support programme Doodle Den (report pending) found that supporting children's academic development has a knock on affect in terms of promoting pro-social behaviour. Ensuring children have a solid foundation with their literacy skills can lead to them having an increased sense of protection and safety.

0 - 18 age category

- All organisations and individuals working with children aged 0 – 18 actively seek to ensure that they are adhering to Children First and proactively deliver on their duty to care;
- All organisations and individuals must have access to Children First Training;
- Pro-actively ensure that all those working with children aged 0 – 18 are appropriately trained.

3. What can be done so that children and young people can enjoy learning in all aspects of their lives?

Families:

- Engage with family support from the earliest age and throughout the life course of the child. Parental engagement with family supports and services for all age categories is essential. The forthcoming CDI Evaluation reports on Mate Tricks, Doodle Den, Early Years and the Healthy Schools programme all highlight the significant positive impact on outcomes for children, when parents engage in supports and services. This will apply for children aged 0 – 18 years.

By Government:

O- 6 age category

- CDI Early Years evaluation (report pending from Dublin Institute of Technology) found that through the delivery of speech and language therapy training to practitioners, teachers and parents the following outcomes were achieved;
 - improved children's cognitive development due to enhanced awareness amongst staff, in relation to how to support early speech and language development;
 - improved literacy rich environment in the early years setting;
 - improved confidence in children availing of CDI's SLT programme and a reduction in bullying as stated by parents;
 - Therefore it is recommended that all early years' practitioners and primary school teachers receive training in Speech and Language development and the replication of the CDI SLT programme.
 - CDI Early Years evaluation (report pending) found that through the combination of the HighScope curriculum and the role of the Parent Carer Facilitator in the CDI Early years programme the following outcomes were achieved:
 - improved home learning environment;
 - improved school readiness;
- Therefore it is recommended that all early years services should implement evidence based curriculum programmes and have a specific parental support element.

O- 12 age category

- CDI Healthy Schools evaluation (report pending) found that parents engaged more readily in schools when they were part of the planning and delivery of activities in schools.
- The pending evaluation of the CDI Doodle Den programme that targets children aged 5 – 7 years, found that literacy support delivered through a balanced framework, which includes fun active experiences, led to improved outcomes for the children's overall literacy. In addition to this, positive results were also found in relation to:
 - improved teacher expectations;
 - increase in children's enjoyment and participation;
 - improved school attendance;
 - improved parent engagement in schools;
 - increase library use;
 - increase in home reading;
- The CDI *"How Are Our Families?"* report (2012) found that Nearly half (n= 99) of young people aged 12 – 17 who participated in the youth survey reported 'never' reading or reading for 'less than 1 hour' during weekdays. This is important within the context of the national literacy and numeracy strategy.
- The CDI Mate Tricks evaluation report (pending) found that to ensure that programmes are achieving their required outcomes we need to engage in a rigorous process of evaluating programmes and consultation with children and young people.

O- 18 age category

- In order to ensure high quality service provision all those engaged in working with children and families aged 0 – 18 need to be highly motivated, supported and skilled. CDI developed a Quality Services Better Outcomes workbook which makes reference to implementation drivers, drawn from the work of Fixsen and Blasé, (2008), which promotes support and enhanced delivery of quality services to children and families. These implementation drivers need to underpin all services for children and families and include Capacity Building, Organisational Change and Leadership.

4. What can be done so that children and young people are healthy and active?

Families:

- Engage with family support from the earliest age and throughout the life course of the child. Parental engagement with family supports and services for all age categories is essential. The forthcoming CDI Evaluation reports on Mate Tricks, Doodle Den, Early Years and the Healthy Schools programme all highlight the significant positive impact on outcomes for children, when parents engage in supports and services. This will apply for children aged 0 – 18 years.

By Government:

6 - 18 age category

- CDI Healthy Schools evaluation (report pending from Trinity College Dublin) found that there were scores in the child depression index, which were some cause for concern;
- Through the CDI Healthy Schools programme there was a focus on greater interagency working, which resulted in improved referral mechanisms and communication between schools and agencies;
- The CDI How Are Our Families report (2011) demonstrates that where there are affordable and accessible activities available that there is a high level of engagement in out of school activities in Tallaght West. For example, in the household survey parents reported 52% of children were involved in after school activities, the most frequently reported categories being music, dance and drama 30% and sports 26%; 35% of young people aged 12 to 17 years often or always attended an after schools club.

5. What do children and young people need to feel economically secure?

By Government:

- There is conflicting data in our How Are Our Families report as parents clearly protect and shield their children from their financial problems. In the household section of the survey 33% of households reported having financial worries almost all of the time, compared to findings in the youth survey, where 71% of participants aged 12 – 17 years reported very often or always having enough money to do the same things as their friends;
- Studies show that poor educational attainment is associated with early school dropout and increased likelihood of lower social and economic circumstances. Therefore, ensuring adequate and effective support at school level should be a priority;
- There is a plethora of international evidence that prevention and early intervention particularly on educational attainment significantly impacts on children's tract rectority. A number of forthcoming CDI reports will evidence initiatives which have supported educational outcomes for children. Which are likely based on the international evidence to improve their opportunity to become economically secure adults.

6. What can be done so that children and young people have a say in decisions that affect their lives?

Families:

- Engage with family support from the earliest age and throughout the life course of the child. Parental engagement with family supports and services for all age categories is essential. The forthcoming CDI Evaluation reports on Mate Tricks, Doodle Den, Early Years and the Healthy

Schools programme all highlight the significant positive impact on outcomes for children, when parents engage in supports and services. This will apply for children aged 0 – 18 years.

By Government:

- The CDI Restorative Practice evaluation report (pending) found that restorative practice has aided children in voicing their opinions. Evaluators and practitioners need skills to do meaningful consultation.
- 7. **What can be done to help children and young people behave positively and to be good citizens?**

Families:

- Engage with family support from the earliest age and throughout the life course of the child. Parental engagement with family supports and services for all age categories is essential. The forthcoming CDI Evaluation reports on Mate Tricks, Doodle Den, Early Years and the Healthy Schools programme all highlight the significant positive impact on outcomes for children, when parents engage in supports and services. This will apply for children aged 0 – 18 years.

By Government:

O- 6 age category

- The CDI forthcoming Early Year's report found that in relation to conflict resolution with pre-school children, they did not need adult intervention to manage conflict as a result of the HighScope training.

O- 12 age category

- In terms of safety the CDI Doodle Den Literacy programme has demonstrated a reduction in bullying and improved pro-social behavior. Both are closely connected to safety and protection, therefore we recommend the replication of the Doodle Den Programme;
- The evaluation of the CDI Mate Tricks programme found no impact on children's pro-social behavior, despite being evidence informed and significant investment and resources, therefore existing and future initiatives aimed at children's safety and protection should be delivered with caution and alongside rigorous evaluation;
- In targeting children's academic skills, CDI's literacy support programme Doodle Den found that supporting children's academic development has a knock on affect in terms of promoting pro-social behaviour. Ensuring children have a solid foundation with their literacy skills can lead to them having an increased sense of protection and safety;
- The CDI Restorative Practice evaluation report (pending) found that Restorative Practice training and implementation has aided children in managing conflict and in developing empathetic skills, resulting in:
 - increased responsibility in their behaviour;
 - increased empathy for the young person and increased empathy from the young person.

8. What can be done to help young people move confidently into adulthood?

Families:

- Engage with family support from the earliest age and throughout the life course of the child. Parental engagement with family supports and services for all age categories is essential. The forthcoming CDI Evaluation reports on Mate Tricks, Doodle Den, Early Years and the Healthy Schools programme all highlight the significant positive impact on outcomes for children, when parents engage in supports and services. This will apply for children aged 0 – 18 years.

By Government:

0 - 18 age category

- Supporting transitions through key educational stages, from home to pre-school, pre-school to primary school, primary school to secondary school and secondary school to college;
- For young people to move into adulthood we need the early identification of need for services and improved access to services, better referral systems as evidenced through CDI's Early Years and Healthy Schools programmes. Up to 65% of children referred to the CDI SLT service, had not been referred to the HSE;
- The importance of early identification of need and provision of appropriate responses in all stages of development are key to supporting children and young people into adulthood. Specific mechanisms and processes to support early identification of need have been demonstrated as effective in the following CDI evaluations underpinning these processes is the need for an area based response which draws on local data and information to place service delivery and a commitment to and leadership regarding interagency collaboration to ensure integrated delivery.
- There is a need to utilise existing data and information to inform service planning and delivery;
- Logic model process should underpin all service delivery i.e. what do we want to achieve? What do we know about how to achieve that? What do we need to do now?
- Supporting the development and well-being of children and families relies on understanding the challenges the community faces, recognising the resources that are clearly evident within the community and identifying the gaps between these as areas for future development.

Other comments:

A core element of the work undertaken by CDI is the rigorous and independent evaluation of all aspects CDI's work, including both the impact of service delivery on outcomes for children and families, as well as consideration of the process elements, and 'how' objectives are progressed. CDI are working with four independent evaluation teams, which are Trinity College Dublin, Queen's University Belfast, National University of Galway and Dublin Institute of Technology who are conducting seven service evaluations and an overall process evaluation. A key learning from this evaluation process is that programmes designed to have a positive impact on children's lives, and their families, need to be rigorously and independently evaluated to evidence whether or not programmes are making the desired impact.
