Evaluation of the Partnership with Parents™ Programme

Executive Summary

Barnardos

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BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

Ireland's population has undergone significant change in recent years, with the number of families increasing by 3.3% to 1,218,370, over the five years to April 2016. Of those families, 218,817 were headed by one parent, mainly mothers (86%) (Central Statistics Office, 2016). Deprivation rates remain high, with enforced deprivation experienced by 19% of the entire population in 2017, with the rate rising to 23% for those aged 0-17 years (Central Statistics Office, 2018). Notably, those living in households with one adult and one or more children aged under 18 had the highest deprivation rate in 2017, at 45% (Central Statistics Office, 2018). While families across every strata of society experience need, parents living in disadvantaged communities can face multiple and additional challenges concurrently, including the need for food and stable housing (Odgers, et al., 2012).

Following the establishment of the Department of Chidren and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in 2011, a range of policy publications have repeatedly outlined the Government's commitment to children and young people up to the age of 24, a vision where all children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. The need to support parents, along with an emphasis on earlier intervention and prevention, are among the six transformational goals identified in the national policy framework: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs, 2014). The framework recommends this is achieved, in part, 'through universal access to good-quality parenting advice and programmes, and access to affordable quality childcare, as well as targeted, evidence-based supports to those parents with greatest needs' (Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs, 2014, p. vi). The more recent departmental strategy, *First 5, a Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028* (Government of Ireland, 2018) commits to supporting parents as a central goal. Coupled with the recent creation of a discrete parenting unit in the DCYA, a key action planned includes developing a tiered model of parenting services (Government of Ireland, 2018).

In line with policy recommendations, a growing body of literature emphasises the importance of investing in supports for families in disadvantaged communities through the provision of parenting and family support services, emphasising the transformative potential of prevention and early intervention in improving outcomes for children and families. The idea that parenting skills can be learned has become commonplace, and there has been a surge in the provision and evaluation of parenting support programmes (Centre for Effective Services, 2012). To this end, there are numerous parenting programmes commonly used within professional and academic settings across Ireland, including: Incredible Years, Triple P, Parents Plus!, Parents under Pressure and Circle of Security; all of which have been evaluated and proven to be effective (Leijten, Raaijmakers, Orobio de Castro, van den Ban, & Matthys, 2017; Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day, 2014; Carr, Hartnett, Brosnan, & Sharry, 2016; Dawe & Harnett, 2007; Huber, McMahon, & Sweller, 2015).

The types of supports provided to parents vary from 'universal support in informal settings for self-referring parents' through to 'specialist services to support families in particular situations, dealing with specific problems that may present at different times in the life-course of the child' (Devaney & Dolan, 2015, p. 5). The majority of the aforementioned parenting programmes are delivered within a group setting, however group-based parenting programmes are not always suitable or effective for families with complex and multi-faceted needs; these families benefit more from tailored and flexible one-to-one programmes (Moran, Ghate, & Van Der Merwe, 2004; Fives, Canavan, & Dolan, 2014). A consultation process with those delivering, receiving and referring to Barnardos services (2005–2006) indicated that families referred to Barnardos for parenting support tend to have higher levels of need than those typically expected to attend a group-based parenting support intervention. As a result of this consultation process, an intensive programme design process commenced, resulting in Barnardos' Partnership with Parents™ programme.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS™

Partnership with Parents™ (PwP) is an intensive, home-based, one-to-one parenting support programme for parents with multiple and complex needs, developed by Barnardos Ireland. The design of PwP commenced in 2009 with a systematic process of translating evidence about what works in parenting support into the design of a new home-based parenting support programme (Prendiville, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2009d). A service design team was tasked with developing a programme that offered parents[1] and their children the best chance to succeed and make a real difference across a range of common needs. To this end, PwP aims to:

- Improve parent-child communication
- Increase parental understanding of, and ability to manage, their child's behaviour
- Improve social development of the child
- Introduce consistent routines
- Increase parental involvement in the child's education
- Ensure the child's physical needs are met
- Increase parental ability to manage crises effectively

With PwP aiming to help parents make changes to their parenting, the programme draws significantly on Social Learning Theory, a fundamental theory of behaviour change (Bandura, 1986). To illustrate the resources, activities and expected outcomes associated with the programme, a logic model (Hayes, Parchman, & Howard, 2011) was developed consisting of three interconnected areas: situation, outcomes and services (Figure 1). The first circle of the logic model identifies the situation in which families using the PwP programme may be living. They may have needs in relation to the core tasks of parenting: care, control and development. The second circle relates to the outcomes that the programme aims to achieve. The third circle identifies the different service programme components of PwP – six plug-ins and two optional programme components (crisis management and practical support). The three circles of the logic model are underpinned by a band, which signifies the importance of the relationship between the worker and parent in PwP.

1 PwP is designed to work with one or both parents, or whoever is fulfilling the parenting role.

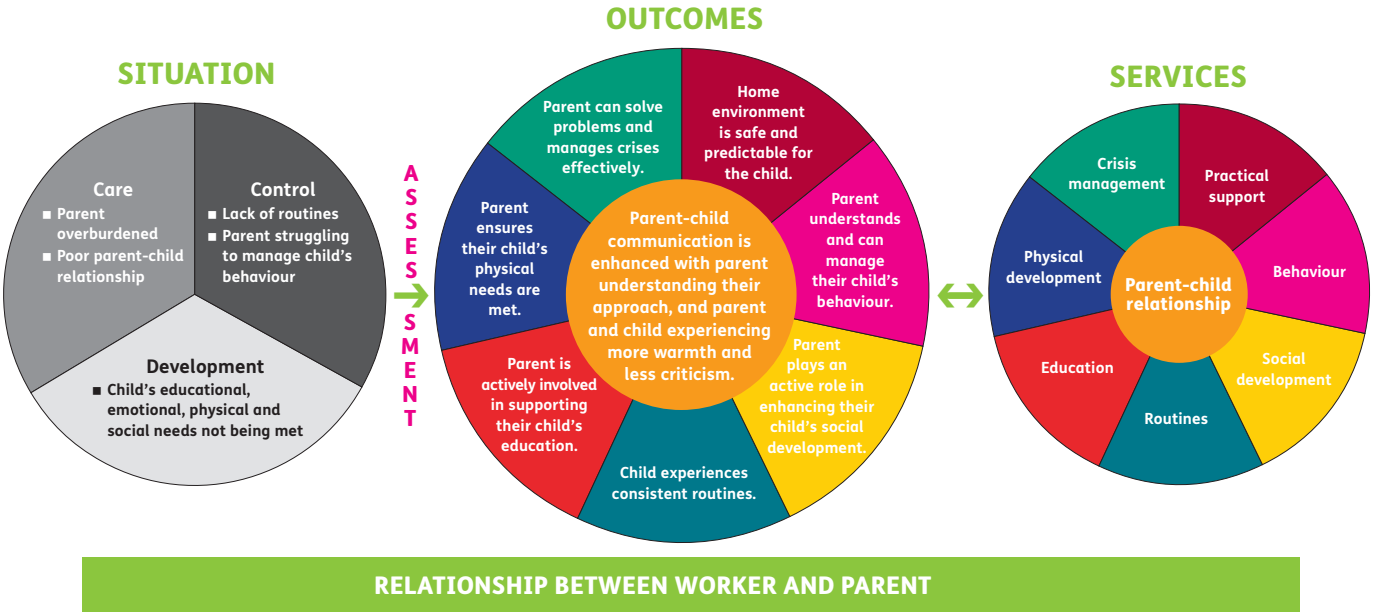

Figure 1 PwP logic model (Barnardos, 2013)

PwP consists of suite of 'plug-ins' – programme components that are used flexibly to individualise and tailor the programme to address the needs of different families. In order to identify which components of the programme will be offered, a formal needs assessment is undertaken with the parents to: 1) increase the practitioner's understanding of the needs and context of the children and family; and 2) provide parents with an opportunity to engage in a guided conversation regarding their needs and the needs of their children. Two assessment tools are used to facilitate this process: the Parent and Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI)[2] (Gerard, 1994) and the PwP assessment wheel[3] (Barnardos, 2013). Together, a parent and their project worker choose the appropriate plug-in following this initial needs assessment.

The programme contains a central plug-in that focuses on the parent-child relationship, which is offered as the starting point to the programme for the majority of parents. The other plug-ins focus on behaviour, social development, routines, education and physical development. As needed, parents are also offered crisis management support and practical support. Parents can receive one or more plug-in depending on their individual needs.

In line with the participatory and reflective approach of the programme, each plug-in is delivered in the form of a parent's activity booklet containing exercises that the practitioner and parent

2 The Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) is a standardised and valid measure of the quality of relationships between parents and their children across seven domains Support, Satisfaction, Involvement, Communication, Limits, Autonomy and Role.

3 The assessment wheel is a user-friendly self-assessment tool for parents. The assessment wheel consists of a scale rating across the plug-in domains of Parent-child Relationship, Behaviour, Routines, Social Development, Education and Physical Development.

complete together over a number of sessions. An accompanying staff guidance booklet was developed to help staff understand the purpose, focus of and evidence behind each session. To further promote reflective practice, parents are provided with a notebook to use as a parenting log to increase parents' awareness of what is happening in their world, their role and the role of others.

The programme was designed to be delivered to parents of children between the ages of 3 and 18 years[4]. Generally, the programme is deemed unsuitable for parents who have limited capacity to 1) retain information, 2) be reflective or 3) implement changes due to complex contextual factors. A phased approach was utilised in the development and piloting of the PwP programme. After the initial development of the programme content and guidance for staff, piloting of the various plug-ins took place over two sequential phases (2011–2012), in which learning was iteratively incorporated in subsequent development and testing (Barnardos, 2014). Following the design and piloting of the programme, PwP was implemented across Barnardos services, leading to this formal evaluation of the programme.

THE EVALUATION

The evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

1. Does the PwP programme result in positive outcomes for children and families?
2. What influences the impact of the programme within the Irish context?

Design and Methods

A mixed method cohort evaluation of PwP took place over a two-year period, from September 2016 to September 2018, with data spanning a six-year period (2012–2018). Data were sourced from two cohorts, 1) the PwP cohort and 2) the study cohort. The PwP cohort relates to all service users who received the PwP programme from 2012 to 2017, while the study cohort relates to a sub-group of those who received PwP and completed pre-post outcome measures. A small sample was also selected from this sub-group for in-depth qualitative interviews. As such, the mixed methods approach combined both primary and secondary data, utilising quantitative and qualitative methods within a planned design (Robson, 2002). There were three discrete, but interconnected, components to the evaluation design:

Quantitative (data from 2012–2017)

- a secondary data analysis of anonymised demographic and participation information collected from the Barnardos children's services database (n=1,471);
- pre-post test data analysis of Parent-Child Relationship Inventories (PCRIs) administered to parents from 2012 to 2017 (n=200); and
- pre-post test data analysis of assessment wheel scores, collected between 2012 and 2017 (n=114).

4 'Birth to 2 years' version of the PwP programme has also been developed to meet the needs of parents with babies and infants but is outside of the scope of this evaluation.

Mixed methods survey (data from November 2017–January 2018)

- an online survey of staff (n=64) that consisted of a series of closed or multiple choice questions concerning staff experience and programme delivery, in addition to open-ended qualitative questions relating to programme delivery and working with families.

Qualitative (data from 2018)

- a series of interviews and focus groups in 2018 – with parents, children, staff and other stakeholders (n=79) – in order to gain their perspectives on parental needs, outcomes of the PwP programme, challenges of the programme, and what aspects influence programme impact.

Evaluation Ethics

The evaluation of PwP was undertaken internally by a team of experienced and vetted researchers who were not involved in the design or piloting of the programme. The study was guided by 1) Barnardos' Principles for Conducting Research (Barnardos, 2018); 2) the British Sociological Association's (BSA) Statement of Ethical Practice (British Sociological Association, 2017); and 3) a steering group, including the evaluation team, director of children's services and two external advisors.

FINDINGS

Secondary Data

Referrals

The majority of referrals came from Tusla and social work (53%, n=574), while self-referral was the second most common type at 23% (n=250). Other referrals came from community-based services, mental health services, health services, other Barnardos services and disability services. In total, 44 reasons for referral were captured in the Barnardos children's services database, often with multiple reasons for referral provided for each service delivery. On average there were 2.75 reasons recorded for each referral, ranging from one reason to 15 reasons. The main reasons for referral included:

- Parenting skills (17%, n=437)
- Behaviour needs (13%, n=329)
- Children with emotional difficulties (8%, n=207)
- Parental separation (8%, n=203)
- Child welfare concerns (7%, n=183)

Programme delivery

The majority of total PwP service users were lone mothers (51%, n=679), followed by married couples (19%, n=246), cohabiting couples (19%, n=245), and lone fathers (5%, n=70). Female participants accounted for 76% of PwP participants and 77% of the study cohort. On average, the PwP programme lasted nine months for the study cohort, in comparison with 7.5 months for the overall PwP cohort. The average number of sessions attended was 14.8 for the study cohort and 11.6 for the PwP cohort.

Plug-in usage

Over two-thirds of participants used one plug-in only, with very few using three or more. The usage of the plug-ins was similar for both the overall programme recipients and study participants. Parent-child relationship plug-in was by far the most popular (52% for study cohort and 54% for PwP cohort), followed by behaviour (34% and 33% respectively). The breakdown of remaining plug-ins included: routines (9% and 10%), physical development (3% and 2%), social development (2% and 1%) and education (1% each).

Outcome measures

Paired samples ranged from 197 pairs to 200 pairs[5] for each domain of the PCRI, representing 33% pre-post completion rate. Validity indicators, captured pre and post intervention, indicated a robust dataset. There were statistically significant improvements across all six domains, ranging from a small to medium effect size (Table 1). Using Cohen's d measure of effect size Support scores showed a medium improvement post intervention. Limit Setting and Communication also experienced a medium improvement, while Involvement scores demonstrated a small to medium improvement. Satisfaction and Autonomy domains recorded small changes, although both were still statistically significant.

Table 1: PCRI t-test results

	Pre mean score	Post mean score	95% confidence interval	Sig (two-tailed)	Cohen's d effect size
Support	43.82	50.43	(-8.05, -5.19)	.00	0.6
Satisfaction	47.14	48.73	(-2.87, -0.3)	.016	0.2
Involvement	44.93	49.27	(-6.02, -2.67)	.00	0.4
Communication	43.14	48.61	(-6.93, -4.01)	.00	0.5
Limit Setting	42.62	48.33	(-6.97, -4.45)	.00	0.6
Autonomy	42.86	45.13	(-3.26, -1.28)	.00	0.3

5 In a number of cases, there is missing data due to incomplete PCRIs. During the scoring of the completed PCRIs by the research team, a domain with missing data were excluded but the other completed domains were included as each parenting domain is independent within the PCRI. Due to the domains not being inter-related during scoring, the range of total paired samples for the respective domains varied between 197 pairs and 200 pairs.

In terms of the PwP assessment wheel, paired samples ranged from 104 pairs to 114 pairs[6] for each domain, representing 19% pre-post completion rate. All domains (with the exception of Social Development) saw a statistically significant improvement (Table 2). Behaviour scores improved to a large degree, with Parent-child Relationship and Routines recording a medium improvement. Physical Development and Education both recorded statistically significant improvements, although these were small in size.

Table 2: PwP assessment wheel t-test results

	Pre mean score	Post mean score	95% confidence interval	Sig (two-tailed)	Cohen's d effect size
Parent-child Relationship	6.54	7.96	(-1.93, -0.91)	.00	0.5
Behaviour	5.31	7.19	(-2.34, -1.41)	.00	0.8
Routines	6.73	8.11	(-1.83, -0.93)	.00	0.6
Social Development	7.19	7.45	(-0.82, 0.3)	.36	NA
Physical Development	7.82	8.47	(-1.07, -0.23)	.003	0.4
Education	7.46	8.43	(-1.46, -0.46)	.00	0.3

Interview Series and Survey

A total of 79 people participated in the series of in-depth interviews / focus groups and a further 64 staff completed the online survey. Interviews took place across six sites, three of which were Dublin based, however the majority were based in Limerick (39%). Interviews and focus groups were conducted with parents and children (59%), as well as staff members (27%) and stakeholders (14%).

Views of parent

Presenting needs

The presenting needs of the parents interviewed varied widely ranging from child-specific issues, such as behaviour and poor school attendance, to more parent-specific issues, such as poor routines, lack of confidence and a sense of being overwhelmed.

> *To be honest with you, before when I was so stressed with him, when he was having his tempers and stuff in the mornings I just wouldn't bring him to school.*
>
> *Parent interview 002 (Mother)*

6 In a number of cases, there was missing data due to incomplete assessment wheels. As each domain was independently scored by the participant, a missing score in a single domain did not affect the score in the other domains so the range of total paired samples varied between 104 pairs and 114 pairs.

Relationship with project worker

Parents reported that, in the main, they had a very positive relationship with their project worker based on trust and openness. Working collaboratively and flexibly emerged as key aspects of the relationship, as did the continuity and consistency in the personnel involved.

> *[Project worker] would make suggestions, they wouldn't be orders, she would make suggestions, we would try them out, if they worked, they worked, fine, and if they didn't, they didn't.*
>
> *Parent interview 007 (Father)*

Content of PwP programme

Parents frequently recalled using the assessment wheel as a method of choosing the appropriate plug-in. Parents often felt that the chosen plug-in was the right approach for them at that particular time. Some parents also found the PCRI questionnaire to be helpful as a tool to evaluate their parental relationship prior to starting a plug-in:

> *It is a nice tool. I mean rating yourself to say do you not have a relationship with your child, do you think your child can trust you? Do you think you can trust that child? We were being truthful.*
>
> *Parent interview 008 (Mother)*

Parents provided feedback specific to the individual plug-ins. Parents reported that they had successfully integrated strategies from the routines plug-in to their child's daily life. One parent, whose child had a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), noted how successful the behaviour plug-in had been with helping them to manage their child's behaviour and establish boundaries and expectations. Parents noted that the scenario-based exercises within the behaviour plug-in was the component that allowed the greatest point of learning.

In terms of support materials, some parents found the parenting log helpful, as they were able to write down and organise their thoughts and reflections. The parent's activity booklets associated with the plug-ins were deemed easy to follow and understand, providing parents with a reference point or grounding in the material.

Changes for families

The majority of changes reported related to the parent-child relationship. Changes for children were reflected in reduced levels of conflict, improved social interaction, improved routines and school attendance, increased ability to cope with change (particularly for separated parents) and an overall sense of increased maturity.

It [PwP] changed the way we approached, completely changed the way we approached our parenting.

Parent interview 010 (Father)

For parents, there was a sense of mutual trust and respect in the parent-child relationship. With these improvements came opportunities to spend more quality time participating in fun activities, which had the knock-on effect of parents perceiving themselves as empowered, more confident and less anxious. They also reported a sense of having more control as a parent, notably by relying on strategies that replaced punitive actions. One parent did caution against the idea that parenting programmes can solve all of a family's needs, however certain aspects of the programme had increased the parent's capacity to deal with the complex challenges.

Parents identified a number of programme strengths that contributed to the improvements experienced, notably the home-based approach, which facilitated the integration of the wider family into the sessions when appropriate. This flexibility and ability to adapt the programme was a sentiment repeated by many parents. Another strength was the non-judgemental relationship with the project worker, who reportedly listened and understood the family's needs, acting as an advocate for the family during difficult times.

In terms of challenges, parents who struggled with housing insecurity voiced concerns with maintaining the positive changes resulting from PwP, for example, sticking to the agreed plan regarding routines. Time constraints also emerged as an issue, with some parents struggling to balance the programme schedule with work or the competing demands of multiple children.

Views of children

Changes for family

There was a general sense from the older children that PwP had benefitted their family and, by and large, they did not mind working through the programme or having the project worker in the home. On this latter point, some younger children noted apprehension about a person they were not familiar with coming to their home, however this subsided once the relationship was established. Older children reported more interaction among family members, which led to improved relationships with fewer arguments. One teenager felt they were better equipped to express their feelings because their parents demonstrated a new ability to respond in a more predictable manner. Related to this were the children's improved understanding regarding expectations of parents. Older children also noted an improved engagement with school due to a more stable home environment.

Views of staff

Views of staff were captured through the interview series (n=21) and the online survey (n=64). Most respondents had been working in Barnardos for eight years or more, with the majority (39%) delivering PwP for three to four years and a further 31% for five or more years.

Training

Staff indicated the benefit of training in order to successfully implement the programme. This prerequisite enhanced a project worker's ability to implement the programme as intended, and staff expressed a desire for continuous refresher training, although it was also noted that there was no substitute for experience in the field.

Engagement

When discussing engagement, most staff indicated that parents needed to be willing and able to reflect on their situation and life experiences, which seemed to be dependent on stability. With this in mind, multiple complex needs were not necessarily a barrier to engagement. Ultimately, parents who wanted to make positive changes were more likely to engage, regardless of other contextual factors. Aspects that did have a negative impact on engagement included a sense of being overwhelmed, experiencing a period of crisis such as homelessness, mental health issues or limited learning capacity. Where parents were separated or when basic parenting skills were absent, more input was reportedly required from staff.

Strengths of PwP

In line with parents' feedback, staff emphasised the benefits of the home-based approach, which facilitated a tailored and flexible service delivery within the family's own living environment. It also allowed for observation of parent-child interaction. Openness, transparency and a non-judgemental attitude was identified by project workers as the cornerstone of a positive relationship with parents undertaking the programme. The majority of project workers deemed PwP suitable for families with a higher level of need – level 3 or 4 on the Hardiker level of need (Hardiker, Exton, & Barker, 1991) – as it is delivered on a one-to-one basis. Project workers valued their ability to deliver the programme at a pace suitable to the parent or to pause the programme for a number of weeks to address other emerging needs for the parents and children.

Challenges of PwP

Project workers identified a number of challenges to successful implementation of the programme, ranging from initial apprehension and challenging relationships with parents, through to literacy and language issues. Many of the challenges reported by staff confirmed the views raised by parents. When parents had difficulties with literacy, project workers allowed extra time for the PwP sessions, with project workers estimating the programme taking two-to-three times longer. Similarly, the PCRI tool was reportedly more challenging to administer when literacy and comprehension issues were present. When working with

a separated father, a project worker described how challenging it was to implement the programme as he did not have access to the children.

Views of stakeholders

Eleven stakeholders, primarily duty social workers and social work team leaders from Tusla, participated in the interview series, reiterating several key findings from the parent, child and staff interviews. Stakeholders emphasised the value of the home-based element of the programme; the importance of the collaborative relationship between the Barnardos worker and the parent; and the impact on parental capacity and self-efficacy more broadly. Stakeholders also placed great value on the ability of the programme to be flexible and tailored to a parent's individual needs, notably highlighting the added value of the practical support and crisis management modules.

DISCUSSION

Reflections on Evaluation Design

The mixed method, cohort design of this evaluation was appropriate given the aims of the study and the complex nature of the intervention. Ultimately, the evaluation has shown major successes in the development and implementation of PwP within real world settings, and across a diverse group of practitioners and service users with complex needs. As with many evaluations of complex social interventions, there are inherent limitations due to the uncontrolled, non-randomised nature of the methodology adopted. Therefore, the findings may not be generalisable and should be interpreted with caution.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation shows that PwP is a very promising intervention with evidence of positive impact on key outcomes for the target population, with important lessons for implementation and across the policy landscape.

Strengths of PwP

- Parents participating in PwP had positive outcomes, as measured through the PCRI and PwP assessment wheel. Statistically significant increases were recorded for scores across the following domains of the PCRI: Support, Satisfaction, Involvement, Communication and Limit Setting. Statistically significant improvements over time were recorded for all but one of the self-identified needs within the assessment wheel, including Parent-child Relationship, Behaviour, Routines, Physical Development and Education. The interview series and online survey corroborated these statistical findings, suggesting: positive outcomes; improved parent-child communication; establishment of routines; enjoyment of being a parent; increased self-efficacy and confidence in their role; reduced anxiety; and feeling supported in their role as a parent.
- The home-based approach to service delivery was key to the success of PwP, potentially allowing the project workers to observe parent-child interactions in the environment in

which they were parenting, while also providing a familiar environment for parents where learning carries the potential to be extended to other children.

- The relationship between the Barnardos project workers and parents was central to the success of the programme, notably the collaborative and participatory way of working, and the establishment of a trusting relationship over time.
- The focus on the parent-child relationship and the reflective way of working was perceived positively by staff and parents, contributing to improved confidence in parental capacity and self-efficacy, along with a sense of being better able to cope.
- Where a parent had received treatment for substance misuse or was in active rehabilitation, the programme generally worked well. These parents had experience of working in reflective ways and were open to engagement with the Barnardos project workers.
- The tailored, flexible manualised approach was perceived as working well, and was particularly impactful when working with parents with more complex reasons for referral.
- The inclusion of children in elements of the programme (where possible) was perceived as very important to parents, children and staff. Children in particular were able to reflect on the positive impact of the programme on their family function and overall social and emotional well-being.
- The variety of plug-ins, along with the crisis management and practical support approaches, provided staff with a range of options to meet the needs of parents. While some plug-ins were less frequently used, staff reported a preference to keep all existing materials.
- The level of experience, training and skill of staff reportedly led to a high level of professional autonomy and judgement in implementation, and in tailoring the programme to families at a local level.
- The programme was highly regarded among external stakeholders, who emphasised the value of the home-based element, worker-parent relationship and the capacity of the programme to complement other work, including where parents were open to social work.

Challenges of PwP

While the majority of findings were markedly positive, a number of challenges and opportunities for learning emerged from the programme.

- Parents may present with multiple and complex needs. Where a family is in chaos or crisis, PwP may be less impactful. The tailored and flexible nature of the programme allows for breaks in such instances, and the additional crisis management approaches can support practitioners to work with parents through crises. Nevertheless, PwP will not work for all parents at all times.
- Some staff expressed dissatisfaction with the PCRI, describing the tool as inappropriate and outdated. However, this view was different to those expressed by parents.

- Maintaining engagement and commitment was a challenge faced by some staff, although this was more likely where the family presented with more complex issues.
- Fathers were less likely to be the main participant in PwP, although the representation of fathers (24%) was above average when compared to the international literature; for example, an average of 17% was found in a systematic review conducted by Davison et al. (2016). Where parents were separated, it was more challenging to engage fathers in programme delivery; however, this is not unusual in a family support context.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Overall, the findings of this evaluation offer a valuable contribution to policy and practice development in the area of parenting supports, particularly on the benefits for children of targeted parenting interventions.

- PwP is an example of a successful targeted programme for parents with complex needs who benefit from receiving input and support on a one-to-one basis in the home. PwP has been shown to work well with parents who have been referred from statutory bodies with multiple referring needs, where, in some cases, group-based programmes were previously deemed unsuitable. In essence, these parents with high levels of support needs appear to do well within the PwP programme.
- PwP should be incorporated as part of the audit of parenting programmes being undertaken by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs under the First 5 strategy. Once complete, this audit will help shape the tiered model of publically funded parenting services to be delivered on the basis of universal provision, with extra support available for parents in line with their level of need on a progressive basis.
- Drawing on the strengths identified in the PwP programme (that is, it worked well with parents with substance misuse issues, or those open to social work involvement) there is plenty of scope to promote the impact of the programme among key agencies and professionals such as Drug Treatment Centres, Drug and Alcohol Taskforce agencies.
- PwP proved beneficial to parents experiencing mental health difficulties, including those experiencing isolation due to parenting alone and issues caused by environmental factors. Adding home-based parenting supports to the suite of non-medicinal, community-based services available to parents with mild-to-moderate mental health difficulties available by referral through primary care should be explored.
- A high proportion of parents cited separation as the primary reason for undertaking PwP and a significant proportion of parents (64%) were lone parents. The availability of home-based parenting supports, such as PwP, to lone parents and parents going through separation should be increased. Given fathers make up just 5% of the lone parent cohort and around a quarter of (PwP) parents overall, there should be specific emphasis on promoting to fathers the benefits of such programmes for both parents and children.

Concluding Remarks

This mixed method evaluation of the PwP programme, spanning an implementation period of five years, supports the need for a tailored, individualised, home-based parenting programme in Ireland – one that is delivered holistically, on a case-by-case basis, empowering parents in partnership with a trusted family worker. The evidence presented in this report demonstrates how the unique design and implementation of PwP works well within the complex, real world, everyday lives of parents. Furthermore, the programme works well across a wide range of presenting needs, and the design allows flexibility to navigate changing or evolving needs over time. The evidence provided in this report demonstrates, not only the need for such a programme, but the successes of PwP for parents, children and professionals providing the programme.

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