# Evaluating the implementation and impact of integrated services in Finglas, North Dublin

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation commissioned by Barnardos Ireland to explore the implementation and impact of integrated service delivery and interagency collaboration in Finglas, an urban area in North Dublin with communities characterised by deep-rooted socio-economic disadvantage. The evaluation centres on two community-led initiatives: the Better Finglas Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme and the Finglas West Family Resource Centre (FWFRC)—both are prevention and early intervention (PEI) services led by Barnardos in partnership with a diverse network of local stakeholders.

### Background and Context

Finglas is a complex urban area comprising high levels of deprivation, intergenerational disadvantage, educational under-attainment, and poor health outcomes. Children represent 25% of the population, and 11% are aged under nine—highlighting the need for robust early years support. The community also contends with high rates of lone parenthood, disability, housing instability, and child protection referrals, underscoring the urgency of coordinated intervention.

### Policy and Operational Context

Ireland faces persistent child poverty and inequality, with 15.2% of children at risk of poverty and thousands living in emergency accommodation. National policies strongly support prevention and early intervention, yet implementation remains uneven. Interagency collaboration is increasingly recognised as vital to delivering cohesive, effective, and efficient services. When done well, it reduces duplication, fills gaps, fosters trust, and delivers improved outcomes for children and families. However, effective collaboration requires clear governance, dedicated resources, and consistent leadership—conditions that the Finglas model strives to meet.

### Evaluation Aims and Methodology

The evaluation is not an assessment of individual services or programmes, but rather an in-depth analysis of the interagency model underpinning prevention and early intervention (PEI) practices in Finglas. Specifically, this evaluation sought to:

1. *Define* the model of integrated services and interagency supports in Finglas.
2. *Assess* how this model is applied within Better Finglas and FWFRC.
3. *Evaluate* its impact on children's and families' access to, engagement with, and experiences of PEI services.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation involved desk research, stakeholder consultations (via interviews, focus groups, and surveys), and service-user feedback. The

methodology was grounded in a participatory ethos, ensuring the inclusion of broad community engagement and produced actionable insights aligned with policy and practice. The approach was underpinned by national policy frameworks and international best practice, situating Finglas within broader efforts to tackle child poverty, social exclusion, and community disadvantage through collaborative, integrated service models.

**The Finglas Interagency Model**

The Finglas model emerged from community-led initiatives responding to longstanding deprivation. The establishment of Better Finglas (2014) and FWFRC (2018) represents a concerted effort to embed early intervention and prevention services in a highly structured, interagency framework. While Better Finglas focuses primarily on early childhood development, FWFRC supports the wider family and community.

Together, they operate under a shared set of core principles, including:
- Holistic responses to systemic and interconnected needs;
- Proactive prevention and early intervention;
- Effective use of shared resources;
- Integrated, accessible, and trauma-informed service delivery;
- Data sharing and evidence-informed practice;
- Community trust and engagement;
- Strategic policy alignment.

The evaluation introduces a Continuum of Collaboration as the conceptual foundation underpinning integrated service delivery, to identify and understand the level at which interagency services are operating within Finglas West. It shows whether partners are engaging in networking, more coordinated engagement, or fully integrated collaboration—offering a practical way to map and assess how agencies are working together at any given time. Better Finglas and FWFRC operate across three levels which include networking, coordination, and comprehensive collaboration levels. In this context, the continuum of collaboration serves to illustrate a flexible spectrum that allows interagency working to shift and adapt in response to context, complexity and available resources.

To support this dynamic model, Better Finglas and the FWFRC are guided by formal governance structures, including Steering Groups composed of statutory, community, and voluntary stakeholders. These groups operate through a layered framework, distinguishing an "inner circle" of core partners directly involved in service planning and delivery, and an "outer circle" of strategic and supporting stakeholders. This arrangement enables rapid, locally responsive decision-making while ensuring alignment with broader system priorities. It also fosters joint planning, shared accountability, and meaningful community participation.

Importantly, the Finglas West Interagency Model of collaborative working is not a one-size-fits-all system. It allows services to be adjusted depending on the family / community needs—rather than forcing them to fit into rigid service categories or pathways. This governance structure supports flexible, person-centred service delivery, avoiding fixed or bureaucratic approaches and enabling a responsive, collaborative environment.

**Key findings from the evaluation include:**
- **Improved access and engagement**: Parents reported easier access to services, particularly in the early years[1], with strong uptake across disadvantaged areas of Finglas West.
- **Positive service experiences**: Families valued the seamless nature of support and the strong relationships with individual staff (e.g., family support workers, HSCLs).
- **Effective coordination**: Service providers noted improved referral pathways, joint planning, and reduced duplication.
- **Community reputation**: Interagency hubs are increasingly recognised as trusted, inclusive spaces that draw families even from outside the immediate catchment.

Collaborative processes have led to improved efficiency, service alignment, and stronger inter-organisational relationships. Challenges remain, including resource limitations, inconsistent participation, and barriers to formalising agreements such as MoUs or SLAs. Parents particularly valued trauma-informed approaches, peer support groups, and the holistic nature of service delivery. However, the evaluation notes a gap in male participation, indicating the need for more inclusive outreach strategies.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The evaluation finds that the Finglas interagency model provides a robust, adaptable framework for delivering integrated, community-based early intervention. It has clearly improved access to services, strengthened coordination among providers, and contributed to better outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

By demonstrating that preventative, holistic, and responsive services can be successfully delivered in areas of entrenched disadvantage, the Finglas model stands out as a powerful and innovative response to complex social challenges. Importantly, the Finglas model provides a replicable framework for other communities in Ireland. While it is tailored to local needs, its core principles—shared governance, cross-sector partnership, and community

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[1] Early Years typically refers to the developmental period from birth to six years of age. In the context of Finglas, this includes a range of services and supports focused on early childhood care and education, health and wellbeing, parenting support, and school readiness—recognising this stage as a critical window for cognitive, emotional, and social development.

participation—can be adapted to fit other disadvantaged urban or rural settings.  The learning from Finglas demonstrates that integrated working, when properly supported, can transform how services respond to need, reduce duplication, and build more resilient systems of care.

To consolidate and extend this progress, the evaluation sets out the following key recommendations:

- Continue to build a strong governance, planning and accountability framework to strengthen the structural and analytical foundations of the interagency model of work in Finglas and strengthen data systems to better capture, analyse and communicate evidence-based outcomes and impact;
- Utilise the Continuum of Collaboration to map and strengthen interagency working responses to emerging needs and opportunities
- Enhance community representation in service design and delivery, with a particular focus on increasing male participation in parenting supports and targeted outreach to minority group inclusion;
- Support the long-term sustainability and promote replication of the model through strategic implementation guidance, evaluation capacities, dedicated and sustained funding, and continued policy advocacy at national level. Long-term investment will be essential to maintain coordination infrastructure, support service innovation, and enable the adaptation of the model in other communities with similar needs.

Taken together, the conclusions and recommendations position the Finglas interagency model as a leading example of effective collaborative practice in disadvantaged urban contexts. Sustaining its impact will require ongoing investment, strong local ownership, and continued alignment with wider policy frameworks—ensuring that children and families in Finglas continue to benefit from integrated, community-led services that are tailored to their needs and grounded in local realities.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of an evaluation exploring the implementation and impact of interagency working and service-integration in Finglas, a disadvantaged urban community in North Dublin. The evaluation, which has been commissioned by Barnardos, centres on the nature and levels of interagency working associated with two distinct prevention and early intervention programmes in Finglas, namely the Better Finglas Area-Based Childhood Programme (ABC) and Finglas West Family Resource Centre (FWFRC). Both bodies are led by Barnardos in collaboration with the Finglas community.

The report also provides an overview of the strategic policy and operational landscape influencing interagency collaboration in Finglas. National policy frameworks strongly support prevention and early intervention, yet challenges persist in translating these policies into effective, integrated services. Ireland's interagency mandate aligns with international best practices, which emphasise clear governance, shared accountability, and sustainable funding. A Continuum of Collaboration model is presented to provide a structured framework for assessing and improving interagency efforts in Finglas.

### 1.1 BARNARDOS IRELAND

Barnardos is a national charity dedicated to transforming the lives of vulnerable children. Established in Ireland in 1962, the organisation has expanded over the past 60 years to provide a diverse range of services for children and families in 45 locations across the country. In that period, Barnardos has also emerged as a thought-leader in what works for children and families across universal services, prevention and early intervention and targeted family support, committing to evidence-based practice and the measurement of impact. This evaluation report into the implementation and impact of interagency working in Finglas is a reflection of that commitment.

#### 1.1.1 Better Finglas

Better Finglas is one of 12 projects under the national Area-Based Childhood (ABC) programme. The ABC Programme, which began in 2013, is a national Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Programme funded by Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), delivered through the Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) within Tusla. Each ABC project is located in an area in which child poverty has, for generations, remained entrenched.

Led by Barnardos, Better Finglas brings together over 50 organisations to support children and families, with a strong focus on the early years - from pregnancy through to age eight. At its core, Better Finglas aims to improve children's health, development, and educational outcomes by delivering a broad range of evidence-based programmes. New and expectant parents are supported with information and guidance on healthy pregnancy, early child development, and parenting strategies. Programmes such as Triple P[2] (Positive Parenting Programme) and Circle of Security[3] help parents foster secure relationships with their children and confidently manage everyday parenting challenges.

In local preschools and early years settings, Better Finglas supports staff through mentoring and training, guided by national quality frameworks such as Síolta[4] and Aistear[5]. These efforts are designed to enhance the quality of early learning environments. Within primary schools, literacy initiatives like Wizard of Words[6] equip children with the skills they need to read effectively and thrive in their education.

Emotional well-being is another key focus. Better Finglas promotes trauma-informed practice across its services, supporting both children and parents who may be experiencing mental health difficulties or other challenges.

In line with the ABC national programme of work, the Better Finglas ABC project is envisaged as an interagency structure that operates at three levels of change[7]:

- **Frontline delivery** of PEI services for children and families which support early child development
- **Capacity building**, facilitation, and support to other service providers to implement evidence-based ways of working
- **Systems change** efforts and advocacy with managers and decision makers at local, regional and national level.

Central to the initiative is strong interagency collaboration. Within that context, the Better Finglas vision aspires to a community where all services - voluntary, community and statutory - work together with families to improve the developmental, health and educational outcomes of young children living in the area.

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[2] See https://www.barnardos.ie/parenting_courses/triple-p-positive-parenting-programmes/
[3] See https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/
[4] https://www.siolta.ie/
[5] See https://curriculumonline.ie/early-childhood/
[6] https://www.barnardos.ie/our-services/work-in-schools/wizards-of-words/
[7] See https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/prevention-partnership-and-family-support/i-am-a-funded-partner-practitioner/abc for more detail.

**Governance and Structure: Better Finglas Steering Group**

Better Finglas operates through a collaborative governance framework designed to empower community participation and ensure accountability. Central to this structure is a Steering Committee composed of diverse stakeholders, including representatives from Dublin City Council, local residents, community organisations, statutory bodies and local schools, (e.g Finglas Youth Resource Centre, St. Helena's Family Resource Centre, Cross Care, Dublin North West Area Partnership, Finglas Cabra Local Drug and Alcohol Taskforce, Dublin City Council, Finglas Childcare Ltd., Sláintecare, Pavee Point, Dublin City Childcare Committee, the HSE and Tusla). This committee meets regularly to set strategic priorities, allocate resources, and monitor progress toward the initiative's goals of social, economic, and cultural regeneration in Finglas.
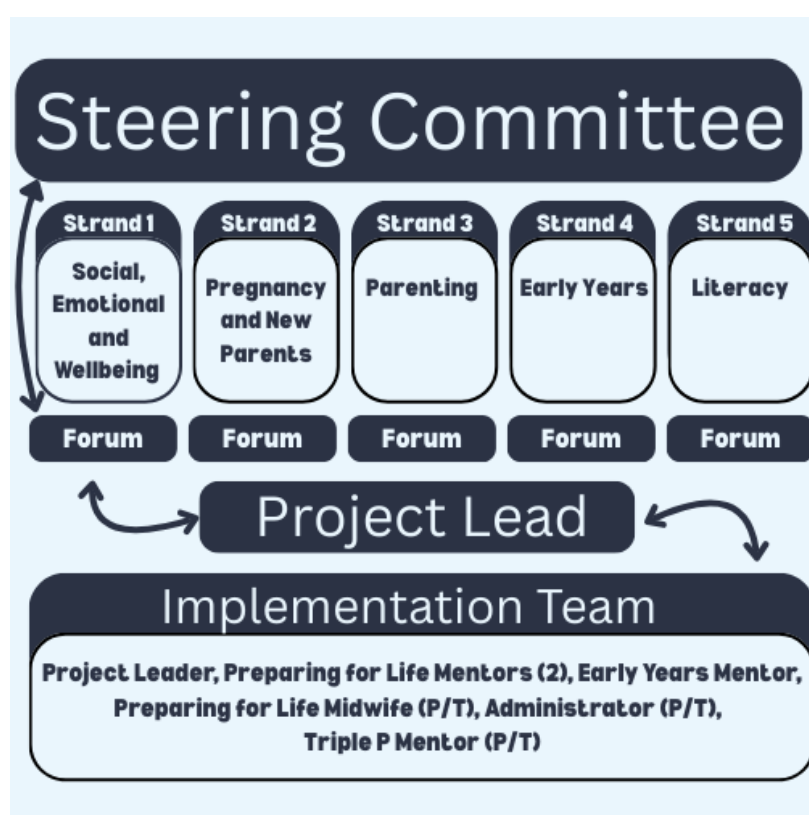


Day-to-day operations are managed by a dedicated Project Lead. The implementation team includes specialised mentors who each oversee the individual strand areas. These specialists also have access to a further layer of support through strand specific Forums and Networks, such as the Parenting Forum, Early Years Forum and Infant Mental Health Learning Network.

These support structures ensure that there are regular opportunities for issues to be raised within the Implementation Team and then brought to the Forum or Network's attention. Issues can then also be raised at the level of the Steering Committee as required. To ensure transparency, the Steering Committee engages residents through public consultations or

feedback sessions, while formal agreements (such as Memoranda of Understanding) clarify roles and responsibilities among partners.

## 1.1.2   Finglas West FRC

Finglas West Family Resource Centre (FWFRC) was established in 2018 under the national Family Resource Centre (FRC) programme.  Recognising the consistent and high levels of deprivation in Finglas West, local stakeholders—through the Better Finglas initiative and other community engagement efforts—advocated strongly for the establishment of an FRC that could respond directly to the complex needs of families in the area. Given Barnardos' longstanding presence in Finglas and its track record in delivering high-quality, child- and family-centred services, stakeholders invited Barnardos to act as the lead agency for the new FRC on behalf of the community. Barnardos' role in this context is to provide professional management, strategic direction, and operational oversight, while remaining grounded in the ethos of community-led development.

The FRC programme is Ireland's largest national, community-based family support initiative, with 121 FRCs situated in communities throughout Ireland[8]. In keeping with the principles of Community Development, most FRCs are led by their own Voluntary Board of Directors which aim to identify and address the specific needs of their respective communities.  The stated aim of the programme is to *combat disadvantage, and improve the functioning of the family unit[9]*. While many FRCs are managed by local voluntary boards, the Finglas West FRC structure reflects a hybrid model—combining the expertise and national infrastructure of Barnardos with strong local engagement and governance. This structure allows for both consistency in service delivery and a deep responsiveness to the particular needs of the Finglas West community.

FWFRC offers a wide range of high-quality, evidence-informed programmes and supports aimed at enhancing child development, parenting capacity, and family wellbeing. These include parenting programmes such as Parenting When Separated[10] and Parents Plus[11], as well as therapeutic supports for children, youth activities, and practical assistance for families facing hardship. Programmes are developed and delivered in response to ongoing consultation with the community and in collaboration with statutory and voluntary service providers.

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[8]  Budget 2025 has made provision for the inclusion of a further five centres across the country. However, no decision has been taken on the location of those sites.

[9]  See https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/family-resource-centres.

[10]  For example, https://www.barnardos.ie/parenting_courses/parents-plus-parenting-when-separated-programme-parents-plus/

[11] See https://www.parentsplus.ie/

In addition to direct service provision, FWFRC serves as a hub for community engagement, with a focus on improving the overall living environment for residents of Finglas West. It prioritises outreach and relationship-building with families who may be marginalised or isolated and works to build trust through consistent, respectful, and strengths-based interaction.

**Governance and Structure: Finglas West FRC Steering Group**

Established in 2018, the Finglas West FRC Steering Group comprises up to 14 local service providers and 3 independent community representatives, ensuring diverse stakeholder input. The group convenes five times annually to oversee and support the FRC's initiatives, progress, and strategic direction.

Member organisations formalise their partnership through signed letters of commitment, with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) governing collaboration between the Steering Group and the Lead Agency. The Steering Group ensures alignment with the FRC's Logic Model (a roadmap for outcomes and activities) and advises on programme implementation. Task-specific subgroups are formed as needed to address evolving priorities during implementation phases.

The Steering Group is currently chaired by Larry Dooley, Community and Social Development Officer, Dublin City Council, leveraging his expertise in community-led initiatives. This structure emphasises accountability, cross-sector collaboration, and responsiveness to community needs, reflecting best practices in Irish community development.

The following organisations are represented on the steering group.

## 1.2 Operational Context

Administratively, Finglas is located within the boundaries of seven local EDs:

- Finglas North A, B, C
- Finglas South A, B, C, D

Additionally, Finglas village centre and its immediate surrounds are situated within the ED of Ballygall A and, for the purposes of this evaluation, demographics of Ballygall A are also included in the analysis below. The catchment area is summarised in the Map presented as Figure 2[12].

*Figure 1: Catchment of Finglas included in this evaluation*



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[12] Source:
https://data.pobal.ie/portal/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=3b0acba7eb694ffa85340a60f81d516c
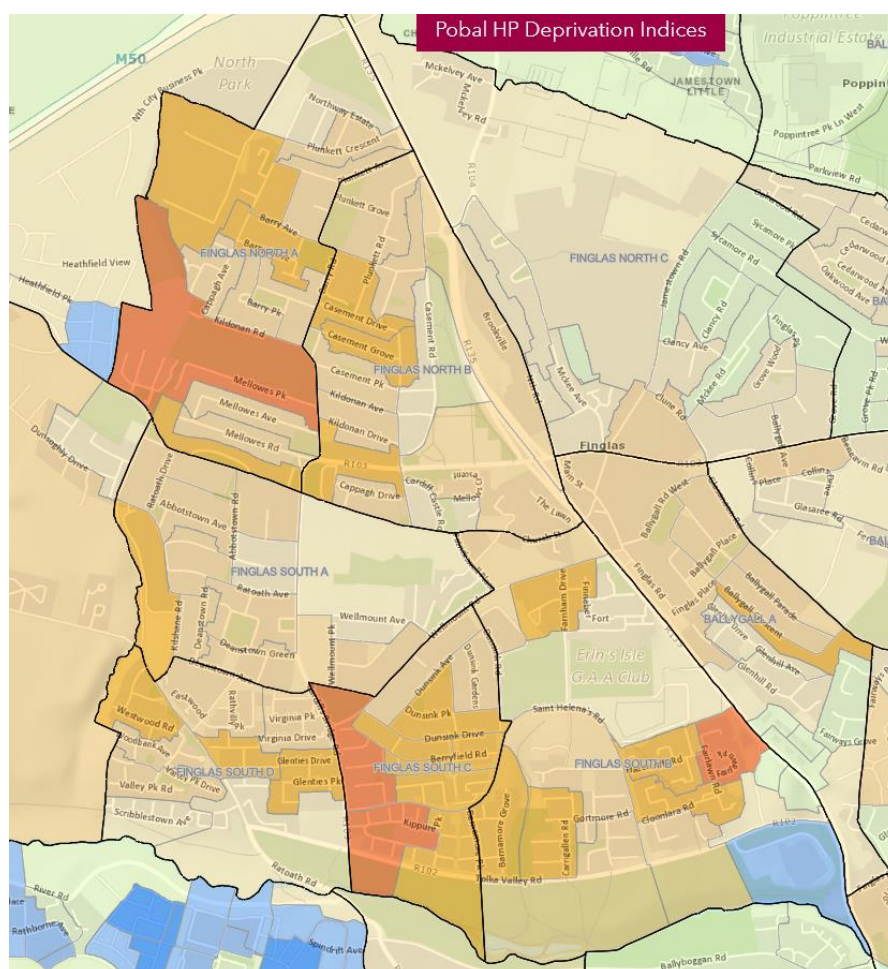
### 1.2.1 Small Areas and Deprivation

Data from Census 2022 reveal that the eight EDs of Finglas incorporate 95 Small Areas (SA), as defined by the CSO[13], each with 80 - 120 households.  Table 1 below gives a more specific breakdown of the area by ED and corresponding number of SAs:

*Table 1: Finglas EDs by Levels of Affluence and Deprivation*

| ED | ED Classification 2022 | Total Small Areas | No of Small Areas Affluent and / or Marginally Above Average | No of Small Areas Marginally Below Average | No of Small Areas Disadvantaged | No of Small Areas Very Disadvantaged | No of Small Areas Extremely Disadvantaged |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Finglas North A | Disadvantaged | 12 | 0 | 1 (8.3%) | 7 (58.4%) | 3 (25%) | 1 (8.3%) |
| Finglas North B | Disadvantaged | 12 | 0 | 2 (16.6%) | 7 (58.4%) | 3 (25%) | 0 |
| Finglas North C | Marginally below average | 15 | 6 (40%) | 8 (53.3%) | 1 (6.7%) | 0 | 0 |
| Finglas South A | Disadvantaged | 11 | 0 | 2 (18.2%) | 8 (72.7%) | 1 (9.1%) | 0 |
| Finglas South B | Disadvantaged | 15 | 3[14] (20%) | 2 (13.3%) | 4 (26.7%) | 5 (33.3%) | 1 (6.7%) |
| Finglas South C | Very Disadvantaged | 9 | 0 | 0 | 2 (22.2%) | 5 (55.6%) | 2 (22.2%) |
| Finglas South D | Disadvantaged | 9 | 0 | 2 (22.2%) | 4 (44.4%) | 3 (33.3%) | 0 |
| Ballygall A | Marginally below average | 12 | 4 (33.3%) | 3 (25%) | 4 (33.3%) | 1 (8.4%) | 0 |
| Total | | 95 | 13 (14%) | 20 (21%) | 37 (39%) | 21 (22%) | 4 (4%) |

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[13]  Small Areas are designed as the lowest level of geography for the compilation of Census statistics, typically comprising between 80 and 120 dwellings.  There is a constraint on Small Areas in that they must nest within Electoral Division boundaries.

[14] One small area defined as Affluent and two as Marginally Above Average.

Census data reinforce earlier statements on the high level of vulnerabilities impacting individuals, households and the wider community of Finglas.  Based on 2022 Census data for example, it is evident that:

- 21% of SAs are marginally below average (equivalent to between 1,600–2,400 households)
- 39% are disadvantaged (2,960–4,440 households)
- 22% are very disadvantaged (1,680–2,520 households)
- 4% are extremely disadvantaged (320–480 households).

Concentrations of disadvantage are particularly evident in West Finglas, the location of FWFRC, especially among SAs of Finglas North A, Finglas North B and Finglas South C.

### 1.2.2   Sociodemographic Profile

*Ethnic and Cultural Background*

Census data from 2022 reveal that the majority of Finglas residents identify as White Irish (74% of total population).  It is worth noting that just under 13% of Finglas respondents did not identify their ethnic or cultural backgrounds.  The Travelling community is more represented here than in the wider national population, making up 1.3% of residents compared to less than 1% nationally.  Small percentages of Black/Black Irish and Asian/Asian Irish are also recorded in the community, emphasising the importance of inclusivity in services and education.

*Housing and Homelessness*

While 57% of housing in Finglas is owner-occupied[15] (Census 2022), 23% of all households in the community rely on Social Housing supports.

The private rental sector, home to 12% of households, has been particularly affected by Ireland's ongoing housing and homelessness crisis, with many families facing insecurity. While figures specific to Finglas are unavailable, Dublin's homelessness crisis has intensified over the last decade and it is inevitable[16] that homelessness is impacting on individuals and families resident in Finglas.  Latest data on family homelessness[17] have indicated that, during the week

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[15] i.e. owned with or without a mortgage.

[16]  As has been revealed to the evaluation team in Focus Group Discussions with parents.

[17] https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Homeless_Report_March_2025.pdf

24th – 30th March 2025, a total of 1,546 families[18] were accessing emergency homeless accommodation in the capital, comprising 2,713 adults and 3,487 child dependents. These conditions place immense strain on families, impacting children's stability, education and emotional wellbeing.

*Employment*

Ireland is currently experiencing a period of full or near full employment. Census data indicate that, among those aged 15 years and over in Finglas, 55% (n=11,508) are in employment.  It is also worth noting, however, that:

2% (n=441) are short-term unemployed
5% (n=942) are long-term unemployed
7% (n=1,418) are unable to work due to long-term sickness or disability.

Rates of long-term unemployment are particularly pronounced in the EDs of Finglas North A (6.5%), Finglas North B (4.7%), Finglas South A (4.8%), Finglas South B (4.7%) and Finglas South C (4.9%).

*Educational Attainment*

Educational outcomes in Finglas present challenges, particularly in early school leaving. Census 2022 figures reveal that 38% of those aged 15 years and over in Finglas, whose education has ceased, have completed a maximum of lower secondary education. This includes:

5% with no formal education (n=814)
14% with primary education only (n=2,499)
19% having attained lower secondary education at most (n=3,389).

Specifically, within Finglas South C, 46% of those aged 15 years or over had completed a maximum of lower secondary education.  This figure stood at 44% in Finglas North A and at 41% in both Finglas North B and Finglas South A. These statistics suggest that children in the community may face generational educational disadvantages, reinforcing the need for early intervention programs to support literacy, school retention, and further education opportunities.

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[18] Of which 55% (n=848) were single parent families.

*Health and Disability*

Health outcomes in Finglas reflect significant and persistent challenges when compared to national patterns. Nearly 6,500 residents in the area are living with a disability—representing approximately one in four people, or 25% of the local population. This is notably higher than the national average, where 13.5% of people reported having a disability in Census 2022 (CSO, 2023). Additionally, 7% of those aged 15 years and over in Finglas are unable to work due to long-term illness or disability, compared to a national rate of just over 4% (CSO, 2023). These figures point to a considerably higher burden of chronic health conditions and disability in the area, which limits participation in the workforce and increases dependency on health and social services. Broader health indicators further highlight this disparity. While 10% of the national population rated their health as fair, bad or very bad in the 2022 Census, the figure rises to 18% in Finglas. In some of the most disadvantaged electoral divisions—Finglas North A (19%), Finglas North B (18%), and Finglas South C (18%)—residents reported even poorer health outcomes. These patterns are consistent with national and international evidence linking adverse childhood experiences, socio-economic deprivation, and poor community infrastructure to long-term health risks. In lower-income areas such as Finglas West, these factors combine to create a cycle where poor health outcomes diminish life opportunities, reduce employability, and place greater demand on already stretched public services.

*Family Composition*

Family structure in Finglas also departs significantly from national trends, particularly in terms of lone parent households. According to Census 2022, there are 1,987 lone parent households in the area, accounting for 21% of all households. By contrast, lone parent households comprise just 11% of all private households nationally (CSO, 2023). This overrepresentation is critical when viewed through the lens of social inclusion and poverty risk: lone parents in Ireland are consistently shown to face higher barriers to employment, education, and access to affordable childcare and housing (ESRI, 2023; CSO SILC, 2022). In Finglas, these structural disadvantages are further exacerbated by local socio-economic conditions, increasing the demand for targeted supports and integrated service provision. The combination of high lone parent prevalence and elevated health vulnerabilities underscores the importance of a community-based, preventative approach that addresses intergenerational disadvantage and promotes family resilience.

*Child Population*

Children and young people aged 0-19 years represent a quarter (25%) of Finglas' population, (CSO, 2022). This evaluation is concerned with the implementation and impact of integrated

prevention and early intervention services in Finglas, with a prioritisation of that impact on children in the antenatal to eight years cohort. Data from Census 2022 reveals that the child population aged up to nine years in Finglas totals 2,911 individuals or 11% of the total population. This substantial youth population highlights the importance of accessible, high-quality early childhood education, healthcare, and parental supports. Ensuring strong early years interventions is crucial in mitigating the long-term effects of socio-economic disadvantage on children's development and future opportunities. These data are presented diagrammatically in Figure 2 below:

*Figure 2: Children aged 0 - 9 as proportion of Finglas Population*
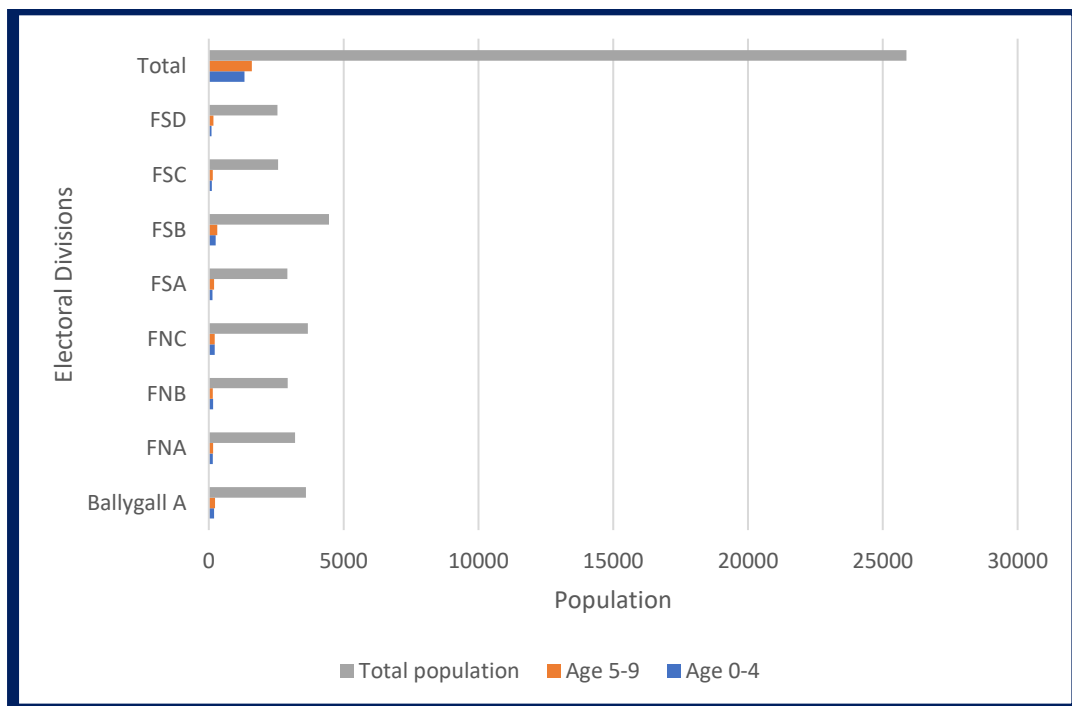


*Child Protection and Welfare*

The Dublin North City area, encompassing Finglas, experiences a high rate of child welfare referrals. During the first half of 2024, Tusla received 2,673 referrals for child welfare, equating to a referral rate of 54.7 per 1000 population (Tusla, 2024). This was the second highest rate of referral per 1000 population in the country. These figures indicate significant child protection concerns, necessitating strengthened family support services and community-based interventions to ensure children's safety and well-being.

## 1.3 A COMPLEX COMMUNITY

These socio-demographic data paint a picture of a community facing significant socio-economic challenges, including high levels of deprivation, housing insecurity, unemployment,

and health issues, presenting a stark picture of the complexity of the Finglas community. Though the data presented above are drawn from statistics obtained via Census 2022, it is important to emphasise that this complex demographic profile is not new. Finglas has for decades been recognised as a community experiencing entrenched levels of poverty and social exclusion.

The purpose of presenting this socio-demographic context is not to pathologise the community of Finglas, but to illustrate the significant challenges faced by parents and families in ensuring their children's health, education, safety and economic security. The social and demographic context of Finglas, particularly Finglas West, indicate a clear and unambiguous need for targeted interventions in education, social services, and health to address these vulnerabilities, particularly for disadvantaged groups like lone-parent families, people with disabilities, and children in need of protection. Such targeted services are important in supporting children and families with complex needs. Additionally, the area's diversity suggests that inclusivity should be a key consideration in policy and community development.

## 1.4 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

This independent evaluation was commissioned by Barnardos to explore the implementation and efficiency of integrated services within this complex community via Better Finglas and FWFRC, and to shed light on barriers to - and facilitators of - service integration. Specifically, it was anticipated that the evaluation would fulfil descriptive and evaluative (process and outcome) functions in response to the following evaluation objectives:

a) *To describe and define the model of integrated services and interagency supports that has been developed, promoted and implemented in Finglas*

b) *To conduct a process evaluation of how integration and interagency support has been applied in both FWFRC and Better Finglas ABC programmes*

c) *To evaluate the impact of the Barnardos model of service integration on child and family access to, engagements with and experiences of prevention and early intervention services in Finglas.*

The evaluation was conducted by external researchers, working in collaboration with Barnardos and local stakeholders.

### 1.4.1 Clarifying and Evaluating a Model

The central priority of the evaluation has been to explore the model of interagency working being implemented in both Finglas programmes. This is not an evaluation of a particular programme or service, but rather an evaluation of *a way of working*. In commissioning this evaluation, Barnardos and its interagency partners in Finglas wished to examine and articulate the "how to" of effective, integrated working. This work will be important in informing ongoing evidence-based integrated service planning and delivery in Finglas, as well as developing generalisable lessons for the implementation of integrated prevention and early intervention programmes elsewhere.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation involved a five-phase programme of work as follows:

Phase 1 – Preparation
Phase 2 – Desk Research
Phase 3 – Service Provider Consultations
Phase 4 – Service User Consultations
Phase 5 – Analysis and Report Writing

Data gathering involved an iterative process with each stage of data collection informing the next. A detailed overview of research activity and data collection processes is outlined below.

### 2.1 PREPARATION PHASE

A comprehensive preparatory phase was undertaken as a critical first step in the evaluation process. Its purpose was to equip the Nexus evaluation team with a comprehensive understanding of both Better Finglas and FWFRC, particularly regarding the nature and scope of interagency working operational in both programmes. During this phase, a series of orientation meetings deepened Nexus's understanding of the diverse stakeholders involved in delivering integrated services across both sites. These meetings also aimed to build relationships with local stakeholders and secure their engagement in the evaluation process.

### 2.1.1 Evaluation Framework

The most significant feature of the preparation phase involved the development of a robust evaluation framework, serving as the first output of the evaluation. The purpose of the framework was to inform and guide all subsequent evaluation activities and ensure consistency in their delivery.

The framework began by developing and presenting a Logic Model for the entire evaluation, outlining anticipated outputs and outcomes from the process. This Logic Model is appended to this report document as Annex I. Thereafter, the evaluation framework:

- Clarified the priority issues to be examined for each of the evaluation objectives
- Identified the i) evaluation activities and ii) sources of information that would provide data relevant to each evaluation objective
- Proposed a series of broad research questions relevant to information-gathering on all objectives.

The framework was initially prepared in draft and was shared with the CWG that had been convened to oversee and support the evaluation. The framework was subsequently finalised following the receipt of feedback from Working Group members and served as the primary guide of all subsequent evaluation activities.

## 2.2 DESK RESEARCH PHASE

The second phase of the evaluation set out to anchor the evaluation process in national policy priorities, evidence-based good practice, local community needs, and existing service provision.  Accordingly, it involved a number of components, most notably:

- A review of documentation pertaining to the services and programmes of Better Finglas and FWFRC, for example proposals, outcome frameworks, progress reports, websites, Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and steering group Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Examination of policy, academic and grey literature pertaining to prevention and early intervention services for children and families, with a particular focus on good practice in interagency working and service-integration
- The development of a sociodemographic profile of Finglas, with particular attention to children, young people and families through the lens of intergenerational disadvantage
- Identifying and mapping the local interagency network landscape in Finglas as it relates to prevention and early intervention services for children and families.

## 2.3 SERVICE PROVIDER CONSULTATIONS

Phase 3 of the evaluation involved a series of consultation exercises and focus group discussions involving a broad range of stakeholders engaged collaboratively in the work of Better Finglas and FWFRC. In total, some 63 professionals, not including steering group members, took part in this data collection process which was designed to contribute detailed information to the descriptive, process and outcome elements of the evaluation. Consultations sought to deepen understanding of the motivators, barriers and enablers of integrated practice in Finglas and to generate perspective of what had and hadn't work well in the model of integration promoted and fostered through Better Finglas and FWFRC services.  This phase also engaged service-providers in discussions about the outcomes for families, children and young people as a result of locally based integrated practice.

There were two principal elements to the service-provider consultation process: one designed to provide detailed qualitative information relevant to the evaluation and the other aimed at providing more quantitative data. In order to develop understanding of the model of integration and interagency working applied in Finglas, consultations began with qualitative data collection via a series of interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Thereafter, the evaluation sought to both validate and extend information emerging from FGDs through a quantitative process, namely via a service-provider survey issued to all service-providers participating in integrated services and interagency working with Better Finglas and FWFRC.

### 2.3.1 Initial Orientation

An initial orientation meeting was held in early May 2024 with the CWG. Of particular relevance to the evaluation was the CWG's identification of the geographical catchments covered by Better Finglas and FWFRC and, by extension, the catchment area to be incorporated in the evaluation. The discussions also highlighted the central role of the steering groups of both initiatives in fostering interagency collaboration.

A further orientation to the evaluation process took place in late May 2024 with local service stakeholders. Twenty-three individuals participated, representing public service[19] and community and voluntary sectors[20]. In addition to outlining the steps of the evaluation process, this event also engaged participants in an exploration of concrete examples of interagency working in Finglas under the stewardship of Better Finglas and FWFRC. This included an examination of barriers to interagency working, alongside an examination of the benefits of interagency working – for service providers, children and families, and the wider community.

In-depth meetings were held with the managers of Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC, designed to unpack the nature, scope and volume of interagency working operational in both programmes. A further discussion was undertaken with two senior personnel in Barnardos to develop a historical context for interagency working in Finglas and the "lead agency" model developed by Barnardos in collaboration with community stakeholders over the previous 12 years. Discussions were also held with the steering groups of both Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC. These involved discussion of emerging issues, as well as consultation regarding optimal approaches to ensuring the community was engaged in the research.

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[19] Including health service, Tusla, schools/education, An Garda Síochána and local authority backgrounds.

[20] Including early childhood care and education, Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force and local development backgrounds.

### 2.3.2   Focus Group Discussions

Thereafter, all partners involved in interagency working in Better Finglas and FWFRC were invited to participate in an evaluation FGD.  FGDs were organised according to age cohorts, with key stakeholders invited to participate in FGDs focused on interagency working centred on:

- The pre-birth to one year old age category
- The two to four year old age category
- The five to eight year old age category.

To optimise participation, two FGD options were made available to relevant service-providers under each category above (e.g. one FGD to be held before and one after lunch; FGDs to be held on different days of the week; one in-person and one online). It was acknowledged that some stakeholders may be involved with more than one age group.  All participants were invited to take part in at least one FGD where their respective inputs on interagency working could be recorded.  FGDs lasted for approximately 90 minutes and were structured in nature, inviting participants to respond to a set of core questions designed to illicit information on each of the evaluation objectives[21].

FGDs were scheduled throughout June and over the first two weeks of July. In total, ten service providers across the community participated in the FGDs.

### 2.3.3   Survey

Based on information from earlier consultations, a survey questionnaire was developed by the research team to both validate and extend learning regarding interagency working. Specifically, the survey set out to explore areas such as organisational policies and commitments; sharing of information and calendars; informal engagements and relationship-building; respondents' participation in formal networks, fora and steering groups; the presence of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and Service-Level Agreements (SLA); joint delivery of programmes, and co-funding of initiatives.  The survey was launched at an information event in mid-October 2024 to which local service-providers were invited and at which ten individuals attended.  The opportunity to complete the survey was offered in hard-copy and online formats.  Upon completion of the Service-Provider consultation phase, 28 responses to the survey had been submitted: 16 online and 12 in hard-copy.  A copy of the survey questionnaire is appended with this report as Annex II.

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[21]  But with a particular emphasis on the objective pertaining to a process evaluation of how integration and interagency support had been applied in both Finglas West FRC and Better Finglas ABC programmes.

The research team met with two focus groups of parents in Better Finglas and one focus group in the FRC. A total of 23 parents participated. Each focus group aimed to allow participants the opportunity to describe their engagements with the range of services that they had encountered - from their own perspectives and that of their children. While discussions in the first and third focus group primarily covered the individual parenting journeys of the participants, the second group centred predominantly on the challenges associated with parenting children with additional needs.

All participants were female, all were either mothers or grandmothers, and all were currently accessing supports or attending groups organised by Better Finglas, FWFRC or St. Helena's Resource Centre. As well as sharing their experiences of accessing a range of services for themselves and their children, participants discussed in particular the importance of peer support groups, one to one supports from HSCLs and Preparing for Life mentors, as well as range of parenting programmes, provided within the community.

*Table 2: Consultation Formats & Engagement Breakdown*

| Method | Participants | Format | Purpose |
|---|---|---|---|
| Orientation Meetings | Collaborative Working Group | In-person | Establish scope, context, and catchment boundaries |
| Service-Provider Stakeholder Event | 23 | In-person | Present evaluation approach and gather examples |
| Service-Provider FGDs | 10 | Hybrid | Structured discussions by age-group services |
| Service-Provider Survey | 28 | Online & paper | Quantify scope and structures of interagency working |
| Manager & Leadership Interviews | 2 | Individual meetings | Historical and strategic insights |
| Steering Group Consultations | Multiple members | Group discussions | Governance and model design input |
| Service-User FGDs | 23 (all female) | In-person | Explore access, experience, outcomes of services |

## 2.5 ANALYSIS AND REPORT-WRITING

All information and findings from Phases 2 – 4 were collated and analysed by the evaluation team. Quantitative data from the service-provider survey was subjected to descriptive analysis, while qualitative data gathered through the remaining consultation exercises was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The evaluation team's objective has been to ensure that the presentation of findings accurately reflects the gathered data and aligns with the overall evaluation objectives outlined by Barnardos. The analysis has been conducted with a keen focus on relevance and accuracy, ensuring that insights derived from the evaluation, and corresponding recommendations, are meaningful and actionable.

This report was initially prepared in draft and presented to the CWG overseeing the research, with editing conducted following CWG feedback.

## 2.6 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Mixed methods research, which integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches, is particularly valuable when examining complex social issues in disadvantaged communities. However, it also introduces unique challenges. The following analysis highlights the strengths and challenges of applying mixed methods research in these contexts.

This approach has provided a comprehensive understanding of the issues involved in building interagency infrastructure in Finglas by capturing both the breadth (quantitative) and depth (qualitative) of the situation. By combining diverse data sources, the research enhances the validity and reliability of the findings. Qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups, were crucial in understanding the community context and interagency activities, making the findings and recommendations more actionable.

A key aim of the research was to adopt a participatory and inclusive approach, ensuring that the voices of community members were heard. This is particularly important in disadvantaged areas, where trust in external researchers may be limited. From the outset, the research team prioritised giving the community a sense of ownership in the process and ensuring that services and organisations involved in the interagency structures felt included.

The flexibility of the mixed methods approach allowed the evaluation team to adapt to changing circumstances and varying levels of engagement throughout the research and evaluation process. While mixed methods can be more time-consuming and resource-intensive than single-method approaches — posing a significant challenge in resource-limited communities — this adaptability was essential.

Ethical considerations were central to the development of the evaluation framework, particularly around ensuring informed consent and anonymity for community members. Additionally, the research team committed to presenting the results to all participants and gathering their feedback, promoting transparency and collaboration.

A challenge of combining qualitative and quantitative data is the methodological complexity of integrating the two. To address this, the evaluation framework provided clear guidance on how to synthesize the different data types, ensuring that the findings remained coherent and meaningful.

The Nexus research team allocated sufficient resources and time to each stage of the process, ensuring that each step was completed thoroughly. While challenges were encountered in accessing input from the required number of local services, extra efforts were made to engage service providers, as well as other target groups and community representatives. However, a gap in community representation arose due to a lack of male participation in the focus groups, as all the parents involved were female, reflecting the groups from which participants were drawn.

Ultimately, the mixed methods approach, with its capacity for in-depth qualitative discussions with key stakeholders over time, ensured that the evaluation findings have been translated into actionable and sustainable interventions. Many of these stakeholders possess significant experience in managing regional programmes and are well-versed in contributing to strategy, policy, and planning. Their insights have helped strike a balance between evaluation evidence, national policy, and local experience, providing valuable guidance for the development of interventions.

## 3. POLICY AND OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

It is important to anchor the interagency efforts of Better Finglas and FWFRC within a wider national and international policy context and to use that context as a means of subsequently considering interagency working in Finglas.

### 3.1 CHILD POVERTY AND EXCLUSION IN IRELAND

A significant number of children in Ireland confront vulnerabilities that threaten their well-being and potential. The Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2022) reports that 15.2% of children and young people are at risk of poverty, experiencing greater deprivation than the wider population. In November 2024, 2,168 families and 4,658 children sought emergency accommodation due to homelessness.

Lone-parent households, representing a quarter of children, face significant discrimination and disadvantage, affecting access to employment and housing. These families, mostly led by mothers, have poverty rates three times higher than the national average (Maître et al., 2018; SILC, 2022).

Other at-risk groups include approximately 2,100 children in direct provision, Traveller children (0.7% of the population), and a quarter of children from the Roma community experiencing food poverty. Mental health issues are rising, with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referrals up 37% since 2020, reaching 23,870 in 2023 (Gavin et al., 2021; Mental Health Reform, 2024).

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues, with studies indicating worsened mental health and well-being outcomes for children and young people, as well as heightened stress and adversity for families, especially those already vulnerable (Growing up in Ireland, 2021; Quinn, McGilloway & Burke, 2021). Tusla – the Child and Family Agency in Ireland – also reported a sharp rise in child protection and welfare referrals, with 91,924 in 2023 – an 11% increase from 2022 and double the number since it's 2014 inception (Tusla, 2024).

### 3.1.1 Prevention and Early Intervention

In response to these and other complexities facing children, young people and families, national policy and practice promotes the principle of *prevention and early intervention*. The State's current National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, for example, defines prevention and early intervention as:

> *"anticipating possible problems, minimising the risk as they arise, and targeting resources at those at high risk or showing early signs of a problem (DCEDIY 2023: 98)."*

Similarly, Tusla, the State's Child and Family Agency, expresses commitment to providing high quality services to children and families at the earliest opportunity across all levels of need, emphasising that providing help to children and families early in the stage of a difficulty can prevent situations from deteriorating[22]. The agency continues by stressing the value of partnership or interagency working in promoting and enabling prevention and early intervention practices.

## 3.2 INTERAGENCY WORKING

Interagency working plays a vital role in developing comprehensive, effective, and sustainable responses to complex community challenges (Adamson & Bromiley 2013). It is particularly valuable in addressing complex and multifaceted issues that require coordinated and holistic solutions. For example, interagency collaboration can enhance the quality and effectiveness of services for children and families with multiple and diverse needs, such as those who are at risk of poverty, social exclusion, or abuse. Rutter (1987) and Sameroff et al. (2000) illustrate that disadvantaged children, facing multiple risks, often experience poorer outcomes. Given that risks manifest across various levels, effective interventions require services at multiple levels, best achieved through interagency collaboration (Hanson & Carta, 1995; Davidson et al., 2012).

At its simplest, interagency working is a term that refers to the process of working together across organisational boundaries to achieve common goals and outcomes. It can take different forms and levels, ranging from information sharing and consultation to joint planning and decision making. This coordinated and collaborative approach integrates resources, expertise, and efforts from different sectors such as government agencies, non-profit organisations, businesses, and community groups.

Interagency working can also promote efficiency and innovation by reducing duplication, fragmentation, and gaps in service delivery, and by facilitating the sharing of resources, expertise, and good practices (Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012). It can also foster trust, mutual learning, and empowerment among stakeholders, and increase their engagement and participation in policy development and implementation (Matarrita-Cascante et al 2020). Similarly, interagency working can contribute to social justice and equity by ensuring that the

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[22] For more detail, visit https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support.

voices and perspectives of marginalised and disadvantaged groups are heard and respected, and that their rights and interests are protected and promoted (O'Leary & Vij, 2012).

Several factors influence the effectiveness of interagency cooperation. These include national legal and policy frameworks, agency/interagency policies and procedures (especially the clarity and quality of joint protocols for service delivery coordination), organisational culture, availability of human and financial resources, and monitoring and evaluation processes (Devaney et al., 2021). Addressing these issues requires robust policies, clear governance, and sustained investment in interagency capacity building.

### 3.2.1   Policy Mandate

In Ireland, the significance of integration and interagency collaboration in delivering public services, notably in healthcare, social welfare, education, and community development, has long been acknowledged. Several key policy documents lay the groundwork for promoting integration and collaborative working:

- Public Service Reform Plan (2011), which emphasised the necessity of joined-up government and collaborative working to enhance service delivery and efficiency

- Healthy Ireland Framework (2013) highlighted partnership and collaboration to tackle health inequalities and promote healthy lifestyles

- Sláintecare (2017) advocated for healthcare system reform, promoting community-based care, coordinated services, and increased patient involvement

- National Social Inclusion Strategy (2020) aimed to combat poverty, social exclusion, and inequality, stressing coordination between government departments and community groups

- Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future underscores the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration to address critical challenges like climate change, healthcare, housing, and social inequality.

This emphasis on cross-sectoral interagency working has also been emphasised in the context of children, young people and families. Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the Children and Young People's Policy Framework (2014) and its successor, Young Ireland (2023) highlight the value of integrated services and multi-agency collaboration to support children, young people and families.  First 5 (2019-2028), the State's framework for all children, from antenatal to

five years of age, and their families includes a distinct objective on the value of an effective early childhood system, enabled by high quality leadership, governance and collaboration in respect of the early years across the whole-of-government.  Similarly, a key priority of the Programme Plan for Child Poverty and Well-being 2023-2025[23] is the consolidation and integration of Family and Parental Support, Health, and Well-being services. This approach recognises that the challenges facing children and families experiencing poverty are often interconnected and cannot be effectively addressed in isolation. By bringing together support services across health, education, parenting, and community sectors, the plan aims to create more cohesive, accessible, and person-centred systems of care.

A specific focus of the Programme Plan is on scaling and replicating effective integrated practice. This means identifying models and initiatives that have demonstrated success in delivering holistic, wraparound support—and expanding these practices across other localities or settings.

*Policy Application*

Despite the presence of structured strategies, interagency collaboration in Ireland has predominantly evolved in an ad hoc manner. However, there is growing recognition of inter-agency partnerships' pivotal role in policymaking and service provision for children and families (Canavan et al., 2009; Barnekow et al., 2013). Service integration/coherence is identified as a recurring theme across government strategies, with evidence suggesting that weak integration undermines day-to-day experiences for children and families. By leveraging existing evidence and fostering a culture of partnership and innovation, Ireland can strengthen its approach to integration and interagency working, ultimately improving outcomes for individuals, families, and communities across the country.

Evidence suggests that such an approach will yield benefits for participating organisations, service users, and the wider public on a consistent basis. These benefits include improved access to and coordination of services, more efficient use of resources, better outcomes for children and families, stronger interagency relationships, and increased public trust in service systems. Policy frameworks lay the foundation for collaboration and ongoing research is crucial for identifying best practices, overcoming barriers, and evaluating the impact of access and engagement with interventions. A challenge lies in bridging the gap between policy intent and local-level innovation to ensure consistent access to necessary services.

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[23] An initiative of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office under the Department of An Taoiseach.

### 3.2.2    International Approaches

International discourse on multiagency working suggests diverse approaches to safeguarding and catering to the welfare of children. However, there is no singular model, with variations in integration levels across collaboration elements and the scope and function of multiagency approaches (Bregu & Delaney, 2016, p. 9). Models can be centralised or decentralised, with varying degrees of prescription regarding collaboration evident in both.

While multiagency work has evolved internationally, no definitive formula guarantees effectiveness. Promising practices indicate that an effective model should consider national and local contexts, available resources, service accessibility, human resource capabilities, and the establishment of trust and working relationships. Interagency structures for children's services can operate at various levels, ranging from strategic decision-making to localised service delivery. These structures facilitate joint decision-making, service planning, delivery organisation, and direct engagement with children and families.

A significant finding across literature is the contextual nature of interagency approaches, where they are shaped by the policy-making and service-delivery frameworks in which they operate, as well as the specific issues they aim to address. A clear distinction between interagency collaboration in strategic planning and decision-making versus its implementation in service-delivery is essential. Recognising this distinction aids in establishing clear objectives, targets, and mechanisms to guide effective collaboration. It also has practical implications: while steering groups typically lead on strategic planning and high-level decision-making, operational networks or interagency teams are more directly involved in implementing and integration of services on the ground.

## 3.3 A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING INTERAGENCY WORKING IN FINGLAS

### 3.3.1    Theories and Terminology of Interagency Collaboration

To understand and conceptualise interagency working, it is essential to appreciate the diversity of models and definitions that have been developed to describe the various forms of collaborative practices between professionals and organisations. Interagency collaboration involves complex dynamics between organisations each with their own goals, processes and perspectives. The diversity in terminology across sectors is reflected in group terms like 'multi-agency', 'inter-agency', 'interdisciplinary', and 'joint working' (Tomlinson, 2003) - each carrying its own nuances, often creating confusion regarding what collaboration entails and how best to implement it. Addressing this ambiguity requires an exploration of the different

types and levels of collaboration and how they evolve over time.  This can be framed using proposed distinctions summarised by Irish research (Owens, 2010) in the following manner:

- *Inter-agency working*: involves more than one agency collaborating in a planned and formal manner, either at a strategic or operational level
- *Multi-agency working*: entails multiple agencies engaging with a client, though not necessarily jointly, and may occur concurrently or sequentially, with shared planning;
- *Joined-up working*: denotes purposeful coordination of planning, considering various policies and practices of multiple agencies
- *Integrated working*: signifies collective support for children and families, placing the child at the forefront to meet their needs, achieved through formal collaboration and coordination among agencies.

The diversity of terminology and lack of precise definitions in the discourse surrounding interagency collaboration reflect several underlying issues, such as a desire for flexibility and accommodation of diverse perspectives and working arrangements across agencies. This ambiguity often results in confusion regarding the objectives to be achieved and the most effective processes, tools, and strategies to employ.

Rather than adhering strictly to singular definitions, it is perhaps more beneficial to focus on understanding the various types and levels of interagency collaboration.  Himmelman (1992) initially provided a foundational framework that conceptualises interagency collaboration as a progressive continuum and highlights how relationships among agencies can evolve over time. Himmelman (1992) delineated four progressive levels of interagency collaboration, which include networking (focused on information exchange), coordination (involving both information exchange and activity alteration), cooperation (combining the former with resource sharing), and collaboration (encompassing all previous aspects along with actively enhancing other agencies for mutual benefit).

Warmington et al. (2004) build on and refine Himmelman's approach within the specific context of services for children and families within the education and social care sectors. They bridge theory and practice through the identification of three distinct forms of interagency collaboration: interagency working, where multiple agencies engage in planned and formal collaboration; multiagency working, which involves multiple agencies working with a stakeholder but not necessarily in a joint manner; and joined-up working, characterised by deliberately coordinated planning, considering multiple policies and agency practices.

Table 3 illustrates the overlap and alignment between the theories of interagency collaboration proposed by Himmelman (1992), Warmington et al. (2004), and Owens (2010):

*Table 3: Theories of Interagency Collaboration*

| Himmelman (1992) | Warmington et al. (2004) | Owens (2010) | Overlap/Alignment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Networking | Multiagency working | Multi-agency working | All involve information exchange and multiple agencies working with a client, though not necessarily jointly. |
| Coordination | Interagency working | Inter-agency working | Both involve planned/formal collaboration and activity alteration. |
| Cooperation | Interagency working | Inter-agency working | Both involve resource sharing and formal collaboration. |
| Collaboration | Joined-up working | Joined-up working | Both involve coordinated planning and mutual enhancement. |
| Integration | Joined-up working | Integrated working | All encompass formal collaboration, coordination, and collective support to meet the needs of children and families. |

These models illustrate a clear progression from basic information sharing to comprehensive, integrated collaboration. Together, they provide a multi-dimensional framework that captures both the strategic intentions and operational realities of interagency work, making them highly valuable for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers aiming to strengthen collaborative practice. By recognising interagency work as an evolving continuum, professionals can better navigate the complexities of joint initiatives, ensuring that partnerships, services and support systems evolve to maximise their impact.

These theoretical frameworks, alongside the comprehensive review of policies and practices related to children and families (particularly in prevention and early intervention), have informed the development of a *Continuum of Collaboration* model, designed as a framework for evaluating interagency efforts in Finglas. This continuum is presented in detail in Chapter 4 below.

## 4. OBJECTIVE A: TO DESCRIBE AND DEFINE THE MODEL OF INTEGRATED SERVICES AND INTERAGENCY SUPPORTS IN FINGLAS

Prior to defining the model of integrated services and interagency supports in Finglas, it is worth taking some time to understand the context for – and evolution of – collaborative prevention and early intervention practice in this community.

### 4.1 NATIONAL CONTEXT

The landscape that has informed the advancement of prevention and early intervention practice has developed dramatically in Ireland over the past 20 years. While the importance of collaborative, cross-sectoral approaches to poverty alleviation and services for children had been acknowledged in Ireland for some time, the early 2000s sharpened focus nationally on the principles of prevention and early intervention, that is:

- **Prevention**: Providing a protective layer of support for children and families to stop difficulties arising or worsening.
- **Early Intervention**: Providing timely support(s) at the earliest possible stage when difficulties emerge[24].

This shift to PEI, coupled with a corresponding emphasis on the implementation of evidence-based services[25] led to the establishment of multi-stakeholder, collaborative, community-based initiatives aimed at testing and demonstrating best practices in prevention and early intervention. Notable among these were the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) in Dublin 24, Youngballymun in Dublin 11, and Preparing for Life (PfL) in Dublin 17. Simultaneously, several national charities, including Barnardos, were also supported to develop evidence-based prevention and early intervention services, and to become thought and practice-leaders in the area of evidence-based prevention and early intervention.

In parallel, other community-based collaboratives observed the development of the PEI approach and explored opportunities for similar developments in their respective catchments. This growing movement led to the formation of the Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN) in 2010 – a voluntary national network designed to share learning, promote best practices and advocate for greater State investment in PEI approaches.

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[24] See https://pein.ie/about-us

[25] i.e., manualised services that had been demonstrated, via rigorous research and evaluation, as resulting in improved outcomes for children irrespective of background or location, provided they were implemented with fidelity.

These practice developments were matched by corresponding policy developments, particularly the establishment of a full Ministry and specific Department for Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in 2011. Similarly, the decision in the Programme for Government (2011) to remove child welfare and protection from the remit of the Health Services Executive (HSE) and to create a dedicated child welfare and protection agency, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, marked a considerable policy shift towards early intervention as a key strategy for improving outcomes and child and family welfare in Ireland.

The national Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme was launched in 2013 with initial investment provided by DCYA and Atlantic Philanthropies.  Local community-based consortia were invited to apply for funding to deliver evidence-informed, area-based prevention and early intervention programmes that would contribute to improved outcomes for children in communities where high levels of child poverty had remained entrenched.  One such consortium had emerged in Finglas and, following a successful application to the ABC Programme, Better Finglas was established.

## 4.2 THE EMERGENCE OF BETTER FINGLAS

Consultations, as part of this evaluation process, have indicated that, in the years leading up to the launch of ABC, an emerging interagency landscape began evolving in Finglas. Working relationships had been established around a range of community needs and target groups, with personnel from Barnardos' Family Support Service in the area playing an important role in catalysing interagency working. Thus, a consortium of community-based professionals had been meeting in Finglas prior to the ABC programme coming on stream, with participants drawn from bodies such as Dublin City Council, the HSE, local schools, early years providers, youth services, the local Partnership company, the Drugs and Alcohol Task Force and voluntary organisations[26].

The ABC programme presented new opportunities to formalise and advance this collaborative agenda, and the interest and support of local TD, Róisín Shortall, offered additional impetus around the Finglas submission to ABC. An informal working group was created to lead the Finglas submission for inclusion in the ABC programme, comprising representatives from agencies with a deep understanding of Finglas and its demographic context.

There was unanimous agreement within this working group that Barnardos would be invited to act as lead agency for the Finglas submission and, if successful, to manage the Better Finglas

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[26] This predated the establishment of Tusla in January, 2014.

programme on behalf of the local consortium. A challenging application process required the consortium to gather substantial evidence of local needs, to demonstrate an understanding of evidence-based interventions and to show capacity to manage those interventions. Barnardos brought considerable expertise to this process, particularly in areas of best practice development and designing effective service delivery models. Barnardos provided a facilitator to resource the planning of the consortium, assisting consortium members to consider what interventions would be best suited to particular need and age groups in the community. This process led to local agreement on the issues on which Better Finglas would focus to improve outcomes for children and families.

The application submitted to ABC by the Finglas multiagency consortium was successful and Better Finglas was selected as one of 12 sites in the national ABC programme. Table 4 below tracks the evolution of Better Finglas since 2013, highlighting key milestones.

*Table 4: Milestones in the evolution of Better Finglas*

| Better Finglas | | |
|---|---|---|
| **2013-2014** | Planning and Launch: | Better Finglas established as part of the national ABC Programme; Barnardos selected as lead agency to manage implementation of the programme in Finglas, focusing on early intervention and prevention for children from pregnancy to eight years old. |
| **2014-2018** | Programme Rollout: | Evidence-based programmes addressing early learning, parenting support, and child well-being introduced; Key initiatives including parenting workshops, literacy initiatives, and supports for expectant mothers become operational. Collaboration with local schools, public health nurses, and community organisations grow during this period. |
| **2019-2021** | Expansion and Impact: | Programmes expand to include mindfulness for children, interagency training, and community-wide literacy campaigns. Better Finglas continues to build strong relationships with local service providers, increasing outreach to more families. |
| **2022-Present** | Sustainability and Development: | Better Finglas focuses on ensuring sustainability of its programmes by embedding practices into local services. Continuing emphasis on data-driven approaches to measure the long-term impact on child development and family well-being. |

The work of Better Finglas is centred on five thematic strands:

a) Early years
b) Literacy
c) Parenting
d) Pregnancy and New Parents
e) Social and Emotional Wellbeing.

A sixth strand, interagency working, acts as a cross-cutting theme that is embedded in all of items a) to e) above.  Along with a commitment to the provision of unified evidenced programmes in the area, interagency working is central to the delivery of the Better Finglas programme.   Objectives for interagency working, cited in programme documentation, highlight the consortium's ambition for:

● Organisations to work together in a co-ordinated way to implement and sustain the Better Finglas plan
● To develop more effective interagency collaborations to support delivery of evidence-based programmes
● To share learning to support future initiatives.

The programme also emphasises a continuum of coordinated, high quality service provision from pre-conception to 8 years, reinforced by Memoranda of Understanding with key partners. These formal agreements with partners (e.g., HSE, Tusla, schools) clarify roles, data-sharing protocols, and service delivery expectations. For example, in relation to support from PHNs in running groups, or schools working together on referrals and monitoring. Furthermore, oversight from the Steering Group served to ensure adherence to Logic Models, e.g. clarity on long-term outcomes linked to "increased access for children and their parents to activities which promote social and emotional wellbeing" as well as maximising focused support from Forums and Networks, e.g. Early Years Forum reviewing any access barriers or issues in transition to primary schools. The model exemplifies how structured governance, clear partner commitments, and a developmental lens can focus on amplifying impact in such community-led PEI initiatives.

## 4.3 FINGLAS WEST FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

The evolution of Better Finglas and its success in delivering its programme of coordinated work laid the foundation for the later establishment of Finglas West FRC in 2018. Stakeholders involved in evaluation consultations noted that the Finglas West community had long been under-resourced and under-served.  Service-providers had an acute awareness

of the high levels of vulnerability in the area, and community residents acknowledged the isolation they felt in their area as a result of inadequate services and resources across the life course.

In 2017, Tusla's announcement of a new round of applications for inclusion in the National FRC Programme presented an opportunity to address some of these gaps in Finglas West. The Better Finglas consortium[27] requested Barnardos to coordinate an application on behalf of Finglas West, seeking to establish and implement an FRC in the area. As with Better Finglas, the impetus for an FRC in Finglas West emerged via locally-based interagency working relationships in the community.

In 2018, after an extensive planning and consultation phase involving a wide range of local community organisations, Finglas West FRC was successfully established as part of Ireland's National FRC Programme, with Barnardos as lead agency for the FRC. With a steering group made up of pre-existing services, local organisations and community members, this marked a significant milestone in providing additional universal services and supports for all community members and families in Finglas West, the most disadvantaged community members in the wider Finglas area.

The planning process for the FRC acknowledged the extensive work by community volunteers over many years to run summer programmes for young people from the community, alongside drop in youth clubs and, for a period, a Traveller Women's Group. These services had been offered from a temporary Portakabin ("The Hub"). In its initial period, the FRC did not have its own space and operated on an outreach basis the premises of partner organisations, including local schools and community partners. The Finglas West FRC management team eventually procured the Hub site and designed a custom-built community space and facility specifically created to serve as a safe, inclusive space for community activities, with a strong focus on inclusivity, accessibility, and child-friendliness.

The primary goal of the FRC is to combat disadvantage and to strengthen and empower children, families and communities. The FRC offers a diverse range of services that cater to the needs of children, parents, and the broader community. Principal among these services are:

- PEEPs Parent and Toddler Groups[28]: Peeps Learning Together Programme has 5 strands to promote learning these are Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Communication and Language, Early Literacy, Early Maths and Health and Physical

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[27] Now referred to as the Better Finglas Steering Group

[28] See https://www.peeple.org.uk/peep-groups-overview

Development. This programme aims to reduce isolation for parents and toddlers living in Finglas West. Each themed session provides stories, songs and an activity to promote social skills, sensory play and the bond between children and caregiver.

- Social and developmental opportunities for young children and their caregivers.
- Community Well-being Projects: Initiatives to promote mental health, physical health, and overall well-being.
- Breath Body Mind[29]: Breath, Body & Minds' overall aim is to improve wellbeing, release bodily tension, stress and anxiety, increase feelings of calm, support focus and attention and regulate emotions.
- Homework Stay and Play: aims to provide a safe and warm environment, promoting parent and child interactions and enhancing community well-being by providing a safe space in the community for families to come stay and play.
- Parenting Programmes: Evidence-based programmes promoting positive parenting skills, supporting a positive parent child relationship, and building positive family relationships.
- Sensory Playgroup: Opportunities for babies to explore their environment through various forms of play e.g. sensory, music, stories. It provides a safe space for parents/carers, is a space for parents/carers to be with their babies and an opportunity for parents to receive peer support and advice.
- Signposting and advocacy: Provide information and advice to community members support and advocacy, enabling access to services that meet relevant needs, including support with self-referrals.

Objectives cited in FRC documentation highlight the ambitions of the centre to facilitate high levels of meaningful community participation at planning and objective-setting levels (e.g. through community membership on its Steering group) and to create, in partnership with the community, a space for community connections and wellbeing. The FRC also highlights its ambition to work effectively with interagency partners to enhance service provision in Finglas West. Against this backdrop, partnership activities prioritised by the FRC include:

- Providing a base for the provision of other services linked to the FRC objectives and values
- Working with other organisations to provide local community events
- Maintaining and growing relationships with community members and professionals and developing links with other service providers.

Table 5 below gives an overview of milestones in the development of FWFRC since initial planning discussions took place in 2017.

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[29] https://www.breath-body-mind.com

*Table 5: Milestones in the evolution of FWFRC*

| Finglas West Family Resource Centre (FRC) | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2017-2018 | Planning Phase: | Engagement with local stakeholders through the wider Better Finglas network begins to identify community needs and priorities, specific to Finglas West. Barnardos is designated as the lead agency for the development of the Finglas West FRC. |
| 2018-2019 | Opening and Early Programmes: | FRC operates from facilities of partner organisations including from local school settings, providing universal, free-of-charge services to the community. Early programmes include parent and toddler groups, creative afterschool groups, and community well-being initiatives. |
| 2020-2021 | Adaptation During COVID-19: | As with many other community services, the FRC pivots to offer online and socially distanced services during the pandemic, including remote parenting workshops and online wellbeing support, addressing increased demand for family supports. |
| 2022 | New Premises Opened: | In August 2022, the FRC officially moves to a larger, purpose-built facility, enhancing its capacity and service offerings to children and families   . |
| 2023-Present | Services Expansion and Community Integration: | The FRC continues to run evidence-informed programmes and initiatives, while focusing on empowering families and building community resilience. Partnerships with community leaders, schools and various local agencies remain a cornerstone of its success. |

## 4.4 SEPARATE INITIATIVES WITH A SHARED APPROACH

Both Better Finglas and FWFRC represent community-driven efforts to provide integrated and effective services, aiming to break cycles of disadvantage and to promote positive outcomes for children and families in the Finglas area. While Better Finglas focuses on young children and their early development, the FRC offers broader community-based initiatives to support families. Both initiatives have worked closely to provide a suite of comprehensive prevention and early intervention services within Finglas and together, they represent a comprehensive network of supports that aims to transform the Finglas community. Better Finglas and FWFRC are grounded in shared values, including:

- A child-centred and family-focused approach
- Strong emphasis on community collaboration
- Use of evidence-based interventions
- Commitment to breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage

Their key strengths, as highlighted by stakeholders from across the community, include commitments to:

- Interagency Collaboration: Shared resources and coordinated services to avoid duplication and maximise impact
- Focus on Early Intervention: A shared commitment to breaking the cycle of disadvantage through early childhood programmes
- Building Community Trust: Both initiatives have become trusted and integral parts of the Finglas community.

## 4.5 DEFINING THE FINGLAS INTERAGENCY WORKING MODEL

Against this historical backdrop and, following extensive review and consultation, the Nexus evaluation team suggests the following as a definition statement of the model of interagency working that operates via both Better Finglas and FWFRC programmes:

- *The Finglas interagency model unites a diverse range of stakeholders from across the community including community leaders and a diverse range of statutory community and voluntary organisations to address community needs proactively, collaboratively and holistically.*
- *By integrating services and fostering strong relationships, agencies and organisations set out to deliver more effective prevention and early intervention services, optimise resources, and build a stronger, more resilient community.*
- *The success of the model relies on clear communication and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people, and families.*

This definition evolves from community-wide acknowledgement that interagency collaboration in Finglas is essential in addressing the complex and interconnected needs of its residents, particularly children, young people, and families. Insights from interviewees and focus group sessions clarified that the rationale for this cross-sectoral approach was grounded in a number of key principles and local realities[30].

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[30] Each of the seven principles is linked to an example offered by those consulted and will be further examined throughout the chapter.

The principles of collaborative working in Finglas were identified by Nexus through an extensive consultation process involving FGDs, interviews, and the survey responses with key stakeholders from across the community. Using thematic analysis, this process captured the experiences, challenges, and insights of those directly involved in service provision and interagency collaboration.

*Principle 1: Addressing Interconnected Needs and Systemic Inequalities*
Finglas faces deeply interconnected challenges, including poverty, educational disadvantage, substance misuse, mental health issues, crime, and social exclusion. These issues are often cyclical and systemic, requiring a coordinated, long-term response. Addressing one issue effectively means tackling others simultaneously.

For example, children experiencing educational disadvantage may also struggle with mental health, family instability, or exposure to substance misuse. Interagency projects such as the Transition to Primary School Programme[31] and Post-Natal Support Groups[32] ensure that these overlapping needs are addressed holistically.

At a structural level, systemic inequalities—such as unemployment and housing instability—must be tackled to break cycles of disadvantage. Initiatives such as Community Employment Schemes and social inclusion measures led by Better Finglas and FWFRC provide long-term support. Programmes like Enhance the Space engage harder-to-reach community members, fostering inclusion and encouraging social mobility. By working together, agencies drive meaningful, sustainable change.

*Principle 2: Prevention, Early Intervention, and Community Resilience*
Proactive support services are more effective and cost-efficient than crisis responses. Schools, Better Finglas, FWFRC, and youth services work together to identify at-risk children early, offering interventions such as after-school programmes, structured working groups, and targeted supports. Interagency links enable PHNs to connect with families in need, ensuring early assistance.

Additionally, strengthening community resilience is key to long-term success. Initiatives such as intergenerational gardening projects, parent support groups, and trauma-informed

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[31] Some further details on this programme are available here: https://betterfinglas.org/our-programmes/early-years/
[32] Similarly, further information on these groups can be found here: https://betterfinglas.org/our-programmes/pregnancy-and-new-parents/groups-for-expectant-new-parents/

learning communities equip residents with the tools to manage challenges. By fostering local leadership and engaging hard-to-reach groups, interagency efforts empower the community to take an active role in its own development.

### Principle 3: Maximising Resources Through Collaboration

Resource constraints require efficient use of funding, expertise, and service delivery. Interagency collaboration enables the pooling of resources, reducing duplication of efforts. A shared database and case management system[33], such as that used by Better Finglas, streamlines service access and improves outcomes for families.

Steering Committees play a central role in guiding programme direction and maintaining high-level oversight. These committees are typically composed of senior representatives from partner organisations who are empowered to allocate resources, guide strategic decisions, and often step in to support programme delivery if needed.

Working groups focus on operational coordination and the day-to-day implementation of service delivery. These groups or fora facilitate practical resource sharing, communication, and help align efforts to avoid duplication. Community representatives also play a crucial role in reaching underrepresented areas. This collective, tiered approach ensures that services remain accessible and sustainable, even in times of financial strain.

### Principle 4: Integrated and Accessible Service Delivery

Families in Finglas often interact with multiple agencies, requiring seamless coordination. A community model, such as that of FWFRC, allows families to access multiple services in one location, reducing barriers to support. Strong partnerships between schools, social services, and community organisations enhance service effectiveness.

For example, post Covid19, through integration, close connection and collaboration with the community, particularly local school principals, Finglas West FRC and Better Finglas identified a growing need for supports for anxiety and conflict management among children. In response the Play Programme was introduced in five local primary schools. These collaborative efforts demonstrate how integrated planning leads to targeted, impactful service delivery.

### Principle 5: Building Community Trust and Engagement

A unified, consistent approach to service delivery fosters trust among community members. When schools, community Gardaí, and youth services collaborate on youth diversion

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[33] This system is described in more detail in Section 5.3.2

programmes or large-scale community events, they send a clear message of collective support for young people.

The establishment of FWFRC addressed a critical gap in local facilities, providing a safe, inclusive space where residents—especially hard-to-reach groups—could feel comfortable accessing services. This ongoing commitment to engagement strengthens relationships between agencies and the wider community, ensuring sustained participation in support initiatives.

### Principle 6: Data Sharing and Evidence-Based Practice

Interagency collaboration facilitates data sharing and analysis, enabling agencies to identify trends, measure impact, and tailor services accordingly. Networks such as Better Finglas and FWFRC bring together school principals and HSCLs to share issues, challenges and welfare concerns, ensuring that families receive appropriate support.

At a strategic level, Better Finglas and FWFRC steering groups, in association with management in both programmes, use logic models to guide service delivery and conduct annual progress reviews. These data-driven approaches enhance accountability, responsiveness, and overall service effectiveness.

### Principle 7: Policy Alignment and Strategic Planning

Ensuring that local services align with national frameworks—such as Sláintecare, First 5 (2019–2028), and the Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2023–2028)—strengthens funding applications and enhances service sustainability.

Better Finglas and FWFRC have successfully adapted their strategies to emerging community needs. For example, parent workshops on additional needs were introduced in response to local demand, and new opportunities to engage with the Traveller community are being explored. These efforts reflect a commitment to responsive, evidence-based strategic planning.

The rationale for interagency work in Finglas is therefore clear. It is essential for addressing the complex, interconnected needs of the community in a holistic, efficient, and sustainable way. By working together, community representatives, organisations and agencies across Finglas seek to deliver more effective prevention and early intervention services, optimise resources, build community trust, and address systemic inequalities. This collaborative approach is key to improving outcomes for children, young people, and families in Finglas and creating a stronger, more resilient community.

Theoretical frameworks and comprehensive review of policies and practices related to children and families documented in Chapter 1, have informed the development of a *Continuum of Collaboration* model, designed as a framework for evaluating interagency efforts in Finglas.

This model offers a structured approach to assessing how agencies work together, ranging from informal information-sharing to fully integrated service delivery. By aligning with the established theories from Himmelman (1992), Warmington et al. (2004), and Owens (2010), this model offers a practical tool for understanding and enhancing interagency partnerships and working.

Recognising the centrality of collaboration to improved service outcomes, this report adopts a condensed version of the above theories, presenting three distinct levels of interagency collaboration:

1. Networking and Information Sharing
2. Coordination and Formal Collaboration
3. Integrated and Comprehensive Collaboration

These levels represent a continuum from minimal interaction to deep collaboration. The Continuum of Collaboration serves as both a conceptual and evaluative framework. It captures the scope of collaborative efforts, assessing the effectiveness of how far they go towards attaining shared objectives.

The model delineates collaboration across various tiers, spanning from minimal interaction to complete collaboration. In the context of Family and Community Services, applying the Continuum of Collaboration Model can aid in evaluating and augmenting interagency collaboration among stakeholders including local government, health services, education providers, and community agencies. Assessing the current collaboration level and striving towards higher tiers, these agencies can effectively address local issues, enhance service delivery, and attain shared community objectives. This approach ensures alignment among agencies, fostering collective impact on the community's welfare.

A summary of the continuum is presented in Table 6 below, presenting a clear overview of the different levels of interagency working, their definitions, key features, and evaluation criteria, facilitating understanding and assessment of collaborative efforts.

*Table 6: Continuum of Collaboration*

| Level of Collaboration | Definition | Key Features | Evaluation Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|
| Networking and Information Sharing | Involves networking and information exchange among multiple agencies. Agencies work with clients independently, and engagement can be concurrent or sequential. | Information exchange Agencies work with clients independently Concurrent or sequential engagement | Frequency and quality of information exchange Awareness of other agencies' roles and services Instances of concurrent or sequential engagement with clients Shared planning efforts Initial or indirect impact on client outcomes |
| Coordination and Formal Collaboration | Entails planned and formal collaboration, including information exchange and activity alteration to achieve better alignment. | Planned and formal collaboration Information exchange and activity alteration | Formal agreements or MOUs in place Regularity of joint planning meetings and activities Examples of coordinated activities and shared resources Impact on service delivery efficiency and effectiveness Emerging evidence of improved outcomes for clients |
| Integrated and Comprehensive Collaboration | Involves comprehensive coordinated planning and mutual enhancement, prioritising collective support to meet client needs. | Comprehensive coordinated planning Mutual enhancement Collective support to meet client needs | Degree of integrated planning and policy alignment Quality of outcomes for clients Evidence of mutual enhancement and capacity building Long-term sustainability of collaborative efforts |

**Networking and Information Sharing**: At this level, interagency collaboration primarily involves networking and information exchange among multiple agencies. Agencies work with clients independently, and engagement can be concurrent or sequential. This level focuses on sharing information, coordinating services, and developing awareness of other agencies' roles and services.

**Coordination and Formal Collaboration**: The next level entails planned and formal collaboration, including networking, mutual engagement, information exchange and activity alteration to achieve better alignment. It involves formal agreements or MOUs, regular joint planning meetings, coordinated activities, and shared resources to enhance service delivery efficiency and effectiveness.

**Integrated working and Comprehensive Collaboration**: The highest level of interagency collaboration involves comprehensive coordinated planning and mutual enhancement, prioritising collective support to meet client needs. It encompasses integrated planning, policy alignment, quality outcomes for clients, evidence of mutual enhancement and capacity building, and long-term sustainability of collaborative efforts.

While the degree of collaboration may vary, the quality of outcomes for service users is an important evaluation criterion at every level of collaboration. By tracking collaboration levels alongside outcomes, stakeholders can more accurately assess both the nature and impact of interagency work.

## 4.8 Progressive Collaboration in Finglas

Aligning the principles underlying the collaboration model in Finglas with the three levels of the Continuum of Collaboration framework can be understood as a progressive journey that evolves from basic networking to fully integrated and comprehensive collaboration. This framework is supported by key principles that facilitate the development of increasingly sophisticated interagency cooperation.

### *Level 1: Networking and Information Sharing*
At the foundational level, the principles of *Data Sharing and Evidence-Based Practice*, along with *Building Community Trust and Engagement*, are essential. These principles enable agencies to exchange relevant information, track trends, and coordinate their responses effectively.

While agencies continue to operate independently, they share critical data on issues such as school attendance and welfare concerns. Networking groups, like Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC school networks, facilitate communication across various services—public health nurses, schools, and youth services—by helping them maintain awareness of each other's roles. This initial stage focuses on establishing regular information-sharing forums, fostering interagency awareness, and creating a foundation for more advanced collaboration.

## Level 2: Coordination and Formal Collaboration

Building on the networking foundation, this level introduces more structured collaboration through principles such as *Integrated and Accessible Service Delivery*, *Maximizing Resources Through Collaboration*, and *Prevention, Early Intervention, and Community Resilience*.

At this stage, agencies move from informal information exchange to formalised collaboration. This shift is evidenced by joint initiatives, such as after-school programmes, youth interventions, and working groups. Formal agreements, including Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), emerge to support these efforts, alongside coordinated activities and shared resources. An example of this is Better Finglas' shared case management system. Regular interagency meetings ensure that efforts remain aligned, promoting more efficient and targeted service delivery.

## Level 3: Integrated and Comprehensive Collaboration

At the highest level of collaboration, the principles of *Interconnected Needs and Systemic Inequalities*, as well as *Policy Alignment and Strategic Planning*, underpin the work.
Services at this level are fully integrated, with a strong focus on collective planning, joint policy alignment, and mutual capacity building. Programmes like the *Additional Needs Working Group* exemplify this comprehensive, multi-agency approach to addressing systemic issues. It could also be argued that the steering committees of both Better Finglas and FWFRC, as multiagency structures catalysing interagency working across the Finglas community, act as useful exemplars of Level 3 collaboration. At this stage, collaboration extends beyond service delivery to encompass community empowerment, ensuring lasting impact and long-term resilience.

The core principles of collaboration provide a solid foundation across all levels. As agencies progress from basic networking to more coordinated efforts, and ultimately to integrated collaboration, the principles evolve to support increasingly sophisticated forms of cooperation. This model, visually represented in Figure 4 below, ensures that services in Finglas transition from reactive and independent efforts to proactive, integrated, and systemic solutions, leading to more effective, sustainable community development.

*Figure 3: Finglas Continuum of Collaboration as a progressive Model of Integration*
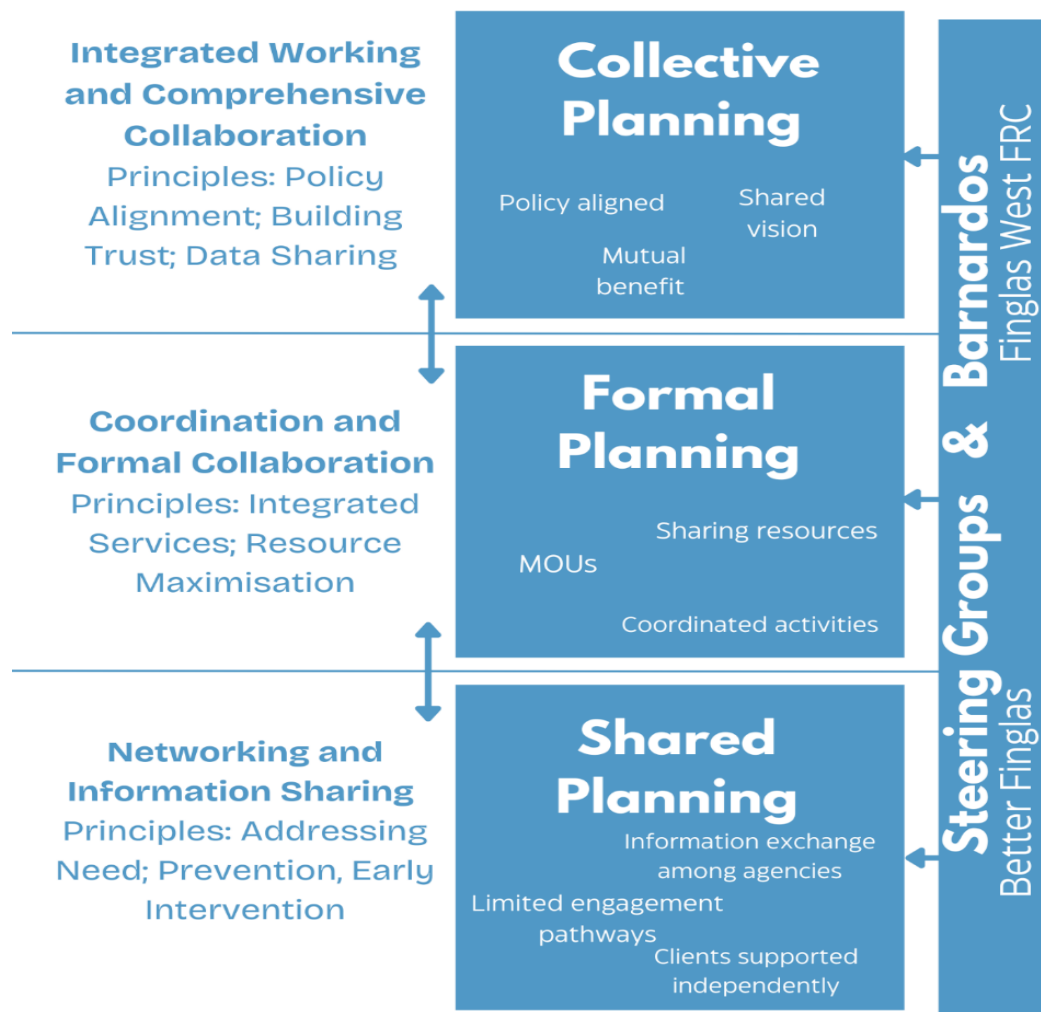


## 4.9 INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION: A NETWORK OF KEY PARTNERS

Interagency working in Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC operates under multi-agency/partner steering groups, which provide strategic direction and serve as the engines for interagency collaboration. These structures consist of an 'inner circle' of core partners responsible for day-to-day decision making and programme implementation, and an 'outer circle' of broader supporting actors, agencies and stakeholders who provide strategic oversight, advocacy and additional resources. This layered approach to interagency collaboration ensures that local expertise is harnessed while maintaining a sustainable, structured governance model.

By structuring partnerships in this way, the Finglas model fosters a dynamic and inclusive approach to service provision, ensuring that key agencies work closely while maintaining broader community involvement.

## 4.10    ROLE OF BARNARDOS

Barnardos plays a pivotal role in fostering interagency collaboration within both the Better Finglas programme and the FWFRC. As the lead agency, Barnardos oversees the coordination of these initiatives, ensuring that all elements of the Finglas interagency model operate effectively under its management umbrella. Within this lead agency role, Barnardos acts as a facilitator for interorganisational working and plays a vital role in building trust between consortium members and enabling group decision-making. This role also includes establishing appropriate processes to support the development and sustainability of effective interagency practices (e.g. interagency team building, logic modelling, service planning). Clear communication channels between Barnardos and other organisations have over time been built and strengthened. By bringing together representatives from the community, local agencies, statutory bodies, and community-based organisations, Barnardos facilitates a collective approach to community support and development. Thus, Barnardos aims to foster a culture of open communication, a shared vision and clear common goals to inform service planning and delivery.

Central to this effort is Barnardos' commitment to promoting an approach to service delivery underpinned by implementation science. By drawing on evidence-based methodologies and research on "what works" in relation to service delivery, Barnardos ensures that both Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC are structured around best practices, including best practices in interagency collaboration. This approach helps refine service delivery, enhances programme effectiveness, and ensures that interventions are tailored to meet the needs of the community.

Barnardos also provides strategic direction, guiding the long-term vision and sustainability of these initiatives. Through its facilitation of steering groups and management of both Better Finglas and FWFRC programmes, it supports partners in aligning their efforts, fostering strong collaboration, and maintaining a shared focus on community-driven outcomes. This strategic oversight enables a cohesive approach to tackling local challenges and maximising resources.

A key aspect of Barnardos' role is securing financial sustainability through the application for funding support. The organisation played a crucial role in convening partners to successfully apply for Area Based Childhood (ABC) funding, ensuring that administrative and governance structures were established effectively. Building on this experience, Barnardos led the 2017-

2018 application process to Tusla for the establishment of Finglas West FRC, leveraging the strong foundations laid in Better Finglas. This application process was a collaborative effort, involving representatives from local schools, youth services, community organisations, and statutory bodies such as Dublin City Council.

Crucially, all stakeholders involved in Better Finglas and FWFRC recognise these initiatives as community-based collaborations. While Barnardos serves as the administrative lead, it is an equal partner in these efforts, working alongside community leaders and local bodies to support the development and progression of both programmes. This distinction is fundamental, ensuring that the initiatives remain rooted in community ownership while benefiting from the expertise and structural support that Barnardos provides.

## 5. OBJECTIVE B: TO CONDUCT A PROCESS EVALUATION INTO HOW THIS MODEL OF INTEGRATION AND INTERAGENCY SUPPORT HAS BEEN APPLIED IN BOTH THE FINGLAS WEST FRC AND BETTER FINGLAS ABC

### 5.1 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

The second evaluation objective calls for a process evaluation into how this model of integration and interagency support has been applied in both the Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC programmes. By its nature, process evaluation sets out to determine if an initiative or, in this case, a model of working has been implemented as intended and has resulted in planned outputs/deliverables. It involves examining activities and outputs from the perspectives of *relevance; appropriateness; quality; efficiency; and emerging system outcomes*[34]. In the context of collaborative programmes such as Better Finglas and FWFRC, it also involves examination of the working relationships between programme partners and the extent to which the collaboration has brought additional value to their respective programmes and services.

A core purpose of process evaluation involves *deepening understanding of the enablers and barriers to successful implementation*, clarifying not only what has and hasn't worked well in programme implementation, but also exploring *why* and *how* certain aspects have succeeded or encountered challenges. Process evaluation is committed to *capturing learning*; learning that has the potential to inform future planning, practice, model definition, replication and scalability.

This chapter, therefore, examines how interagency working in Finglas operates in practice. It outlines the agencies and organisations involved in collaborative activity and demonstrates where those agencies and organisations fit within the bigger collaboration picture of Better Finglas and FWFRC. A flavour of collaborative efforts is offered to illustrate the model in action, while analysis is also offered on system-level outcomes realised via interagency working. This section of the chapter concludes with a brief description of factors that enable and/or challenge effective interagency practice in Finglas.

### 5.2 COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: INNER AND OUTER CIRCLES OF ENGAGEMENT

As referenced earlier, interagency working in the context of Better Finglas and FWFRC is centred around a network of key partners committed to a collaborative approach in delivering PEI services and programmes to children and families. This network involves various levels of

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[34] For example, impacts to or changes in the way in which agencies and services work together or with their local community. These can be planned and, where it arises, unplanned outcomes.

engagement, and, for illustrative purposes, the evaluation team has described collaboration partners as fitting into one of two circles: *inner* and an *outer* circle.

The *inner circle,* essentially the steering committees of both Better Finglas and FWFRC, consists of core partners who are actively involved in decision-making and operational aspects of Better Finglas and FWFRC. These partners are the driving forces behind the promotion, support and implementation of collaborative programmes and activities in Finglas.

The *outer circle* comprises supporting agencies, advocacy groups and broader community stakeholders. These partners play a crucial role in amplifying collaborative efforts, providing additional support, and ensuring community-wide engagement with local initiatives. Together, the inner and outer circles represent a cohesive system where strategic partners drive implementation while supporting entities amplify the impact of interagency collaboration.

Table 7 below presents an overview of the key organisations involved in the evolution and implementation of the Finglas Interagency model. It identifies agencies/stakeholders according to their respective levels of participation; whether as core, essential partner (Inner Circle) or a supporting, contributing entity (Outer Circle), as well as their specific roles and responsibilities.

*Table 7: Key Interagency Organisations*

| Type of Organisations | Participant Organisations | Inner-Outer Circle | Role and Contribution |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Local Residents and Community Leaders** | Parents and Families | Inner | Directly shape service provision through active participation and feedback. |
| | Community Leaders and Volunteers | Inner | Play a vital role in advocating for the community and delivering grassroots prevention initiatives |
| | Young People | Outer | Involvement of young people in decision-making processes to ensure that services are relevant and effective. |
| **Child and Family Support Services** | Better Finglas (Area-Based Childhood Programme) | Inner | Provides early intervention and family support services, including parenting programmes and therapeutic services. Better Finglas acts as a central hub within the interagency model. |
| | Finglas West Family Resource Centre | Inner | Offers parenting support, parent and child groups , and community activities to strengthen families and prevent crises, targeting the Finglas West area mostly. The Finglas West FRC operates through an interagency, community development approach within a Finglas interagency model. |
| | St Helena's Resource Centre | Inner | Serves as a support for much of the interagency work happening in Finglas. Provides a range of adult education activities, group activities for children, programmes for the older population, specialised programmes and meeting space for the local community groups of Finglas and in particular, South Finglas. |
| | Barnardos | Inner | Barnardos provides early intervention, family support, and therapeutic services to vulnerable children and families in the Finglas community. Barnardos provides leadership and governance, managing both Finglas West FRC and Better Finglas and its |

| | | | staff at local and regional level remain committed to all interagency work within the community. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Statutory Agencies** | HSE | Inner | Health and mental health services, with oversight for Sláintecare as well as PHN programmes, child psychology, and early years health checks. Representatives participate in working groups and contribute to activities and events. Professional staff (SLT, OT, etc.) also support inter agency initiatives. |
| | Dublin City Council | Inner | Provides community development support, housing provision and homelessness prevention, particularly for families at risk. Local representative from DCC highly involved in the evolution and sustaining of both Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC. |
| | Finglas Tusla Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) | Inner | A network of agencies, coordinated by Tusla as part of Tusla Prevention Partnership and Family Support Services, working together to provide coordinated family support and early intervention services. |
| **Educational Institutions** | Primary and Secondary Schools | Inner | Schools play a central role in identifying children at risk and providing early support through programmes like the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme. Members of the HSCL cluster are active participants within working groups, as are the school principals. |
| | Early Years Services | Inner | Preschools and crèches are critical for identifying childhood developmental delays or family challenges early on. Representatives of early years services are active within steering groups and working groups. |
| **Youth Services** | Finglas Youth Resource Centre (FYRC) | Inner | Provides recreational, educational, and support services for young people, focusing on early intervention to prevent disengagement. Youth workers are involved in working groups and support community events. |
| | Foróige / Crosscare | Outer | Deliver youth development programmes, including mentoring and leadership initiatives, to support young people at risk. Offer youth clubs, skills development, and early intervention programmes |
| **Interagency Groups and Networks** | North Dublin Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force | Inner | Addresses substance misuse issues through collaborative prevention programmes. Representatives from the Task Force engage closely within working groups. The Finglas Community Safety Forum is an initiative from the Task Force. |
| | Dublin North West Partnership | Inner | Community-based organisation focused on tackling social exclusion and improving the quality of life for residents in Dublin's North West area through collaborative, |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | integrated, and innovative initiatives. Representatives support interagency work in Finglas and participate actively in working groups. |
| **Other Community-based Supports** | Community Garda | Inner | Involved in community policing and youth diversion programmes to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. |
| | Local Sports Clubs and Youth Groups | Outer | Provide positive outlets for young people, promoting physical and mental wellbeing and preventing anti-social behaviour. |
| | Finglas Counselling Service | Outer | Offer therapeutic support for children, young people, and families to address mental health challenges early. |
| | Finglas Addiction Support Team (FAST) | Outer | Works to prevent substance misuse among young people through education, outreach, and early intervention. |

The participants above have, over the years, worked together to develop a range of dedicated, evidence-informed prevention and early intervention programmes and initiatives, many of which have been co-delivered with partner organisations, as well as jointly planned and co-funded in some instances. These structures have evolved into a strong framework where community participation acts not only as a guiding principle, but also as a key driver in shaping service delivery to ensure responsiveness, relevance and appropriateness to local needs. These initiatives cut across the various levels outlined in the *Continuum of Collaboration* and have included shared planning centred on informal networking and information sharing, more formal planning associated with coordination and formal collaboration, and collective planning aligned to integrated working.

To plan, develop and support these initiatives, a series of working groups and networks has been established. Of particular importance are the Steering Committees of both Better Finglas and FWFRC, which act as the driving forces behind both initiatives. The Steering Committees are the essence of the inner circle; they plan the actions for both initiatives and provide oversight on their effectively delivery.

Other key working groups, fora and networks including the following:

- Additional Needs Working Group
- Better Finglas Subgroups (including Early Years Forum and Schools Group)
- Finglas Tusla Child and Family Support Network (and subgroups)
- Community Safety Forum
- HSCL Cluster
- Local Primary Principals' Group
- Parenting Forum
- Trauma Informed Learning Network.

Community participation is intentionally embedded within these structures to ensure that lived experiences, insights and feedback from families directly inform service provision. The Parenting Forum, Trauma Informed Learning Network and HSCL cluster, for example, provide platforms for local voices to shape decisions. Likewise, schools and early years services have been crucial in identifying needs early and participating actively in planning and delivery through the Early Years Forum and Principal's Group.

Additionally, local service-providers also identified up to 40 other active local groups, focused on issues and target groups across the life course, that involved both universal (community education, learning and development, family support) and targeted (residents associations, addiction and domestic violence support) interventions. Many participants noted that they

were serving on these groups as co-ordinators or chairpersons, representatives of their organisations or agencies or as local community members. For the most part, the thematic focus for these groups was on issues relating to community, parenting, social and emotional wellbeing, youth, early years and new parents.

## 5.3 Interagency Work in Action: Case Studies

An important feature of understanding the varied and progressive levels of interagency working in Finglas involves delving deeply into individual projects and initiatives that have been established by Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC.  The following case studies present an overview of four locally based prevention and early intervention activities, each aligned to distinct levels of collaboration from the evaluation's continuum of collaboration. The final example highlights the fluid or progressive nature of the continuum. Each of these initiatives can be seen to demonstrate elements of more intensive inter agency working at various stages in their development.

### 5.3.1 The Finglas Parenting Forum (Levels of Collaboration: Networking and Information-Sharing, and Coordination and Formal Collaboration)

The Finglas Parenting Forum is a collaborative initiative within the Finglas community that supports the delivery of evidence-based parenting programmes. The forum typically includes a diverse range of participants, such as those from:

- Community Organisations: Groups like Better Finglas, St Helena's Resource Centre and other local NGOs.
- Schools and Educational Institutions: Representatives from primary and secondary schools in the area, including Home School Liaison Officers (HSLOs) and Principals.
- Statutory Agencies: Such as local Tusla and HSE representatives
- Youth and Family Support Services: Professionals working in areas like counselling, childcare, and family support.
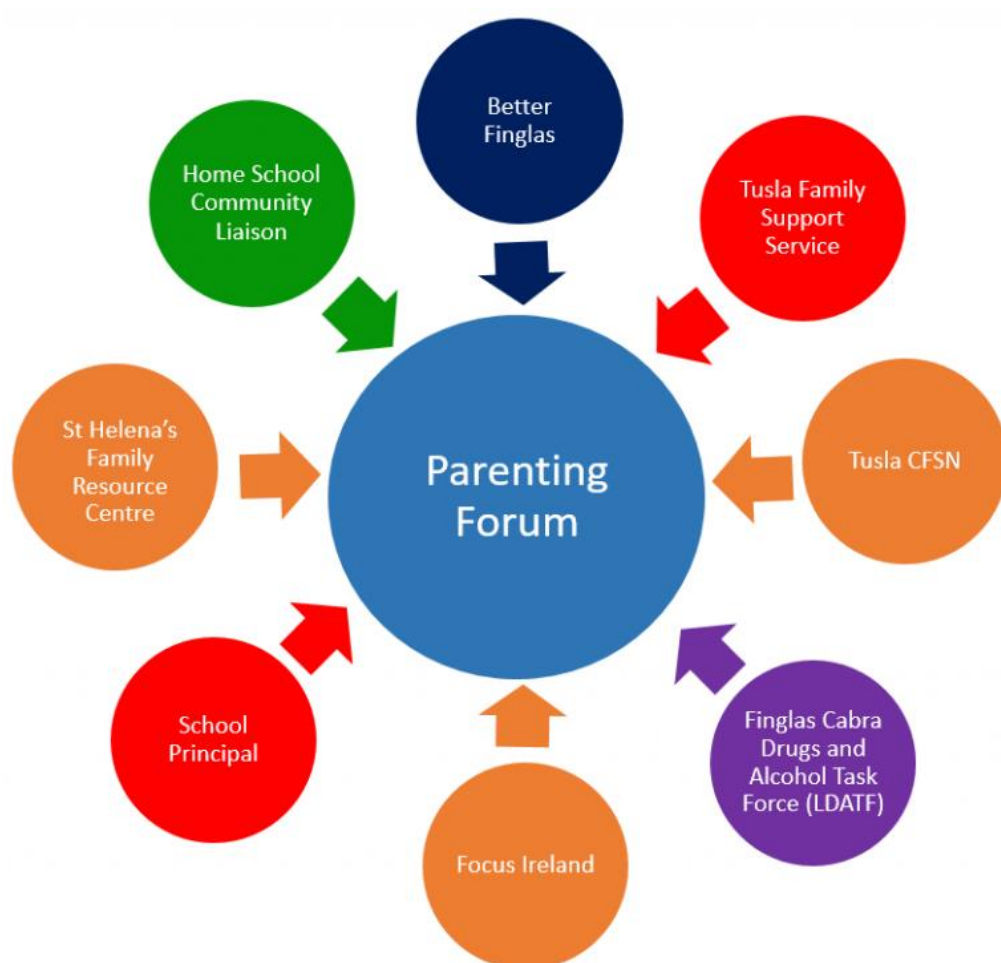
The forum operates as a collaborative platform for participating bodies to exchange information, identify need, engage in shared planning and the delivery of initiatives that support parents and families. Key aspects of its operation include:

- *Regular Meetings*: The forum meets periodically to discuss issues affecting parents and children in Finglas, share updates on ongoing projects, and consider new initiatives.
- *Need Assessment*: The forum identifies the specific needs of parents and families through consultations and feedback from community members.
- *Programme Development*: Based on identified needs, the forum engages in design, shared planning and implementation of programmes such as parenting courses, workshops, and support groups. Many of the forum members are also involved in other local interagency structures and provide information updates on relevant local activities, as well as sharing the work of the Forum with their other partners.
- *Resource Sharing*: Members pool resources, expertise, and networks to ensure that parents have access to the services and support they need.

- *Awareness Campaigns*: The forum promotes available services and resources to ensure parents are aware of those services and are able to access them. Programmes that are planned through the Forum can be added through Shared Calendars.
- *Collaboration with Schools*: The forum works closely with schools to address issues like attendance, engagement, and parental involvement in education. Initiatives are delivered within schools with the specific support of HSCLs. These HSCLs are also able to access training provided through BF or other Forum partners.

The forum contributes to positive outcomes for parents, children, and the wider Finglas community. These outcomes align with a number of the principles that, as outlined above in the previous chapter, underpin the model of interagency working in Finglas. These include the principles of:

- ***Addressing Interconnected Needs and Systemic Inequalities***, particularly by increasing parental awareness of services and supports available to them.

- ***Prevention, Early Intervention, and Community Resilience***, seeking to provide proactive supports to parents and families in the community on a range of needs, issues and concerns. The forum helps identify and address family challenges early, preventing more serious issues from developing. Parents of children with additional needs within the community have attended information workshops as signposted by HSCLs, ensuring that parents are more informed and understanding of the complexities of the system. New parents are encouraged to attend events such as Family Fun Days and can be, over time, referred to workshops on topics such as mental health, child development, and navigating the education system.

- ***Maximising Resources Through Collaboration***, reducing duplication of effort.

- ***Building Community Trust and Engagement***, through the work of the Forum, parents have access to a network of peers and professionals, reducing isolation and fostering a sense of community. Through increased levels of engagement, these parents are more involved in their children's development and educational outcomes for children. Parents are better informed about and connected to local services, such as counselling, childcare, and other supports. Peer support options are also developed that allow for strengthened relationships between parents, schools, and service providers.

- ***Data Sharing and Evidence-Based Practice***: Through facilitating collaboration between local agencies to more effectively serve the needs of the community, the

range of Forum members share learning, support each other and find solutions to challenges around service delivery at their regular meetings. The feedback from these meetings is also relayed to the Better Finglas Steering Group, updating on how parenting programmes are progressing and ensuring that information is shared at review and planning levels.

As a local interagency network, the Parenting Forum plays an important role in connecting service providers, and in enhancing delivery of parenting programmes, courses and workshops. The Forum's work in turn empowers parents and strengthens families in the Finglas area. By fostering collaboration among schools and service providers, it addresses many challenges faced by individual families as they navigate a complex system. Through sharing information and resources, the Forum demonstrates the power of building strong foundations within a community-driven model that supports children, families and the wider Finglas area.

### 5.3.2 Central Administration Hub and Shared Calendar (Level of Collaboration: Coordination and Formal Collaboration)

The Central Administration Hub and Shared Calendar are key components of a collaborative framework between Better Finglas and St. Helena's Resource Centre[35], designed to streamline operations, improve communication, and enhance service delivery for the community.

The Central Administration Hub serves as the operational and logistical centre for coordinating activities, resources, and communication between Better Finglas and St. Helena's Resource Centre. Arising from an identified need to ensure that community members would be able to access programmes efficiently, a shared platform was developed in 2021-2022. During Covid, with pressure to move courses and their registration processes online, Microsoft Forms was used as a means of capturing this type of data. As consent forms were added, the system further evolved to send automatic texts to parents as part of this registration process. QR codes were added to ease these steps and stickers have since been produced to promote activities. As the platform has been developed over time, staff have worked to ensure that sensitive data, such as participant information, is stored and shared securely, in compliance with data protection regulations.

Principles reflected in the implementation of the Central Administration Hub and Shared Calendar include:

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[35] St. Helena's Resource Centre is part of Tusla Prevention Partnership and Family Support Services and provides a range of adult education activities, group activities for children, programmes for the older population, specialised programmes and meeting space for the local community groups of Finglas and in particular, South Finglas.

- ***Integrated Service Delivery***: A key element of the coordination and integration of services through the hub is to ensure that programmes are aligned and complementary. With Better Finglas running a parenting programme and St. Helena's offering childcare services, the hub has developed to ensure that these services are scheduled and delivered in a way that can support accessibility for families.

- ***Maximising Resources through Collaboration:*** The hub also manages shared resources, such as funding, staff, and facilities, to avoid duplication and ensure efficient use of available assets. The system serves as a central repository for data collected by both organisations, enabling joint analysis and reporting on numbers as and when required for funders or for funding applications. This can allow for tracking attendance at programmes and if required examine the catchment area from which participants are drawn. Through their collaboration on the hub, it ensures that there is regular communication between staff and stakeholders from both organisations.

- ***Data Sharing and Evidence-Based Practice:*** As well as developing this platform, both organisations also make use of a Shared Calendar tool to coordinate activities, events, and programmes. It ensures that both organisations are aware of each other's schedules, reducing conflicts and maximising participation from the community. The shared calendar helps in allocating shared resources, such as venues, equipment, and staff, ensuring that they are used efficiently. The shared calendar is accessible to community members, providing them with a clear overview of available programmes and events. The calendar is printed out and available at door or in the offices from each organisation. As with the Hub, potential programme participants can also access information through a QR code. The shared calendar is updated on a quarterly basis, with planning and review sessions an important part of the work of both BF and St. Helena's.

- **_Building Community Trust and Engagement:_** While community members indicated through the research process that they had made use of both shared calendar and central administration hub, local service providers also acknowledged the importance of both initiatives, increasing service-provider awareness of the full range of services available in community.

The teams in both organisations have noted that there are certain challenges linked to access to technology within the community. Staff have been trained to provide support to community members, where such challenges linked to both digital literacy and access to reliable technology have been raised.

The Central Administration Hub and Shared Calendar are essential tools for fostering collaboration between Better Finglas and St. Helena's. By centralising administration, coordinating schedules, and sharing resources, these tools enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of both organisations, ultimately benefiting the community. However, successful implementation requires careful planning, strong communication, and ongoing commitment to address potential challenges. When used effectively, these tools can significantly improve service delivery and outcomes for children, families, and the wider community in Finglas. This system has been used as a model for other geographic areas.

### 5.3.3 The Finglas Additional Needs Working Group (Level of Collaboration: Integrated and Comprehensive Collaboration)

One of the most significant interagency achievements, as noted by survey respondents, focus group participants and other interviewees, has been the Finglas Additional Needs Working Group. Established under Better Finglas in 2023, this group was formed in response to the frustration and challenges faced by parents in the community in navigating an often-confusing system of assessments, diagnoses and lengthy waiting lists. Comprising representatives from Barnardos, Better Finglas, Finglas West FRC, St Helena's Resource Centre, Finglas CFSN, HSE and other local services working with families, the working group meets regularly to develop collective responses to the most pressing needs of families of children with additional needs.

Activities of this multi-agency working group range from parental engagement sessions through to seasonal events. An important innovative programme of activities brings together professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists or advocates working in this sector to provide workshops to parents on themes of particular importance. Workshops are frequently oversubscribed, with parental demand extending beyond the Finglas catchment, a phenomenon informed mainly by word of mouth.

The following Figure 5 presents an up-to-date infographic of work being carried out by this collective. The success of this initiative underscores the effectiveness of interagency collaboration in responding appropriately to community needs and highlights the necessity for continued investment in structured, locally driven support networks.

As a positive and successful example of an integrated interagency piece of work, the Additional Needs Working Group has the potential to make a further significant impact on the lives of children with additional needs and their families. Achievements are closely aligned with the following principles of the Finglas model:

*Figure 6: Activities Organised through the Additional Needs Working Group*



ADDITIONAL NEEDS PROGRESS REPORT SEPT '23-AUGUST '24

**17 INFORMATION WORKSHOPS**
Self Care Peer Support, Occupational Therapy Practical Support, Psychology, AS I AM, Speech and Language Supports, CDNT Benefits and Entitlements, Signposting and Advice

**303 Parents Attended**

**PARENT ENGAGEMENT**
2 x Parent consultations
Ongoing review and evaluation
Led by need

**SEASONAL EVENTS**
Sensitive Santa - 68 Parents 45 Children
July Outdoor Play Group with OT - 10 Children
Summer Trips - 52 parents 81 kids
Summer Fun Day - 10 Parents 15 Children

**WORKING GROUP**
MULTI AGENCY COLLABORATION

**ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT**
Completion of a sanctuary space
Plans to commence sensory play area

**ACCESS TO FUNDING - TUSLA**
Successful funding applications from Tusla in response to needs;
€4,925 Summer Programmes
€30,000 Sensory Garden
Donation of Sanctuary Space by O' Brien Landscapers
Pending Application with DCC for completion of sensory play space

**PARENTING PROGRAMME**
3 x Parent's Plus ADHD Parent Groups

**23 Parents Attended**

Better Finglas, FWFRC, St. Helena's Resource Centre, Finglas CFSN, Finglas Counselling Service, St. Helena's Childcare Centre, CDNT, HSE Primary Care Services OT SLT and Psychology, Slainte Care

- ***Addressing Interconnected Needs and Systemic Inequalities***: The working group is providing coordinated and holistic support that can lead to better developmental, educational, and social outcomes for children.

- ***Prevention, Early Intervention, and Community Resilience***: By providing families with resources and support, the working group contributes to parental and family capacity to advocate for their children and navigate complex systems, as individual families, but also as peer groups.

- ***Building Community Trust and Engagement***: By strengthening the capacity of individual families and peer groups, the activities of the Additional Needs Working Group support the wider community through training, resources, and awareness-raising.

- ***Policy Alignment and Strategic Planning:*** The Working Group also acts as an advocacy platform for policy changes and increased funding to better support children with additional needs at a systemic level.

As the working group continues to strengthen, it can ideally look to new funding, resources or grants to build on its work to date. Using its coordinated structures, it can present protocols

for communication and coordination between agencies to streamline service delivery. As more families are engaged, the involvement of parents in the working group can be promoted to ensure their perspectives and needs are fully represented. There can also be a focus on linking in with more marginalised families with outreach strategies.

The Finglas Additional Needs Working Group plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of children with additional needs and their families in the Finglas area. By fostering collaboration, optimising resources, and advocating for systemic change, the group has the potential to significantly improve outcomes for this vulnerable population.

The Additional Needs Working Group also provides local professionals with the opportunities to support and enhance their own and each other's practice, exploring creative, collective responses to a complex and confusing system of assessments, diagnoses and lengthy waiting lists.  It is this focus on mutual enhancement, in a context of significant service-challenges and deficits, that categorises this interagency collaboration in Finglas as a comprehensive form of collective support to meet the needs of families and practitioners.

### 5.3.4 Post Natal Support Group (Level of Collaboration: Progressive Integration Across Levels)

The Post Natal Support Group was created in 2017 to address gaps in postnatal care for vulnerable mothers and infants in Finglas, as noted, a community facing socio-economic challenges and health inequalities. Better Finglas partnered with St Helena's Resource Centre, the Rotunda Hospital, the HSE to integrate clinical expertise with localised, community-driven support. With an objective to improve health outcomes for mothers and newborns by bridging hospital care and community services, the initiative ensures continuity of care, while addressing relevant social determinants of health (e.g., mental health, housing, parenting support). Community midwives work closely with BF and St Helena's, based on a longstanding MOU with the HSE. Specialised facilitators provide a bespoke programme of support, allowing for a wraparound of other community-based services, as required by the participants.

Key interagency activities include:
- Co-designed care pathways where midwives and community health workers jointly developed postnatal care plans tailored to local community members.
- Home visits in collaboration with community nurses to identify risks (e.g., postpartum depression) and connect families to local resources.
- Peer support networks that are run through St Helena's Resource Centre, including mother-and-baby groups facilitated by community workers to reduce isolation and share parenting strategies.

- Access to workshops and sessions on nutrition, mental health, and infant development, baby massage, as well as links to Preparing for Life mentors and specialised facilitators

All partners refer to a range of important outcomes, linked initially to reduced hospital readmissions for postnatal complications and improved access to mental health services and parenting supports, but also strengthened trust between healthcare providers and the community. These key outcomes are linked to integrated planning (Level 3 Collaboration), as well as shared accountability between hospital and community actors, aligned policies, and pooled resources (e.g., staff time, funding). The Steering Group Leadership ensures that community needs continue to drive priorities.

The initiative can be seen as a useful model for better understanding the continuum of interagency working, demonstrating how such partnerships can address systemic inequities. It highlights the importance of "progressive integration"—starting with networking (Level 1) and evolving into shared systems (Level 3) as trust and capacity grew. Sustainable interagency work requires long-term organisational commitment, as evidenced by the MOU between the HSE and Better Finglas. The Post Natal Support Group's success relied on formalised structures and joint governance, as well as aligning clinical expertise with grassroots insights. This case study reflects the progressive nature of interagency work, demonstrating how this level of collaboration is a dynamic, trust-driven process, and higher integration levels yield lasting impact when anchored in shared structures and community engagement.

### 5.3.5 Summary of Case Studies

These case studies explore interagency collaboration in Finglas, framed by a "Continuum of Collaboration" model. There are many more examples that could have been selected to highlight the level and extent on interagency working across Finglas in the area of prevention and early intervention. These four examples highlight the following key points:

- Collaboration is fluid, shifting between levels based on needs, trust, and organisational commitment. Early stages often begin with networking (Level 1) and progress as partnerships deepen.

- Level 3 (integrated planning) is the most sustainable but hardest to achieve, requiring long-term systemic commitment rather than relying on individual relationships.

- Steering groups (Better Finglas, FWFRC) drive collaboration by aligning community and organisational goals, pooling resources, and fostering accountability. Behind these steering groups, Barnardos staff ensure consistency and sustainability.

- Collaboration principles (e.g., prevention, resource sharing, data alignment) map to different levels, with policy alignment and trust-building tied to higher integration.

These examples stress that success is not judged by one level alone but recognise that deeper integration happens over time and serves to improve sustainability, advancing collaboration further, balancing flexibility with strategic goals. Interagency collaboration through Better Finglas and Finglas West can be characterised by "adaptive progression" along the Continuum and any such variation in levels is not a critique but reflects the natural evolution of partnerships. Such collaboration is dynamic, shifting between levels based on needs, trust, and organisational capacity.

The case studies underscore that interagency work thrives when it adapts to context, invests in trust, and institutionalises collaboration, ensuring efforts outlast individual actors and respond to evolving community needs.

## 5.4 System-level Outcomes linked to Interagency Working in Finglas

Respondents to the evaluation survey were asked to consider, from their experience of interagency working in Finglas, the extent to which they had observed **positive changes and outcomes** in the areas outlined in Figure 6 below.
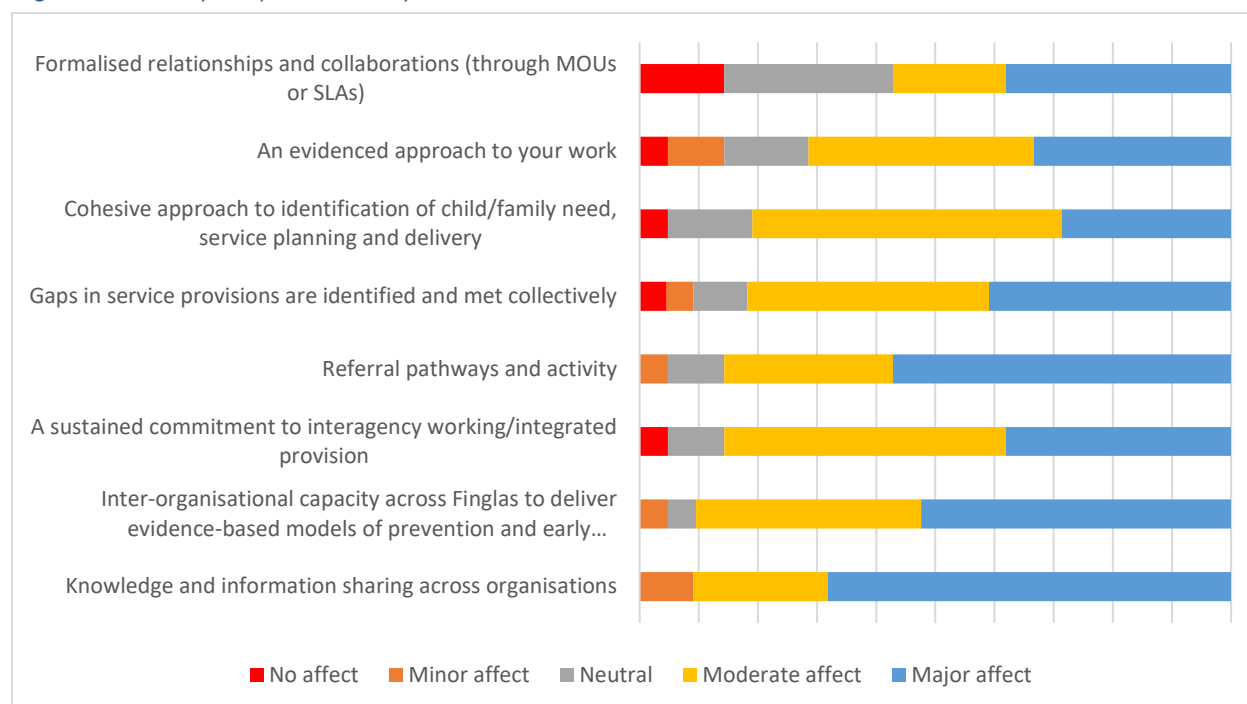
Respondents reported that the main impacts of their interagency work had been linked to information-sharing, organisational capacity building, better referral pathways and a commitment to further cooperation and coordination of service provision in Finglas[36]. Survey findings highlighted the following:

- 91% of respondents reported positive changes in information sharing
- 86% noted improvements in referral pathways
- 82% observed greater cohesion in service planning
- 90% recognised increased organisational capacity

These findings were also supported by focus group participants and Barnardos staff.

As above, the vast majority of respondents reported **significant benefits from involvement in interagency working** and agreed with the following statements presented in Figure 7:

100% of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the following benefits of interagency collaboration:

- Interagency working enhances service delivery in my strands of work
- Because of interagency working, community members can access more services

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[36] Principally Levels 1 and 2 on the Continuum of Collaboration.

- Because of interagency working, community members can access better services
- Services could be more efficient if there was more interagency working
- New practices and new ideas come out of interagency working
- My working life has benefited from my involvement in these structures
- Interagency working allows us to better plan and review our work

*Figure 8: Survey responses re Involvement in Interagency Working Statements (Positive)*
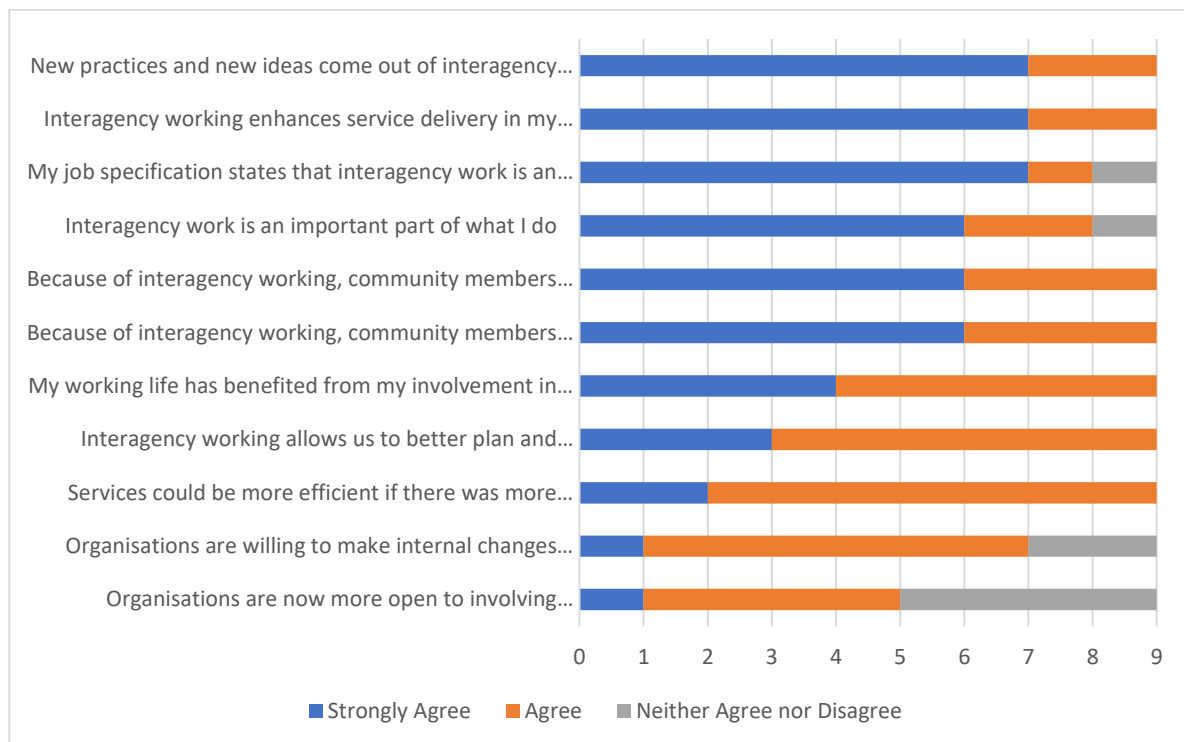


Despite these advantages, challenges were also noted, particularly regarding community engagement or knowledge of structures. The majority of respondents disagreed with the following statements:

- Community members understand the type of collaboration that goes on behind the scenes
- There is a strong community voice within interagency structures in Finglas.

*Figure 9: Survey responses re Involvement in Interagency Working Statements (Negative)*
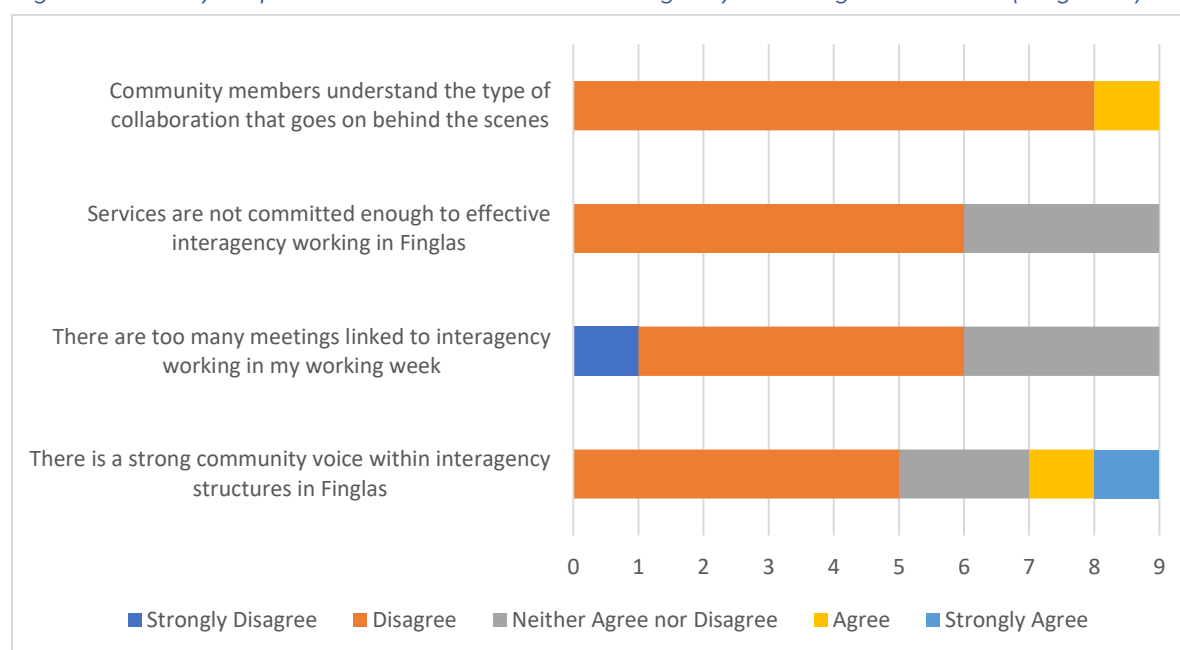


The findings highlight strong support for interagency collaboration, with respondents recognising its role in enhancing service delivery, efficiency, and innovation. While challenges were noted in community engagement and awareness of interagency structures, this lack of visibility can potentially also be seen as a positive outcome. When collaboration happens seamlessly behind the scenes, it allows community members and parents to access services without the burden of navigating complex interagency processes. Instead, they experience a well-coordinated and efficient support system. However, ensuring a stronger community voice within these structures remains important to enhance responsiveness and inclusivity. Strengthening targeted communication and engagement efforts could help achieve this balance, maintaining seamless service delivery while fostering greater community involvement where beneficial.

## 5.5 ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

### 5.5.1 Enabling Factors

Consultations with local service-providers, via focus groups, interviews and survey highlighted key factors that enabled or supported effective prevention and early intervention collaboration in Finglas. The most frequently cited enabler was ***support from managers***, particularly when interagency collaboration was recognised as a priority within respective organisational cultures. Managerial flexibility, for example to facilitate attendance at meetings and/or where resources were explicitly allocated for interagency engagement, were also essential. It was suggested that the support and encouragement from managers to

attend meetings was important in embedding a culture of collaboration. Senior staff participation in meetings reinforced the value of interagency efforts and encouraged wider buy-in:

> "The HSE as part of my role allows attendance at meetings which relate to Sláintecare Healthy Communities, which helps in balancing interagency activities with my other responsibilities."

> "Having the time allocated in work to attend is great. Professional relationships have also been built."

> "Flexible management which supports availability to attend/ take part in meetings; the manager sees value in linking in with other services to ensure needs of community are met."

*Administrative support* provided by lead agencies and coordinating bodies was highlighted as important. For instance, interagency coordination meetings were perceived as assisting in building effective working relationships across partners. Facilitative administration for interagency coordination meetings, including the provision of up-to-date information, agendas in advance, as well as ongoing support and communication from partner agencies, was seen as a vital ingredient in ensuring the success of such meetings. As survey respondents explained:

> "Partner organisations such as Better Finglas, Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force and Tusla co-ordinate and chair these meetings, making it easier to attend by providing agendas in advance and some offering virtual meeting options."

> "Up to date information and regular liaison. Flexibility. Meet ups and regular opportunities to communicate and share resources. Working in a collaborative manner, whether under a Meitheal or with a tailored support plan for a child/family. Shared responsibilities."

Critically, *resources* were also identified as an important facilitator of interagency working. This included practical resources (such as building availability to host meetings) financial resources (funding for events), as well as human resources (staff availability to facilitate collaborative working efforts between organisations). As coordinating bodies, Barnardos and Tusla were viewed as effective in managing interagency work. Notably, the approach adopted by coordinating agencies was a crucial factor and flexibility, responsiveness and listening to community needs were highlighted as important in fostering interagency working:

"Resourced buildings, workers, activities; engaged on enhancement programmes; engaged on promotion of services through pop up fun days."

"Barnardos staff responsive and flexible. Good listening by Barnardos to needs articulated by schools e.g. nurture, restorative practice, anxiety modules for parents"

"Flexibility in own organisation allowing interagency work Support from local community bodies, including Barnardos, to develop interagency links."

### 5.5.2 Barriers and Challenges

Research participants also gave examples of barriers or challenges to engagement in interagency working. A key challenge identified was that interagency efforts in the community had not yet succeeded in fully engaging representatives from certain geographic areas or target groups in ongoing collaborative processes. In some cases, this was attributed to limited community infrastructure—such as the absence of residents' associations in more marginalised areas—and in others, to geographic funding limitations that unintentionally excluded participation:

"Geographical areas – funding is often geographically based, which excludes participation in certain cases."

"It's hard to target more marginalised groups; not many residents' associations in place to connect to vulnerable communities."

"East/West split in Finglas."

"Some primary schools are hesitant to get involved."

It was widely agreed that a deep level of foundational work is required with community representatives from these groups and areas to improve coordination, build trust, and enable higher levels of prevention and early intervention supports for children and families.

Another challenge noted by participants was the difficulty in providing tangible, quantifiable evidence of outcomes from interagency work. While the benefits of collaboration were well recognised at practitioner level, some participants felt that scepticism remained among senior management regarding the strategic value of interagency structures, due to the limited availability of system-level data:

"It's hard to show the long-term impact of working together when the outcomes are often indirect or relational."

The time required for effective interagency engagement also emerged as a key challenge. A number of participants stressed the importance of meetings being structured and time-efficient to sustain involvement:

"Time can be a barrier so having meetings that are time efficient, often meetings are drawn out with lengthy reports that can be read prior to meetings, instead of pouring over reports at meeting by staff member, i.e., being read to us – just ask if there are any questions."

"I would say that at one point there were too many meetings attached to one organisation as there were many subgroups, again meetings were too often and too long so therefore it was impossible to engage."

Other barriers included competing organisational priorities, differing policies and internal processes, and limited capacity:

"Biggest barrier is limited time due to competing priorities within the organisation, which can restrict the extent of participation in interagency activities."

"Different organisations have different policies, processes and agendas and this can delay decision-making, making it challenging to implement joint actions promptly."

"Criteria for referrals, capacity to take referrals, not enough resources."

The practical logistics of attending meetings and making staff consistently available were also frequently mentioned:
"Being able to make time to get to the meetings."

"Mainly time management and meetings overlapping or being held when groups are running."

"Time and availability, reduced resources (people). Services being overstretched. Sustainability of staff (staff changing and fixed staff overwhelm). Over-reliance on one service."

Finally, a number of participants raised broader operational and systemic challenges, particularly in relation to data sharing, funding, and staff turnover. Data protection regulations, such as GDPR, were seen as a barrier to cross-agency information-sharing, especially in sensitive cases involving families in crisis or policing issues. Participants also expressed frustration with the lack of secure or long-term funding streams to support collaborative working, which placed additional strain on staff and hindered sustainability. High staff turnover—particularly in key coordination or leadership roles—was also viewed as undermining continuity and momentum:

"Changeover of staffing/forum as well as geographic barriers."

"Funding constraints can also be a barrier as not all collaborative projects have the necessary financial support."

"Sharing of information considering GDPR and policing issues."

Overall, while the Finglas interagency model has been effective in fostering collaboration, improving service delivery, and enhancing organisational capacity, challenges remain. These include limitations in engaging certain geographic and marginalised groups, demonstrating measurable outcomes, and navigating systemic barriers such as inconsistent funding, data protection restrictions, and staff turnover. Addressing these barriers will be critical to sustaining and scaling the impact of the model over time.

## 6. OBJECTIVE C: TO EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF THE BARNARDOS MODEL OF SERVICE INTEGRATION ON CHILD AND FAMILY ACCESS TO, ENGAGEMENTS WITH AND EXPERIENCES OF PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES IN FINGLAS

### 6.1 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter examines the impact of the interagency support model in Finglas on child and family engagement with prevention and early intervention services. It reviews the manner in which community members have accessed a range of services, and their subsequent engagement and experiences of these services.

While parents consulted[37] during this evaluation may not have been fully aware of the interagency collaboration underlying service provision, they identified tangible improvements in their access to, engagement and experience of community supports. However, due to this distance between parents, community members and service users and the interagency coordination behind the services that they had accessed, it was often challenging for community members involved in the research to speak authoritatively or with precision about how services had collaborated. To address this, the research team endeavoured to work with research participants from the community to trace their parenting pathways linked to the Finglas services within the interagency model. Through this analysis, unpacking and re-evaluating their experiences, parents were able to point to specific examples where they could highlight interagency impacts. Parents provided a rich set of insights about how they had benefited from the range of services, frequently pointing out the importance of specific workers in supporting their parenting journeys. Family support workers, HSCLs, community workers and others had often provided vital supports during challenging family circumstances, across both younger and older children and on a personal level.

While these personal accounts offer important insights and feedback on how the interagency model had impacted community members, the feedback from service providers presents much of the key information and data findings within this chapter. This is inevitable given the often-hidden interagency work that has gone on behind the scenes involving      interagency meetings, planning and review sessions, as well as all efforts linked to information sharing, funding applications and other coordination activities.

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[37] All of whom were participants in programmes or services of Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC.

Existing data and feedback strongly suggest that interagency collaboration has had a tangible impact on families accessing prevention and early intervention services.

Heatmaps of service engagement, presented below, highlight that Better Finglas and FWFRC broadly serve the communities of Finglas. These visuals demonstrate that service uptake is concentrated in areas with the highest levels of need. Notably, some families travel from outside the immediate Finglas area to access supports, suggesting that similar services may not be available elsewhere and a growing reputation for accessibility, effectiveness and trustworthiness within these interagency hubs.

Service providers report significant improvements in referral pathways, with 89% indicating a more streamlined approach to connecting families with the right supports. For example, a parent referred for a parenting course through Better Finglas may, through the same point of contact, be linked into other relevant supports without having to navigate multiple systems independently. Likewise, 91% agree that interagency collaboration has strengthened service provision. Word-of-mouth referrals have also been crucial in building trust and encouraging engagement. Families often hear about and engage with services through other parents or school staff which indicates a sense of safety, understanding and reinforces trust and engagement.

Beyond statistics, qualitative feedback from parents highlights key benefits of the model. Many note that services feel easier to navigate because of the interconnected approach, while others express appreciation for the safe and supportive spaces created through interagency collaboration. In particular, parents of children with additional needs report that access to workshops and peer support networks has been invaluable in helping them feel less isolated and share tips on how to navigate a challenging system of assessments, diagnoses and complicated sets of associated waiting lists. This indicates that interagency collaboration has been instrumental in shaping service delivery that is not only more relational in nature, but also more accessible to families and responsive to their emerging needs.

## 6.3.1 Access

*Service providers are committed to using interagency working to respond to community need and build access opportunities for all within the community. Heatmaps indicate relatively even spread of take up of services across Finglas, with some harder to reach areas less involved and many from outside catchment participating in groups and programmes*

Throughout this evaluation process, service-providers from across Finglas consistently highlighted the importance of interagency working associated with both Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC in effectively identifying and responding to local needs. This model was identified as facilitating targeted, early intervention service-delivery, while simultaneously ensuring a cohesive interagency approach to strengthen families and prevent crises.

Earlier sections of this report have demonstrated the stark complexity of the Finglas community. Finglas, and in particular the neighbourhoods of Finglas West, has been shown to consistently experience poor outcomes on a range of social and economic indicators. A critical feature of this evaluation, therefore, must be to assess the manner in which interagency working in Finglas contributes to appropriate access to a continuum of services, ranging from prevention and early intervention services, through to more targeted, intensive supports for those families that most require them.

A set of tables and heat maps are presented below, highlighting the geographic take-up of collaborative programmes offered by Better Finglas and FWFRC.

Better Finglas

*Appropriate and adequate access to services from across community, with some more marginalised areas less likely to participate*

From a selection of Better Finglas programmes and groups, a random sample was taken of a maximum of 50 participants from the following initiatives. Each participant's details were anonymised apart from the location/ street name of their residence. Based on these addresses, a heatmap was produced with a focus on the 8 Electoral Divisions of the catchment area. Table 8 gives a breakdown of the number of those participants involved in each group and the catchment areas in which they reside.

*Table 8: Better Finglas Programmes and Participants*

| BF Programmes | Total | Catchment Area | Outside Catchment |
|---|---|---|---|
| ADHD Group | 49 | 37 | 12 |
| Baby Massage Group | 49 | 20 | 29 |
| PEEPs (Drop-in Group) | 25 | 18 | 7 |
| Parenting for Life Families | 44 | 30 | 14 |
| Additional Needs Group | 48 | 20 | 28 |
| Library Book Club | 49 | 37 | 12 |
| | 264 | 162 | 102 |

The vast majority of participants are female across each programme and group, with up to 2% male participants within parenting groups such as the ADHD programmes, Additional Needs Workshops and the Parent and Toddler groups.

- ADHD
- Baby Massage Group
- Library Parent and Toddler Bookclub
- PEEP (drop in group)
- Parenting for Life families
- Antenatal Group
- Additional Needs Group
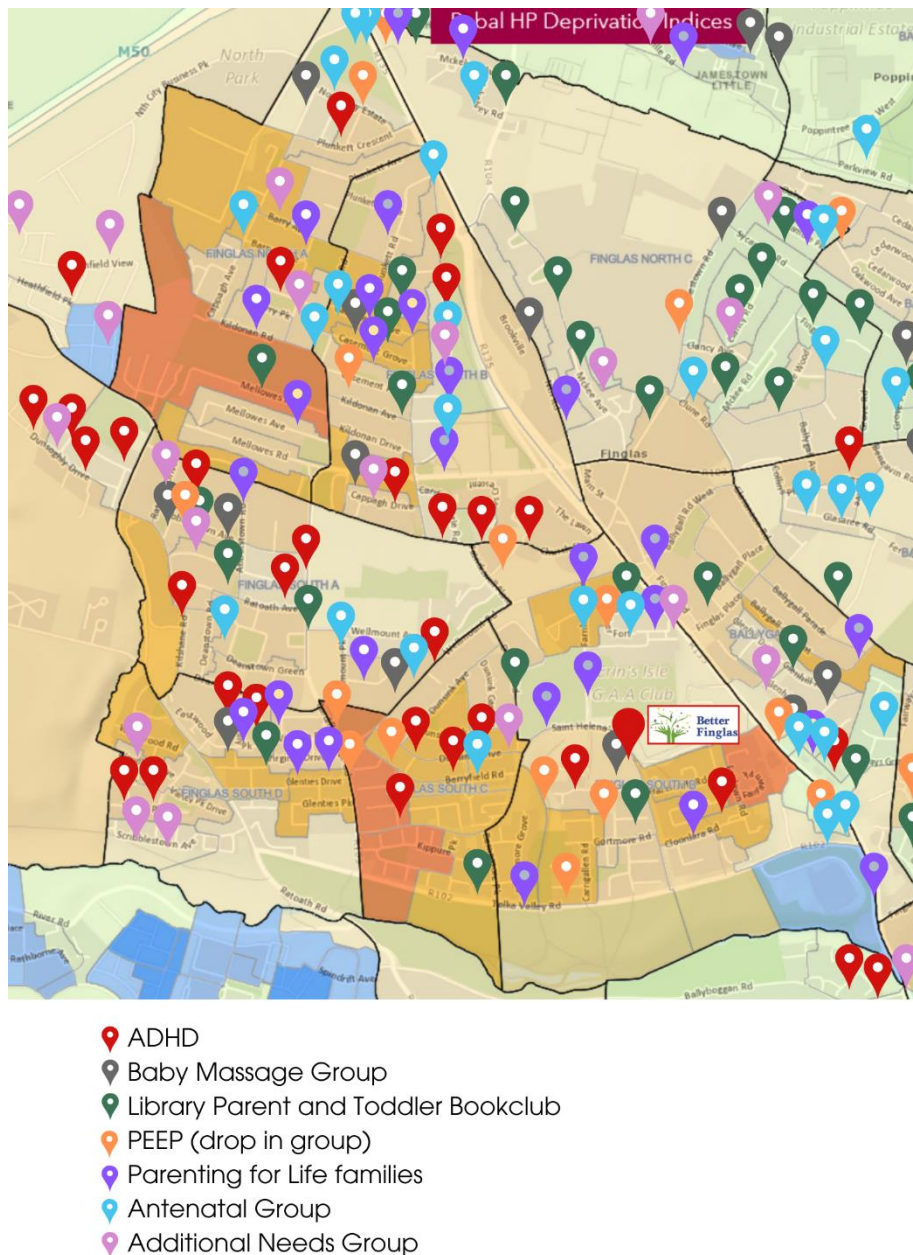
The Better Finglas office is indicated as a red pin and an image of its logo at the centre of the Finglas South B ED. The heatmap above (Figure 8) highlights a relatively equal spread of participants from across each of the 7 EDs, with the lowest amount from the sample coming from Finglas South C and Finglas North A. These represent the EDs with the highest concentration of disadvantage, as noted above in Section 4.2. This can be seen as a concern that BF services are not reaching adequate numbers in these areas of the community.

Larger numbers of the Baby Massage group are resident in Finglas North C and Ballygall A, both of which are considered marginally below average, based on the most recent Census

data. The universal provision of such programmes can potentially be seen as leading to greater access from those in the catchment from less disadvantaged areas.

Some 38% of participants from this sample are attending these groups and residing outside of the catchment area. For many of these participants, programme managers and service providers indicate that due to the housing crisis, they are unable to access housing in their desired areas of Finglas, where they grew up and have family connections. For these participants, the closest areas in which they can access housing through Dublin City Council or HAP arrangements are further north of the community and associated catchment area for Better Finglas. Many of these participants have also had to manage precarious housing situations or homelessness with their families.

It is important to note that addresses are not always captured in service data (to reduce access barriers, maintain anonymity), so it is possible that more disadvantaged groups are attending these services but are not reflected in the available statistics. This underreporting may point to a larger, unmet need within these communities.

Finglas West FRC

*A more targeted approach, with community members more likely to use services from the immediate community area*

Table 9 below highlights the geographic take-up of six programmes delivered by Finglas West FRC in 2025. A sample of 103 parents who had participated in these six programmes, which were delivered in the FRC building (indicated by the red marker and logo in the map). Of the 103 participating parents, 98 were female, while five males took part in the Parent and Toddler Group and Homework Stay and Play Group.

*Table 9: Finglas West FRC Programmes and Participants*

| FRC Programme | Total | Catchment Area | Outside Catchment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Peeps Parent & Toddler Group | 22 | 21 | 1 |
| Baby Massage | 22 | 19 | 3 |
| Sensory Adventures | 35 | 25 | 10 |
| Homework Stay and Play | 10 | 8 | 2 |
| Parents Wellbeing | 9 | 7 | 2 |
| Parents Plus ADHD Prog. | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| | 103 | 83 | 20 |

*Figure 11: FRC Service Users by Geographic Area and Programme*



- 📍 Peeps Parent & Toddler Group
- 📍 Baby Massage
- 📍 Sensory Adventures
- 📍 Homework Stay and Play
- 📍 Parents Wellbeing
- 📍 Parents Plus ADHD Programme
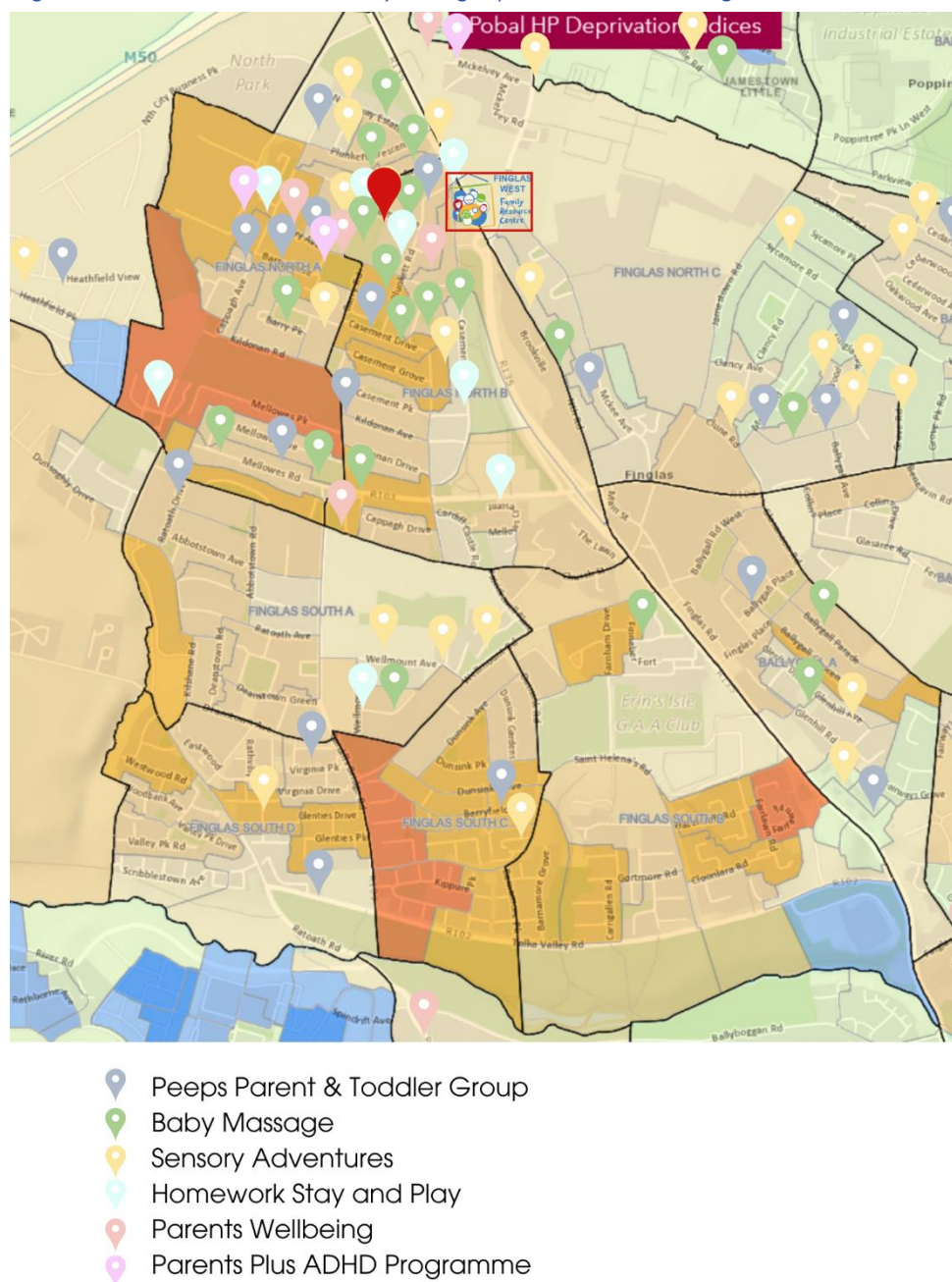
From the above heatmap (Figure 11), it is notable that the majority of participants were resident in Finglas West, particularly in the EDs of Finglas North A and B, both of which are categorised as disadvantaged and both of which adjoin the FRC. This is the case for each of the six programmes, with some participants travelling from the other 6 EDs of the community. Furthermore, 23 of the total number travel from outside these 8 EDs, coming from areas nearby in Cabra, Glasnevin and Ballymun.

It is notable that fewer parents from the communities of Finglas South A, B, C and D participated in these programmes, all of which are also categorised as disadvantaged[38]. However, it is to be expected that the highest concentration of participants in such programmes would be resident in the communities closest to the actual FRC building. It was not possible to provide greater analysis of the socio-economic profile of participants, for example with regard to indicators such as lone-parents, unemployment, etc.

There is a lower percentage of participants (22%) from outside the catchment area than for the BF programmes. This may be explained through the more targeted nature of the programmes being delivered through the FRC. As above, participant addresses are not collected for drop-in and community engagement events, which may result in an incomplete understanding of attendees' geographical distribution.

Summary of Finglas West FRC and BF Heatmaps

*High levels of access across Finglas community, however there is also a high degree of involvement in certain BF and FRC services from those from outside the catchment area*

While the universal nature of the work allows for access and engagement from outside the Finglas catchment, it is clear from the data that local families are being served and supported via the programmes of both Better Finglas and FWFRC. The extent of access to these supports from outside the immediate community suggests a possible lack of access to similar early intervention supports elsewhere. This is particularly evident in the Baby Massage group and Additional Needs Working Group participants, with over half of the participants are from outside the catchment area in each instance.

Table 10 presents the number of participants within the catchment area and those outside the catchment area attending Better Finglas and FWFRC programmes.

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[38] And Finglas South C categorised as very disadvantaged.

*Table 10: Combined Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC Programmes and Participants*

| Programme Names | Total | Catchment Area | Outside Catchment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Peeps Parent & Toddler Group (FRC) | 22 | 21 | 1 |
| Baby Massage (FRC) | 22 | 19 | 3 |
| Sensory Adventures (FRC) | 35 | 25 | 10 |
| Homework Stay and Play (FRC) | 10 | 8 | 2 |
| Parents Wellbeing (FRC) | 9 | 7 | 2 |
| Parents Plus ADHD Prog (FRC) | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| ADHD Group (BF) | 49 | 37 | 12 |
| Baby Massage Group (BF) | 49 | 20 | 29 |
| PEEPs (Drop-in Group) (BF) | 25 | 18 | 7 |
| Parenting for Life Families (BF) | 44 | 30 | 14 |
| Additional Needs Group (BF) | 48 | 20 | 28 |
| Library Book Club (BF) | 49 | 37 | 12 |
| **Total Participants** | **367** | **245** | **122** |

Viewing both heatmaps overlaid (Figure 12), the concentrations of disadvantage, particularly in West Finglas, are being addressed by the combination of programmes and groups being delivered through the two organisations. While the area with least number of participants is also one of the most deprived (Finglas South C), it also one of the least populated.

*Figure 12: BF and FRC Service Users by Geographic Area and Programme*
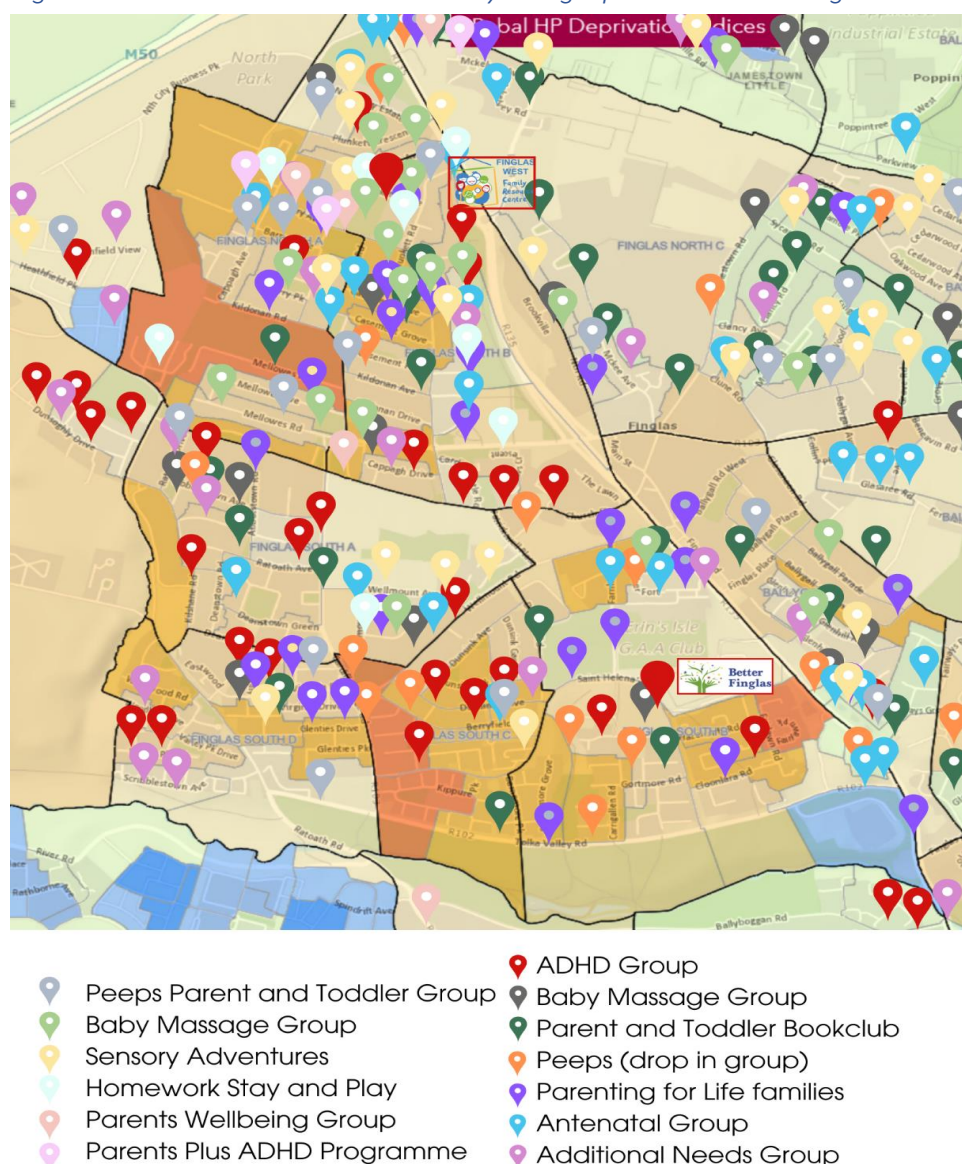


In Finglas, interagency programmes have played a significant role in engaging local communities, with a notable difference in participation across various initiatives. A total of 367 people participated in the different programmes, with 66.8% of participants coming from within the catchment area and 33.2% from outside it.

At Finglas West FRC, the programmes show strong local engagement, with 80.6% of participants living within the catchment area. Popular programmes include Sensory Adventures (35 participants), Peeps Parent & Toddler Group (22 participants), and Baby Massage (22 participants), reflecting the centre's ability to attract and retain local families.

In contrast, the Better Finglas programmes had a wider geographical reach. While the majority of participants (61.4%) were still from the catchment area, a higher percentage (38.6%) came from outside, indicating the broader appeal and potential unmet need in other

areas of these initiatives. The most attended Better Finglas programmes from the sample were the ADHD Group, Baby Massage Group, and Library Book Club, highlighting the diverse interests and needs being addressed.

These statistics demonstrate the role of interagency collaboration in offering a range of programmes that cater to both the local community and those from surrounding areas. The FRC's strong local focus contrasts with Better Finglas' wider outreach, but together, these programmes create a comprehensive prevention and early intervention support network that meets different needs in the Finglas area.

The involvement of participants from surrounding areas underscores the critical role of interagency working, enabling organisations to collaborate, pool resources, and extend services to a wider community. This approach not only increases accessibility, especially in areas with limited resources, but also fosters inclusivity, ensuring the programmes are open to all. The broader reach optimises resource use, making the programmes more sustainable and effective, while strengthening networks across communities. By reaching those from neighbouring areas, the programmes fill gaps in service provision and can serve to foster community relationships.

Parent Voice

*Parents describe successful parenting pathways linked to the supports accessed. However, quite often, they are unaware of role of interagency working to provide seamless access to services.*

Though they may have been unaware of interagency collaboration in the background to service-provision, parents consulted[39] during this evaluation identified tangible improvements in their access to community supports. Community members have enhanced access to targeted programmes linked to the interagency model, such as programmes for parents of children with disabilities, LGBTQI individuals, and school aged children accessing after school initiatives delivered in partnership with schools and youth projects.

Information sharing and capacity building for service providers has also supported increased access for community members, e.g. teacher training linked to needs identified by school personnel. Many such training programmes, identified through the Parenting Forum, have been implemented through co-planning between Better Finglas, statutory and community partners and with the strategic support of Barnardos. These initiatives are in turn monitored and evaluated by service providers in relation to how they impact on increased access for

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[39] All of whom were participants in programmes or services of Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC.

community members. Updates are reported on to steering groups, funders and other local stakeholders.

Survey respondents reinforced such examples where access by community members and parents to programmes and initiatives has been improved because of increased training levels for staff in schools. A principal highlighted the role of interagency collaboration in building capacity to better engage and support the school community. School staff have received training in areas such as "nurture and restorative practice" and this in turn has assisted their support of parents and children with additional needs within the school.

Involvement in interagency initiatives led to increased levels of access, with a consistent stream of new parents attending in-person and online for courses and programmes such as for Parents Plus, ADHD and Anxiety modules. Increased knowledge of how each service operates has allowed for improved referral pathways for community members and their ability to access new programmes and initiatives:

> "Knowledge sharing has led to better signposting to other services and knowing who to ask." (Community Garda)

> "Interagency collaboration has made services more accessible by providing streamlined referral pathways between organisations." (HSE representative)

This has also positively impacted the community:

> "Families are familiar with referral pathways and links to other services." (Family Support Worker)

> "Service users are requesting programmes now instead of being referred only." (Better Finglas)

Through the parental input in the focus group sessions, parents reported that access to services had been seamless from the point of information provision by a service provider, through to signposting and/or a more formal referral when these steps had happened. These parents indicated that they had been unaware of the nature and extent of such background work undertaken by the service providers through interagency activities, meetings and other engagements. However, the impact for these parents was that they had been able to find out about a particular service or programme and very quickly find that they could start participating or attending an appropriate course, often with the extra supports in place, such as childcare provision, transport or language assistance.

Parents described their parenting journey as a series of steps supported by key service providers in the lives of their families or specifically their children. Whether an early year's provider, a HSCL officer or a family support worker from BF or the FRC, these professionals were named as critical facilitators in enabling positive change and access to the appropriate services. Quite often parents spoke of dealing with waiting lists to access a service for themselves or a child or trying to navigate challenging referral systems; during these times, they noted the importance of initially having a safe space for meetings, a professional advocate or mentor and over time access to a peer support group. The parents clearly emphasised the value provided by both BF and the FRC regarding providing these essential supports.

### 6.3.2  Engagement

*Service providers report that their interagency work builds trust and connections, leading to increased engagement from community members. Parents place a high degree of value on such informal supports, and the "invisible hands" of service providers working together on their behalf.*

Research participants emphasised the role of interagency collaboration in improving engagement, particularly in reaching new families. This collaboration has fostered trust and awareness, leading to greater participation in programmes. For example, joint outreach efforts between parenting programmes and childcare providers, have been particularly effective in increasing engagement and participation at workshops and events by addressing barriers such as childcare availability:

> "Interagency collaboration with the local resource centre to deliver a parenting evidenced based intervention whilst being able to offer childcare place for the parents attending as often barrier to seeking and gaining the support is sessional childcare." (Family Support Worker)

> "Joint outreach efforts with delivery partners and HSE waiting list clients have increased community participation in health programmes, as our combined resources allow for broader reach and better promotion of services. This collaboration has led to higher attendance at health workshops and community events." (HSE representative)

Community members can recognise these improved interagency relationships, and this can foster increased levels of trust and engagement:

"When families have a positive relationship/support with one service provider, it can lead to confidence in accessing other services." (Family Support Worker)

"Families appear to appreciate the shared knowledge of services rather than duplication and repetition." (Community Garda)

"Familiarity with all workers enables me to feel easier about engaging." (HSCL)

Again, proximity between service providers supports this model:

"Close contacts with many agencies, more commitment and higher engagement from services." (HSCL)

"Having various organisations working out of a hub creates relationships, awareness and service delivery." (Community Worker)

Through these stronger connections and increased levels of cross-referrals, community members are more empowered to engage in both universal and targeted programmes within schools, summer projects and community initiatives. The ability to come along with friends and in turn to make new friends was highlighted as an important element to promote engagement.

As above, those parents involved in the research process indicated that they were not fully aware as to how the organisations and services in Finglas would collaborate to support their engagement. But when examining this issue, they were able to recognise how they felt supported and empowered to attend services within community settings. As their confidence grew over time, they became more willing to try new activities or seek additional supports. Parents mentioned that they were often more involved with local services such as baby massage or breastfeeding groups with second and third children. They also acknowledged the importance of "invisible hands"—the ongoing, often unseen efforts of key workers who helped ensure consistent engagement.

Parents spoke of some of these key family support workers as regularly reaching out at important junctures in their lives and those of their children. While these phone calls, texts or WhatsApp messages were simply check-ins or information notes to alert parents of upcoming programmes or courses, the recipients indicated that these were important building blocks for them sustaining a positive parenting journey. The ongoing relationship building that happened over time between community member and family support worker,

HSCL or other key support person allowed for the journey to continue and engagement within services to also lead to increased resilience and a stronger connection to their community and area. Parents placed a strong emphasis on the importance of these acts of engagement.

## 6.4 EXPERIENCE

*Parents indicate positive experiences of information, referral and signposting processes as well as the services themselves. High degree of value placed on the critical mediation role played by support workers. Service providers are fully committed to interagency work and the potential for further collaboration and coordination.*

Focus group discussions with Finglas community members provided positive feedback on parental experience of the programmes and services accessed via Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC. For many parents (primarily mothers), their initial engagement stemmed from a concern with a child, leading to referrals from Early Years or HSCL to one of the community-based services facilitated through Better Finglas or the Finglas West FRC. Many recounted how they had been seamlessly facilitated into a network of support through interagency work happening behind the scenes.

Community members in these discussions highlighted the arduous nature of seeking supports from statutory services and how the safe spaces provided through the community organisations had acted as a critical mediator for them. Here, they received direct one to one supports as well as access to peer groups as they began a challenging navigation of what was described as "maze-like" systems of referrals and waiting lists. Parenting programmes, mother-and-toddler groups, and additional needs services—often coordinated through interagency partnerships—were among the most valued supports and described as key experiences for these community members.

Service provider survey respondents also underscored the importance of creating a safe and positive space for community members, through which they could be empowered over time to better understand the nature of the services and how to navigate them independently. Positive experiences were of utmost importance so that word of mouth could also encourage other parents and community members to become involved and access supports. These positive feedback loops were considered as key to reinforcing the benefits and engaging other community members.

> "If positive, builds the service users confidence and promotes learning and independence and less reliance on services." (Family Support Worker)

"Parents recommending above to other parents." (School Principal)

As community members are more aware of how systems operate and how to access specific services, they share their knowledge within groups and their wider circles.

"Understanding the work of the CDNT (Children's Disability Network Team) and how it relates to children in our service." (Community Worker)

"Feedback shared on success of services." (HSCL Officer)

At an organisational level, the experiences of positive interagency work foster stronger networks and co-ordinated service delivery.

"The quality of the service has improved through interagency training initiatives where different organisations share best practices. For example, staff from various agencies, including HSE, Barnardos, Dublin Northwest Partnership participate in a Trauma-informed care Network which has enhanced the delivery of services to families dealing with complex issues." (HSE Representative)

Participants detailed the practical impacts of interagency work, such as securing placements, making referrals, and assisting colleagues with funding applications. Information-sharing was a central theme:

"Information sharing to inform of upcoming training opportunities, broader knowledge of the services and supports being offered/provided in the local area among organisations." (Family Support Worker)

"The meetings are a great way to connect with other services in the area and gather information about other supports. We have been able to refer our families to services and workshops in the community. Forming sub groups to address individual tasks." (Community Worker)

Interagency collaboration also enhances needs assessments and service planning:

"These play a huge role around planning and identifying gaps. It's also very important for signposting others and learning about what is available in the community." (Early Years Mentor)

"These roles significantly benefit our organisation by enhancing our capacity to deliver effective health promotion services. Interagency working helps our organisation to listen to and meet the needs of the community voice. For example, collaborating with Barnardos Better Finglas has led to the establishment of an additional needs working group to provide workshops (delivered by HSE health care professionals) that meet the needs of parents that have children with additional needs and that are sitting on long waiting lists. Regular participation in these networks allows me to stay updated on local services, which facilitates signposting and referrals to appropriate resources. The role of Health Promotion and Improvement Officer acts as a connector between community resources and HSE services and vice versa." (HSE Representative)

Information sharing, including face-to-face meetings, was highlighted as a fundamental aspect of networking:

"Sharing information. Sharing contact details. Networking and introductions. Signposting to services and funding for school activities and parent services and supports. Sharing woes. Mutual support." (School Principal)

"I can share information about upcoming events, training and funding. Parents on our programmes have linked in with services in the community." (Youth Worker)

"They are a great way of finding out about services, signposting parents to others, face to face relationship building, sharing information, planning courses, identifying needs" (HSCL Officer)

Participation in interagency networks also provides funding-related benefits and higher quality initiatives:

"We come up with better quality initiatives, we are better informed of needs of community and understanding what other organisations are doing." (Programme Co-ordinator)

"Allows me to access a wider network which can help me provide better supports, i.e. access resources, funding knowledge." (Parenting Support Worker)

The ability to access new funding sources is also an important element of the experience for service providers in their interagency activities.

"I use networks to find out more about funding opportunities." (Community Education Worker)

"Networks provide other opportunities to refer people in community relationships develop into bigger things- funding applications; information sharing; co-designing events." (Programme Co-ordinator)

Ultimately, interagency partnerships and collaborative working directly impact community members by enabling swift responses to emerging needs:

"The actions arising might involve securing a placement for a community member based on contact with other network member, referring or signposting to other organisation based on the relationship, supporting my network colleagues by helping with funding applications, sharing up to date information on our activities and services." (Better Finglas)

From the parents' perspective, the research participants indicated that their direct experience of programmes, initiatives, groups or courses were unlikely to have been affected by the background actions of the interagency networks or collaborative working arrangements per se. However, as the focus group participants unpacked their parenting journeys and how they have arrived at these same initiatives, many could review their experiences over time and recognise or attribute the successful steps as linked to how support arrangements had been put in place. From an initial feeling of ignorance or lack of confidence, many parents described a process of empowerment linked to the work of these same service providers, especially those family support and community workers who had "taken us under their wing".

This cumulative process of access, engagement and positive experience had allowed many of the focus group participants to develop their own desire for further education. One of the participants had become the parent representative on the BF Steering Group to "give a little back". This same parent explained:

"From being able to volunteer with the Toddler Group, I have decided to work with children and have just completed an SNA course. I have found my calling."

Parents listed the wide range of programmes that they had experienced since the end of Covid19 and associated lockdowns. Some parents were now looking at becoming more involved in their community through peer support groups and accessing further training for themselves.

In summary, the research participants emphasised that interagency collaboration has significantly enhanced *accessibility, engagement, and overall experiences* for both community members and service providers in Finglas. Improved access to targeted programmes and training has streamlined referral pathways and strengthened service delivery. Growing trust and engagement have led to higher participation rates, while close proximity and joint outreach efforts have reinforced these connections. Furthermore, shared knowledge and coordinated initiatives have empowered families to navigate services more effectively, fostering long-term independence and well-being. These collaborative networks aim to build a more responsive and holistic support system that efficiently and inclusively meets community needs. The evidence and feedback presented in this chapter suggest that the interagency model is effectively serving the Finglas community.

## 7. LEARNING, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

The preceding chapters of this report have sought to take the reader on a journey, beginning at national and international levels and ultimately progressing to the local. The report has anchored this evaluation process in national policy frameworks, particularly those pertaining to children, young people and families, and those that emphasise the role of interagency working in effective prevention and early intervention practice and in improving outcomes for children. It has also sought to shine a spotlight on evidence-based good practice and to use that good practice as a basis for establishing an appropriate lens[40] by which to evaluate the interagency approach associated with prevention and early intervention efforts of Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC.

Thereafter, the report has embedded this evaluation in the social, economic and service contexts of Finglas. It acknowledges the complexity of Finglas as a community and recognises the entrenched and intergenerational levels of poverty and exclusion experienced by the community, particularly the neighbourhoods of Finglas West. This complex community context presents the rationale for the development and evolution of both Better Finglas and FWFRC. It also lays the foundation for intensive prevention and early intervention practice in Finglas and for a model of interagency working across the Finglas community.

This evaluation is not an evaluation of Better Finglas or FWFRC, or their respective programmes and services. Rather, it is an evaluation of the approach to interagency working that underpins prevention and early intervention practice in both initiatives. Accordingly, the report proceeds to define the model of interagency working in Finglas, highlighting core principles that underpin its operation. It examines how interagency working in Finglas operates in practice and identifies system-level outcomes that arise from the local model. It also reflects on the manner in which the Finglas model aligns with an evidence-based Continuum of Collaboration, mapping practice along levels in a progressive journey of collaboration.

Finally, the report considers the impact of interagency working on the access, engagement and experiences of families in Finglas with local services as a result of this locally based interagency approach. In draws on input from both parents, as service-users, and service-providers to assess that impact. Using heat maps, it also examines the geographic take-up of

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[40] Via a Continuum of Collaboration model.

collaborative programmes offered by Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC and considers if engagement in programmes reveals enhanced access to services for families in the most disadvantaged communities of Finglas.

Key learning and central conclusions from that journey through national, international and local contexts are presented below.

## 7.2 CONCLUSIONS

### A Policy Imperative

Examination of national policy in Ireland reveals a strong policy mandate for evidence-based prevention and early intervention programmes and services, especially in communities with prolonged histories of poverty, social exclusion and poorer outcomes for children and young people.  It is widely accepted within that policy mandate that interagency working, across sectors and disciplines, is an essential feature of effective prevention and early intervention practice, providing increased opportunities to address complex family and community circumstances. Commitment to interagency working in Finglas - across statutory, community and voluntary bodies - aligns with and adds value to that policy mandate.

### Continuum of Collaboration

Within the wider framework of collaboration among professionals, a wide variety of terminology is used to categorise interagency working.  A core feature of this diverse terminology is a recognition of varied levels of interagency working, with individual terms referring to diverse levels of individual and organisational engagement across diverse levels of collaboration.  Against that backdrop, this evaluation has presented a Continuum of Collaboration model to demonstrate levels of interagency working as steps on a progressive journey from informal information-sharing to fully integrated service delivery.

### History of Interagency Working in Finglas

While this evaluation process is concerned primarily with interagency working associated with the prevention and early intervention efforts of Better Finglas and FWFRC, it is important to point out that interagency collaboration pre-dates the establishment of both initiatives.  Local partners, many of whom continue to engage in collaborative activity in Finglas, have sought to develop an integrated model of support, even before structured and long-term funding was available.

That said, the emergence of the national ABC programme provided increased focus on interagency supports and, with core funding, provided the opportunity to develop a meaningful, multi-year, multi-partner collaboration in respect of children and families in Finglas. The establishment of an FRC in Finglas West afforded the opportunity to extend and deepen multi-partner approach to prevention and early intervention services in those areas of Finglas most impacted by intergenerational poverty and social exclusion.

*Defining the Finglas Model*

Following extensive review and consultation, the following is presented as a definition statement of the model of interagency working that operates within both Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC programmes:

- *The Finglas interagency model unites a diverse range of stakeholders from across the community including community leaders and a diverse range of statutory community and voluntary organisations to address community needs proactively, collaboratively and holistically.*
- *By integrating services and fostering strong relationships, agencies and organisations set out to deliver more effective prevention and early intervention services, optimise resources, and build a stronger, more resilient community.*
- *The success of the model relies on clear communication and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people, and families.*

This definition evolves from community-wide acknowledgement that interagency collaboration in Finglas is essential in addressing the complex and interconnected needs of its residents, particularly children, young people, and families.

Interagency working in the context of Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC is centred around a network of key partners committed to a collaborative approach. This network involves an *inner circle,* which consists of core partners, principally the steering groups of both initiatives, who are actively involved in decision-making and operational aspects of Better Finglas and FWFRC, and who act as the driving force behind the promotion, support and implementation of collaborative programmes and activities in Finglas. The network also involves an *outer circle* of partners, comprising supporting actors, agencies, advocacy groups and broader community stakeholders. These partners play a crucial role in amplifying collaborative efforts, providing additional support, and ensuring community-wide engagement with local initiatives.

The implementation of the Finglas interagency working model is underpinned by a range of core principles, demonstrating partner agencies/organisations' commitment to:

- Addressing interconnected needs and systemic inequalities
- Prevention, early intervention, and community resilience
- Maximising resources through collaboration
- Integrated and accessible service delivery
- Building community participation, trust and engagement
- Data sharing and evidence-based practice
- Policy Alignment and Strategic Planning.

The application of these principles is critical in ensuring a multi-partner approach to prevention and early intervention that is both *relevant and appropriate* to the needs of children and families in the community, especially those experiencing the greatest levels of complex need and systemic inequalities; that aligns with research-informed, policy priorities, and that contributes in meaningful ways to community resilience, community trust and community engagement.

Commitment to multi-partner provision of unified evidence-based programmes facilitates *quality* provision and increases the likelihood of improved outcomes for children and their parents. Furthermore, commitment across participating bodies to maximising available resources, data sharing and integrated service delivery contributes to the responsiveness and *efficiency* of service provision in Finglas and, as will be discussed below, enhances community access to services.

*System outcomes*

The evaluation observes a range of system-level outcomes associated with interagency working in Finglas. This report presents evidence of increased information-sharing, levels of organisational capacity building, improved referral pathways and notable organisational commitment to further cooperation and coordination of service provision in Finglas.

One hundred percent of individual service providers (n=28) that participated in an evaluation survey *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* with the following benefits of interagency collaboration:

- Interagency working enhances service delivery in my strands of work
- Because of interagency working, community members can access more services

- Because of interagency working, community members can access better services
- Services could be more efficient if there was more interagency working
- New practices and new ideas come out of interagency working
- My working life has benefited from my involvement in these structures
- Interagency working allows us to better plan and review our work.

These benefits were expressed by individuals representing statutory, community and voluntary bodies.

*The Finglas Model in Relation to the Continuum of Collaboration*

A core feature of this evaluation has been the presentation of a Continuum of Collaboration model, designed to illustrate and map prevention and early intervention practice along levels in a progressive journey of collaboration.  The principal purpose of presenting this Continuum has been to provide a conceptual framework by which to conduct evaluation of the approach to interagency working in Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC.

This evaluation observes that interagency activity in Finglas operates across all levels of collaboration in that Continuum:

- **Level 1: Networking and Information Sharing**, key features of which include information exchange; agencies working with clients independently and concurrent or sequential engagement

- **Level 2: Coordination and Formal Collaboration** that involve informal and formal collaboration, information exchange and activity alteration within and across systems

- **Level 3: Integrated and Comprehensive Collaboration**, inclusive of comprehensive and coordinated planning across agencies, commitment to mutual enhancement across participating agencies and collective support to meet client needs.

Information from evaluation consultations, particularly the service-provider survey referenced throughout the report, indicates greater volumes of activity in Levels 1 and 2. For example, participants in the survey indicated that their collaborative efforts were most concentrated on information sharing, engagement in formal and informal networks, co-delivering local services and shared use of spaces. These activities reflect a solid and well-established foundation for collaborative work in Finglas. They were less likely to deliver staff training or capacity building, share calendars and/or work on policy influencing, activities more associated with Levels 2 and 3.

Against that backdrop, the implementation of interagency working in Better Finglas and Finglas West, aligned to the Continuum of Collaboration, can best be illustrated as fluid and responsive process of increased integration as required, with the ability to shift along the continuum.  There are clearly identifiable examples of integrated working and comprehensive collaboration, for example the BF and FWFRC steering groups, the Additional Needs Working Group and Post Natal Working Group as referenced in Chapter 5 – highlighting the commitment and success of the model to support more complex and sustained interagency practices where appropriate. Several other interagency working practices in Finglas can also be identified that fall within the realms of networking and information sharing, and coordination and formal collaboration.

*Figure 13: Finglas Continuum of Collaboration as a progressive Model of Integration*
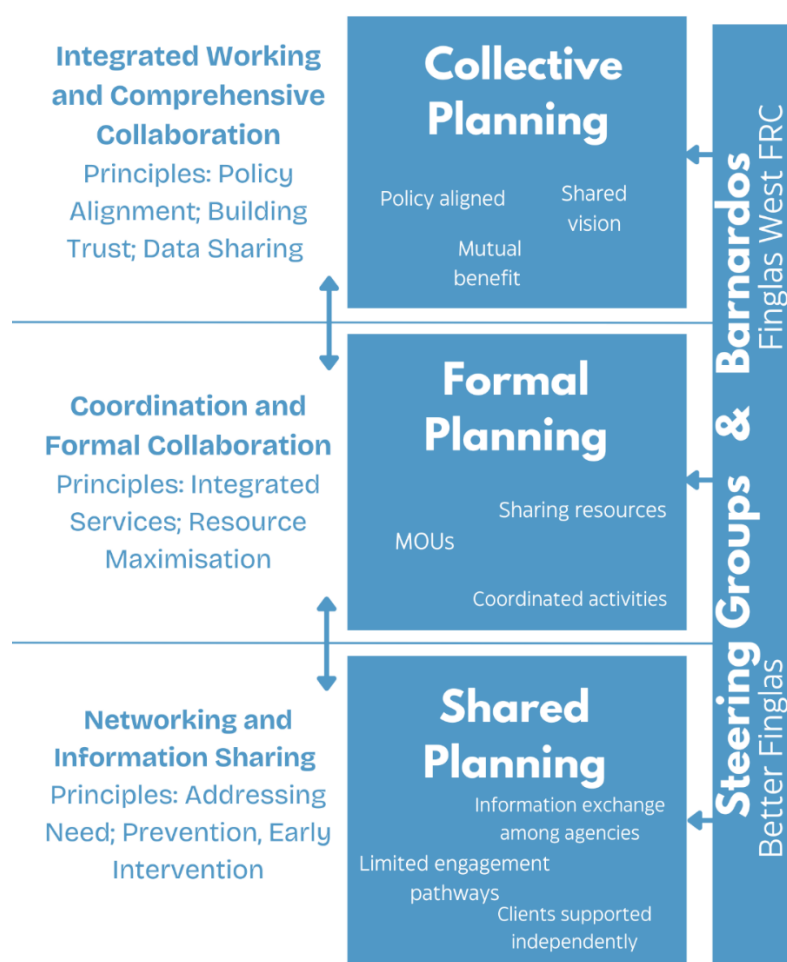


Overall, time and trust are required to facilitate progression along the collaboration journey, as well as management and organisational commitment. There is a risk in pigeon-holing

initiatives into simply one level of collaboration and defining success only on the basis of that one level of engagement. It is important to note that interagency working is not static; rather it evolves and shifts across different levels depending on the aims and stage of the work. For example, at the outset of a new initiative, collaboration may begin at Level 1 with networking and information sharing, moving along the continuum to Level 3 as agencies deepen their commitment to collective goals and there is evidence of integrated and comprehensive planning across sectors. This fluidity ensures that the interagency process is adaptable and responsive to changing and emerging needs of both the participants and the communities they serve.

Research indicates that higher levels of integration and comprehensive planning lead to more sustainable interagency working. They are premised on agency/organisational commitments to working in a collaborative fashion and are less reliant on the dispositions of individual staff members and their respective relationships with professionals from other agencies and sectors. While there is value in collaboration across all levels, level 3 signifies the highest and most sustainable level of interagency commitment and is frequently the hardest to achieve. The steering groups of Better Finglas and FWFRC - and their members - play a central role in driving collaboration between community members and community organisations by facilitating the movement through different levels of the continuum. By engaging stakeholders at various stages of the process, steering groups can help align the goals of the community members with those of the organisations; pooling resources, shared responsibilities/accountability and cooperation which propels the collaboration forward.

Individual principles, highlighted as central to the Finglas model of interagency working, lend themselves more easily to specific levels of collaboration. For instance, principles and actions associated with prevention and early intervention, and addressing need, will fall most easily into shared planning, networking and information sharing. Integrated services and resource maximisation will require more formal planning associated with coordination and formal collaboration. Similarly, principles of policy alignment, sharing data and building trust will generally require commitments to collective planning, integrated working and comprehensive collaboration. These principles are aligned below to the earlier diagram illustrating current levels of interagency working in Finglas.

It can be said, therefore, that interagency working in Finglas is on a progressive journey of collaboration. Depending on stakeholder ambitions regarding future collaboration, decisions may need to be taken within the steering groups of Better Finglas and Finglas West FRC on modifications to the current Finglas model in order to reach the desired level or levels of collaboration. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the Recommendations Section to follow.

What can be learned from the experience of interagency working in Finglas that could be applied to the collaborative efforts of other communities across the country? What lessons can be derived from the Finglas experience, particularly with regard to factors that enable effective interagency practice, as well as factors that undermine it.

## 7.3.1 Enablers

Effective interagency working does not happen of its own accord. It requires the devotion of time, energy and commitment of key parties within and across agencies to generate success. Individual service-provides in Finglas, consulted as part of this evaluation, cited the importance of factors such as support from their respective managers, the availability of administrative support and financial resources in enabling their meaningful participation in interagency practice.

But within a complex institutional ecosystem, such as the organisational and agency landscape in Finglas, a dynamic inner circle of planning, coordination and leadership is required to catalyse cross-disciplinary relationship-building and to facilitate local service providers to engage in collaborative ways of working. These dynamic planning, coordination and leadership functions have been provided in Finglas by the steering groups of both Better Finglas and FWFRC, and by Barnardos as the lead agency for both initiatives.

### *Steering Committees*

Descriptions of the steering committees of both Better Finglas and FWFRC have been presented throughout this report. They comprise senior representatives of statutory and voluntary agencies central to the promotion of a vibrant community and central to the provision of prevention and early intervention services in Finglas. At one level, steering committees act as formal governance structures for both initiatives, setting strategic priorities, allocating resources, and monitoring progress within Better Finglas and FWFRC. At another level, they also generate essential momentum around collaborative approaches to meeting child, family and community need.

The members of the steering committees are themselves locally based practitioners; they recognise the value of collaboration, seeking to practice that collaboration in their day-to-day work within their respective professional roles, while also animating collaboration with peers across statutory, community and voluntary sectors. Through their operation, the Better

Finglas and Finglas West FRC steering committees demonstrate integrated and comprehensive collaboration in action. It is the observation of the Nexus evaluation team that, without the inner circle of collaborative working provided by the steering committees, interagency service-provision for children and families would be performed in a more ad hoc and less considered manner than actually pertains in Finglas.

### Barnardos

While an oversight structure committed to – and demonstrating in practice – interagency collaboration, an equally essential enabler of community-based interagency practice is the role played by a dynamic lead agency. In the context of integrated prevention and early intervention practice in Finglas, Barnardos has brought to the lead agency role the authority and expertise of a national organisation, coupling that national profile with community-based relationships and the capacity to implement evidence-based practice. Reference has been made earlier in this report to the manner in which Barnardos has played a pivotal role in fostering interagency collaboration within both the Better Finglas programme and the FWFRC. As the lead agency, Barnardos oversees the coordination of these initiatives, ensuring that all elements of the Finglas interagency model operate effectively under its management umbrella and under the strategic direction of the steering groups of both initiatives. Within this lead agency role, Barnardos acts as a facilitator of interorganisational working, and plays a vital role in building trust between consortium members and in enabling group decision-making. This role also includes establishing appropriate processes to support the development and sustainability of effective interagency practices (e.g. interagency team building, logic modelling, service planning).

The community's decision to select Barnardos as lead agency for both Better Finglas and FWFRC was taken in a considered manner. It was premised on agencies' pre-existing working relationships with Barnardos and on the high levels of trust that existed in Barnardos prior to the emergence of either Better Finglas or the FRC. This observation is important. Effective collaboration across agencies and sectors requires effective leadership: leadership that is recognised as both competent and trustworthy in equal measure.

### Foundational Work

Effective interagency collaboration also requires time. Not just the time for individual staff members across participating organisations and agencies to devote to multiagency meetings and projects, but time for personnel and their respective agencies to deepen their knowledge and understanding of one another; to build relationships; to clarify the strengths of their own agency while taking the time to deepen their appreciation of the strengths of another. Time

is required to progress from initial levels of networking and information sharing within and across agencies to levels of coordination and formal collaboration. And time is required at institutional management level to create the conditions for effective integrated practice and comprehensive collaboration

Developing effective integration and interagency collaboration involves a marathon, not a sprint and the experience of building the Finglas model of interagency working demonstrates that. Cross sectoral working relationships have been evolving in this community since before the emergence the ABC Programme and the launch of Better Finglas. They continue to evolve as personnel change within individual agencies[41], as new agencies enter the operational landscape and as the needs of children and families in the community evolve. Time, commitment and persistence are required. The ongoing development of working relationships and the commitment to working in a collaborative fashion encapsulates the foundational work that has been ongoing for over a decade to create an effective model of collaboration in prevention and early intervention services in Finglas.

### The Value of Interagency Working

Agencies, and particularly senior management within agencies, will only commit to the marathon of interagency collaboration if staff engagement results in tangible benefits for their respective organisations. This stands to reason. Why would any organisation devote time and energy to something that does not yield benefits?

The benefits of interagency working are varied. At an objective level, they relate to improved outcomes for the client or service-user group of the agencies involved. At a subjective level, they relate to increased operational efficiencies within the participating agencies, i.e. that the work of individual agencies is enhanced by engagement and collaboration with the collective.

Interagency working is only as good as the results it produces for service-users and for the participating agencies.  Success in interagency efforts generates more commitment to collaboration and generates even greater success.  Simply put, interagency working gets stronger when the benefits of engagement are tangible to those who engage in it[42].

It is evident to this evaluation that the benefits of interagency working are felt within the service-provider community in Finglas and this builds the momentum for further engagement and further collaboration – helping to ensure sustainability of interagency working. As noted previously, 100% of respondents to a service-provider survey, undertaken as part of this evaluation, stated that:

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[41] Including personnel employed by Barnardos in Better Finglas and FWFRC.
[42] See the related section on the challenges of measuring outcome from interagency working.

- Interagency working enhances service delivery in my strands of work
- Because of interagency working, community members can access more services
- Because of interagency working, community members can access better services
- Services could be more efficient if there was more interagency working
- New practices and new ideas come out of interagency working
- My working life has benefited from my involvement in these structures
- Interagency working allows us to better plan and review our work.

### 7.3.2 Challenges Associated with Interagency Working

Unsurprisingly, challenges that undermine interagency collaboration emerge when the key enablers outlined above are not given adequate attention and resources. Consultations with local service-providers in Finglas revealed concerns about inadequate time for the development of cross-sectoral working relationships and, in some cases, the lack of prioritisation of interagency working among their respective managers. Personnel changes within agencies, a common feature of the social sector landscape, was also referenced as hampering the development of collaborative work, with time needed for new personnel to develop their understanding of other agencies and to develop positive working relationships with peers in other bodies.

Yet, these are common features of the social sector and the operational structures of Better Finglas and FWFRC have found ways to minimise the potential negative impact of these challenges.

Perhaps more complex and more difficult to address are the challenges associated with measuring the impact of interagency collaboration and ensuring the reach and effect of interagency working on the hardest to reach communities.

*Measurement*

As noted above, understanding the value of interagency working is critically important to its sustainability. Service-providers consulted during this consultation were able to identify personal and organisational benefits arising from their engagement in collaborative activities. Similarly, they were able to comment on what they perceived to be benefits to families in the community. However, few were able to point to quantifiable measurements of those benefits or outcomes.

For example, this evaluation has pointed to improvements in access, engagement and positive experience of services by parents and families in Finglas, improvements that have been underpinned by collaborative working across agencies. In particular, it has relied on the observations of both parents and service-providers. But that is the problem; it has relied on observations and not on data.

The experience in Finglas demonstrates the challenge of quantifying outcomes as a direct result of interagency working, especially for the client groups expected to benefit from that collaborative activity. This needs to be addressed in future in a thoughtful and intentional manner. It would be worthwhile exploring literature on outcomes associated with collaboration and service-integration, to identify key performance indicators and means of measurement and to locate those indicators within an outcomes framework. The recommendations sections below offer direction in this regard.

### *The Reach of Interagency Working*

One of the most significant challenges facing all social service organisations is the challenge of reaching the most marginalised groups and communities. Frequently referred to as "hardest to reach", these communities frequently have had negative prior experiences of social service intervention and frequently demonstrate considerable distrust of agencies.

Perhaps the greatest acid test of effective interagency working is whether or not it facilitates increased reach into the most excluded families and communities, increasing access to appropriate services and supports and contributing to improved individual, family and community outcomes.

Earlier sections of this evaluation report have acknowledged that Better Finglas and FWFRC may not always gather data of service-user location. The comments below on reach into the most excluded families and communities therefore may warrant challenge. However, the evaluation has observed from available data that, in the context of:

- Better Finglas: interagency working had contributed to appropriate and adequate access to services to families from across the Finglas community, with some more marginalised areas less likely to participate
- FWFRC: a more targeted approach existed, with community members of the more disadvantaged areas of Finglas West more likely to use services
- Both Better Finglas and FWFRC: high levels of family access to services across the Finglas community; however, there was also a high degree of involvement in certain Better and FRC services from those from outside the catchment area.

Consultations with local service-providers also highlighted the challenge of reaching and engaging more excluded cohorts.

There is clearly a need for all collaborative initiatives to consider how interagency working enhances reach into more marginalised groups and communities and to plan specifically in that regard. Recommendation 3 below offers direction, particularly in relation to broadening and deepening the involvement of diverse community voices in shaping and co-delivering coordinated services.

## 7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation concludes that the Finglas interagency model represents a robust and adaptable framework for delivering integrated, community-based early intervention. It has demonstrably improved access to services, enhanced inter-agency coordination, and contributed to better outcomes for vulnerable children and families. The evidence from Finglas indicates that with appropriate support, integrated working can transform service delivery, reduce duplication, and foster more resilient and efficient systems of care.
To consolidate these achievements and ensure sustained progress, the evaluation puts forward the following key recommendations:

*Recommendation 1: Continue to Build a Strong Governance, Planning, and Accountability Framework*

To ensure consistent implementation, shared understanding, and measurable impact, it is essential to continue strengthen the structural and analytical foundations of the interagency model. This includes interdependent actions:

**Action (i) Establish a Common Measurement Framework (CMF)**
Building on current work, a Common Measurement Framework (CMF) should be created to monitor progress, assess performance, and evaluate outcomes consistently across all agencies. The CMF should include agreed indicators, data sources, collection methods, and reporting protocols, all clearly aligned with mapped outcome pathways.

The CMF will enable systematic tracking of what is working, for whom, and under what conditions. It will also support continuous improvement, evidence-based decision-making, and transparent communication with funders, policymakers, and the wider community.

Where possible, the framework should incorporate both quantitative and qualitative measures to capture the richness of integrated service delivery.

**Action (ii) Strengthen Cross-Agency Coordination through ongoing Formalisation and Strategic Planning**

To embed the CMF into everyday practice, formal mechanisms for coordination should be reviewed and further established. These may include, where necessary:

- **Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)** that clearly define agency roles, responsibilities, and shared objectives;
- **Joint planning frameworks** to align activities;
- **Ongoing development of referral protocols** that ensure seamless pathways for families;
- **Regular interagency planning meetings** linked to CMF findings;
- **Joint training and capacity-building initiatives** to reinforce the model's principles and support a culture of collaboration.

Formalisation increases clarity, accountability, and efficiency while reducing fragmentation and allows coordination efforts to become more streamlined. When underpinned by a shared CMF, these coordination efforts become more focused, strategic, and outcome-driven.

*Recommendation 2: Utilise the Continuum of Collaboration to Map and Strengthen Interagency Working*

The evaluation recommends applying the Continuum of Collaboration framework, which recognises that partnerships exist along a spectrum: from informal networking and information sharing, through coordination and formal collaboration, to fully integrated working. This framework provides a structured way to assess the current state of interagency relationships, identify opportunities for deeper collaboration, and understand the fluid nature of partnership development.

By regularly revisiting the continuum, agencies can reflect on how their relationships are evolving, strengthen collective capacity, and respond flexibly to emerging needs and opportunities. It also helps distinguish between surface-level coordination and truly integrated systems of care.

*Recommendation 3: Further Enhance Community Representation and Inclusion in Service Design and Delivery*

It is critical to broaden and deepen the involvement of diverse community voices, particularly in shaping and co-delivering services. Specific emphasis should be placed on:

- Increasing male participation in parenting and family programmes
- Targeted outreach to engage minority and underrepresented groups; addressing barriers related to language, culture, or trust
- Creating formal channels for ongoing community feedback and involvement

Further strengthening community representation ensures services are culturally relevant, accessible, and responsive to the lived realities of Finglas residents. Establishing stronger and more formalised mechanisms for ongoing community engagement—such as advisory groups, feedback forums, and participatory evaluation—will foster greater local ownership, trust, and equity in service provision.

*Recommendation 4: Support Long-Term Sustainability and Promote Replication of the Model*

In parallel, efforts should be made to facilitate replication and adaptation of the model in other areas facing similar socio-economic challenges. To maintain and expand the success of the Finglas interagency model, a dual focus on sustainability and replication is essential. This includes:

- Securing long-term investment in dedicated personnel, infrastructure, and evaluation capacity;
- Advocating for the model's integration into national policy and funding frameworks;
- Developing detailed guidance to support implementation in new areas;
- Creating opportunities for peer learning and professional exchange among sites;
- Ensuring flexible funding streams to support local adaptation.

These efforts will embed the model's principles into wider systems of care, enabling other communities with similar needs to benefit from a tested, effective approach while safeguarding ongoing quality and innovation in Finglas. Sustaining the Finglas interagency model's achievements requires securing long-term investment in dedicated resources, including staffing, training, and infrastructure. Continued advocacy at the national policy level is necessary to embed the model within broader early intervention and social care frameworks, ensuring it remains a funding and strategic priority.

**Conclusion**

Together, these recommendations reinforce the Finglas interagency model as a leading example of collaborative practice in disadvantaged urban contexts. To sustain and amplify its impact, ongoing investment, strong local leadership, and alignment with national frameworks are essential. By embedding structures for governance, evaluation, coordination, and community engagement, Finglas can continue to provide integrated, responsive, and equitable evidence-based support for children and families—while serving as a model for broader systemic change.

## ANNEX I: EVALUATION LOGIC MODEL

| Objectives | Inputs | Activities & Outputs | Short-term outcomes | Long-term outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • To describe and define the model of integrated services and interagency supports that has been developed, promoted and implemented in Finglas.<br><br>• To conduct a process evaluation of how integration and interagency support has been applied in both Finglas West FRC and Better Finglas ABC programmes.<br><br>• To evaluate the impact of the Barnardos model of service integration on child and family access to, engagements with and experiences of prevention and early intervention services in Finglas | • Six-month consultancy process<br><br>• Team of consultants with extensive social sector experience<br><br>• Barnardos personnel (national, regional and local)<br><br>• Collaborative working group<br><br>• Stakeholders across both Finglas West FRC and ABC Better Finglas | • Evaluation framework<br><br>• Area-profile, outlining community needs and characteristics<br><br>• Policy & best practice review<br><br>• Service-map and profile of service-integration in Finglas<br><br>• Service-user and service-provider consultation<br><br>• Descriptive, process and outcome evaluation report (draft and final), inclusive of recommendations for future action | Barnardos and collaboration partners have a deeper understanding of:<br>• the processes involved in implementing and promoting integrated child and family services in Finglas<br>• the impact of the integrated model of child and family services implemented in Finglas on services<br>• the extent to which community and service-user needs are met by integrated services model<br>• how integration can be supported and enhanced in real world settings<br><br>Barnardos and collaboration partners have a roadmap for strengthening service-integration in Finglas FRC and Better Finglas | • Evidenced demonstration model of integrated prevention and early intervention services for children and families available for dissemination and replication<br><br>• Enhanced prevention and early intervention service capacity, quality and integration in the Finglas community<br><br>• Optimal outcomes for children/families in Finglas |

## ANNEX II: EVALUATION SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

### 1.1    BACKGROUND AND AREAS OF WORK

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of organisation: | |
| Email address: | |
| Your role: | |
| Length of time in role: | |

1.  Which of the following strands do you deal with in your work? (Tick all that apply)

| Strand | I work in this strand (please put two ticks for the most important one) | I am involved in interagency work linked to this strand |
|---|---|---|
| 1.  Pregnancy and new parents | | |
| 2.  Parenting | | |
| 3.  Early years | | |
| 4.  Social and emotional well being | | |
| 5.  Literacy | | |
| 6.  Youth | | |
| 7.  Community | | |
| 8.  Other (please specify e.g. policing, addiction, schools, etc.) _____ | | |

2.  To what extent do you collaborate with other organisations, services or networks to do the following:

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assess local need | | | | | |
| Plan for/develop future programmes or initiatives to address community needs | | | | | |
| Share information about services | | | | | |
| Seek or use joint funding | | | | | |
| Share calendars | | | | | |
| Access funding through my organisation to support new initiative (e.g. summer camp, mental health campaign, parenting programme) | | | | | |
| Deliver staff training or capacity building | | | | | |
| Co-deliver service programmes or activities | | | | | |
| Influence local policy | | | | | |
| Build formal networks | | | | | |
| Share or access community spaces | | | | | |
| Build informal networks | | | | | |

3.  If you are involved in interagency work, as a member of any networks/ working groups/ steering groups, can you please name these groups or networks here:

| Name of Group | Your role (e.g. chairperson, representing my organisation,) |
|---|---|
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

4.  How do such role(s) have an **impact within your organisation**? (e.g. actions arising might involve securing a placement for a community member based on contact with other network member, referring or signposting to other organisation based on relationship, supporting my network colleagues by helping with funding applications, sharing up to date information on our activities and services, etc.)

|  |
|---|
|  |

5.  In a typical working week, what **percentage of your time** goes to support your interagency work? (i.e. participating in meetings linked to your membership in these formal or informal networks, following up on actions, relaying information within my organisation, etc.)

|  |
|---|
|  |

6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My job specification states that interagency work is an important part of what I do | | | | | |
| Interagency working enhances service delivery in my strands of work | | | | | |
| Because of interagency working, community members can access more services | | | | | |
| Because of interagency working, community members can access better services | | | | | |
| Services are not committed enough to effective interagency working in Finglas | | | | | |
| There are too many meetings linked to interagency working in my working week | | | | | |
| Services could be more efficient if there was more interagency working | | | | | |
| New practices and new ideas come out of interagency working | | | | | |
| Organisations are willing to make internal changes because of participating in interagency structures | | | | | |
| My working life has benefited from my involvement in these structures | | | | | |
| Interagency working allows us to better plan and review our work | | | | | |
| Organisations are now more open to involving themselves in interagency work | | | | | |
| Community members understand the type of collaboration that goes on behind the scenes | | | | | |
| There is a strong community voice within interagency structures in Finglas | | | | | |
| Interagency work is an important part of what I do | | | | | |

7. Can you give some examples of how you have been **enabled or supported** to engage in these examples of interagency working? (e.g. support from Barnardos or other lead partners, manager allowing flexibility to attend meetings, resources being allocated, etc.)

8. On the other hand, can you give some examples of **barriers or challenges** that exist to prevent you to engage in these examples of interagency working? (e.g. some target groups or geographic areas are not as involved in the structures, difficult to provide evidence of outcomes for this work,

managers in my organisations don't see the value or benefits to service users or community members, etc.)

9. Based on your experience of interagency working in Finglas, please indicate the extent to which you have seen **positive changes and outcomes** in these following areas

| | No affect | Minor affect | Neutral | Moderate affect | Major affect |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge and information sharing across organisations | | | | | |
| Referral pathways and activity | | | | | |
| Gaps in service provisions are identified and met collectively | | | | | |
| Cohesive approach to identification of child/family need, service planning and delivery | | | | | |
| An evidenced approach to your work | | | | | |
| Formalised relationships and collaborations (through MOUs or SLAs) | | | | | |
| A sustained commitment to interagency working/integrated provision | | | | | |
| Inter-organisational capacity across Finglas to deliver evidence-based models of prevention and early intervention services | | | | | |

## 1.4 IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

10. In relation to community members, can you give any examples as to how interagency working in Finglas has led to improvements or better outcomes in relation to the following:

Access to services

Engagement with services

Experience of services

## 1.5 FEEDBACK FOR OTHER AREAS

11. If you were to share the Finglas model with another community, what are the 3 core messages that you think should be highlighted?

1.

2.

3.

**Thanking you for your time and support in completing the survey**

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