



What's Working for Children...

Evidence based practice – the what, why and how

Dublin, Ireland
11 and 12 May 2011

Conference Report

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On behalf of Archways
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Archways is a national organisation working in collaboration with local and national agencies to promote, research, and deliver evidence based programmes for children & young people. Archways provides a bridge between evidence based programmes and communities and supports the development of sustainable linked practices that build on existing strengths and resources. Archways gratefully acknowledges the support of What's Working for Children conference partners the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and The Atlantic Philanthropies and also Barnardos Ireland, Barnardos Northern Ireland, The Centre for Effective Services, Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) and Preparing for Life.

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1. Introduction

This report presents a summary of the proceedings of **What's Working for Children** conference which was held in Dublin, Ireland on 11 and 12 May 2011. It was organised by Archways in conjunction with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and The Atlantic Philanthropies and was supported by Barnardos Ireland, Barnardos Northern Ireland, The Centre for Effective Services, Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) and Preparing for Life.

The conference brought together in the region of 300 stakeholders across the community voluntary, statutory and philanthropic sectors to consider the future development of evidence based practice and early intervention and prevention strategies for children and families. It featured international and Irish experts in evidence based practice and it explored implementation challenges and upscaling opportunities. It also showcased the progress which has been made across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in implementing evidence based practice in early intervention and prevention at community level.

The key themes of discussion during the conference were:

- The challenge of integrating evidence based programmes into mainstream children's services policy to allow upscaling of implementation
- The necessity of implementing programmes with fidelity to achieve positive outcomes for children and families, and
- The importance of using baseline data from longitudinal studies and conducting rigorous evaluation of programme outcomes to demonstrate cost effectiveness and support a rebalancing of existing public resources towards a greater proportion of early intervention and prevention programmes for children and families.

The overall focus of the conference was the value, particularly in the context of current budgetary pressures, of well implemented early intervention and prevention evidence based programmes in delivering positive outcomes to children and families and to society in general.

2. Welcome Address: Dr. Tony Crooks

“The work we are doing is of enormous importance, it can help secure our future.

It is extraordinarily fragile in a country in the winter of recession.

Individual projects may succeed but the experiment as a whole may fail.”

Dr. Tony Crooks

Dr. Tony Crooks is Chairperson of Archways, Adjunct Professor of Applied Social Studies at NUI Maynooth and is also a member of a number of boards of management in the community voluntary sector.

Tony opened the conference by welcoming the Minister for Children, conference speakers and delegates. Tony outlined the context for the conference which included the recent change of government and the enormous importance of the upgrading of the office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to a full department and a full cabinet seat.

He also spoke of the opportunity that this conference provided to reflect back on the progress that had been achieved over the past three years since the Forum on Prevention and Early Intervention for Children and Youth which was hosted in May 2008 by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and The Atlantic Philanthropies.

Tony referred to the vast amount of research and rigorous evaluation of programmes that have taken place in Ireland over recent years, from randomised control trials, population studies, quasi experimental designs and other studies and how the focus could now move to demonstrating what is working for children and families.

Tony acknowledged both The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs for their support in hosting this conference and in progressing this important work.

Tony then summarised the questions that would be considered over the course of the conference, including:

- How to demonstrate cost effectiveness
- How to move from individual projects to proven programmes, and
- How to learn from what happened elsewhere and to adapt.

Tony concluded by referencing an OECD report from the 1990s relating to enterprise development. The report acknowledged the extent of innovation in Ireland but cautioned in relation to a lack of follow through to ensure development and sustainability. Tony explained how this concern transferred to the future of evidence based programmes in Ireland and the importance now of moving from local experiments to wider upscaling and implementation.

3. Opening Address: Frances Fitzgerald, T.D., Minister for Children

“I am encouraged and energised by the commitment in this area of early intervention.

I value the focus of what you are doing.

Our natural resource is our children; they will form the next generation and will impact the economy and hugely influence our quality of life.”

Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald, T.D.

Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald began her address by thanking Archways and all involved in putting the conference together, noting that she was delighted to be associated with it. She contrasted the focus of this conference on early intervention and prevention with that of a number of reports due shortly relating to child protection and she acknowledged that the huge commitment in this area of early intervention and prevention would give her strength in these fragile times.

The Minister spoke about the value statement in the new government’s decision to create a full minister in this area and the amalgamation of functions from the areas of education, health and justice within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. She stated her expectation that this would bring about real change.

The Minister asked speakers and delegates to consider how we move from project to policy and wider implementation and what lessons from international and Irish experience can be incorporated into the National Children’s Strategy and national youth policy.

The Minister drew attention to the significant investment by her department in the national longitudinal children’s survey ‘Growing Up in Ireland’. She urged all to use this and other baseline data to identify areas of priority and she committed to integrating findings into policy, drawing together research and practice: “There are lessons to be learned, cultural shifts to be made; we need to bring the two strands together.”

The Minister closed by reminding all present to keep children at the centre of our considerations and by reiterating her acknowledgement of the frontline work in early intervention and prevention that is being done. She stated that integration of early intervention and prevention into mainstream policy was a priority of government.

4. Keynote Plenary: Dr. Steve Aos

Dr. Steve Aos is Director of Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) in the US, the nonpartisan research arm of the Washington state government. His work involves using cost-benefit analysis to advise local government investment decisions relating to evidence based programmes to improve child welfare, education and mental health levels and to reduce substance abuse, child abuse and overall crime levels.

The experience in Washington State is relevant to the Irish context. Washington State has a population of six million people and is operating with budget deficits, where public spending has exceeded public income, which Steve referred to as tax dollars. This has meant they have needed to invest in programmes that give the best outcomes, which from a financial perspective equates to the best return on investment.

“Smart government is nimble government.

It is increasingly possible to use rigorous evidence to identify what works, to calculate return on investment routinely and consistently, and to pass and implement policies based on findings.”

Dr. Steve Aos

Steve explained the process using an analogy of a consumer’s guide to car purchasing, where all options are rated in terms of a set of desirable criteria. This process involves three steps.

The first step consists of a review of all programmes that have been through a rigorous evaluation of real world impact. From this they identify the average effect of each programme in relation to desired outcomes. This process identifies which programmes work and it leads to a list of programmes for second step review.

The second step involves analysis of how much it costs to run each programme and what benefits are gained. Costs are shown per participant that is enrolled in a programme. Benefits are usually shown in terms of savings, such as the percentage likelihood of the participant avoiding a costly intervention at a later stage, such as out-of-home placement (foster care).

The third step involves putting together a selection of programmes which are most likely to give the best outcomes taking cost into account, under a broad policy heading such as child welfare or crime reduction. This is known as a portfolio of programmes for consideration by government.

Steve demonstrated how over the past decade, Washington State has outperformed the US overall, in terms of reducing crime levels while managing crime prevention costs. He attributed this success to state government shifting the portfolio of funded programmes in favour of evidence based programmes with high cost benefit ratios. In other words, programmes that are shown through rigorous evaluation to deliver outcomes and long term savings that outweigh their running costs.

Steve shared preliminary cost benefit figures from the WSIPP analysis of the evidence based Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) programme for low income families, where the cost per participant was found to be in the region of \$9,000 and the benefit per participant was found to be in the region of \$25,000. This amounts to an approximate return of two dollars saved for every dollar spent. It means that the NFP programme works, it delivers positive outcomes to vulnerable children including reduced abuse, increased test scores and it avoids later crime response interventions that would have cost the state twice as much as the programme cost. With good humour and wit, Steve demonstrated how, over time, the NFP programme amounts to what is known in the financial world as delivering return of 8%, which beats the stock market return of 4% by a factor of two!

Steve cautioned that returns are only secured if programmes are implemented with fidelity: “If you don’t do them well, they won’t work.” He also highlighted the importance of aligning participants with the right programmes. Further advice included policy makers creating funding incentives to encourage interest and innovations in evidence based programmes. The real challenge for Steve and his colleagues has been to convince policy makers to select programmes that are demonstrated to work: “We do the picking, they do the passing.” Steve advises perseverance: “Put the numbers back in front of them again.”

5. Keynote Plenary: Cheryl Hopkins

“I am passionate about improving outcomes for children.

We wanted to do more than just move the furniture, we wanted to improve outcomes.

You start with a logic model, what outcomes you want to achieve.

We have a portfolio of evidence based programmes and we measure impact through a well-being survey, year on year.”

Cheryl Hopkins

Cheryl Hopkins is Service Director, Strategy & Commissioning, Children, Young People & Families of Birmingham City Council in the UK. This has involved working with service delivery partners and other stakeholders across the city to develop the ‘Brighter Futures’ children’s services strategy and implementation programme. Cheryl provided the background context to the Brighter Futures Strategy which was launched in 2007 and serves as a case study of city-wide evidence based programme implementation. At that time Birmingham, a city with a population in the region of one million people including 260,000 children, compared poorly with other parts of the UK in terms of children’s outcomes, despite over 60,000 people working with children and young people.

The goal at that time was to bring all 35 stakeholders together to gather baseline data about children’s lives, to identify agreed outcomes, to adapt a shared language and logic model for interventions and to implement a portfolio of evidence based programmes to bring about better outcomes. Public investment in the Brighter Futures Strategy in Birmingham is very significant, amounting to £41.7m over 15 years, subject to current budgetary reviews. The portfolio includes a number of the evidence based programmes within the seminar showcase list for this conference, including Incredible Years and Triple P. This is in addition to Nurse Family Partnership and PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies).

Cheryl recalled the practical aspects of getting broad stakeholder agreement to a shared strategy. This included a series of facilitated sessions to break down narrow sub-sectoral perspectives: “This partnership approach has been crucial.” She also spoke of the value of robust data about children’s needs from their annual well-being survey of 20,000 children in Birmingham. This acts as baseline information at city level, school level and ward level, it captures needs and over time it measures programme impacts. This is supplemented with randomised control trials of programme efficacy and they also undertake cost benefit analysis drawing from the methodologies outlined by Dr. Steve Aos of WSIPP.

Cheryl noted the positive outcomes that have been achieved in the three years of implementation to date. She stated her anticipation of significant returns in the years ahead when the young children of today reach school leaving age. Referring to research figures about the cost of neglect of conduct disorder, she outlined their expected benefit realisation through early intervention and prevention, of savings of two to one over 15 years, balanced in favour of intervention at a very young age.

In conclusion, Cheryl explored the difficult political choices that present relating to investment in early intervention and prevention and how it takes political courage to do this: “The investors are not always the beneficiaries.” She also offered advice relating to use of robust data, ensuring programme implementation with fidelity, conducting systematic reviews and taking a programme management approach focused on deliverables and milestones.

6. Keynote Plenary: Dr. Karen Blase

“The evidence based movement is an international experiment to make better use of research findings in typical service settings. The purpose is to produce greater benefits to children, adults, families and society.

The science to service gap... what is known is generally not what is adopted...

Evidence helps you to choose what to implement but not how to implement.

It’s a cycle, you need to plan, do, study, act and not just to do and then to do again. You need to value reflection.”

Dr. Karen Blase

Dr. Karen Blase works as Senior Scientist with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina in the US, and is also Co-Director of the National Implementation Research Network in Washington DC. She shared the findings of a major review of the literature relating to implementation of evidence based programmes in the areas of education and child welfare. This review focused on four key areas:

- How to choose what programmes to implement
- How to implement programmes so they produce the intended benefits
- How to scale up to provide access to all relevant children and families, and
- How to align systems, structures and functions for sustainability.

Karen outlined a clear differentiation between knowing what to implement and knowing how to implement. She spoke of ‘implementation math’, the ‘what’ by the ‘how’ equalling positive outcomes for children and families. She cautioned that it is necessary to get both right, particularly the ‘how’, as the right programme implemented the wrong way produces no impact. She referred to research that demonstrated that a less good programme implemented well has more impact than a good programme implemented poorly. She presented a list of implementation supports such as training and organisational change and outlined how each are necessary but not sufficient. All are needed.

Karen then spoke of four stages of implementation outlined in research: exploration, installation, initial implementation and full implementation. She emphasised how none of these stages can be skipped, how it is critical to collect outcome and fidelity data at each stage and how it is sometimes necessary to revisit stages. She cautioned against making decisions too early, particularly during the installation stage, during which most problems arise.

Karen shared her learnings relating to infrastructural implementation drivers such as investment in data administration, fidelity assessments, implementation teams and the critical need to foster a culture of coaching and adaptive leadership. She likened the programme implementation infrastructural process to that of the process for building a road. To the amusement of delegates she explored the idea that a road building funder would only pay for tar and not all the other necessary infrastructural components such as gravel and levelling. The difference in this road building case is that these requirements are visible: “We need to make our implementation progress visible.”

Karen reiterated Cheryl Hopkins point about the right people getting the right programmes and she spoke about the direct relevance of the Six Sigma PDSA cycle of plan, do, study and act and the importance of a feedback loop that assesses faulty assumptions. Her final words of advice to promote the well-being of children were to refer to science, fund infrastructure, inform communities and value leadership.

7. Questions & Answers: International Experts

The questions and answers session focussing on lessons from the international experience was moderated by Dr. Tony Crooks. The panel comprised keynote speakers:

- Dr. Steve Aos
- Cheryl Hopkins
- Dr. Karen Blase

Marian Quinn of CDI Tallaght asked the panel to advise, in the context of the economic recession and pressure to reduce practitioner non-contact time, how service providers could convince funders of the value of reflection to service delivery.

Karen advised that it takes a cultural shift to achieve this acceptance of the requirement to fund full fidelity. She illustrated this through the analogy of the medical unit with ten units of a vaccination and a target population of one hundred. Yes they can dilute the vaccination and all one hundred will get a shot, but none will have been immunised and the outcome is of no value. These are the tough choices that policy makers in Ireland now face.

Steve emphasised the need for political support for programmes, champions to secure funding and relayed the US experience where good programmes are cut due to budgetary pressures. Cheryl agreed that it would be very difficult and that early intervention and prevention programmes may lose out to the demands of child protection. She called on leadership to hold the line and continue to demonstrate value for money.

Audry Deane of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul asked the panel how we can get all stakeholders from competing subsectors to agree outcomes before starting work.

Karen stated that everyone needs to recognise that the same children are presenting challenges in the areas of child welfare, juvenile justice and education. Steve explained how the solution comes down to good leadership who are capable of breaking down silos which compete for scarce funds. He emphasised that this is not the best way to service children. Cheryl agreed that it is a myth that the subsectors target different children. She acknowledged this issue from the Birmingham experience and outlined the practical approach they followed. This was based on data about needs and then agreement across sectors on outcomes instead of outputs.

There were also interesting questions from Dr. Celia Keenaghan of the Child and Youth Programme at NUI Galway and the University of Ulster relating to the impact of evidence based programmes on mainstream programmes and Dr. Sinéad Hanafin of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs relating to the proportion of budget allocations to evidence based programmes in international settings. Figures shared by Karen from the overall US experience were relatively low, for example 1% to 2% penetration of evidence based programmes as part of mainstream funding, up to 10% in some areas. She stated the clear need for considerably more upscaling across the US. Steve cited cases of 30% to 40% in some areas such as juvenile justice in Washington State and the potential positive future impact of the creation of a 10% innovation fund to encourage new programme design.

Final questions came from John Keogh of CDYSB relating to stakeholder participation in new programme development and Neil Haran of the University of Limerick relating to the balance between committing to target groups and wider communities.

8. Day 2 Opening Address: Mary Sutton

“We believe the earlier the investments with children, the greater the return to society.

This provides a foundation for lifelong learning, reduces poverty and fosters social mobility.

It generates savings from negative outcomes that are avoided.”

Mary Sutton

Mary Sutton is Country Director with The Atlantic Philanthropies with responsibility for the Republic of Ireland. She outlined how The Atlantic Philanthropies is now at the third and final stage of grant making, following the ‘giving while living’ philosophy. The strategy has been to make large investments to help solve large problems now to avoid bigger problems later, such as in early intervention for vulnerable children. The goal is to address disparities for disadvantaged children and to support a network of organisations who advocate for children and who deliver evidence based services to children. Mary spoke about how the values of empowerment and voice for all citizens in society and an approach involving rights, respect and dignity are at the heart of The Atlantic Philanthropies funded work.

The Atlantic Philanthropies have advanced this goal by working in partnership with government and encouraging community activism and volunteerism. They have supported a portfolio of around 30 services in Ireland, resourcing rigorous evaluation to gather findings and to advocate for long term change. Work in Ireland began in 1989. The second phase began in 2003 and to date investment across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has been in the region of \$1.4 billion. The focus of the third and final phase of the work which runs from 2011 to 2016 will be to promote dissemination of learning to influence policy making in favour of early intervention and prevention and supporting system reform. This will be done through coalition building, evaluation and demonstration of effective practice.

Mary expressed her agreement with the points made earlier in the conference by Dr. Steve Aos: “It is about spending resources more wisely and stopping doing what doesn’t work.” She also expressed her agreement with Dr. Karen Blase and Cheryl Hopkins: “It is about making financial decisions.” She explained how the public sector needs to be deployed towards better outcomes and how a vision is needed that is grounded in the current reality. Developing the earlier conference theme of ‘smart government’, Mary spoke of a ‘smart society’ that values reflective practice and focuses on outcomes: “These are not luxury add-ons but examples of smart ways of doing business.”

Mary congratulated Archways and partners on the conference and acknowledged the vision and commitment of her colleagues in The Atlantic Philanthropies. She acknowledged the research work of their partner NGOs and universities and she concluded by expressing her agreement with Dr. Tony Crooks that the work is fragile: “We do not want to look back and see that there was a golden age for prevention and early intervention, but that it was dissipated. Rather, we want to see that this was a way of working whose moment had come and that became a building block of the better, fairer society that emerged out of the wreckage.”

9. Plenary Speaker: Dr. Sinéad Hanafin

“I am making a pitch that people use the information from the Growing Up in Ireland study. It is freely available for bona fide researchers. Findings allow tailoring of services to meet children’s needs. This is a pitch for the continuation of that study; it needs to be used for it to continue.”

Dr. Sinéad Hanafin

Sinéad Hanafin is Head of Research at the Department of Health and Children and has led the implementation of the National Children’s Research Programme which includes involvement in the national longitudinal ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ study and compiling a biennial ‘State of the Nation’ report relating to child demographics and child well-being indicators. Their aim is to develop an evidence-informed overarching strategy which is grounded in good quality research data.

Sinéad spoke of how the department’s research work is guided by Bronfenbrenner’s socio ecological model, which takes account of the complexity and multidimensionality of children’s lives. They are using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches and they are privileging the voice of the child.

Sinéad called on all attending the conference to make use of the data from the ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ study. Data gathering and analysis has been carried out by the ESRI in conjunction with Trinity College Dublin and samples are extensive, covering one in five of all nine month old babies in Ireland and one in six of all nine year old children in Ireland in 2008. Sinéad outlined how this is the first longitudinal study covering broad aspects of children’s lives in Ireland. She stated how the department’s investment of €27 million over the phase 1 seven year period needs to be maximised by all in this field in order to ensure that the study can continue. Researchers were invited to access publicly available summary reports and to contact the department to access a micro-data file which safeguards the confidentiality of all study participants.

Sinéad also called for all attending the conference to make use of the ‘State of the Nation’ report which uses multiple data sources to compare well-being indicators for children within Ireland and with children across the EU. For example, the report highlights variance in well-being at regional levels such as 18.6% of children across the state being at risk of poverty, but up to 31% of children in the Midlands region, and also variance across countries such as the recent finding that Irish girls aged 16 have the highest level of binge drinking in the EU. It also tracks changes over time and identifies areas of risk which have implications for services.

Sinéad spoke of the need to balance quantitative research with qualitative research and she outlined the huge commitment in the department to listening to the voice of children. In this regard she advised researchers: “To be very clear about what you can deliver on, you must either set a boundary or deliver.” Her advice resonated with delegates when she presented extracts from consultations with children relating to their experiences of emergency accommodation which illustrated how sometimes: “It is the small things that we do that can make things better.”

10. Plenary Speaker: Billy Gamble

“There are long term savings if you get it right.”

Billy Gamble

Billy Gamble is the Chair of the Dissemination Initiative on Prevention and Early Intervention in Northern Ireland. This is a multi agency stakeholder body focused on early intervention and prevention, funded in collaboration by The Atlantic Philanthropies and the statutory sector. It operates three strands: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and all-island. The focus is to work together gathering learning and influencing strategies to get politicians to move funding towards what makes a difference. The experience has been of a cycle of gathering data, analysing results and sharing findings to make incremental differences to the lives of children.

Billy spoke of the context of unprecedented fiscal austerity and the research findings of the UK Institute for Fiscal Studies that public budget cuts in the UK have the most impact on the poorest in society. He also spoke of the value of The Atlantic Philanthropies investment in evidence based projects and in high quality research and evaluation. He acknowledged that there is opportunity within a time of scarce resources as politicians are under more scrutiny to deliver better outcomes: “They are faced with difficult decisions about closures to deliver better outcomes; this requires strong leadership.”

11. Questions & Answers: The Irish Experience

The questions and answers session focussing on the Irish experience was moderated by John Lonergan, former Governor of Mountjoy Prison and advocate for individuals who experience social disadvantage.

The panel comprised:

- Fergus Finlay, Chief Executive, Barnardos
- Mary Doyle, Director General, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
- Paul Murray, Programme Executive, The Atlantic Philanthropies, NI
- Nuala Doherty, CEO, The Centre for Effective Services
- Mary Black, Assistant Director of Public Health, Health & Social Wellbeing Improvement, PHA, NI
- Gordon Jeyes, newly appointed National Director, Children & Family Services, HSE
- Dr. Karen Blase, Senior Scientist, Frank Porter Graham Institute of Child Development

John Lonergan began the session by reflecting on the presentation from Dr. Sinéad Hanafin and how her statement that ‘the little things make a huge difference’ resonated with him. He urged all to continue to respect children, as it is through respect that children will get what they need. He then put a general question to the panel about how we can put evidence based programmes into action, what we need to do to get all parts working together, keeping children at the centre, ensuring we deliver and working with the finite resources of the present.

Fergus Finlay spoke of the change process that Barnardos had followed in implementing evidence based programmes and their investment in change management, training, development of standards of practice and frameworks and enabling everyone involved to recognise the need for change within themselves. The move has been towards a culture of respect for children, placing children at the centre of services and helping children to solve their own problems.



Mary Doyle outlined the process of change within the new Department of Children and Youth Affairs and how they will be able to be more effective in establishing good policy, using a more integrated approach and through structures that allow people to contribute. Mary also discussed how the department has conducted some groundbreaking research which will feed into policy and how the voice of the child has been heard. She also mentioned the relevance of programme evaluation as the feedback loop into policy, the connection through children services committees between national policy and implementation at local level and also the role of The Centre for Effective Services. Mary emphasised the commitment at departmental level to the agenda of mainstreaming early intervention and prevention.

Paul Murray illustrated The Atlantic Philanthropies role as a change catalyst in the areas of social justice and children's rights and his agreement with Karen Blase's experiences around implementation, particularly the finding that no one element is sufficient, it is the combination of each element that is required. He also spoke of the need to transition from small and special projects to big programmes becoming 'normal' and he reiterated the need to ensure fidelity in programme implementation with an emphasis on identifying what needs to be done to get the desired outcomes.

Nuala Doherty stated her support for building child centred programmes using the weight of scientific evidence available to us and called for a basic requirement for all staff working with children to possess and apply a baseline of knowledge of child development. She cautioned against either or thinking relating to funding of early intervention versus child protection services and spoke from a perspective of a continuum of services with a change in gradient to achieve a better balance.

Mary Black spoke of the need to systemise what we are doing in the areas of early intervention and prevention and to root good practice in community engagement. She also emphasised the importance of cross sectoral collaboration: "The need to champion the agenda at all levels requires all of us to avoid territoriality whether it is professional, sectoral or geographic. Individuals can make a difference."

Gordon Jeyes asked delegates to consider how the adult's world is organised vertically but the children's world is organised horizontally and how we cannot distinguish between their needs for health, education and for love; what we offer needs to feel appropriate to the child. He spoke of the opportunity for the Minister to spend political capital wisely along a continuum of response. He acknowledged the crisis of credibility in the child protection sector: "We don't have a proper system, we have good practitioners but children are held as welfare cases for too long." In addressing this he spoke of how "children consulted with respect will provide the answers."

Karen Blase spoke of the tremendous potential in Ireland at present and the need to build on our culture of storytelling, balancing this with good data: "The plural of anecdote is policy, stories are important, develop them for your audience, but stay the course with data, it will tell you if you are getting good enough results." She cautioned to interpret programme outcome data with programme fidelity data, asking questions relating to implementation or effectiveness problems. She also spoke about the need to build formal structures to help build capacity in implementation teams.

John Lonergan then opened the floor to audience involvement inviting questions relating to the future. Noel Kelly of Preparing for Life began by referring back to Cheryl Hopkins points about rebalancing portfolios in the context of the current economic climate, and asked the panel to discuss how we identify services to be cut in favour of evidence based practice, how we get the timing right and what we do in the interim period. In response to this question, Gordon Jeyes spoke of how we need to ask if we are getting sufficient impact for the level of resource in the public sector. He stated his view that Ireland had not yet come to terms with what has to be done and the amount of change involved such as targeted universalism, identifying families on the 'edge of care'.

Fergus Finlay struck a chord with all delegates when he spoke of Minister for Justice Alan Shatter's recent statement that he would have a 'big think' about the proposed prison at Thornton Hall. Fergus outlined how this has cost €45 million to date and will cost in the region of €100 million each year to run, totalling €1 billion per decade: "In its second decade it will be populated by the kids we are neglecting now. We need to think about that. The police, the health services, all know where the trouble is, but we don't have an early warning system. Mindsets need to change." This was followed by a call from each of Nuala Doherty and Mary Black for services to join together and pool resources to achieve outcomes for children and families.

Eleanor McClorey of youngballymun asked the panel about facilitation of dialogue between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and other functions across government to ensure broad involvement in the challenges of capacity building and sustainability relating to programmes for children. In response Mary Doyle referenced the five identified outcomes for children and the how each needs to be considered in terms of what we need to do in the long, medium and short terms, the mobilisation of resources and the measurement of results.

A brief open floor followed, during which front line sectoral frustration with teacher training provision was voiced by Michael Logan of Archways. This was acknowledged by delegates through applause. Concern with non representation of the community voluntary sector on some county childcare service committees was voiced by Aileen O'Donoghue of Archways. This concern was also acknowledged by delegates through applause.

Margaret Rogers of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul stated that an opportunity to renegotiate our contract with children was created with the new Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Margaret McGlynn of the Dublin 8 School Completion Programme questioned aspects of statutory services relating to children. The final contribution came from Mary Cullen of Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth and Family Project, who spoke about the importance of national reform in the identification of children at risk. She raised the issue of some communities' mistrust of the HSE and the urgent need for that culture to change. A further round of applause from delegates followed.

John Lonergan concluded the session by reminding panellists and delegates of the weight of responsibility ahead, captured in the proverb: "To do the popular thing is seldom right, but to do the right thing is seldom popular."

12. Concluding Remarks: Dr. Tony Crooks

“Every now and then we get an opportunity to change things. I feel we are at one of those moments now. We need to grasp these possibilities and make a real difference. Each of the community, government and philanthropic sectors can’t do it on their own, but working together we can do things.”
Dr. Tony Crooks

In closing the conference, Tony remarked on his pride in being a part of what we are all trying to do to improve outcomes for children and families. He spoke of the significant relevance of the upgrading of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to a full department with a full cabinet minister and the value statement that this communicated.

He reminded delegates that The Atlantic Philanthropies are now at the final stage of their work, involving research dissemination and influencing of policy making and that this provides a window of opportunity for work on the ground.

Tony thanked all those involved in organising the conference which was led by Archways and supported by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and The Atlantic Philanthropies and also Barnardos Ireland, Barnardos Northern Ireland, The Centre for Effective Services, CDI and Preparing for Life. In particular, Tony thanked Anne O’Brien of Archways, Keynote conference organisers and the Chartered Accountants House for the organisation, staffing and venue.

Tony concluded with acknowledgement of Aileen O’Donoghue of Archways and her inspiration and commitment to undertake this conference.

13. Seminar Programme: Evidence Based Practice in Ireland

A. Preparing for Life Programme (Northside Partnership and UCD)

This seminar was presented by **Noel Kelly of Northside Partnership** and **Dr. Orla Doyle of UCD**. Noel outlined the Preparing for Life (PFL) programme which is a community led parenting programme from pre birth through the early years, focussed on the outcome of school readiness. Implementation learnings have included the importance of staff team meetings and external supervision: “It has been a great experience, there have been lots of frustrations along the way, trying to build resilience within our team so we can keep going and present a positive face to families at all times.”

Orla explained the rigorous evaluation of PFL and the value in collecting data relating to all aspects of children and families lives: “We collect everything from child health, parent health, self efficacy, relationships... as we don’t know all the outcomes at this stage.” Orla’s experience has been that this approach has been very useful and has been acceptable to participants: “Parents like talking about their children.”

B. Growing Child Programme (Lifestart)

Dr. Pauline McClenaghan of Lifestart Foundation led this seminar and explained how the Lifestart Growing Child programme developed from a US curriculum about how children develop and learn. The programme is delivered in Ireland through a home visitation methodology, with the goal of supporting relationships within families. The programme is currently under rigorous evaluation and early findings have been very positive relating to outcomes for children and families. Pauline explained how it was possible to adapt delivery to meet the needs of some families without undermining fidelity, for example by breaking up one session into three short sessions, delivered at more frequent intervals.

C. Triple P (Longford Westmeath Parenting Partnership)

This seminar was presented by **Conor Owens and Eamonn Farrell of Longford/Westmeath Parenting Partnership**. They described how the programme has been implemented free of charge and is open to all parents of children aged seven and younger in the Longford and Westmeath areas. Conor and Eamonn spoke of the multitude of evaluations that have demonstrated the cost effectiveness of the programme. One recent study from South Carolina in the US demonstrated that programme costs of \$1.6 million were recouped within ten months and that savings of \$3.7 million were gained over two years from the out of home placement costs that were avoided.

Conor and Eamonn also spoke of the value of programme delivery through public health nurses due to their accessibility to families and their skill in helping break down the stigma around support for parenting. The key challenge for public health nurses has been to shift from imparting content to imparting process, getting parents to take ownership of a problem so they can learn skills that they can generalise. This seminar also explored innovative approaches to programme recruitment and the positive situation now where some programme participants are self referring.

D. Functional Family Therapy (Families First)

The Functional Family Therapy (FFT) seminar was presented by **Tom Sexton of Indiana University, Astrid Van Dam of FFT Associates and Alice Ann Lee of Families First**. FFT is a structured programme within a community setting for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It focuses on changing the way a family works now, how they communicate and how they solve problems. The goal is to reduce barriers to change such as negativity and blame and to work with the window of opportunity that results to introduce new behavioural competencies that empower families to manage their lives in a more positive manner, thereby reducing emotional and behavioural difficulties. The programme follows three phases of engaging and motivating, bringing about behavioural change and then working to achieve generalisation.

The seminar summarised the implementation journey within the Irish context, emphasised the importance of fidelity and presented initial evaluation outcomes.

E. Programmes for School Aged Children (CDI)

This seminar was presented by **Aileen Murphy and Gráinne Smith of Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)**. It outlined the background to CDI and the implementation of three school and community based programmes across Tallaght West known as Mate-Tricks, Doodle Den and Healthy Schools. Mate-Tricks is a pro-social skills programme for ten year old children, Doodle Den is a literacy programme for five to six year old children and Healthy Schools is a whole school programme which works to strengthen links with the community, promoting access to local health provision and improving health outcomes for children.

The seminar covered the large numbers of children involved in each of these programmes, the logic model, the manualised approach and the inter-agency structure for programme delivery. It also explored the rigorous approach to evaluation of programme outcomes. Aileen and Gráinne emphasised programme fidelity, with reflective practice key to the CDI approach to programme implementation.

F. Area Based Initiatives (Start Strong and youngballymun)

This seminar was presented by **Ciairín de Buis of Start Strong and Ann Stellenberg of youngballymun**. Start Strong is an advocacy organisation that campaigns for children's early care and education. It was formed from the Irish Childcare Policy Network (ICPN) and consists of a coalition of organisations and individuals interested in progressing childcare and early learning policies in Ireland. Ciairín explained how Start Strong advocates for area based integrated supports as this structure is effective in many ways, including maximising referral systems for families.

The youngballymun experience provides an example of an area based hub of service coordination where evidence based programmes are offered within community settings. Ann explored a number of aspects of integration of services, drawing from the youngballymun experience, particularly the need for strong relationships and communications between service providers together with common values and an appreciation of each other's roles in service delivery.

G. The What Works Process and Tool (The CES)

Sean Denyer of the Centre for Effective Services (The CES) and **Lily Murphy of Blue Heron Coaching** presented this seminar which outlined the 'What Works Process' and the 'What Works Tool', which can be used to enhance the design, implementation and evaluation of services for children and families. Sean explained that it is a facilitated process with programme managers and practitioners, involving a series of questions which promote reflection. It is used to identify the strengths and challenges in programme design and delivery, which help to promote information sharing and change management.

Lily illustrated how the process works within organisations. She spoke of how it begins with an organisation connecting with CES, they participate in a development day and then a facilitation day follows. Feedback messages from participant organisations have been positive, agreeing that it is a useful exercise and that while it sometimes identifies 'uncomfortable issues', it highlights good practice. Most organisations acknowledge the value in bringing in external facilitators to ask the question: "Why?"

H. The Media Initiative for Children (Early Years)

The seminar covering the Media Initiative for Children (TMIC) was presented by **Clionagh Boyle and Rachel Steele of Early Years- the organisation for young children**. Early Years provides information and training for parents, childcare providers, employers and local authorities. The seminar showcased the TMIC programme for children, which involves a number of short cartoons of six children, engaging in social interaction, each of the children from different backgrounds. The programme aims to promote cultural awareness and address discrimination based on religion, ethnic background or disability. Key messages for children are that 'it is okay to be different' and that 'bullying is wrong'. The programme is supplemented with character puppets to allow classroom discussion of feelings.

The seminar discussed the process of evaluation involving randomised control trials (RCTs), which are underway through Queens University. This follows a successful pilot evaluation of the programme which showed that children who had participated in the programme had positive differences in relation to understanding of feelings relating to exclusion, recognition of exclusion and willingness to play with other children from different backgrounds. Initial results from RCTs show 'clear evidence' of these findings within all groups in society, demonstrating that the programme is suitable for replication outside Northern Ireland.

I. Tús Maith (Barnardos)

This seminar was presented by **Mary Corrigan, Grainne Burke and Mark Brennan of Barnardos**. It provided an overview of the Tús Maith programme design and implementation together with outcomes for children. Tús Maith which translates to 'a good start' is a care and preschool education programme for children from disadvantaged areas, focussed on promoting school readiness. Tús Maith integrates the High/Scope curriculum with the REDI (REsearch based Developmentally Informed) programme in order to maximise the developmental outcomes for children. A key focus is in supporting the development of emotional literacy and self esteem, for example through the use of daily compliment sheets.

The Barnardos team outlined the results of an evaluation of the Tús Maith programme and shared anecdotal examples of strong programme outcomes transferring from the preschool to the home environment, such as: "His brother hit him and he didn't hit him back as normal, he turned to me and said I'm very sad", from the mother of a three year old boy living with exposure to domestic violence.

J. Making New Initiatives Work with Existing Resources (Archways, PP & HSE)

This seminar was presented by **Dr. Sean McDonnell of Archways** together with **Fiona O’Grady of the Paul Partnership and Anne Lynott of the HSE**. It explored a cost effective and community based approach to the implementation of the Incredible Years programmes across Limerick city. It demonstrated the value of interagency working within existing community services structures. Sean outlined how the Incredible Years parent programmes for toddlers and children are delivered by Archways and Paul Partnership with other agencies, and how the parent programmes for infants are delivered by Archways and the public health nursing service, with evaluation of programmes by NUI Maynooth.

Fiona spoke of the journey over a number of years in developing an area based programme infrastructure which includes a multi agency senior management committee consisting of NEPS, Barnardos, Limerick Regeneration, Society of St Vincent de Paul, Limerick Social Services and other agencies. Anne explored programme delivery challenges for public health nurses, including the pressures of managing increasing workloads due to the current HSE employment moratorium and increasing population, acknowledging the positive aspects which have included improved outcomes for children and families, the new way of working and the benefits of closer work with other agencies.

K. The Design, Implementation and Evaluation of a Community Change Initiative (youngballymun)

This seminar was presented by **Eleanor McClorey and Gemma Cox of youngballymun**, an area based organisation working with the community of Ballymun to achieve whole population change by offering a number of positive impact services at key life stages. A community change initiative is a “community level intervention intended to improve the outcomes for individuals, families and communities by implementing integrated strategies across a range of systems and sectors, relying on participation from citizens and institutions and also a wide range of social services.”

This complex initiative is focused on delivering measurably improved outcomes for children and families and serves as a learning model for implementing change at a neighbourhood level. youngballymun operates as an integrated services hub, embedding evidence based practices in services throughout the community. The goal is to build capacity and dialogue between services to support collaborative working and ultimately make evidence based initiatives the mainstream approach to service delivery.

L. The Importance of Fidelity (NCB, Northern Ireland)

The seminar focusing on the importance of fidelity in implementation was delivered by **Teresa Geraghty and Frances Molyneaux of the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) in Northern Ireland**. NCB supports children, young people and families and those who work with them through project delivery and advocacy. Frances emphasised how evidence based programmes such as Nurse Family Partnership, Incredible Years and PATHS must be delivered with fidelity if the desired outcomes are to be achieved.

Teresa outlined how fidelity involves: “Specifying what should happen, how much, how often and by which people.” She then presented a conceptual framework for measuring fidelity and quality of programme implementation. This framework includes consideration of potential moderators such as participant responsiveness and quality of programme delivery.