



# **Co. Wicklow Children and Young People's Services Committee**

## **Submission to Local Economic and Community Plan for Wicklow January 2015**

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## Co. Wicklow Children and Young People's Services Committee

### Background

The purpose of the Children and Young People's Services Committees [CYPSCs] is to secure better developmental outcomes for children through more effective integration of existing services and interventions at local level.

The Five Outcome areas for Children in Ireland envision that all children should be:

1. Healthy, both physically and mentally;
2. Supported in active learning;
3. Safe from accidental and intentional harm, and secure in the immediate and wider physical environment;
4. Economically secure;
5. Part of positive networks of family, friends, neighbours and the community, and included and participating in society

The CYPSC in Co. Wicklow is a high level committee drawn from a range of statutory, community and voluntary agencies involved in working with children, young people and their families across Co. Wicklow. There are 14 agencies represented on the CYPSC in Co. Wicklow. The membership brings together a vast range of expertise particularly in the areas of health, education, youth work and justice.

Colette McLoughlin, Chair	ISA Manager, Tusla
Joe Lane, Deputy Chair	Head of Services, Social, Cultural & Community, Wicklow County Council
Emer Breen	Irish Primary Principals Network Representative
Peter Brennan	Bray Area Partnership
Frank d'Arcy	Co. Wicklow Partnership
Alison Fox	Youth Officer, Kildare and Wicklow ETB
Dr. Davina Healy	Principal Medical Officer, HSE
Declan McCarthy	Superintendent, Bray Garda Station, An Garda Síochána
Dr. Glenda Kavanagh	Lucena Clinic
Jackie Kelly	HSE
Mary Kenny	National Education and Welfare Board (now Tusla)
Kevin Lewis	Kildare and Wicklow ETB
Catherine O'Grady	(Community & Voluntary Group Representative) Marian Centre, Bray
Emma Skinner	Juvenile Liaison Officer, An Garda Síochána
Eugene Waters	Coordinator, Wicklow County Childcare Committee
Kevin Webster	Principal Social Worker, Tusla
Deirdre Whitfield	Administrative Officer, Wicklow County Council
Rosemary Yeates	(Community & Voluntary Group Representative) Bray & East Wicklow Youth Services
Fionnuala Curry	Coordinator, Co. Wicklow CYPSC

The Co. Wicklow Children and Young People's Plan [CYPP] for 2012 to 2015 was submitted to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA] in October 2012. In 2015 the committee will commence planning for our next three year plan 2016-2018 and this will be informed by the national policy framework 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' published in 2014. A significant development within the framework is that it covers policy in relation to all children and young people up to age 24.

The work of the CYPSC in Co. Wicklow is undertaken by six subgroups as follows:

**Physical Health Subgroup** – focussed on priorities such as play, healthy eating, physical activity

**Youth Mental Health Subgroup** – focussed on priorities highlighted in relation to youth mental health in the county

**Supported in Active Learning Subgroup** – focussed on concerns in relation to literacy and numeracy

**Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Steering Committee** – to focus on priorities identified such as parenting courses, family support services, domestic violence and the implementation of the local area pathway structure

**Change Management Subgroup** – a high level ‘decision makers’ group to focus on change during the implementation of the CYPP

**Data/Planning Subgroup** – this subgroup will be reformed in 2015 to plan the development of the new CYPP

Whilst each Subgroup is chaired by a CYPSC member external membership from relevant agencies in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors is actively encouraged. The membership of subgroups significantly extends the reach of the CYPSC and greatly enhances the level of expertise involved.

### **Summary of successes to date**

- Increased level of collaborative and interagency working across all outcome areas
- Increased play infrastructure in the county
- Increase in the number of healthy eating programme being delivered in the county
- Training provided to frontline early childhood care and education (ECCE) professionals to support the delivery of literacy and numeracy work in their settings
- Targeted literacy and numeracy training to community (ECCE) workers
- Establishment of a Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of the new Family Support Strategy including the local area pathway structure in this ISA area and appoint of the Child & Family Support Network Co-ordinator to support this work

### **Factors influencing the lives of children and young people in Co. Wicklow**

The absolute deprivation score for Co. Wicklow has dropped from 1.3 in 2006 to -5.9 in 2011. This represents a drop of 7.2, compared to a nationwide drop of 6.5.<sup>1</sup>

Total population of Co. Wicklow 136,640 and 47,686 (35%) are in the age range 0 – 24 years.

The proportion of lone parents in Co. Wicklow i.e. as a proportion of all households with dependent children was 21.2% in 2011. Rathmichael (Bray) at 51.6% has a lone parent ratio 2.5 times greater than the national average.<sup>2</sup>

Despite comparatively high education levels in the county there are still small numbers of EDs where slightly larger proportion of the adult population have only primary education e.g. Rathmichael (Bray) and Rathdrum. The proportion of those with third level education has decreased from 32.9% in 2006 to 31.8% in 2011. Some EDs with particularly low shares of population with third-level education e.g. Rathmichael (Bray).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 2011 Pobal HP Deprivation Index – Area Profile for County Wicklow (Engling & Haase, 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Male unemployment in Co. Wicklow experienced a three-fold increase from 8.5% in 2006 to 22.8% in 2011 that is higher than the national average. Similarly female unemployment rates doubled from 7.5% in 2006 to 15% in 2011. Some EDs have reached levels well above those prevailing for the county e.g. Rathmichael, Bray (42.2% male, 28.7% female), Carnew (33% male, 24.7% female) and Arklow (36% male, 21.6% female).<sup>4</sup>

Wicklow has seen a decrease in the proportion of local authority housing from 10% to 9%.

17,616 people with a disability in Wicklow and 64.9 per 1,000 children with a disability (second highest in the country)<sup>5</sup>

Whilst Wicklow has seen a decrease in its suicide rate from 13.4 in 2004 to 8.9 in 2013 (NOSP Annual Report 2013) rates of self-harm in Ireland increased during the period from 2007 to 2010. According to the National Registry of Deliberate Self Harm Annual Report 2013 the rates for Wicklow were 172 for men and 193 for women (compared to national rates of 182 for men and 217 for women).<sup>6</sup>

There are 175 ECCE settings in Co. Wicklow and 160 of these are providing the free pre-school year.

### **Impact of poverty**

According to the recently published UNICEF 12<sup>th</sup> Report Card (*Children of the Recession*), the proportion of children in Ireland living in poverty rose sharply from 18% in 2008 up to 28.6% in 2012, an increase of 130,000 in the number of children living in poverty. The increase in Ireland's poverty rates is one of the largest: of the 41 countries examined, only 4 countries saw a bigger increase. In contrast, 18 of the 41 countries succeeded in reducing the rate of child poverty during the recession. The biggest positive changes were in Poland and Chile. In Poland, the child poverty rate fell from 22.4% to 14.5% during the same years, 2008-2012.

In explaining the negative impact on children in countries hit hard by recession, the Report Card points to unemployment and underemployment in families. It also points to variations between governments in how strong they made the "safety nets" for the poorest in society through social spending - both during the boom years before recession and in their responses to the recession. "Safety net" policies include both public services and income supports for families.<sup>7</sup>

Bray was selected at the end of 2013 as one of the new ABC sites and the funding allocated under the SPECS programme (€830,000 over a three year period) will be used to provide evidence based programmes/interventions with children from pre-birth to 7 years and their families.

### **LECP Submission**

There are significant benefits to the Co. Wicklow CYPSC approach and work, e.g. relationships have developed and strengthened, new programmes/initiatives supported more collaborative approaches to working with vulnerable children/families. However, the work is challenged e.g. by significant cuts to budgets/resources, service levels unable to meet demand, gaps in service provision and accessibility particularly in the West of the county. While universal services/ supports for children/young people are critically important, engaging with the most excluded is a key priority for

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Health Analysis, Irish Examiner

<sup>6</sup> Person-based European age-standardised rate per 100,000 population.

<sup>7</sup> [www.startstrong.ie](http://www.startstrong.ie)

the CYPSC. This submission relates to all children and young people in Co. Wicklow including those with disabilities, seldom heard young people, members of the travelling community and those from new communities. In preparation for this submission a consultation with seldom heard young people was undertaken to ascertain their views in relation to the five outcome areas and these are included in the submission.

We want to ensure that the structure, work and role of the CYPSC in Wicklow is understood and worked with as part of the development and implementation of the plan. The lives and outcomes for children and young people cuts across a range of sectors and services e.g. health, education, welfare, planning, transport, etc. The submission is presented in relation to the five national outcome areas set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. This submission is a brief overview of key considerations for Wicklow County Council and the LCDC in its LECP planning phase. Further discussion and consultation is welcomed.

## 1

### Outcome 1: Active and healthy

Being active and healthy is a significant contributor to overall wellbeing. The majority of children and young people in Ireland enjoy good health. However, we have some significant health challenges, including obesity, substance misuse and mental health:

- 6% of 13-year-olds are obese<sup>7</sup> and a further 20% are overweight;
- 20% of 16-year-olds are weekly drinkers;<sup>8</sup>
- 75% of mental health disorders emerge before the age of 25.<sup>9</sup>

The aims are that all children and young people are physically healthy and able to make positive health choices, have good mental health, have a positive and respectful approach to relationships and sexual health, and that their lives are enriched through the enjoyment of play, recreation, sports, arts, culture and nature.

Source: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014:5

#### Physical Health

- We need to ensure that universal health services are available and accessible to all children, young people and their families. The health outcomes of children/young people are linked to parental attachment and early year's development. This impacts on longer term outcomes. The HSE are currently reviewing community health provision, with a national paediatric model of care which will be presented to the HSE and Oireachtas. The HSE are working with Atlantic Philanthropies to fund intensive early intervention programmes targeting children under two years of age. This aims to equip parents with attachment, learning and development stages and how to respond to their children at each stage. It is the intention that this programme will be rolled out nationally
- In Bray we have successfully secured the ABC programme, which is a targeted approach with many dimensions. This programme is currently commencing in Bray. A key component is ante natal and early education with parents. While this programme is at an early stage in Bray, the initial pilot sites nationally have proven very positive. It is important in the longer term (if positive) that this programme a) is sustainable in the long term in Bray and b) extends to other

parts of the county. This programme needs to be fully embraced and supported by stakeholders to afford it every opportunity of being successful

### ***Food and Nutrition***

- The courses that exist across Wicklow to promote healthy food and nutrition need to be supported and developed further.
- Breakfast clubs are an important component of supporting vulnerable children to commence each day with a healthy breakfast. At national level this needs to be safeguarded and budgets made available
- School meals schemes are similar. We a) need to ensure that this scheme remains in place in Wicklow, b) ensure numbers of pupils within schools are able to avail of the scheme where it is in place (schools are allocated a number of pupils based on when they successfully applied for the scheme, where school numbers have increased additional pupil numbers are not catered for), c) additional schools should be included in the scheme- evidence of number of DEIS schools not included in Wicklow
- Food Dudes- need to continue to roll out within schools as a very positive programme. However, changes to the programme are making it very challenging to implement practically within school resources. Therefore, this is evidence of good national policy but operating this programme poses a number of challenges
- Parents are key- education is important. Supporting educational initiatives targeting parents is important to ensure that parents are aware, and fully supportive of healthy eating
- A recent consultation with young seldom heard young people<sup>8</sup> pointed to the fact that unhealthy food was cheaper and easier to access than healthy food, over 50% of them suggested that more healthy food be made available in schools

### ***Play /Recreation***

- There has been a huge increase in the provision of playgrounds across Wicklow in recent years. This is linked to the work of County Wicklow Partnership, Wicklow County Council and local community groups.
- However, playgrounds are only one aspect of childhood play and we need to ensure that play spaces are developed to fit with children's needs as they grow.
- There needs to be more awareness of the importance of play amongst a) parents and b) communities. Children need to be more welcomed to play on green spaces, which is not always the case.
- We need to ensure that the infrastructure that exists is well used, and maintained. Example of play workers employed by Dublin City Council.
- Scottish models that fully support play in all weathers and walking are very beneficial and should be explored in Wicklow.
- The way that children/young people use screen time as recreation time is a real concern. Having options that support healthy play and recreation such as playgrounds, green spaces, gardens, and accessible clubs/groups is necessary.

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<sup>8</sup> Info gathered from young people's data December 2014. A consultation with seldom heard young people undertaken on behalf of the Co. Wicklow CYPSC.

- Many young people<sup>9</sup> noted that there were sports facilities and gyms in their local area but over 70% of them said that cost was a barrier for them and that access should be made free or more affordable to them.

### ***Transport***

- Schools need to be accessible safely by foot/cycling to decrease dependence on cars. This links to planning
- Schools need to encourage and support play as children/young people spend most of their days in schools. Schools and childcare facilities need to be designed in ways that support play.

### **Mental Health**

- Information gaps exist in relation to the services that are available in Wicklow and how to access them and this is an issue for young people and their parents as well as other professionals such as teachers.
- Access to Youth Mental Health Services is currently based on referral by GPs. There are waiting lists to access existing services in Wicklow who are struggling to meet demand
- There is no defined youth mental health initiative in the county (e.g. Headstrong). This initiative targets young people in a youth friendly environment and is proven to be a successful model in engaging with young people. The Headstrong model can be an early intervention service which can prevent later and more costly intervention.
- There are national gaps in accessing services for 16 and 17 year olds. They fall between child and adult services which are a major concern. CAMHS services assesses young people right up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday however access to A&E on call services and inpatient beds are a difficulty.
- Eighteen year olds enter adult psychiatric services which are often inappropriate. We acknowledge that this is a difficulty nationwide, not just in Wicklow.
- Dual Diagnosis (mental health/addiction). There is no service in Wicklow to respond to the needs of these young people.
- GPs are playing an increasing role as the first point of contact with young people who are experiencing mental health issues. It is important that they are aware of the services that exist, when and where to refer.
- Despite a limited teen counselling service being available through Bray Youth Services there is a lack of teen counselling services in the county.
- Public transport has been an issue for young people accessing supports as they are often only available in the main towns i.e. Bray, Wicklow and Arklow.
- CAMHS waiting list is approximately 8 months for routine assessments, emergency assessments are offered to those that require it.
- Seldom Heard Young people noted <sup>10</sup> that there have been improvements in mental health supports and awareness in schools and youth services but they also said that stress levels and poor self-esteem are still major issues for young people.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

## 2

## Outcome 2: Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development

The vast majority of young people in Ireland enjoy learning, with 92% completing second-level education and over 60%<sup>10</sup> going on to third-level education. However, there are also some stark statistics – only 13% of young people in the Traveller community complete the Leaving Certificate. Children and young people with special needs, those whose first language is not English and those who have experienced social exclusion need additional supports to achieve their learning potential. Learning starts from birth and goes beyond formal schooling and should encourage creativity and lifelong learning. Engagement in education is a significant protective factor against negative outcomes.

The aims are to ensure that all children get the best foundation in learning and development, have social and emotional wellbeing, and are engaged in and achieving in education.

Source: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014:5

- Building literacy and numeracy of young people- early intervention and family based programmes are critical in achieving good outcomes
- A family learning environment is critical, therefore supporting parents to increase their learning can play a key role in better outcomes for children
- Services need to ensure that information is accessible to all including parents with low levels of literacy
- Managing transitions is important- pre-school to primary, primary to post primary, post primary to third level/further training/employment. Vulnerable groups tend to drop out of education and services at critical points
- School attendance important. While rates across Wicklow are in line with national levels, there are concerns relating to specific groups e.g. Travellers, particular communities
- DEIS can play a crucial role. However a national review is underway and therefore the future of DEIS is uncertain. In addition this scheme has been closed for many years. Therefore, a number of new schools in Wicklow that should be designated are not included. These children and their families are not gaining the supports that other similar families are due to this anomaly
- Programmes targeting men- fathers, in Wicklow have been successful and should be extended. Positive role models in education are important for positive childhood outcomes
- As noted earlier, the ABC model in Bray can provide learning for future work to support educational attainment, learning and development. This is critical to support (seems like this sentence is cut off?)
- The numbers and process for assessments of children within schools is not understood as there are substantial limitations regarding the type and number of assessments that can take place within schools. Early diagnosis of learning and behavioural difficulties can play a key role in supporting children/young people to achieve their full potential
- Local planning for new schools and education premises should be:
  - South facing
  - Have well designed play areas

<sup>10</sup>Ibid

- Bicycle areas and wet gear storage to support cycling to school
- Eco sustainable- rainwater harvesting, solar energy
- Multi- purpose use- open to other uses outside of school time
- Take not of the impact on sustainability of existing educational facilities
- The Government's Community Subvention Scheme, designed to provide low cost childcare opportunities to low income families should be expanded to include provision by private childcare providers as well as community childcare services, which are not accessible in all parts of the county.
- Learning through play and in the natural environment should be encouraged and recognised as a valid and preferable mode of learning for certain age cohorts, such as early year's education.
- Participation by marginalised groups (such as Travellers) in universal early year's programmes (such as ECCE) should be targeted and conversely, work should be done to prepare early years services to become more accessible and inclusive of such groups.
- School attendance is important. While rates across Wicklow are in line with national levels, there are concerns relating to specific groups e.g. Travellers, particular communities. It is also noted while attendance patterns emerge in the first two years of primary school, statutory agencies cannot legally enforce attendance until the age of six. As early intervention is crucial, this creates difficulties with long terms consequences.
- That there will be school places for all children and that school enrolment and admissions processes will be fair, equitable and inclusive.
- That students will receive the necessary supports in as far as is practicable to derive the maximum benefit from their schooling.
- The engagement of the Library services is important in relation to supporting/ building literacy and numeracy among young people and families
- Young people's feedback<sup>11</sup> in relation to school was varied and they noted that positive and negative experiences often depended on their relationships with teachers over 50% of them reported negative teacher- student relationships and many of them suggested using more interactive ways of learning in schools.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

## 3

## Outcome 3: Safe and protected from harm

Keeping children and young people safe and protected from harm is the responsibility of everyone in our society. Children and young people themselves must be educated and made aware of dangers and how to protect themselves from harm and harmful or risky behaviour.

The aims are that all children and young people have a secure, stable and caring home environment; that they are safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation; that they are protected from bullying and discrimination; and that they are safe from crime and anti-social behaviour.

All children and young people need safeguarding. The Government recognises, however, that specific groups of children and young people are particularly at risk and so need additional support and protection.

Source: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014: 5 & 6

- Tusla services have been restructured so that there are clear, distinct and separate pathways for child protection and welfare. Priority is given by some of Tusla's services to children who are deemed to be at ongoing risk of harm (i.e. child protection cases). Tusla will take the Lead role with regard to such Child Protection matters and in assessing whether cases are child protection or more appropriate for child welfare and family support interventions.
- Tusla, in collaboration with other key agencies, has begun to adopt and implement Tusla's national Family Support Strategy which aims to assess presenting needs, offer supports and interventions to children and their families in a timely, appropriate fashion.
- Tusla will take the Lead role on certain cases where the needs of the children and families are assessed as being of a higher priority and will Lead out on these Family Support Plan, with a view to reducing the level of concerns and redirecting these cases to other appropriate support services.
- Other services (i.e. mainly Tusla funded services) are being established to respond to the high number of child welfare and family support cases, mainly through the Local Area Pathway (LAP) approach.
- All responses and approaches to child protection and welfare is predicated on interagency collaboration and participation.
- For children deemed at ongoing risk where families are unable to cope, Tusla will continue to admit children into care, only as a last resort, and for the shortest time possible. Family reunification is, and will continue to be, considered for all children and young people who are in Care, in the County.
- Tusla will continue to work on those children who are on the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS) and will liaise with families and other Agencies as appropriate.
- For young people leaving care and in need of Aftercare services, Tusla will continue to liaise with key other Agencies to address the needs of those leaving State care. Tusla awaits DCYA approach with regard to Aftercare and if/what aspects will be placed on a statutory footing. Leaving Care and Aftercare will become part of the work of the Wicklow CYPSC in due course.
- The provision of a Refuge service in Bray supports women and children affected by Domestic Violence in the county and beyond.

- The reduction in the numbers of Gardaí involved in community policing impact on service provision in the area of youth diversion and engagement with young at-risk persons.
- Programmes in school can be successful and should be maintained and extended – Garda Schools Programme which is given to 5th and 6th classes in national school, Garda Secondary school programme, normally delivered during transition year and the Garda Internet Safety programme delivered to both parents and young people
- Violence and the threat of violence among young people. It is normalised behaviour among some groups of young people. Young people are fearful around their personal safety – afraid of getting “hopped on” when they go out to socialise.
- With the increased use of cannabis and other drugs among young people – drug related intimidation is a problem in some areas.
- Grey area around Teens in violent relationships (girlfriend/boyfriend), particularly if one is under 18. The young person may be denying that it is happening and parents cannot keep her/him away from the partner. Very little specific targeting of teens in relation to violence in relationships or training available to workers. More research needed to see if there are links between this type of violent behaviour in relationships and the increase in young people’s access to pornography.
- CSC and youth groups should be consulted in relation to anti-social behaviour policies/plans of the Local Authority.
- As the main delivery agent of social housing, this section plays a crucial role in the emotional and physical health, safety and well-being of young people and families in their homes and communities, specifically in the following areas:
  - Estate Design -there is a lot of research on this subject and it often shows that estate design is more concerned with the needs of the car than the play and mobility needs of children (see Home Zones for example, also ‘Delivering Homes Sustaining’ Communities 2007)
  - Housing design and quality
  - Safety in the neighbourhood through designing out crime/lighting etc.
  - Estate management
  - Young people included in estate management (e.g. Fassaroe have a youth estate management group)
  - Promoting and planning homelessness prevention
  - Teenage homelessness and supported accommodation for teenage parents, children leaving care or custody, homeless 16/17 year olds, travellers
  - Awareness of the relationship of the home environment to child development and effects of homelessness on children and measures to address this
  - Addressing the needs of children/young people with complex health conditions/disabilities
  - Anti-Social Behaviour – complex area with a range of impacts on young people
- The Gardaí were mentioned repeatedly in the young people’s consultation process<sup>12</sup> and almost all of the groups referred to a need improve relationships between young people and the Gardaí: ‘*Gardaí should not treat all young people as criminals*’, and some suggested for more Gardaí to be on patrol to keep areas safe.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

The Government recognises that young people want to work and progress in life, and need to be given opportunities to do so. Poverty, sub-standard housing and social exclusion have a significant impact on a person's life outcomes and efforts must be made to promote social inclusion and reduce inequalities for children, young people and their families.

The aims are that all children and young people are protected from poverty and social exclusion; that they are living in child/youth-friendly sustainable communities; that they have opportunities for ongoing education and training; and that they have pathways to economic participation, entrepreneurship, fulfilling employment and independent living.

**Early as possible Intervention to achieve better social and economic outcomes for young people. (Pre-birth to six year olds and their parents)**

Empirical studies have identified that the characteristics of parents, other circumstances being equal, are likely to exert the main influence on the well-being of children, socially and economically (*Haase et al '08*). As such it is essential that early intervention supports are provided, particularly to more vulnerable family units, to enable children reach life stage development targets in the context of having the capacity to achieve their full life-cycle potential socially and economically.

Mobilise collaborative action to involve state and local area based services – Tusla; HSE; local authority; local development companies; community resource centres etc. for the development and delivery of accessible quality services such as:

- Mentoring and advise with regard to healthy pregnancy and childbirth
- Information and support to parents on practices to enhance nutrition, cognitive, social and emotional development
- Developmental checks, parenting programmes etc.

National policy context shaping strategy relating to: CSC establishment; early intervention pilot initiatives; ABC Programme. Findings in international studies such as *Dwyer et al '95* on mother and child interaction and *Marcus et al '01* on the influence of attachment on school completion.

Evidenced informed local early years and family support practice in the area.

**Investing in evidence informed programmes for children and young people to support educational achievement. (Pre-compulsory/compulsory school age children)**

Education allows children and young people to develop socially and intellectually and is an important factor in predicting adult life chances. Research suggests that interventions work best when they are introduced early on in a child's development and when they are sustained over time (Barnardos, 2009).

Implement a collaborative response across agencies to services designed to support social and educational attainment in children, including:

- Support greater integration and coordination across services delivered through Department of Education and Science and Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

- Ensure the universal ECCE scheme offering free half day pre-school place to all children the year prior to joining primary school is of a high standard and compliant with current childcare quality framework.
- Improve access to and collaboration with services such as child psychologists, psychiatrists and speech and language therapists.

Linking in with National Childcare Investment Programme and developments in line with National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care. Findings by Creegon (2006) that early identification and remediation of speech and language needs is crucial to intervention and successful outcomes.

**Stable and secure home environment. ( a. Families with young people who are minors b. Young people above the age of majority and within the policy framework age range)**

Basic needs provision such as adequate housing, steady tenure and a secure home environment is a prerequisite for stability across the life-cycle that contributes to positive childhood development and subsequent progression. Lack of proper accommodation and homelessness present chaotic family circumstances that impact on and disrupt key childhood development stages. The shortage of and/or affordability of proper housing accommodation is a major issue particularly in the Bray/north Wicklow area.

Concerted action is required to ensure adequate housing accommodation is available and accessible locally for families involving:

- Supply
- Social housing provision
- Rent controls
- State transfers such as rent supplement that are sufficient to enable families secure ongoing tenancy in proper housing accommodation locally.

Linking to findings in international studies such as *Elardo et al '76* on the relationship of the home environment on the child's development. Observations and experience emanating from evidenced informed local early years and family support practice in the area.

**Welfare dependent families (Minors).** Significant issues are faced by families who are totally welfare dependent leading to situations of exclusion, marginalisation and poverty. Intergenerational aspects of welfare dependency concentrated in particular neighbourhoods exacerbates this situation and the consequential low life progression expectations present very challenging circumstances for the family whereby a cycle of poverty and disadvantage is perpetuated and accepted. Children in such family units are particularly affected and have poorer developmental outcomes from birth onwards resulting in lower aspirations and progression expectations.

Innovative interventions are required to engage welfare depend parents to support progression and economic independence in a realistic and situation appropriate manner that helps sustain the family unit. Collaborative action by key state and local and community bodies is necessary in order to deliver a coherent seamless service provision involving:

- Dissemination of user friendly and accessible information to build awareness and knowledge of existing activation and progression related supports and services

- Engagement processes that enable a positive and productive interaction in terms of supporting realistic progression planning and outcomes
- Focused contacts with the business sector to identify the skills and competencies required of the workforce to meet labour market demands and confirming the range of schemes available to incentivise job opportunities for the unemployed
- Provision of tailored training, upskilling and general confidence building as appropriate to the profile and circumstances of engaged job seekers to move them closer to labour market opportunities including self-employment options
- Disincentives must be removed from the system to ensure that taking up employment is economically advantageous – issues with differential rent; rent supplement payments; medical card etc.

Linking to objectives outlined in the Government's *Pathways to Work* and *Action Plan for Jobs* strategies. Observations and experience emanating from evidenced informed area based local and community development work – engagement processes connected to the BAP Local Employment Service Network.

**Working poor (Minors).** Changes in the economy have dramatically impacted on the labour market. Part-time, temporary and low paid positions have contributed to a new cohort of working poor. In a family context lack of disposable income inhibits the range of possibilities to support childhood development. This situation has a detrimental impact on children's life outcomes.

- State intervention and structural change is required to ensure that those (parents) in employment have, at a basic level, a living wage to support a quality of life beneficial to their children's development and well-being. More coordinated application of state support schemes is required such as the Family Income Supplement
- Investigation is required as to the possible application of the CWCIC/CIB benefits check model to working poor households by way of establishing whether all supports provided by the state are being availed of – FIS; medical card etc.

Linking to *Children's Rights Alliance Pre-Budget Submission September'13* highlighting the negative effects of welfare and tax policies on certain groupings such as working lone parents. Findings in international studies such as *Mayer '02* noting the influence of parental income on children's development outcomes.

**Young people and employment (16 to 24 year olds).** Youth unemployment levels are a cause for serious concern including individuals on the live register and those that are not in receipt of a state welfare payment – local registered youth unemployment has risen by 80% in the period 2007 to 2014. The challenges confronting young people in securing employment are compounded for those who are marginalised with low level educational attainment, lacking work place experience and not possessing training and competencies relevant to the labour market.

Local and national policy must lessen/minimise the period that a young person remains unemployed by providing for:

- Retention in the education system to at least upper second level
- Relevant labour market orientated training and apprenticeships
- Tailored activation supports to enable entry to and progression with the labour market
- Accessible childcare for young lone parents to enable their participation in activation and progression support programmes

- Removal of anomalies in the system that can lead to disincentives to work such as a young person in employment being classified as the main income earner in a welfare dependent family living in social housing and the potential impact on differential rent applied

Linking to EU wide *Youth Guarantee*. National policy and practice as implemented by DSP. Observations and experience emanating from evidenced informed area based local and community development work – engagement processes connected to the BAP Local Employment Service Network; youth development projects etc.

Any local planning needs to be cognisant of the Irish policy responding to the EU Youth Guarantee – Pathways To Work (2014). Particular attention needs to be focused on those under 25 who are most removed from the labour market and now in the Long Term Unemployed category (over 1 year). Both educational and employment services need to work collaboratively with the community and youth sector to support the engagement and retention of these particularly vulnerable young people. The plan needs to look at new and innovative supports for these young people as they are not engaging with those more traditional services currently on offer.

Many seldom heard young people<sup>13</sup> did not have positive experiences to report in relation to economic security, many of them mentioned their families not having enough money for even basic needs and almost all of them (approx. 75%) said that there were no jobs available for young people in their area.

## 5

### Outcome 5: Connected, respected and contributing

Children and young people should be supported and encouraged to play a full role in society recognising that they themselves, through their choices and determination, can heavily influence their own lives now and in the future. Measures are needed to create a society in which all children and young people are valued and respected for who they are, so that they can freely express their identity.

The aims are that all children and young people have a sense of their own identity, are free from discrimination and are part of positive networks of friends, family and community; furthermore, that they are civically engaged, socially and environmentally conscious, and are aware of their rights as well as being responsible and respectful of the law.

- Family Support Projects are critical in supporting and working with the most vulnerable families
- There are a number of Family Support services in the County who are attending to the needs of vulnerable and 'at risk' children, families and local communities with a view to supporting them through vulnerable times and 'stabilising' them to a greater level of functioning and integration into their own families and communities. Some such projects include Arklow Springboard and Wicklow town Child & Family Centre, the Marian Centre, Extern. There is an urgent need to replicate these types of projects to other parts of the county e.g. Bray, Greystones/NTMK and the provision of premises by the local authority in partnership with Tusla should be a priority.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

- TUSLA , in collaboration with other key agencies, are planning to establish approx. four Child and Family Support Networks (CFSN) Hubs across the county which will be an important way to identify, work and co-ordinate supports for vulnerable children, families and local communities. The existence of Family support projects as a basis for these hubs will play a central role in supporting this work.
- Children who have become, or are at risk of becoming homeless as a result of family homelessness is a growing concern. As homelessness is increasing more children are at risk of living transient lives. All indicators show that childhood homelessness is a determinant of longer term outcomes. There are families now being made homeless who would not have been vulnerable in the past (as a result of repossession, rent increases, low levels of rent supplement, inability to access local authority housing). This is a substantial concern and requires a commitment to developing transitional accommodation for families as a link between crisis accommodation (e.g. Women's Refuge, B&Bs etc.) and long term housing.
- Teenage homelessness is also a growing concern. Most vulnerable are young people leaving care and children in domestic violence households.
- The historic homeless budget and services in the county are limited and this impacts on responses.
- Addiction Services- There is no specific service (e.g. YODA) for young people under 18 in Wicklow. Therefore, where and how to respond appropriately to drug misuse amongst young people is a challenge in the county.
- There are limited services for the children of drug misusers. These children are a particularly vulnerable group.
- The importance of young people, especially those who are most disadvantaged, having the opportunity and being actively targeted to engage in youth development projects which support building resilience and developing strong social networks. This youth work needs to be supported and its funding protected.
- The value of both youth work and community development must be recognised and supported within all plans aiming at creating supportive networks and engagement of young people within their local community and society as a whole. Youth Services within the county have taken over 30% cuts to their budgets in recent years and West Wicklow is particularly disadvantaged with no staffed services available to young people in the area.
- There is a need to create a climate where young people are both engaged and feel the need to become involved in the community across the wide spectrum of education, social culture, sport, service delivery and community development. Such a climate would foster Active Citizenship and Participation and ensure meaningful opportunities are provided for Community Service and Volunteering, Mutual Aid, Advocacy and Campaigning, Youth Media, Social Entrepreneurship, Leadership, Training and Practice. Supporting young people's democratic participation and social action has the potential to provide young people with key social skills for life such as leadership, communication skills, personal responsibility, teamwork, the ability to work with others and the tools with many of the challenges impacting on them today.
- The young people involved in the consultation<sup>14</sup> generally reported positive networks among families and friends and also positive involvement within their immediate communities with many having been involved with sports clubs and youth project activities. However, many of them did not feel that young people were respected among the wider area and experienced

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

discrimination based on their address or 'for just being young, hanging about the shops. We should be given more of a chance'

- Children with special needs should be integrated into mainstream environments, crèches, pre-schools and schools. The mainstream environments should be supported to meet the daily needs of these children.
- Teenagers with a disability should be supported to participate in mainstream youth education/ training and social activities.
- Inclusive social groups to be developed to provide children with a disability the opportunity to develop their skills and ultimately their self-esteem through their participation in sport and or social activities according to their abilities.
- Currently Bray Lakers and Arklow Vikings are active but mainly sports focused and specifically for children with a disability. Integration of children with a disability into mainstream social clubs should be supported and prioritised. (Football Association of Ireland have two national co-ordinators to lead including children with disabilities in football, this is not active in Wicklow yet).
- Playgrounds in Wicklow are not inclusive of children with a disability and some of them are recent developments e.g. playground on Seafront in Bray. Inclusive play equipment needs to be provided in all playgrounds e.g. spinning roundabout with some spaces for wheelchairs (Marley Park has one) and wheelchair accessible swings.
- Inclusive changing places need to be prioritised in Wicklow as there are none currently in existence. While there are wheelchair accessible toilets they do not have large changing mats or toilets large enough to facilitate a carer changing a child/young adult with a disability. The lack of this facility restricts any outings these children go on. A changing place North (Bray) and South (Arklow) of the county would make a huge difference to the social life of children with a disability and would also benefit adults with a disability.

For more information in relation to the Co. Wicklow Children and Young People's Services Committee please visit <http://www.wccc.ie/resources/wicklowcsc/>

If you wish to contact the Co. Wicklow Children and Young People's Services Committee please do so to:

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