

A review of the international evidence on interagency working, to inform the development of Children's Services Committees in Ireland

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'Transforming Children's Services – interagency collaboration in action'

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www.ioe.ac.uk/tcru

The research

- Commissioned by CES on behalf of OMCYA (now DCYA)
- Rapid literature review

Outline of presentation

- Impact of interagency working on outcomes for children
- Interagency planning structures
- Information sharing
- Differential (Alternative) Response Model
- Frameworks for assessing need

Methods

- High-level overview of 8 key research reviews
- Searches of bibliographic databases and internet
- 121 items selected for review
- Most evidence from UK or USA where models and approaches under consideration have been used
- Included also Ireland, New Zealand and a wide range of countries through two international reviews

What do we mean by interagency working?

- **Cooperation:** services work together toward consistent goals but maintain their independence
- **Collaboration:** services plan together and address overlaps, duplication and gaps
- **Coordination:** services work together in a planned and systematic way towards shared goals
- **Integration:** different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery

(Source: Nick Frost, 2005)

What do we mean by outcomes?

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

Henry Ford (1863-1947)

A chain of outcomes

SHORT <i>Learning</i>	MEDIUM <i>Actions</i>	LONG-TERM <i>Conditions</i>
Changes in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Knowledge • Attitudes • Skills • Opinion • Aspirations • Motivation • Behavioural intent - 	Changes in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour • Decision-making • Policies • Social action 	Changes in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditions • Social (well-being) • Health • Economic • Civic • Environmental <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Source: Taylor-Powell (2011)</i></p>

A phased approach

- Level 1: Changes to inputs/processes, such as the introduction of new tools and management structures.
- Level 2: Changes to routines, experiences and practices of practitioners and service managers.
- Level 3: Changes to outcomes for children, young people and families.
- Level 4: Institutional/systematic embedding of the changes across organisations.

Source: Easton et al (2010)

What is the evidence on outcomes of IW?

“There is promising evidence from many countries on the benefits of a more joined-up approach in improving professional practice and providing better support at an earlier stage for children and families who need it”.

BUT

“There is, as yet, limited evidence on improved outcomes for children and families from this way of working”

Source: Statham (2011)

Impact for agencies

- Clearer identification of service gaps and less fragmentation
- Greater involvement of service users and wider community
- Ability to harness resources of individual partners
- Greater efficiency through reduction in duplication, sharing overheads
- Building of capacity to resolve policy problems
- Greater focus on prevention and early intervention
- Greater reliance on evidence-based practice

BUT ALSO

- Increased demands and pressures on individual agencies from earlier identification of need
- Difficulties in engaging some partner agencies
- Time and resources needed to support interagency planning

Impact for professionals

- Improved enjoyment and well-being in their working lives
- Enhanced knowledge and understanding of other professionals' roles
- Better understanding of the needs of children and families, and the availability of services across a range of agencies and sectors
- More opportunities for personal and career development and skills acquisition
- Improved information sharing, communication and trust between professionals
- Greater willingness to take risks, potential for innovation

BUT ALSO

- Joined-up working may increase workloads (the evidence is mixed)
- Some practitioners report confusion about professional identity/roles

Impact for service users

- Improved access to services and speedier response
- Better information and communication from professionals
- Greater consultation over case planning
- Holistic approach leading to more seamless services
- Improved outcomes (e.g. child able to remain at home, improvements in attainment)

Interagency planning structures

- Children's Trusts (England)
- Children and Young People's Committees (N.I)
- Children and Young People's Partnerships (Wales)
- Montgomery County Collaboration (USA)
- Strengthening Families/High & Complex Needs Local Management Boards (NZ)

Common features

- Outcomes framework
- Bring agencies together to jointly plan services
- Mostly strategic rather than case management
- Government support and oversight
- Rely on cooperation and commitment
- Coordinator

Joint planning: challenges

Contextual barriers/political climate

- changes in political steer
- financial uncertainty
- a climate of constant organisational change
- agency boundaries not co-terminous

Organisational challenges

- different agency policies, procedures and systems
- agencies have different remits and do not collect the same data
- professional, technical and ethical obstacles to information sharing

Commitment obstacles

- lack of explicit commitment to interagency working
- differing levels of 'buy-in'; some agencies reluctant to engage
- where managers do not experience interagency working as part of core work, it is vulnerable to changes in work priorities

Joint planning: what works well

- Strong leadership
- Agency ‘champions’
- Clear mandate from own organisation
- Time (to develop relationships, reflect, review)
- Support from a coordinator
- Focus on strategic issues

Specific initiatives

- Information sharing
- Differential/Alternative Response Model
- Shared assessment frameworks
 - Evidence of effectiveness
 - Evidence on barriers and enablers

Information sharing

- **Case level:** sharing information about an individual child/family
- **Strategic level:** sharing aggregate data for planning purposes

Both levels need good data-sharing protocols

National databases

Electronic information-sharing systems that professionals use to find out if another agency is working with a child

- Contact Point (England, national version discontinued)
- Youth Reference Index, Netherlands

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLUrJo3L4yU>

Barriers and enablers of information sharing

BARRIERS

- Lack of trust
- Differences in agency cultures, goals, vocabularies
- Different ways of collecting and recording information
- Incompatible IT systems
- Insufficient funding and resources
- Confusion over legal requirements and confidentiality

ENABLERS

- Clear data-sharing protocols agreed by all relevant agencies
- Voluntary sharing of information
- Common understanding of the purpose of information sharing
- Technical assistance, especially for computerised systems
- An information 'champion' in each agency

Differential Response Model

An approach to child welfare developed in countries where reporting of concerns about child abuse & neglect is *mandatory*.

Emphasises the need to respond differently to different types of reported cases of child abuse and neglect– two or more pathways:

Investigation

- This pathway involves gathering forensic evidence and requires a formal determination regarding whether child maltreatment has occurred or the child is at immediate risk of abuse or neglect.

Assessment (alternative response)

- This form of response, usually applied in low and moderate risk cases, involves assessing the family's strengths and needs and offering services to meet these needs and to support positive parenting.

Differential Response Model: Evidence for effectiveness

- Evidence is largely positive
- Modest benefit to safety, as indicated by fewer re-reports of abuse and neglect
- In the short term, DRM costs more but in the longer term may save money
- **Parents report:**
 - More favourable attitude towards child protection services
 - More likely to report being positively engaged
 - More likely to receive services earlier in the process
- **Social Workers report:**
 - Greater worker satisfaction under the non-investigative pathway
 - Participation in the non investigative pathway an effective strategy for meeting client's needs
 - Increased co-operation between child protection services and partner agencies
 - Increase in workload rather than reduction

Differential Response Model: Barriers & enablers

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gaining ‘buy in’ from all relevant agencies to the approach• Providing clear guidance and training on the criteria for deciding between assessment and investigation routes• Identifying sufficient preventive services to offer families where an investigation is not undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing the mindset of front-line workers to understand the different approach• Finding sufficient providers of family support services – especially in rural areas• Making consistent decisions about which families should receive the alternative response• Providing sufficient training for staff• The ‘fear factor’ among workers – of being blamed if a case is assigned to the assessment track and something happens.

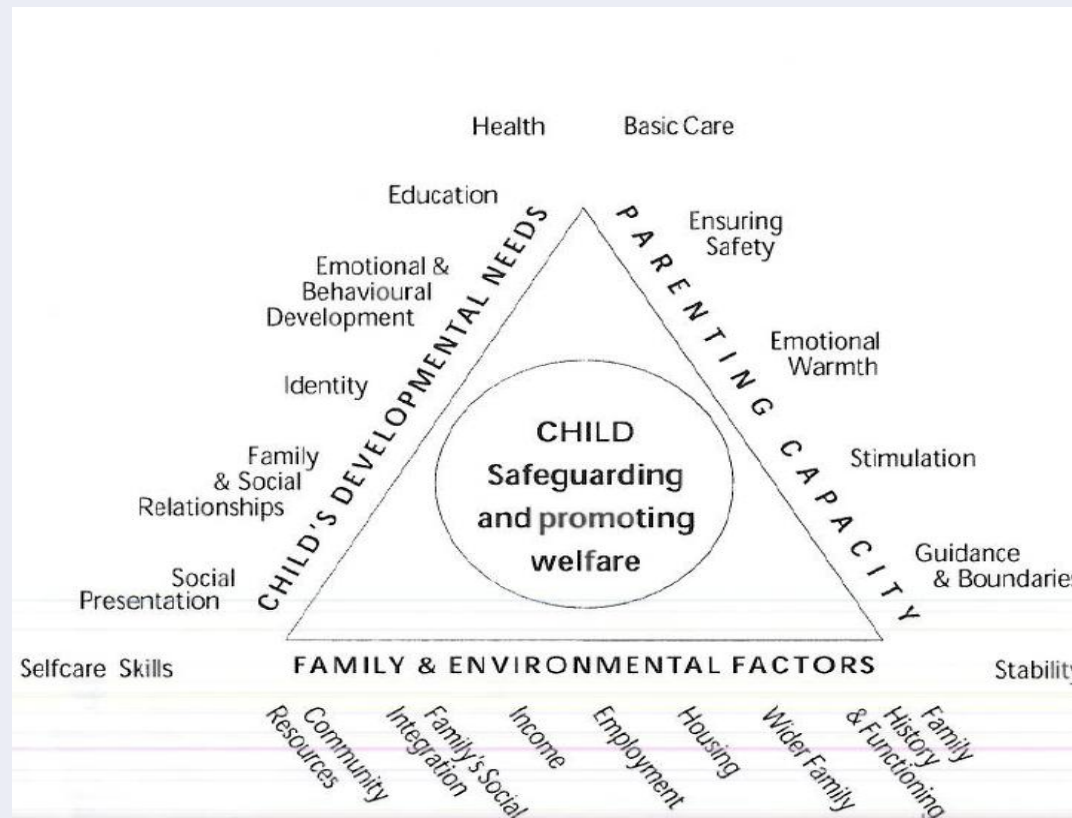
Shared assessment frameworks

- Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (FACNF)- many countries
- Common Assessment Framework (CAF) - England and Wales
- *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC) - Scotland

Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families

- Specialist assessment for *targeted support* (Levels 2 to 4 of Hardiker model), conducted *primarily by social workers*
- Uses ‘Assessment triangle’ with three domains of child development, parenting capacity and family/environmental factors
- Extensively used in 15 countries worldwide
- A version of the FACNF developed for use in Ireland

Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families



Common Assessment Framework

- Standardised approach to conducting assessments of *children's additional needs*
- Can be used by *all* agencies to identify *any* child requiring extra support *at an early stage*, and to promote co-ordination of services to meet needs
- Uses 'Assessment triangle' with three domains of child development, parenting capacity and family/environmental factors
- Stages involve: pre- assessment checklist → standardised form → procedure for delivering services → review process
- Introduces 'Lead professional' role

Getting it right for every child

- Outcomes led approach to delivering services, based around a common co-ordinating framework (8 well being indicators)
- Uses the assessment triangle, but renamed the ‘My World Triangle’, adapted to present information from the child’s perspective
- Differs from CAF in that it focuses on *all children* not just those with additional needs
- Unique feature of GIRFEC is the ‘Named Person’ – a professional working in universal health services or education responsible for ensuring child gets support right across life stage.

Joint assessment: Evidence of effectiveness

- Stronger interagency working
- Better access for children and families to appropriate levels of support
- Harder to demonstrate improved outcomes for children
- Important that systems are implemented and used as intended

Joint assessment: Enablers & barriers

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity about the purpose of common assessments and when they should be undertaken • Well communicated 'vision' • Good organisational support • High level commitment • Sense of ownership at all levels • Inter-professional training • Guidance on the use of new forms • Time for practitioners to develop trusting relationships across agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms which are too long or inflexible • Lack of strategic support and encouragement • Perception that it is not 'core' work, and not recognised in time allocations • Database and information sharing problems • Duplication of existing assessments • Concerns about additional workload • No resources to meet the needs that are identified

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Available at www.dcyia.ie