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# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction to CYPSC and The Book Magic Project

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs established the first Children and Young People's Services Committees (formerly Children's Services Committees) in 2007 with the purpose of improving outcomes for children and families at local and community level. A Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) has since been established for every county in Ireland. CYPSCs are recognised by Government as a key structure to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people, aged 0–24 years. These structures bring a diverse group of organisations and agencies from across the statutory, community and voluntary sectors together to engage in joint planning of services for children and young people at county level. All major organisations and agencies working locally on behalf of children and young people are represented. The Children and Young People Services Committees as the “key infrastructure for planning and co-ordination of services for children and young people”<sup>1</sup> are cited across multiple policies and actions developed by Government.

**Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures**, the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020, supports interagency working and charges the Children and Young People's Services Committees with a key role in this regard. Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) seek to **secure better outcomes for children and young people through more effective integration of existing services and interventions at local level**. CYPSCs work towards the five national outcomes for children and young people in Ireland. These are that children and young people:

- ★ are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing
- ★ are achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development
- ★ are safe and protected from harm
- ★ have economic security and opportunity
- ★ are connected, respected and contributing to their world<sup>2</sup>

County Mayo CYPSC is responsible for improving the lives of children, young people and families at local and community level through integrated planning, working and service delivery. Like that of other CYPSCs, the Committee ensures that work together so that children and families “receive better and more accessible services”<sup>3</sup>.

In this context, The Book Magic Project was established in April 2019 by the Active and Healthy 0-6 years Subgroup of Mayo Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) to support more parents in County Mayo to read to their children.

This initiative was in line with CYPSC's national and local objectives, especially its focus on “giving children the best start in life is one of the most effective ways of making sure that children and their families for good health and quality of life”<sup>4</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2019) .CYPSC Shared Vision, Next Steps 2019-2024. Government of Ireland. Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014). The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Mayo Children and Young People's Services Committee and Health Services Executive (2018). Mayo Health and Wellbeing Plan 0-3Years (2018-2022).

The Book Magic Project comprised the process of families receiving a bag of books that had been carefully selected by the Mayo library service. The books dealt with a range of topics focusing on emotional wellbeing, all in the form of easy-to-read stories with eye-catching illustrations.

Mayo CYPSC indicated:

**“All available practice and research shows the many benefits of parents reading to their children. Reading to young children can help them to organise their feelings and can comfort them if they’re struggling with difficult emotions. It also helps cement the parent/child bond, which is a key component of healthy child development.”<sup>5</sup>**

Central to the establishment of The Book Magic Project was CYPSC’s Mayo Health and Wellbeing Plan 0-3 Years (2018-2022) which identified parents reading to their children as an action that can lead to better mental health and better relationships between children and their families. This was further enforced by Mayo CYPSC’s Active and Healthy 0-6 Years Subgroup own discussions on how support agencies could best work together to support parents to give their children the best start in life and that relevant support for children and families in the first three years can lead to better health and wellbeing in the future.

Funded by the Dormant Accounts Fund, Mayo CYPSC, and Healthy Ireland, The Book Magic Project tasked a range of family support agencies across Mayo to lead the implementation of this initiative and cross-section of families across County Mayo were identified by the support agencies involved.

To further the good practice process and enhance learning from the initiative the Active and Healthy 0-6 Years Subgroup of CYPSC Mayo commissioned an independent evaluation of The Book Magic Project.

The following report provides an account of the outcomes of an independent evaluation process of The Book Magic Project undertaken between October 2019 and November 2019.

*“We know parents do all they can to give their child the best start in life. Parents are busy, and meeting all the demands of life can be challenging. Reading to your baby and child even for a short length of time on a regular basis is time well spent. It helps your relationship with your baby and child and helps with their language development. It can also be a break or a wind-down from the daily rush of life. Supporting children and families to read and encouraging families to use local libraries, which are free, is an important action from our Early Years Health and Wellbeing plan”*

*– Chairperson, Mayo CYPSC Active and Healthy 0-6 Years Sub Group*

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<sup>5</sup> The Book Magic Project Launch (April 2019).

# CHAPTER 1

## Overview of The Book Magic Project



Four hundred families with six hundred children are engaging with family support services in County Mayo for a wide variety of reasons and various lengths of time.<sup>6</sup> Families have a myriad of reasons for engaging with these support structures which they themselves may approach (self-refer) as they may perceive that they need the support of one or more service or may be referred to a particular agency by a service such as a public health nurse, school etc. The families may be experiencing a range of social, economic and mental health and well-being issues such as adult mental health difficulties experienced by a parent or both parents, poor coping skills, low income, housing need/homelessness. Commencing in April 2019, the Book Magic Project sought to work with parents/primary care givers and children who are accessing a range of family support services in County Mayo including zero2six (Tusla) support, speech and language support, disability support and mental health and well-being supports.

As previously mentioned there was a clear rationale for the development of The Book Magic Project. Its development arose from discussions held by Active and Healthy 0-6 Sub Group of Mayo Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC). In discussing themes arising from Mayo County Library's work on the Right to Read Initiative it became apparent that local organisations working with families in a support capacity that some families do not consider libraries a place "for them"<sup>7</sup>. This is despite free membership and the recent abolition of fines.

In addition, stakeholders from Tusla, CYPSC, and Health Services Executive (Health Promotion and Improvement) and Psychology services raised concerns about the increasing number of parents who struggle with attachment issues between parent and child due to the other stressors in the family. It was recognised by all sub group stakeholders that there was a "need to promote good attachment between parents and young children and which has long been evident to the frontline workers"<sup>8</sup>.

Arising from these discussions, the idea to provide such families with story books dealing with feelings and emotions was developed. The rationale was that by equipping parents with the simple language and terms in the stories, they in turn could equip their children with the emotional literacy needed to talk about feelings in a constructive way. By giving the books directly to families, instead of putting the onus on them to come into libraries or bookshops in search of these books, it was felt the promotion of attachment would be made accessible to all.

The Book Magic Project was therefore developed to strengthen the parent-child relationship through a concrete, accessible and warm activity like reading/sharing books.

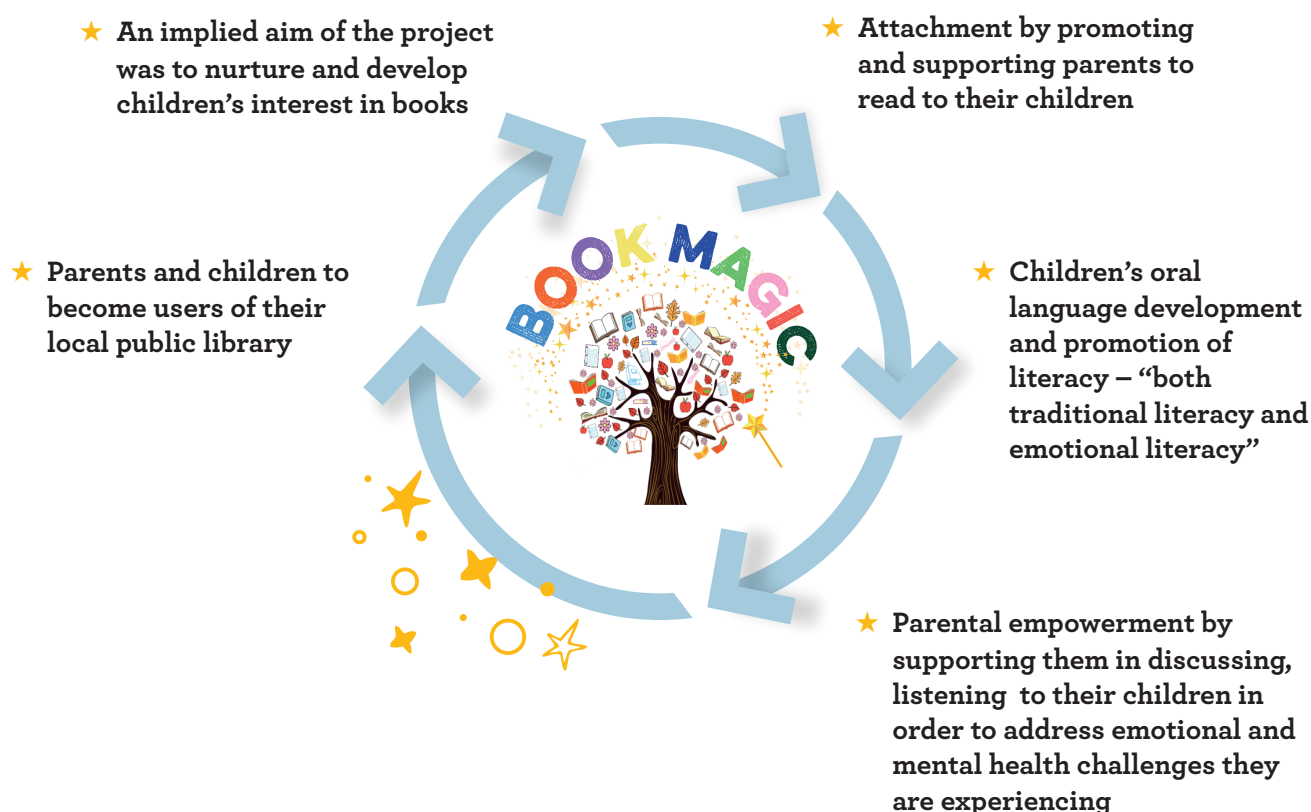
In recognition of these needs identified by the Active and Healthy 0-6 Sub Group, The Book Magic Project aimed to support the following:

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<sup>6</sup> The Book Magic Project Dormant Accounts Proposal 2019

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid



As stated previously, children's experience with books plays an important role. Many children enter early years education and school with thousands of hours of experience with books. Their homes contain hundreds of picture books. They see their parents and other family members reading for pleasure. Other children enter early years education and school with few experiences of shared book reading. There may be few if any child friendly books in their homes. Their parents and siblings may not be 'readers'. For these families the children's educational attainment even at such an early stage of development may be already be on the back foot compared to their peers.

The core principles of The Book Magic Project centred firstly on the premise that how babies and young children are read to is as important as how frequently they are read to. When an adult shares a book with a baby or young child, they read and the child listens. In respect to The Book Magic Project the adult helps the child become the teller of the story. The adult becomes the listener, the questioner, the audience for the child. Secondly, picture book reading provides children with many of the skills that are necessary for instance school readiness - vocabulary, sound structure, the meaning of print, the structure of stories and language, sustained attention and the pleasure of learning. It is well documented that it is important for a parent (care giver) to read frequently with a baby and/or young child. Children who are read to three times per week or more do much better in later development than children who are read to less than three times per week. It is important to begin reading to children at an early age (Christian, Morrison & Bryant, 1998). By nine months of age, infants can appreciate books that are interesting to touch or that make sounds.



Just as no one can learn to play a musical instrument just by listening to someone else play, likewise, no one can learn to read just by listening to someone else read. Children learn most from books when they are actively involved. The fundamental reading technique encouraged by The Book Magic Project included prompting the child to say something about the book, expanding the child's response by rephrasing and adding information to it, and repeating the words, talking about the pictures, exploring the emotions presented in the book and the meaning for the child "to make sense of their world" (Family Support Practitioner). For instance, the parent and the child are looking at the page of a book that has a picture of a cat on it. The parent says, "What is this?" (the prompt) while pointing to the cat. The child says, cat, and the parent follows with "That's right (the evaluation); it's a black cat (the expansion); can you say black cat?" (the repetition). Sometimes the parent can read the written words on the page or talk about the picture and then prompt the child to say something. For many books, the parents can do less and less reading of the written words in the book each time the parent-child reads it leaving it more to be led by the child.

*"Encouraging parents to read to their children, parents (from a family that is being supported by family support workers) receive a bag of books, many of which are based on social/emotional themes, and encouraged to read to their children. The results of this, as expected, should help to improve child/parent bond, in addition to the other well documented benefits of reading to children. The social/emotional themes of the books also provide an opportunity to open up dialogue on issue that the child or their family may be experiencing (e.g., anxiety, anger, etc.)."*

*The Book Magic Project – Dormant Accounts Application*

The Book Magic Project as a home based intervention sought to improve parent/carer giver attachment, emotional health and well-being of children aged 0-6 years. Notwithstanding this central focus on emotional development and attachment, emergent literacy cannot be ignored given that print media (books) is the vehicle that The Book Magic Project used to develop children's emotional literacy. Print concepts include the child's understanding of how to handle a book, that is, page turning, tracking and also the knowledge that a book has a title, an author, perhaps an illustrator, table of contents and description of the book on the back cover. Print concepts also include the knowledge of what a word is, what a sentence is, what a letter is and the fact that there are spaces between words.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, although the primary focus of the project was on developing children's access to books and their emotional wellbeing, there was also a focus on emergent literacy skills as well as library access and oral language competency.

<sup>9</sup> Whitehurst, G. & Lonigan, C. (2001). Emergent literacy: Development from prereaders to readers. In S.B. Neuman & D.K. Dickinson (Eds), Handbook of Early Literacy Research. pp.11-29. New York: Guildford.

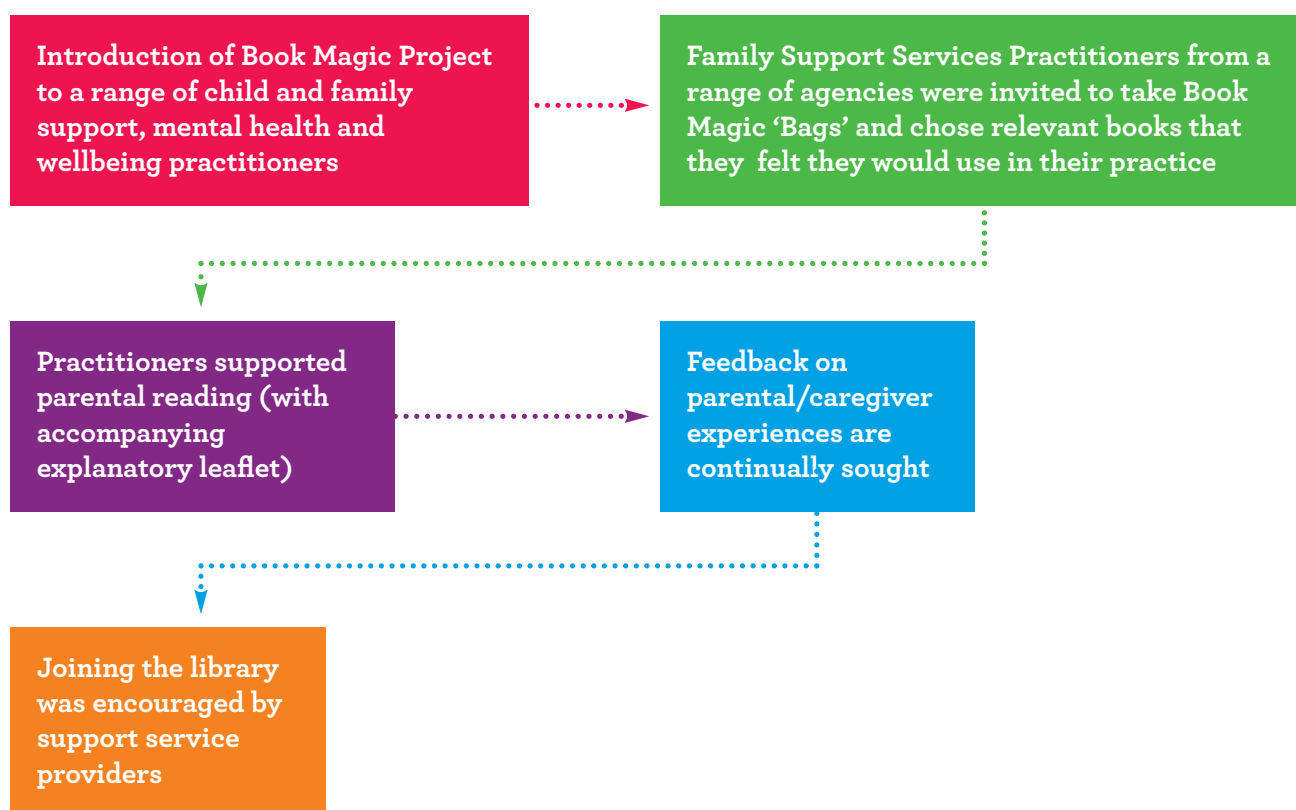
## The Book Magic Project Delivery Process

Four key agency members of the Active and Healthy 0-6 Years Sub Group were fundamentally drivers in leading out on the development and delivery of the Book Magic Project – these included sub group members from CYPSC itself, Mayo County Library Service, HSE Health Promotion and Tusla Zero2six Family Support. Implementation of The Book Magic Project was a continuous process model.

The day-to-day operation of The Book Magic Project was the responsibility of the Active and Healthy 0-6 Years Subgroup of Mayo CYPSC with funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund. Mayo County Library undertook to provide books for the project and to stock follow-up reading material. Initial engagement was developed by family support workers on regular in-home visits to clients. The goal was then to encourage families to engage directly with their nearest library branch. The Active and Healthy 0-6 Years Sub Group invited fifteen practitioners from a range of support services in County Mayo comprising family support, mental health and well-being and early years' practitioners to participate in The Book Magic Project. This was achieved through invitation to launch in April 2019.

Figure 1 describes the modus operandi of the project.

Figure 1: Modus Operandi: The Book Magic Project

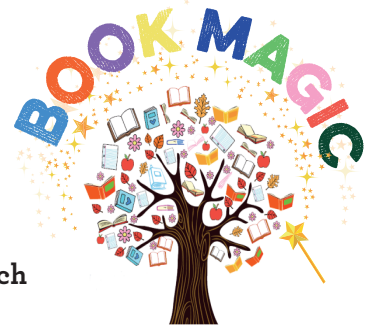


In April 2019, the delivery process commenced with a launch and 'induction'/introduction to the Book Magic Project and its aims with ten support service providers across a range of support disciplines.

Figure 2 identifies the initial stakeholder agencies who attended the launch/induction process.

*Figure 2: The Book Magic Project Initial Stakeholders*

- ★ Tusla - Zero2Six Family Support and The Edge Project
- ★ Mayo Traveller Support Group
- ★ Mayo County Childcare Committee
- ★ Family Resource Centre Programme – Ballina and Westport
- ★ Safari Club (Castlebar) Enable Ireland
- ★ Western Care Association
- ★ Health Services Executive – PCCC, Dental, Psychology, Speech and Language



The members of the ‘informal’ working group of the Active and Healthy 0-6 Years Sub Group of Mayo CYPSC to support the delivery of the project took on specific roles including:

- ★ CYPSC Co-ordinator convened the working group meetings, co-ordinated The Book Magic Project launch activities, monitored numbers of family participants and participating agencies.
- ★ Mayo County Library represented permanent liaison with regard to the library’s role in the project, including the selection and ordering of books for the project, liaising with the funder with regard to financial output for The Book Magic Project.
- ★ Tusla Zero2six Family Support called for and ensured review of on ongoing evaluation of project as they arose from agency representatives.
- ★ HSE chaired the working group and ensured delivery of the programme under the Dormant Accounts conditions of funding.

At the time of writing (November 2019), 21 families with children between the ages of 3 and 8 years of age have participated in The Book Magic Project with the majority attending pre-school or are in Junior Infants in primary school. Families were situated in Castlebar, Westport, Claremorris and Louisburgh areas. The following section provides an overview of the evaluation process undertaken.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Book Magic Project: Purpose and Overview of the Evaluation



The aim of the evaluation of The Book Magic Project was to assess the significance of the project to support service practitioners and family participants in order to gain insight into how the project might be improved. Specifically, the evaluation explores:

- ★ Practitioners' experience of implementing the processes of The Book Magic Project (e.g. supporting parents/care givers in their reading interactions with their children);
- ★ Children's use of the books as described by their parents;
- ★ Parent-child emotional engagement and development of attachment around story reading;
- ★ Parental knowledge of children's developing knowledge of books and reading;
- ★ Parental confidence and attitude in parenting especially around significant emotional issues;
- ★ Children's motivation and engagement as perceived by significant adults in the project and family's reported experience of the project.
- ★ In addition, the operation of the project and the examination of the effects on partnership working across significant family and health support agencies in County Mayo under the brief of CYPSC.

The evaluation sample and qualitative data collection strategies employed, the organisation and analysis of the data are documented in the following section. Issues related to the evaluation process such as ethics, reliability, validity, sampling, recruitment of study participants are examined as part of the scrutiny of evaluation. Consideration of social and cultural factors influencing the lives of the project primary stakeholders led to thoughtful decision-making around choice of venues for interviews and around the style and tone of interactions with stakeholders especially parents and children. The evaluation focus was on the influence of the Book Magic Project on the relationship between parent and child; the focus on the child's experience in relation to a story being read; and the emphasis on horizontal relationships between all stakeholders in the project.

Qualitative data gathering which was the substantive phase of the evaluation process, was conducted using qualitative research strategies including focus group discussions, in-depth individual interviews, and analysis of extant documents such as evaluations gathered by the project working group. The involvement of a sample of stakeholders in the evaluation process and its focus on evaluating the project as a dynamic, evolving entity in process permeates this evaluation study and The Book Magic Project, particularly in relation to its emphasis on the importance of relationships between parent and child. An attitude of reciprocity and habits of listening to and building on the child's contribution to the dialogue was central to the project evaluation.

The evaluation process used multiple methods – **individual interviews, focus groups, written feedback from stakeholders** – to represent the voices of support service practitioners, parents and children. The evaluation sample comprised participants in The Book Magic Project between April 2019 and November 2019 - the first six months of the project. The sample emanated from a population which consists of all participants in The Book Magic Project. The sampling frame is a list of all the elements in the population from which the sample was drawn, comprising: parents and children (aged 3-8 years), family support and mental health practitioners, and sub group members including representatives from Tusla Zero to Six Family Support, the HSE Health Promotion and Improvement, CYPSC and Mayo County Library. Different elements of the sampling frame were asked to participate in interviews and focus group discussions.

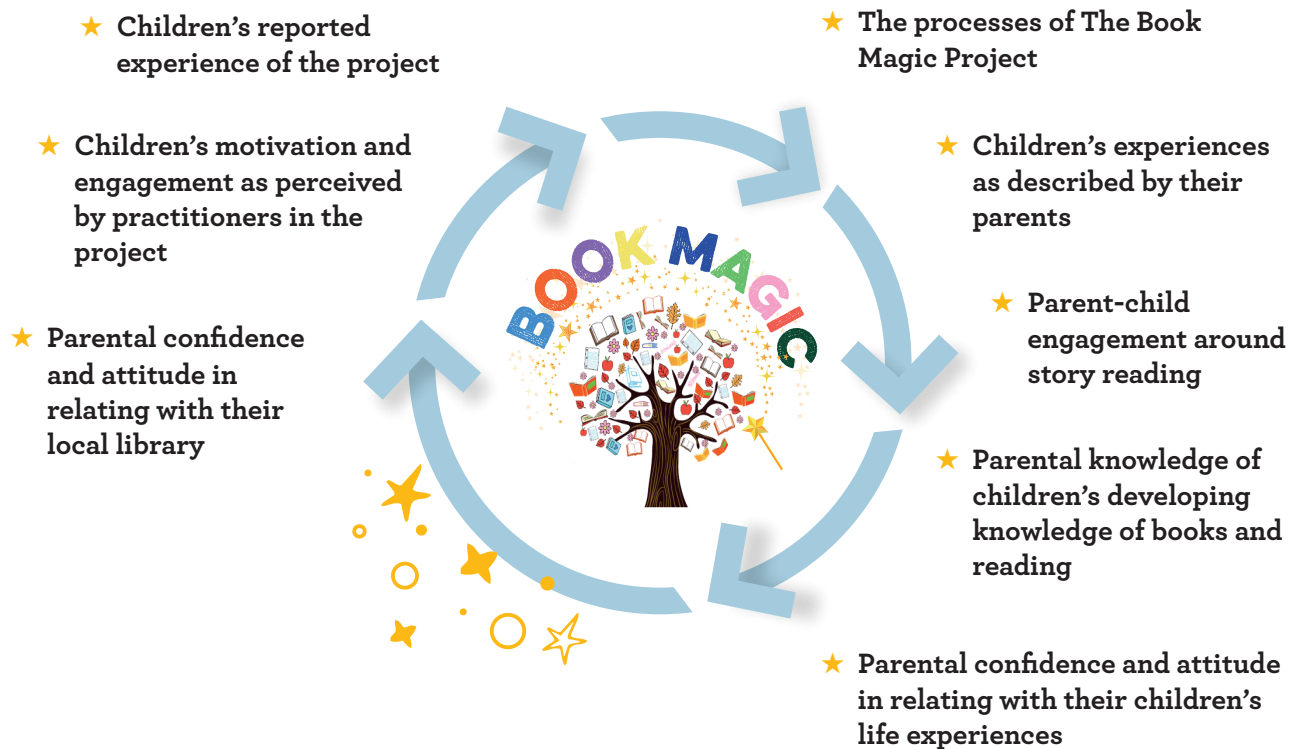
The sample was necessarily purposive because the evaluation required that the voices of the various groups of stakeholders were represented and that their contributions can be attributed to the group from which they emanated – family care givers/parents, children and support service providers. Table 1 provides details on the sample that was extracted from each group and the nature of their participation in the research.

Table 1: The Book Magic Project Evaluation Participants

Participants	Focus Group	Interviews	Documented Feedback
Parents		2	
Children		4	
Support Practitioners	Working Group	10	11

Focus groups were chosen as a data collection tool because they were especially suitable for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to observe not only what people think but the kind of interaction that took place in planning, implementing and reviewing The Book Magic Project. Interviews were semi-structured and were informed by the documentary feedback previously gathered by the working group. All support service practitioners (17) who were involved in the initial roll out of The Book Magic Project, were invited to participate in interviews. Ten agreed to participate in a one-to-one interview.

Parents and children were key participants in the evaluation study. Because parents and children were central to The Book Magic Project, it was important to elicit their views on their experience of the project so that the project might be improved for future parent participants. The children's interviews took place in October 2019 and were conducted in the presence of both a family support worker and the primary carer within the family. The reason for this was to ensure children protection rules were observed. Families asked to participate in the evaluation were recruited by members of the working group on behalf of the evaluator. Evaluation questions centred on what was experience of implementing the following:



All ethical protocols demanded were followed. The purpose of the evaluation was explained to all participants and their informed consent was obtained. Assurances were given and care was taken to protect the identity of participants. Each family participant was given a Plain Language Statement and an Informed Consent form to read and sign. Participants were advised that participation in the evaluation study was voluntary and that even when consent was given, it could be withdrawn at any time. No participant declined to sign the form. Consent was sought again, verbally at the beginning of each interview.

Informed consent was obtained from the children's parents on the children's behalf. A special informed consent form written in clear age-appropriate language was designed for the children to be read out to them by their parents. Then, on the day of the interviews, children were invited to participate in interview and were given the option of not getting involved. An additional adult, a Family Support Worker, was present throughout the interview discussion with children. Children's assent was also interpreted by observing their engagement, their body language and their facial expressions. When, children became restless the interview was ceased and the children re-engaged when they were invited to comment on a story-book. This concept of situated ethics was important when working with young children because children may not understand the notion that giving consent at a single point in time has consequences for later periods of time. Therefore, children had a right to express their choices on an ongoing basis.





## CHAPTER 3

### The Book Magic Project: Policy and Theoretical Context



In order to provide a context in which to place The Book Magic Project the following section briefly examines the broader policy framework and thinking in respect to children and young people with specific focus on attachment, family focused support work and literacy. It investigates the various policies and thinking and seeks to ascertain the place of story-reading processes in attachment, literacy and family support practices and to determine their approaches to collaborative agency work.

As referenced earlier, ***Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014–2020*** tasks CYPSC with ensuring interagency communication and collaboration. Its stated national outcome seeks to “strengthen the support system around the child and young person” through its six transformative goals. The framework includes more 160 commitments from its focus on early interventions and quality services to promote best outcomes for children, particularly in the vitally-important early years, to improving childhood health and wellbeing in line with goals of ‘Healthy Ireland’ to critically in the context of The Book Magic Project delivering better supports for families and parenting.

Healthy Ireland is the national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland. Its main focus is on prevention and keeping people healthier for longer. The framework too is committed to:

- ★ Implementing evidence based prevention and early intervention initiatives aimed at children and families, initially focusing on areas of disadvantage, drawing evidence emerging from the prevention and early intervention programme.
- ★ Combining mental health promotion programmes with interventions that address broader determinants and social problems as part of a multi-agency approach, particularly in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and fragmentation.

***First 5: A Whole Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, 2019–2028*** is Ireland’s first ever cross-departmental strategy to support babies, young children and their families. The strategy provides a clear context for The Book Magic Project. The ten-year plan seeks to deliver a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring and a new model of parenting support. Among the five major areas of action ‘First 5’ sets out new measures to promote positive health behaviours and the mental health of babies, young children and their families, and to enhance the National Healthy Childhood Programme which acknowledges that good physical and mental health in the early years is essential for children’s experiences and for their later outcomes. The policy states that positive experiences in early childhood mean reduced incidence of heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease and depression, thus acknowledging the key thinking that investment in health promotion and health services in the early years pay dividends for children, families, and for the health service. This is a fundamental part of creating a Healthy Ireland, giving every child the best start in life.

*“The first five years of a child’s life only happen once, but the impact of their experiences during this period can last a lifetime”.*

*– An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar  
(at the launch of First 5)*

**First 5** also seeks to improve existing parenting supports provided across a range of government departments and state agencies. It further indicates that accessible, high-quality information and guidance will be made available for parents to promote healthy behaviours, facilitate positive play-based early learning and create the conditions to form and maintain strong parent-child relationships in recognition of the essential role played by families in nurturing healthy child development. Families are at the heart of this strategy and the importance of a smooth educational continuum for all children as they move from their pre-schools into school. **First 5** also acknowledges the importance of children experiencing high quality, age appropriate learning opportunities wherever they are, in settings, schools or at home and how very young children's learning and development is supported through play based and emergent child-led curriculums.

The library service is a key and integral part of the context for The Book Magic Project. The service's three-year strategy, ***Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities Strategy***, seeks a continuation of 'Right to Read' a national literacy and reading programme to promote literacy and reading development for individuals, families and children that provides core services, resources and initiatives for a range of user groups. It is collaborative cross-government initiative that provides a nationally coordinated framework for literacy support and reading development in all local authorities to "Promote the benefits of literacy and reading development for all ages and provide opportunities for people to develop as literate and informed individuals" (p23). ***Our Public Libraries 2022*** acknowledges the "significant potential to develop targeted outreach initiatives for hard to reach individuals and groups. The local library provides a social space for the isolated in urban and rural communities and collaboration with local agencies and community groups can develop and support initiatives that encourage people to use the library" (p30). Therefore, initiatives such as The Book Magic Project can be firmly positioned within this context. In addition, like that of its preceding strategies ***Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*** places community and local agency co-operation at the heart of its work stating libraries "will work with local partners to reach disadvantaged, marginalised and new communities, increasing these communities' awareness of services available and firmly establishing the library as a resource that is accessible for all" (p.41) thereby supporting collaboration and co-operation under the CYPSC umbrella facilitation approach.

A further context for The Book Magic Project particularly in relation to its emphasis on literacy development is the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy, 2011-2020. The strategy describes actions to support parents and communities to "provide advice and information to parents to enable them to support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development" (p.22). The strategy exhorts schools to "provide or host sensitively designed opportunities for parents to develop their confidence and their capacity to help their children at home in relation to literacy and numeracy" (p.23). A European Commission report, ***Family Literacy in Europe***<sup>10</sup> identified Ireland and Germany as behind in recognising the importance of the home environment on literacy acquisition relative to their European peers. The introduction of **Aistear**, the early childhood curriculum framework (2009) in Ireland and the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy (2011) both highlight the role of parents in developing children's literacy, thus bringing policy focus on the home literacy environment.

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<sup>10</sup> Carpentieri, J., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Litster, J., Vorhaus, J. (2011). Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development. London: NRDC, Institute of Education.

**Aistear** emphasises the importance of parental involvement in their children's education in a dedicated chapter in the Guidelines for Good Practice section called Building partnerships between parents and practitioners. Here, it encourages parents to support their child's learning by reading to him/her, joining the local library and choosing books together (p.9). The Primary School Curriculum (1999) also acknowledges parents' role in their children's language development, for example, and it describes ways that parents might support children's language development (NCCA, 1999, English Teacher Guidelines p.19).

The new **Primary language Curriculum (PSC)** for Junior and Senior infants is aligned with the principles and methodologies of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2015). Drawing on Aistear and research on language development, the language curriculum recognises the importance of positive dispositions, the individuality and agency of the child, the centrality of collaborative learning, play as a pedagogical approach, and the integrated nature of learning (2016, p.100). The curriculum also states "Language is co-constructed between the adult and child through joint attention, mutual interest and enjoyment" (p.20). It refers to the importance of the home and family culture when it includes as one of its aims the importance of building on children's prior knowledge (p.26) and when it discusses the role of parents in supporting children's language development - Children's homes and communities play a key role in their language learning, which is developed through meaningful interactions with parents and extended family and friends. Aistear, the PSC and the Primary Language Curriculum all recognise a holistic approach to literacy acquisition, that is, literacy is acquired in many different ways, both formally and informally (PSC English, p.7), for example through play and story, through engagement with multi-media devices, library visits, exposure to print-rich environments and through a balanced approach to literacy at school, which includes an emphasis on both skills and comprehension in literacy and on the provision of authentic real-life literacy-learning contexts. A playful approach to literacy teaching and learning is emphasized through its Stage 1 (Junior and Senior Infants) learning outcomes. The emergent approach to literacy seen in all three curricula also recognises the developmental nature of literacy as opposed to a reading readiness perspective. Thus far, this chapter has outlined various policy documents pertinent the operating environment of The Book Magic Project.

The next section examines literature which further supports the primary incentive for the development of The Book Magic Project namely attachment and emotional well-being. An aim of The Book Magic Project was to strengthen the bond between parent and child and to stimulate the child's early language, cognitive, and social development. Abundant research suggests shared reading processes such attachment, emotional wellbeing and indeed educational and social dividends. Parental involvement in their children's learning is associated with higher academic achievement for their children.<sup>11</sup> Parent-child interactions; (especially when they are warm, responsive and interesting to the child) influence a child's academic development.<sup>12</sup> Findings from Carpentieri et al's (2011) found that family literacy programmes are effective, both in improving child literacy and in improving parental support skills.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Kim, S., & Hill, N. (2015). Including fathers in the picture: A meta-analysis of parental involvement and students' academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

<sup>12</sup> Christian, K., Morrison, F. J., & Bryant, F. (1998). Predicting kindergarten academic skills: Interactions among child care, maternal education and family literacy environments. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.

<sup>13</sup> Carpentieri, J., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Litster, J., Vorhaus, J. (2011). *Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development*. London: NRDC, Institute of Education.

Gilkerson, Richards & Topping (2017) found that language engagement and interaction between parent and child is higher when they are engaged in story reading sessions than during non-reading sessions.<sup>14</sup> Story-reading, therefore, is a worthwhile context to support the development of parent-child language interactions. Baker et al. also found that shared storybook reading plays an important role in promoting reading motivations and that it is related to later interest in independent reading.<sup>15</sup>

Most of the research on home influences found that engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education, and income.<sup>16</sup> This is a key finding. By implication it means that a child can read his/her way out of disadvantage. When discussing quality interactions, affect cannot be ignored, that is, the relationship between the people involved in the interaction. There is evidence to suggest that a number of aspects of parenting, such as the quality of parent-child attachment, and the way in which control and warmth are combined to form a parenting style, have had strong significant effects on children's later psychological adjustment.<sup>17</sup>

Bus (1993) also wrote about how reading to children strengthens the emotional attachment between child and caregiver.<sup>18</sup> Terms such as 'reciprocity' (NCCA, 2009) appears in literature on attachment in connection with reading.

The aim of this empirical study is to evaluate the significance of the project to The Book Magic Project participants – families, support practitioners and the CYPSC Active and Healthy 0-6 years sub group members – and examine if the outcomes confirm what policy and theoretical thinking has proposed. This following section of the evaluation presents the findings and analysis of The Book Magic Project using a mixed methods evaluation strategy.

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<sup>14</sup> Gilkerson, J., Richards, J. & Topping, K. (2017). The impact of book reading in the early years on parent-child language interaction. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*.

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## CHAPTER 4

### The Book Magic Project: Evaluation Findings and Analysis



The purpose of the evaluation study was to establish the views of those involved in The Book Magic Project. The participant sample was asked for their views on the impact of the project, on the modus operandi of the project and on ways that the project might be improved. This chapter begins by presenting the findings from children and parents followed by that of the family support practitioners. The data arising from the evaluation gathering phase was analysed under a thematic framework influenced by The Book Magic Project aims, the literature review and the evaluation brief itself.

Thematic analysis was introduced as the analytic strategy and its compatibility with the evaluation study's policy and theoretical framework was noted. This chapter will present and discuss the findings from the entire data set.

**Family Perspectives:** As stated previously, two families took part in the evaluation process collectively comprising two adults and four children. The children were all under the age of seven years. The two families concerned in this small sample had previously encountered poor parental mental health in the case of one family and physical illness and bereavement in the case of the other family. Each family were in receipt of support from a range of agencies.

*“Reading to your baby and young child has been proven to help grow their brain, grow a bond between you, and helps develop their language, emotional literacy and creativity.”*

*– The Book Magic Project  
Explanatory Sheet for Parents*

Tusla Zero to Six Family Support service was the key service in the provision of support for both families at the time of writing. It was clear from the sample families involved in the interviews that the introduction of The Book Magic Project into their households was successful. Parents expressed significant impacts arising from The Book Magic Project including improved attachment and supportive behaviours in building attachment, emotional wellbeing and parental empowerment. While less significant they also felt that the project introduced and encouraged literacy concepts simply as one parent stated “by the books being in the house”. In respect to encouraging library use one family were already public library use while the other family had increased their visiting of the library and felt that they “will use it more frequently in the future”.

The following section gives a thematic presentation of the responses arising from the family group interviews and seeks to give voice to the parents and children reaction to The Book Magic Project by including direct quotes and assessment of the impact of the project on the families.

**Enhanced Attachment:** Both families identified that the “moments of reading together” (parent) played a significant part in their day and in “working through” specific traumatic events with the child as opposed for the child. Parents felt that it added structure to the day and located a particular child-parent time to spend together – “it’s a regular thing... a way to end the day” (parent). Children spoke about how much they “liked picking and reading the book” with their parent. Parents recognised that “reading and discussing” what was happening in the books provided “a chance to listen to him” and



understanding “how he was feeling” and well as means of expressing empathy and care for the child. The books were a focus to connect with their children and spend time together that was not “chaotic”. The ‘look of the books’ ensured families were willing and happy to engage with The Book Magic Project – “so attractive that any child would want to pick them up and read... they were fun too! It was easy to pick up the book and read with him” (parent).

**Improved Emotional Well-being:** The Book Magic Project allowed the children “to make sense of what was happening” by talking about “what was going on in *Fergal is Fuming*”(parent). It offered a space and time to read together and talk about the characters in the book and “relating what was happening to the character and what was happening in his life”(parent). The reading was child-led, children spoke about “you can make up your own words,” by looking at the pictures. One child spoke about how the book helped in dealing with worry and described “the worry was really big and getting bigger but talking made it smaller and smaller... took the worry away (*Ruby’s Worry*).

**Supported Parental Empowerment:** Parents indicated that it helped their connection with their children “just being together side by side while reading... it’s not every night but often”. Parents felt that by reading the book together and making that space and time for reading allowed them to “listen to what they the children) were feeling”. One parent spoke previously not being “equipped to deal with what she was feeling – all I got was that she was sad – but with the book, I understood the sadness and she talked about it through the book”.

**Introduced and Supported Literacy and Language Development:** Both families were conscious that through the introduction of The Book Magic Project in their homes that their children became print aware; it increased their children’s understanding of how to hold a book (two very young children), turning the page and especially describing illustrations; and – as one child indicated, “I like the rhyming... it’s fun” – supported the building blocks for reading, especially word recognition and sounds.

Access to the “special” books allowed the children to explore their own concept of the story “making up their own stories... even giving a different ending!” (parent) thereby exploring word meanings, story structure and building confidence in using words to describe the illustrations.

**Books as Conduit for Emotional Expression:** The attractiveness of the books on offer was raised again as a significant factor in ensuring that the families engaged in story reading together and the child own independent reading – “they are such lovely books you would just have to pick them and look at them... very attractive to the kids” (parent). For the most part, The Book Magic books were picture books where words while important, it was the pictures that drew both child and parent into the story, supporting an opportunity for emotional expression, opinion and expansion of vocabulary to describe feelings.

In reviewing feedback from families, supporting and improving emotional well-being is the predominant outcome for families at this stage of the project’s delivery, particularly in facilitating children and parents to discuss the experience of poor adult mental health in the family:

“Family with [parent] suffering severe depression for the first time... gave (other parent) ‘*The Colour Thief*’, ‘*In my Heart*’ and ‘*The Princess and The Fog*’. [Parent] and the children (aged 6 and 8 years) loved the first two in particular and reported that they were very helpful in discussing a challenging topic for them.”

A notable aspect of one family’s experience was unanticipated outcomes but significant in terms of family support approach used by practitioners. The parent stated that The Book Magic Project took “the fear of Tusla away”. When this statement was explored further with the parent, it became clear that The

Book Magic Project provided an opportunity for the support agency and family to communicate, build a better rapport and eliminate possible negative feeling towards a support agency because of a different approach and avenue perhaps not formerly exercised:

“Tusla being involved (in the family) is never something you want, you are a bit afraid of... they are involved because something is wrong or broken... but the books changed that... here she (Family Support Worker) is handing us these books and talking about them and suggests how to use... it just takes the fear of Tusla away” (parent).

This simple statement points to an emphasis on dialogue rather than didacticism throughout The Book Magic Project, allowing for a sharing of positive, accessible and constructive mechanisms in this case books and story reading that makes the process of working with parents inclusive and reciprocal rather than didactic and passive.

In terms of recommendations for the future development of The Book Magic Project, parents and children did not articulate specific recommendations with the exception of one family. The children agreed and recommended that the books should “be given to other boys and girls... to make them feel better”.

As with the sample interviews with families the theme of attachment, language and literary development arose in the documentary feedback of family’s experiences of The Book Magic Project, as the following family experience indicates:

“*In My Heart*” – the family also have this book in Spanish and they really enjoyed having the opportunity to share it together as a multi-lingual family”.

The Book Magic Project was used to support the addressing of significant emotional challenges experienced by children and their families. The following provides a sample of the feedback and the range of emotional issues The Book Magic Project sought to support in addressing with families:

★ “6-year-old boy with an ill sibling and separation from a parent [gave] ‘*Look Who’s Here* (Mindfully Me)’ and ‘*Worries Go Away*’.”

★ “Used ‘*Ruby’s Worry*’ with an 8-year-girl suffering from anxiety in school”.

★ “5-year-old boy with parent with severe mental health issues and separation from a parent had ‘*Fergal is Fuming*’.”

★ “One little boy (aged 6 years) who is a huge worrier got the book ‘*My Bag of Worries*’ to bring home to read and chat about with his family.”

Families at this stage of the project development uniformly expressed their contentment with the outcomes that the books facilitated within their families. The support process that arises through The Book Magic Project available from the various support agencies increased the emotional wellbeing, improved attachment and general introduction and enhancement of literacy and language development as well as increased access and use of the welcoming public space in libraries.

“...be given to other boys and girls... to make them feel better.”

– Child participant

**Practitioners' Perspectives:** Throughout the evaluation process, interface with the various support agencies resulted in shared enthusiasm for The Book Magic Project and a recognition that the books were “empowering and supporting children and parents through difficult transitioning”. In addition, the uniformity of reflections on The Book Magic Project by practitioners was clear throughout the evaluation process. These perspectives are arranged in similar thematic outcomes as used in the family perspective to ensure alignment with the evaluation aims.

**The Book Magic Project Establishment and Process:** Practitioners commented on how “simple” the idea of The Book Magic Project is – “encouraging families to pick up a book and read” and that it is “value for money” use of resources.

The development of the launch of The Book Magic Project that allowed practitioners “to come pick out book that we felt were appropriate for their service and their families” was identified as an important plank in the positivity surrounding the project, supporting a networking opportunity and even generation of new cross agency initiatives:

“The book launch was also a wonderful opportunity to meet individuals in other services. I have met [another service] and we are planning a project around educating the Traveller community on the services we offer, it was extremely beneficial to chat to [service] and understand the values, cultures, lifestyle of the Traveller community”.

**Enhanced Attachment:** As stated previously, supporting the attachment process was a driving force from the outset of The Book Magic Project. Practitioners recognised the importance of attachment from infant mental health right through to adulthood. All practitioners interviewed indicated that The Book Magic Project supported this message of attachment particularly in households experiencing emotional, physical, cultural, financial and social challenges.

“As a result of ‘Magic Books’ I encouraged a mother (parenting alone) of a 2-year-old to use books to build up her positive interactions with her child. I encouraged her to use the books under the concept of the 3 Cs, which pre-schools use with kids by putting pictures of their family on the school wall. The 3 Cs are: Confidence, Conversation, Comfort” (Support Service Practitioner).

“One family accessed ‘*Ruby’s Worry*’ from being signposted to it during a parenting course (Common Sense parenting – Tusla) and found it helpful for their child.

Like that of families, practitioners reported that The Book Magic ‘bag’ of books supported child-led engagement with the storytelling process: “One child wrote his name on the actual bag and took ownership.”

**Improved Emotional Well-being/Mental health and Well-being:** In respect of supporting and improving emotional literacy, there was clear fidelity across all support service practitioners who participated in the evaluation process. Each of the practitioners felt that the majority of children participating in The Book Magic Project were better able to relate stories to experiences in their own:

“Children are better able to discuss characters in a story.”

“One child in a family with a bullying experience helped address her stressors – take on board as a family... open the chat and learning how to cope (using) ‘*Ruby’s Worry*’ to teach her how to cope... a tool box on what to do”(Support Service Practitioner).



**Supported Parental Empowerment:** Associated with emotional wellbeing were outcomes in respect of addressing behavioural challenges that some parent encounter and supporting parents in dealing with such issues. To this end, The Book Magic Project was also used in at least two group settings delivered by support service practitioners:

“We facilitate a toddler group and presently we have 10-12 families attending. I place books on table so parents and children have an opportunity to look at them and take them away if they like... The main priority is encouraging parents to enjoy the books, read with their children and bring their children to the library. It is a great way to start conversations around topics like ‘*Hands are Not for Hitting*’, unfortunately, this is a popular book within the group.”

**Supported the Speech and Language Development:** As referred to previously, the range of support services involved in The Book Magic Project was wide and included not only specific family and mental health practitioners but also speech and language practitioners and the delivery of their supports. Feedback from the latter service added additional outcomes to the process including the following:

“Children starting to think they can read from using these books which encourages their speech (motivational).”

“Had a child with high level language delay but they encouraged the family to decide how to use the book to bring out language in the child and this worked well.”

“Supported the developing language needs of a family who speak a different language....”

“Use of repetition was a very useful for the child and family...”

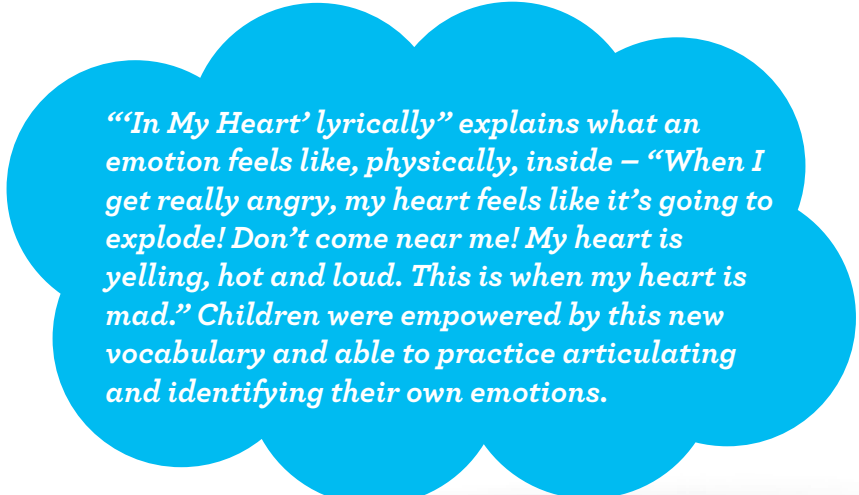
Practitioners felt that the “well chosen” books within The Book Magic Project were a key factor in achieving this outcome. An example of the impact is as follows:

‘*The Princess and the Fog*’ is a good starting point for explaining depression to all children, especially those who may have a parent or close family member with depression.

**Introduced the library as a resource to families:** The majority of practitioners stated that where families were not already members of the library, The Book Magic Project encouraged a positive relationship with their local library as a result of their participation:

“Have completed three library visits with my group... all of whom have now joined the library (only one was joined previously)... we do a story time there and shared discussion on stories read. Hoping parents will continue the library visits over the summer.”

However, four practitioners indicated that for some families they did not see the library “as a place for them”. However, The Book Magic Project may in the future support them to engage with this local community resource. “Some parents were afraid to their take children to the library but are going to try.”



*“‘In My Heart’ lyrically” explains what an emotion feels like, physically, inside – “When I get really angry, my heart feels like it’s going to explode! Don’t come near me! My heart is yelling, hot and loud. This is when my heart is mad.” Children were empowered by this new vocabulary and able to practice articulating and identifying their own emotions.*

**Introduced and Supported Literacy and Language Development:** Again the uniformity in responses amongst support service practitioners in respect literacy and language development was uniformly positive. In support of literacy, practitioners played a significant part in this process by “advising to find a spot in the house, hold the book, concentration, literacy link between reading and speech”.

Practitioners stated that The Book Magic Project encourages parents’ interest in their child’s development in reading – “Learnt the importance of reason to encourage reading, imagination...”.

Observation of the child-parent story reading experience by practitioners suggested that parents used more open-ended questions and conversation prompts and expanded on children’s comments – “I saw an increased interest in listening to stories”. Children, in turn, asked more questions and sought information about the text and commented about the pictures and the text, and generally exhibited enthusiasm for the shared reading activity and “children are more confident in choosing their own books”.

## **The Book Magic Project: Examples of Practice Dissemination**

While the evaluation process sought to concentrate on the reflections of the families and support service practitioners, in the course of the process the sub group members indicated that even in the short period of time that The Book Magic Project was up and running, ‘mainstreaming’ opportunities became apparent. Other communities and groups became interested in The Book Magic Project and its process of development and examination of how it may apply to their communities/groups.

The following examples indicate this wide range of application of The Book Magic Project into the future:

On foot of their involvement in The Book Magic Project and its basic tenet of encouraging attachment, one family resource centre has established a book club for parents and children (0-3 years) and is working with its local library to support the process.

“An active retirement group enquired about the initiative. Two grandparents took down the details of ‘*Ruby’s Worry*’ as they said they have grandchildren who could use the book. They may be a group that would benefit from being made aware of the campaign, as childminding is the role of many Irish grandparents.” (Active and Healthy 0-6 Sub Group member).

“A member of the governance body of Oberstown Children’s Centre in Dublin has taken our Book Magic explanation leaflet this morning, plus our feedback on the initiative so far, and plans to consider how to introduce the concept to the residential unit in Oberstown as she does not have a sense that reading and resilience building/attachment through reading is nurtured with their client group.” (Active and Healthy 0-6 Sub Group member)

“A colleague has suggested we use the Magic Books as part of our Bronntanas campaign every Xmas in Mayo. Volunteers buy gifts worth €25 for families and we can name the books, asking volunteers to buy specifics.” (Active and Healthy 0-6 Sub Group member)

## Proposed Enhancement of the Delivery of The Book Magic Project

While the information garnered from both families and support service practitioners was predominantly positive a number of responses suggested that some additions to The Book Magic Project would enhance the project further. These included:

- ★ **The Book Magic Project Launch and Process:** A minority of practitioners “found the initial launch/circulation of the book bags confusing” and “by the time I got there all the good books were gone!” While the explanatory sheet that accompanied the book bags was useful some practitioners felt “that they have to figure out how to use it in their service”.
- ★ **Inclusion of books reflecting diversity and promoting equality:** “We have a very diverse group and it would be nice to have everyone represented.” The inclusion of “different language books” were proposed by a number of support service practitioners to ensure that new Irish communities and those in Gaeltacht areas have access to The Book Magic Project.
- ★ The focus of The Book Magic Project was on families with children 0 – 6 years, however practitioners felt that **older children and their families would benefit from a similar book reading support programme.**
- ★ Practitioners suggested that **samples of the books should be displayed in one place in the library** (including libraries throughout the county) with some relevant parenting or adult mental health support, healthy eating books, information leaflets etc. on display nearby in order to offer further opportunity to enhance parenting skills and support mechanisms.
- ★ As The Book Magic Project followed a very organic development and engagement with participant families, therefore the administration of The Book Magic Project (especially as it expands) requires an **improved tracking and feedback structure** to ensure that the positives and the challenges that may arise are fully addressed and do not diminish the growth and expansion of the project into the future.

Six months into the project’s launch there is no doubt that The Book Magic Project has nurtured positive relationships between children and parents, encouraged parents’ interest in their children’s development in reading, improved children’s literacy behaviours, encouraged parents to get involved in library activities and fostered good relationships with the local library, increasing the likelihood that parents would continue to use the library after their engagement with The Book Magic Project. Evaluation participants reported that relationships between parents and their children improved as a result of participation in the project and, parents were empowered by their experience of participation in the project.

The modus operandi of the project was strongly endorsed by participants – both families and support service practitioners – stating their intention to continue their involvement with the project. The Book Magic Project appears to have acted as a springboard for many families by becoming involved in the project they then move on to becoming involved in more community connections such as the public library and the bond between the parent and child has been enriched.

As many practitioners indicated in the evaluation process, the ‘special’ aspect of The Book Magic Project was its “simplicity”. It is easily understood by parents. It does not require them to do more than enjoy the company of their child. The benefits were immediate – the enhancement of the parent-child bond and attachment.

That simplicity means that it should expand and it should continue with its focus. For parents and children, The Book Magic Project provided significant, nuanced and positive outcomes often in a ‘chaotic’ emotional environment and,”it became a light at the end of the day”:

“...looked forward to bedtime... he makes up his own stories while I am reading him the story, that I loved to listen to... we look forward to bedtime and story reading... he knew more about things and talk about emotions... more than I realised and we use the books to talk about serious issues... like depression.”

That children and parents were supported to be more able to engage in reading to bridge emotional and attachment between both and the additional benefits of being more positively disposed towards books and reading. Longer-term (while some support service practitioners are seeing already), the increased vocabulary and facility to speculate and extrapolate and the confidence engendered from parental attention among children is apparent.

From the sample of both families and support service practitioners it was apparent that The Book Magic Project can influence children’s learning and parental involvement in their children’s emotional wellbeing and learning. It remains a resource that can potentially be used in other settings including early years’ education as well as in the community where it potentially will continue to strengthen relationships between support service providers and families. In addition, as we have referenced, The Book Magic Project may serve as a model to be used by others interested in developing similar interventions.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Book Magic Project: Conclusion and Recommendations



The following section of this evaluation presents a conclusion with particular reference to the factors that contributed to The Book Magic Project success to date and recommendations for its future development.

Based on the evidence gathered through the evaluation process The Book Magic Project focus on supporting attachment, enhanced emotional wellbeing interwoven with the use of books, vehicles of literacy to support literacy and language development and reach out by the County Mayo Library service has in a short period of time impacted considerably on children, parents and support service practitioners.

The Book Magic Project is an illustration of interdependence between support services in the county and how CYPSC has facilitated agencies to develop an impactful, relevant and cost effect programme of support. It has established that attachment and support from another (e.g. parent-child relationship) is central to the development of emotional wellbeing, parental empowerment language development.

Though still at an early stage the benefits that parents derive from being involved in their children's emotional development through shared book interactions appears to start the process of building greater resilience, greater mental health, improved relationships, greater social competence and less stressful experiences.

An added benefit through less anticipated articulated by both a family and practitioners indicates that The Book Magic Project helps to eliminate negative feelings about servicers for parents and contributes to relationship building with services.

The significant success factors in establishing and ensuring the relevancy and the considerable impact of The Book Magic Project in a very short period of time includes the following:

The Mayo CYSPC Active and Healthy 0-6 years Subgroup collectively identifying needs of families, sharing learning and “building avenues to get to families”. The interagency synergy created by Mayo CYPSC allowed good practice to happen, resourced it to happen through a flexible process of discussion, identification of need and creating a relevant set of actions that was not only impactful but relevant and supports demonstration of the value of CYPSC support learning transfer across agencies as one sub group member indicated it is a “simple partnership (of local agencies) straightforward and not forced”.

“It goes back to CYPSC co-ordinator identifying people who are ready to work with a focus on the early years and the Library and family support members saw the potential of the project.” (Working group member)

The expertise of each member of The Book Magic Project Working Group demonstrates the value of partnership and highlights the strategic use of relatively minimal resources “that works well together to implement a vision”. Sub group members stated a contributing factor to the success of The Book Magic Project was “the right people at the right time delivering a simple idea but the facilitation structure through CYPSC was there”.

In line with CYPSC's focus, The Book Magic Project further implements the importance of children voice in initiatives ensuring child-led actions were central to the initiative e.g. supporting a child picking the book to read.

The books in The Book Magic Project "were well chosen" by the library service and this aspect of the Project should not be under-estimated as was identified throughout the evaluation process by both families and support service practitioners. Picture books, some with no words supported not only traditional and emotional literacy but ensured accessibility for both the child and the parent especially where adult literacy was an issue. The involvement of the public library service remains a significant plank in the success and continuation of The Book Magic Project.

The conscious and deliberate participation of Mayo County Library service added status and significance to the project. Situating the project in a community environment that has reach to multiple communities across the county gave parents and children an opportunity to come into a venue that they may never previously have visited. This support to the parent/child through the process of joining the library and meeting library personnel who are familiar with The Book Magic Project has significant potential to embed the project in the communities across the county.

The Book Magic Project is clearly becoming a resource for practitioners as part of their "scaffolding approach" for families and support enhanced communication and allows for a "softer" approach to family support – "supported by a trusted agreement with families - no pressure to return 'honesty thing' handing over trust and responsibility to people". The primary concept of family support is to provide support to the family as a unit as opposed to working in isolation primarily with one individual's needs and for practitioners to work collaboratively and form partnerships with parents and their families in order to support the parents.

It is clear that The Book Magic Project has not yet reached its optimum potential in providing opportunities for expansion to other agencies and within agencies such as pre-school/play school leaders, education system such as DEIS schools/school completion and/or CYPSC Education Sub-group and the potential for local authority and health promotion structures:

"Look at different ways of using the library – pre-school block loans, focus on class room assistants, incorporate healthy reading for parents".

For instance, the DEIS strategy describes actions to support parents and communities – "provide advice and information to parents to enable them to support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development" (p.22).

The strategy advises schools to build effective working relationships with parents and communities and advises schools to build effective working relationships with parents and communities to support learning and in so doing to use Home-School-Community liaison (HSCL) teachers to support this work in DEIS schools (p.23). This concurs with the aims of The Book Magic Project.

It also encourages schools to get involved in initiatives in parental and wider community initiatives that support literacy and numeracy. It specifically mentions shared reading and the library services as examples. Therefore, The Book Magic Project is perfectly suited to establishing in a programme involving parents and school.

Public health nurses came in for special mention among practitioners in terms of the future development of The Book Magic Project as the evolution of public health nursing has avenues to and can concentrate energies on those experiencing disadvantage and potential added value to a focus on perinatal mental health.

Its potential to further diminish social inequality by facilitating children in gaining significant literary and language skills in advance of formal education, but above all building their emotional and mental health resilience through increased feeling of security, attachment and care from their parent or parents will bear dividends into the future. As an abundance of research highlighted previously children who have been read to are substantially ahead of children who have not been read to traditionally on tests of language development. Children can jump ahead by several months in just a few weeks of reading. We have found these effects with children from economic backgrounds ranging from poverty to affluence.

From a rural development perspective and considering the rurality of County Mayo and financial barriers that families can experience, many rural areas in County Mayo do not have a bookshop/local library branch and books can be expensive but this project has provided families with a continuing supply of quality books.

In addition, The Book Magic Project has potential to bridge cultural estrangement gap experienced by some families including the Traveller Community and new Irish communities where significant literacy both traditional and emotional barriers can occur because of social and cultural inequalities.

However, as one key agency stated:

“The potential for this project is immense, it just needs to gradually increase its reach and not take on too much too soon”.

The collaboration of partners in this initiative – CYPSC, Mayo County Library Service, HSE Health Promotion and Improvement and Tusla Zero to Six Family Support – are of paramount importance in the continued delivery of The Book Magic Project. In addition, each partner within the working group and Active and Healthy 0-6 years Sub Group have their own independent networks and cross-pollination will potentially occur, which needs to be planned for to ensure it is managed and resourced to continue to effectiveness of this initiative.

In order to support the future development the following recommendations and measurable objectives based on a combination of reflections from families and support service practitioners to provide direction for the future development of The Book Magic Project.



## Future Directions

Objective	Activities	Measurables	Projected Outcomes
To establish The Book Magic Project in the education environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Pilot delivery of The Book Magic Project in infant classes</li> <li>★ Deliver a Book Magic presentation to infant class parents so as to encourage parents to participate in The Book Magic Project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Delivery in three DEIS schools in three areas of County Mayo</li> <li>★ Delivery of presentation directly to parents of infant class children in three DEIS schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Increased child participation in The Book Magic Project</li> <li>★ Increased understanding by parents of the emotional, educational and attachment benefits of The Book Magic Project approach</li> </ul>
To pilot a focus on older children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Pilot delivery of the Book Magic Project to older children (10-12 years) in one school setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Identification of Book Magic Books for older children</li> <li>★ Deliver to 12 older children in one primary school participating in the School Completion Programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Increased emotional and literacy support through reading</li> <li>★ Enhanced link with parents of older children at risk of poor mental and emotional health, and poor transitioning to post primary schools</li> </ul>
Establish ongoing support, evaluation and learning documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Deliver a series of formal induction workshops to new services and sectors</li> <li>★ Development of accompanying explanatory sheets for specific sectors such as education</li> <li>★ Review the project annually with 'existing' practitioners who use The Book Magic Project</li> <li>★ Expand practitioner's knowledge of the benefits and application of The Book Magic Project such as use in Play Therapy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ One annual induction workshop</li> <li>★ One annual review and information seminar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Introduction of The Book Magic Project to 'new' services and sectors to gradually increase involvement of wider support services</li> <li>★ Increased practitioners sharing of ideas and 'tips' in using the Book Magic Project</li> <li>★ Documentation of practitioner's experience of implementation and outcomes of The Book Magic Project</li> </ul>



### Future Directions

Objective	Activities	Measurables	Projected Outcomes
To increase Book Magic practical resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Develop a list of activities for parents</li> <li>★ Develop Book Magic book review sheet for children where they can draw or write their own review</li> <li>★ Gather parenting books with information on attachment, addressing behavioural challenges in library setting with link to Book Magic Project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ One parent support sheet</li> <li>★ One book review sheet</li> <li>★ List of parenting support books in library setting associated with The Book Magic Project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Enhanced support tools for parents</li> <li>★ Increased child evaluation of the Book Magic books</li> <li>★ Enhanced support and promotion of The Book Magic Project in local libraries</li> </ul>
To develop a Book Magic operational plan for 2021–2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Develop The Book Magic Project Operational Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Operational plan containing vision, aims, objectives, actions, financials, review and risk assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Effective growth of The Book Magic Project function and activities over a three-year period</li> </ul>



Notes





Leabharlann Chontae Mhaigh Eo  
Mayo County Library



ciste na  
gcuntas díomhaoin  
the dormant  
accounts fund



Healthy  
Mayo



TUSLA  
An Ombudsman's Office  
Liamán na n-Engleabhar  
Children's Family Agency



Healthy Ireland  
at your Library



MAYO.IE



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEES

Mayo