

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre  
11th Biennial International Conference

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11<sup>th</sup> Biennial  
International Conference

Promoting Equality  
Through *Family Support*

13 - 14  
June 2024

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,  
University of Galway



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Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June – Schedule

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<b>Parallel Session 4: G006</b>	<b>Promoting Equality through Research and Evidence</b>	
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Supporting Families in Conditions of Extreme Adversity – how the Greentown Programme Learned to Work with Complex Realities	Dr Jane Mulcahy, Dr Catherine Naughtan, Dr Sean Redmond	

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A Demonstration Project between an Irish Child Welfare Agency (Tusla) and a UCD Systemic Family Psychotherapy Training Programme to Promote Access to Training and Therapeutic Service in a Statutory Child Welfare Agency	Valerie O'Brien, Niall Reynolds, Marina Everri, Diane Hanly, Catriona Redmond, Mattia Messena	
All Things to All People: The Inseparability of Quality and (In)equality in Meaningful Family Support	Dr Maria O'Dwyer, Susan Brocklesby	

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<b>Parallel Session 8: Bioscience Building</b>		<b>Workshop 2</b>
Accepting Non-Neutrality and Walking Together: Exploring Liberation Praxis to Embrace Identity, Justice-seeking, and Equity in Family Support Practice	Becca Dove	

<b>Parallel Session 9: Bioscience Building</b>		<b>Workshop 3</b>
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## Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June – Abstracts

### Parallel Session 1: GO23

### Promoting Equality in Child and Family Support 1

#### **What about Engaging with Men in Family Support? Just for Dads – a Groupwork Programme for Fathers**

*Hilary Jenkinson, Social Work Lecturer, School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork*

Engaging men, and fathers in particular is an often overlooked and challenging area of family support practice. Is this because fathers are reluctant to get involved or is it because they tend to be overlooked by services? Faced with the challenge of engaging fathers in family work, colleagues from Springboard family support service, Knocknaheeny in Cork and the School of Applied Studies in University College Cork developed Just for Dads, a pioneering, ten-week groupwork programme aimed at engaging with fathers and supporting them in their parenting role.

This presentation will outline the processes of devising the Just for Dads programme, the achievements and challenges of facilitating the group as well as the lessons learned and practice insights gained along the way. In particular the value of peer support among fathers and the use of a strengths-based approach will be explored as these have emerged as particularly important aspects of the programme from both the facilitators and service users' perspectives.

Just for Dads is an open access groupwork programme available free to practitioners for download and use.

#### **Powerful Parenting: How Family Support can Promote Inclusion and Fairness in its Approach to Working with Parents**

*Louise Renwick, The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)*

The Aim of this presentation is to reflect on inclusive practices promoted within the Powerful Parenting model that break down barriers to accessing effective family supports.

It draws on research from Catarina Leitão. (2022) entitled "Evaluation of the CDI Parenting Support Model: Powerful Parenting" along with using CDI's internal quantitative monitoring and evaluation data and findings.

The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) developed and has been implementing the Powerful Parenting Model (PPM) since 2008. The PPM is an evidence-informed parental participation model. The model places Parent Carer Facilitators (PCFs) directly within Early Years Settings, and more recently in International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS), in Tallaght. PCFs support parents of babies and young children within the services, in their homes and in the community. Powerful Parenting aims to:

- Improve parental resilience and coping skills.
- Improve parental engagement in their child's learning and development.
- Improve parental competence and confidence.

The PPM embodies inclusion in a unique way, ensuring PCFs are placed within services to facilitate inclusive and accessible supports. The PCF team serve as 'connectors', ensuring support is readily

available to parents, dismantling barriers to this support by being present on site in the early year's settings, IPAS settings and being a presence in the local community. In 2023, our PCF team engaged in 360 one to one meetings with parents and conducted 47 home visits. In addition, 301 parents were supported through courses such as infant massage and Parents Plus. PCFs also made 134 referrals to other services as part of their direct work with parents.

The PPM has been evaluated (Leitao, 2022), with key strengths being identified as:

- focusing on more than one area of need
- easily accessible support
- tailored support
- coordination with other services
- and focus on building trusting relationships with families.

This presentation will focus on how the PPM has played a key role in promoting equality and inclusion among parents and families in Tallaght, integrating key findings from the programme evaluation and CDI's monitoring and evaluation processes.

### **An Evaluation of a Programme for Children in Refuge**

*Dr Eleanor Hollywood, Associate Professor in Children's Nursing, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin*

The aim of this research was to conduct an evaluation of the 'Where I'm At' project for Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services (MWRSS). Case study research utilising qualitative data sources was employed for the evaluation. One of the most fundamental aspects of engaging case study research is the identification of 'the case' and the identification of 'the context'. For the evaluation 'the case' was the 'Where I'm At' project which forms part of the children's programme at MWRSS and 'the context' was the refuge where women and their children stay. The context in this case study research is comprised of, and influenced by, economic, social, political, and historical elements which were all considered in the evaluation. In case study research it is the designated 'units of analysis' that form the case, and for this evaluation the main units of analysis were the interviews with the women in the refuge and the interviews with the children in the refuge. There were also subunits of analysis within the case which consisted of handprint evaluations collected from women in refuge, handprint evaluations and reflective diary notes collected from key workers at the refuge and a 'walking in their shoes' exercise completed by keyworkers at the refuge. Ethical approval was secured prior to data collection. All data was managed using NVivo computer software and thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. The findings indicate that the 'Where I'm At' project is a significantly valuable component of the Children's Programme at MWRSS. The role of the Children's Support Worker cannot be underestimated as indicated from the numerous positive interview extracts from women and children. This research has showcased how the Children's Support Worker provides support for the child individually and within their family. Since this evaluation Tusla has mainstreamed funding for a Children's Support Worker at MWRSS.

### **Parallel Session 2: Auditorium**

### **Supporting Children and Families in Formal and Informal Care Arrangements 1**

#### **Informal Kinship Care - Supporting those that Step up**

*Laura Dunleavy coordinator of Kinship Care Ireland, a national program hosted by Treoir*

This presentation will explore kinship care and the current context of the work of Kinship Care Ireland. Kinship care is the fulltime care of a child by a relative or close family friend when they are

unable to be cared for by a parent. Kinship care can arise due to the death of a parent, or the impact of other Adverse Childhood Experiences. The need for kinship care can often arise in response to a crisis and families have specific support needs.

Kinship Care Ireland (KCI) aims to promote the recognition, rights, and entitlements of children, young people and families in kinship care.

Topics covered in this presentation will include;

- Kinship Care Ireland- who are we and what do we do.
- What is kinship care- formal & informal.
- The benefits of kinship care for children and families.
- The gaps in practice and challenges that impact kinship families as a result.
- Current context of kinship care in Ireland, research nationally and internationally.
- The voice of kinship carers, the voice of young people in kinship care.
- In the interim of policy- what can we do as practitioners? Useful resources and information to share with kinship carers.
- The importance of getting the right information to kinship carers, at the right time.
- Q&A

In February 2023, The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Irish Government develop 'a policy on the rights of the children in informal kinship care'. The Department of Children Equality Disability Integration & Youth are developing this policy, as cited in Young Ireland National Framework.

### **Practitioner Research: Informing Practice to Generate Debate and Maintain Solidarity in Context of Social Inequality**

*Denis Murray, Family/Systemic Psychotherapist, HSE Adolescent Addiction Service*

The number of children in Ireland experiencing poverty, homelessness or accommodation insecurity and associated educational, social and health related impact is on the rise. In the circumstances, it is incumbent on services and professionals to develop an ethic of hospitality and supportive relationships, which may help to create a buffer from adverse circumstances.

Official Statistics from the Department of Health showed 9188 adults and 3991 children accessed emergency accommodation during October 2023. However, FEANTSA, the European umbrella organisation for agencies working with homeless, highlight that many more people live in vulnerable situations that equate to homelessness. The circumstances leading to people becoming homeless are multiple and varied. Research indicates that 38% become homeless before age nineteen years. Poverty figures for 2022 indicate that 7.5% of children in Ireland were living in consistent poverty, which equates to 89,288 children. These deficits can cascade into further impacts on health, education and behaviour including the seductiveness of substance use. In the circumstances, practitioners, working with people on the margins of society, ought to be active in identifying, quantifying, and describing the range of issue that are causing distress and pain in the lives of the people they meet. Practitioner research ought to be viewed as a work in progress and made available to the widest possible audience, in order to generate debate, inform policy and maintain solidarity in context of social injustice and to advocate for resources especially when the welfare of children is at issue. The creation of a just society is a collective responsibility and as such, it is important that practitioners do

not to separate clinical knowledge from cultural, social, economic or gender knowledge as to do so could have the effect of silencing the voice of the main victims of inequitable economic policies.

### **“Families. Not Institutions.” A Roadmap for Care Reform for Children**

*Michela Costa, Nolan Quigley, Otto Sestak and Victoria Olarte, Hope and Homes for Children, 2022*

This publication distils nearly thirty years of Hope and Homes for Children’s experience in driving forward care reform across a variety of contexts, supporting our ultimate aim of consigning the institutionalisation of children to the history books.

It provides critical lessons learned, practical evidence and recommendations to support global, regional and national decision makers to build political will, strategies, policies, and target funding to transform care systems.

#### Summary: Care Reform and Poverty’s Role in Child Institutionalization

Globally, poverty is a significant factor leading to the institutionalization of children, often exacerbated by systemic biases and discrimination. The roadmap “Families. Not Institutions” advocates for family and community care as alternatives to harmful institutionalization. It outlines the benefits of care reform and its alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The roadmap views care reform as a systemic approach that can prevent unnecessary family separation and institutionalization, promoting societal change and equality. However, ignoring systemic causes can be detrimental, emphasizing the need for investments in families over institutions.

The roadmap discusses the structural barriers leading to institutionalization:

- **Poverty as a Driver:** Poverty directly leads to children being separated from families and placed in institutions. It amplifies other factors like disability, gender, violence, and discrimination. Without social protection, families are vulnerable to circumstances that may lead to separation.
- **Systemic Biases:** Poverty intersects with biases, especially affecting girls and women. Gender discrimination in healthcare, education, and social protection increases their vulnerability. Women’s lack of agency in fulfilling child protection roles further contributes to this issue.
- **Policy Concerns:** Focusing solely on poverty without addressing systemic bias and discrimination risks creating policies that only redistribute resources. It’s crucial to consider these biases to effectively combat child institutionalization. Reference to SDG 5 - gender equality, is also pertinent.

The roadmap serves as a guide for policy-makers and practitioners to transform child care systems by transitioning from institutionalized settings to nurturing environments that uphold children’s rights and promote their holistic development. It is a call to action to prevent the separation of children from their families and to end the cycle of harm caused by institutions. The roadmap’s approach is integral to achieving the SDGs and ensuring that no child is left behind in the pursuit of a more inclusive and supportive society.

### **Understanding the Experiences of LGBTQ+ Young Adults During Their Time in Care**

*Dr. Marlene Matarese, University of Galway, School of Political Science & Sociology, Social Work Programme/The University of Connecticut, School of Social Work and Dr. Declan Coogan University of Galway, School of Political Science & Sociology, Social Work Programme*

LGBTQ+ young people are a vulnerable population which is exacerbated when they are also involved in the child welfare system. It is estimated that youth who identify as LGBT represent between 3% and 8% of youth in the United States, yet studies have found that over 30% of children in the child welfare system identify as LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ youth in foster care have been found to experience disparities including being more likely to: report mistreatment by staff and caregivers while in foster care, be placed in congregate care, have multiple placements and disruptions, to be hospitalized for emotional reasons, and experience barriers to accessing gender affirming medical care.

In Ireland and abroad, studies have also found LGBTQ+ youth to be more likely to experience behavioural health risks including depression; anxiety; suicidality; substance use, and risk of sexually transmitted infections. Though there is minimal research in Ireland focused on LGBTQ+ children in child welfare, reports have noted that LGBTQ+ youth are anecdotally over-represented in the care system but there is not data to verify this. This can lead to an invisible, overrepresented, vulnerable population of youth that do not feel safe, supported, or experience culturally responsive care.

This session will provide an overview of a small mixed method study of primarily qualitative interviews with LGBTQ+ care leavers aged 18-29 living in Ireland. This session will highlight the experiences that LGBTQ+ young adults had in the Irish care system and how they were supported around their SOGIE while in care. Participants will learn strategies to improve the Irish care system for LGBTQ+ children and youth currently in care and build on successes to improve policy and practice.

### **Family Support Practitioners Providing Tailored Support to Families in State Provided Accommodation**

*Charlene Duff, National CoOrdinator, Prevention, Partnership and Family Support and Donna Butler ESF+ Officer, Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, Tusla.*

Families in state accommodation experience the most complex trauma on leaving their birth country to be living in Ireland and are frequently living in inadequate accommodation, experiencing discrimination, limited access to general practitioners, and other services required for their health and wellbeing.

Research recommends that tailored family support is developed for refugee parents to support them in adjusting to parenting in a new context. Tailored family support programmes should be developed for refugee parents to support them in adjusting to parenting in a new context, suggesting ways in which that can get accomplished.

Tusla with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth made an application for funding to the Managing Authority in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science who has responsibility for implementation of the ESF+ in Ireland. The request was for funding to be made available for the provision of dedicated family support practitioners to provide a standardised pathway for family support to parents and children, including applicants in the

International Protection system as part of a multiagency, multidisciplinary approach. The Family Support Practitioner would be in place as a standard pathway, as a point of contact in each Tusla area, with a role in supporting families and coordinating them with relevant professionals delivering child and family support services in the community.

The presentation will provide an overview of the process of identifying a gap in provision, to the successful funding allocation through to early project implementation, noting the data and monitoring collection tools used in the process. It will provide an overview of the Family Support Practitioner posts funded under European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) across 17 Tusla regions. The presentation will discuss the implementation of the project and give insight into the early identified needs presenting by families in state provided accommodation and the response by the integrated pathways of the ESF+ funded project.

### **Providing Meaningful ‘Access’ for Children in Care by Empowering Birth Parents**

*Berni Smyth, CEO of Kerry Diocesan Youth Services (KDYS); Peig O’Sullivan, Coordinator of Cróige – Tusla-funded KDYS Access Service*

This workshop will explore the tension that exists between ‘the Best Interest Principle’ and the experience of ‘Access’ for birth parents whose children are in State Care.

Cróige is a project established to provide meaningful access for Children in Care with their biological parents. The staff on this team have worked in the community for 16+ years building a strong reputation for strengths-based family support. This workshop is informed by interviews conducted with biological parents availing of the service in 2022.

In 2022, 44 biological parents engaged with the service and the service arranged and supervised 1,500 + access visits. 15 families within this cohort are care experienced themselves accounting for 50 children now in the Care system with some families experience of Care spanning two generations. Over half of the parents engaged in the Cróige project in 2022 were known to KDYS as children with high levels of trust in the service.

Biological parents who participated in this study, reported feelings of powerlessness. The relationship between parents and social workers can be both complex and difficult (Thompson & Thorpe 2004, Forrester et al 2008), while parents who have lost the custody of their children often feel disempowered by the authorities (Slettebo 2011). The workshop will explore how parental participation is based on the desire to support parents to have a positive role in Care planning.

This workshop sets out relevant research and best practice examples demonstrating that support for biological parents, informed by family support principles, leads to more positive engagement and ultimately better outcomes for their children. Using case examples, this interactive workshop will examine complex issues relating to Care and Access arrangements to identify solutions that support the participation of biological parents in planning for their child’s care and that enhance ‘the best interest principle.’

### **Promoting Equality by Exploring the Role and Voice of Young Carers in Family Support**

*Ms. Victoria Mc Donagh, Lecturer and Head of Department of Social Care & Early Childhood at the South East Technological University. Doctoral candidate in Social Science at University College Cork*

Young carers and young adult carers, play a pivotal role for many families in society, however their voice is often not heard and recognised in both policy and practice. Leu and Becker (2022) describe Ireland as emerging with regard to research, policy and practice for young carers. Young carers often

go unrecognised and hidden in society, yet they provide a crucial support system for the family unit. There are often many challenges for caring roles and caring relationships within families. It is difficult to understand the true prevalence of caring by young carers in Irish society, therefore many young carers and their families may struggle without formal support and services. The aim of this presentation is to highlight the role and voice of young carers within the family and family support system.

This presentation derives from current PhD research being undertaken by the author, exploring the concept of young carers for future practice and policy in Ireland. The author derives from a practice background, having worked for many years in family support and family support with family carers. The author also has lived past experience as a young carer. The presentation will contribute to the overarching theme of the conference by presenting current research and early research findings of an international policy analysis of young carer policy and practice, to explore what Ireland can learn and potentially develop into policy and practice for young carers. This presentation will hope to contribute to the awareness and discussion of the role young carers within the family support system.

**Parallel Session 4: G006**

**Promoting Equality through Programme and Policy Development**

### **Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) as a Tool for Promoting Equality in Social Programs**

*Sebastian Galindo, Arati Joshi, and Dharmendra Kalauni, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, University of Florida*

Countries and developmental organizations across the globe implement a variety of welfare and social programs with a common goal of fostering equity, promoting human development and reducing socio-economic disparities within communities. Evaluating the effectiveness and impact of such a program requires careful consideration and understanding of the culture and cultural context. Culture and cultural context encompass factors beyond the demographics, such as power and societal norms. When evaluators lack cultural competence for the identification and understanding of these factors, their biases may affect the design and implementation of evaluations, the interpretation of findings, and the elaboration of appropriate recommendations. Adoption of principles of culturally responsive practices (CRE) is recommended to avoid such consequences and promote equality. This study aims to review the principles of CRE and its application in various social programs. Data for this study were collected through the systematic review of journal articles, reports, and white papers found through Google and Google Scholar. Relevant sources, selected from the search results, were identified and imported to the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Analysis was done in NVivo to identify the documented principles of CRE and its applications to promote equality in social programs. The authors developed a series of recommendations for the utilization of CRE that are grounded both on the study's data and on their personal experiences evaluating a variety of programs. Findings revealed that developing cultural competence, working with diverse team members, ensuring evaluation validity and rigor, using innovative evaluation strategies, and promoting participatory evaluation approaches are crucial for CRE. To promote equality in social programs, evaluation design should incorporate the concepts of participatory, responsive, empowerment, and utilization-based evaluation.

### **Learning from the Covid-19 Pandemic: Promoting Equality for Children in Government Policy Development**

*Dr. Natasha Daniels, Dr. Danielle Kennan, University of Galway*

This presentation is based on qualitative research undertaken in 2023, focused on the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on the rights of children experiencing disadvantage. This research is part of an international project working towards the development and implementation of Child Right Impact Assessment (CRIA) for us across European policy decision making processes. The project partners included Foroige, the Children's Rights Alliance, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Eurochild and the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, who led this research.

The overarching aim of the research was to develop an understanding of how a child equality lens can be embedded into policy decision-making and development in the future. Data was collected from two critical cohorts to develop our understanding of this. Firstly, consultations with 50 children experiencing disadvantage were conducted, focusing on their identification of what rights were not upheld during Covid-19. Secondly, interviews with 13 public officials with decision making responsibility during this time of emergency were conducted. These focused on examining the extent to which decision-making processes included an assessment of the impact on children's rights, and whether consideration was given to structural inequalities.

This presentation will triangulate the knowledge gained from the children and the public officials and reiterate the importance of embedding CRIs within policy development processes in the future. Evidence relating to the inequalities disadvantaged children experienced, and evidence of how this was and could have been better considered will be presented. The essential need for the data informing these assessments to be disaggregated, to take account of children experiencing disadvantage, will be highlighted. In addition, the essential role of the community and voluntary organisations in moderating the impacts of the pandemic restrictions on disadvantaged children will be highlighted. In conclusion, a child rights-based approach to policy related decision making that in turn can ensure inequities are considered in decision-making and addressed will be promoted.

### **Wraparound Therapeutic Supports within a Family Support/ Community Development Setting**

*Grace Kearney, National Programme Lead, Family Resource Centre National Forum. Sandra Roe & Dr. Annabel Egan, Independent Researchers*

Family Resource Centre's ( FRC's) are key active agents within the community based therapeutic field, providing fundamental therapeutic support for individual and group-based therapy. Lending itself to full early intervention and prevention support provision for families, individuals, and communities. The model of practice being endorsed by the FRC National Programme is a 'wraparound approach' literally wrapping services and supports around families to ensure a holistic approach.

In 2022, the HSE provided once off 'Recovery & Resilience' funding to the FRC National Programme to fund therapeutic support for Children and their families in the aftermath of Covid 19. This funding enabled the FRC's to provide 15,347 therapeutic support hours to 4,548 Children and 3,820 Adults.

Research was also commissioned as part of this fund, to investigate the impact of 'Family Resource Centre's Supporting Children and Families after Covid.' This research employed both qualitative and quantitative measures to ensure the voice & experiences of children and their parents was captured actuarially.

The research unveiled that Covid had a profound impact on Children and their families, with 74% highlighting that covid had a negative impact on their education and 38.5% of children stated they felt 'sad' during Covid and 44% felt 'happy/ excited' when the covid restrictions were lifted.

Therapists stated that the main impact of covid was 'increased anxiety' (62.8%) followed by decreased 'social skills' (58.1%) & increased 'isolation/ loneliness' (27.9%).

'Increased anxiety, stress & worry' (39.4%) was reported by parents on the impact of covid on their own health and wellbeing.

Social, emotional & behavioural issues were the key issues identified affecting children attending therapy by FRC staff & therapists, this was followed by grief and mental health issues.

The most common therapy offered was play therapy (81%) and according to parents these therapies helped their children to recognise and understand their 'emotions/ feelings' better (31.8%), and to reduce anxiety levels (19.3%).

## Parallel Session 5: G007

## Promoting Inclusion for One Parent Families

### **Overcoming Hard Times: Qualitative Research Exploring the Power of Support for Lone Parents, and their Families, in Challenging Circumstances in Ireland and Northern Ireland**

*Dr Alison Montgomery, Anne Eustace, Dr Jennifer Hanratty and Dearbhaile Slane, The Centre for Effective Services (CES), Dublin and Belfast*

Research shows that lone parents experience the highest levels of poverty and deprivation in Irish society. The Centre for Effective Services (CES) recently completed two qualitative research projects examining:

1. financial vulnerabilities experienced by lone parents in Northern Ireland and the impact on them and their families, and
2. the power of community education in Ireland to support lone parents to fulfil their potential in education, employment and society.

The research used participatory, qualitative research methods bringing the voice and experience of lone parents into the foreground. Over 400 lone parents participated, through surveys, focus group, case studies and personal scenarios portraying their lived experience of challenging times.

Findings from the Solus research, delivered in partnership with Parenting Focus, indicated that many single and separated parents in Northern Ireland experience significant financial struggles and hardship. Challenges in finding or juggling employment and childcare while trying to survive on low incomes can negatively impact their mental and physical wellbeing. Attempting to shield their children from the effects of financial hardship also contributed to anxiety. The experiences of lone fathers were also spotlighted in the research.

The research funded by the Bechaire Fund, involving case studies of 8 local community education settings across Ireland, found that lone parents participating in community education are likely to progress to further or higher education and better paid employment. Wraparound support, most importantly the provision of childcare, facilitates equality of access to community education and strengthens mental health and wellbeing. Participation in community education empowers lone parents and their children, raising appreciation of, and commitment to, education.

The research findings indicate that lone parents can experience inequity and exclusion within society, particularly when accessing education, employment and financial supports. Recommendations arising

from the research propose how policies, services and specific supports, across the island of Ireland, can address the challenges lone parents face in seeking to provide for themselves and their families.

### **Meaningful Co-production in Research and Policy Development using the PAHRCA Method with Lone Parents with Experiences of Homelessness**

*Laurie O'Donnell, Daniel Hoey, Emily Hawe, Louise Bayliss and Kathleena Twomey, Focus Ireland*

As part of a four-year EU-Horizon 2020 funded project INVOLVE, Focus Ireland is conducting research with lone parents with experiences of homelessness. The aim of the project is to increase political participation and trust of marginalised groups by including them in the development of policies that directly impact their lives. Using Participatory Action Human Rights and Capability Approach (PAHRCA) as a framework, the project will produce policy recommendations and a policy paper developed with lone parents based on their experiences of using social services.

PAHRCA brings together participatory, human rights and capability theory into one research approach. The goal is about working with marginalised groups to build capacity, co-produce knowledge and empower them to understand and challenge the structures that perpetuate the inequalities they experience. It challenges traditional methods of research by redistributing power between the researcher and the researched. This methodology provides an innovative, practical way to create genuine engagement and co-production with marginalised groups. It avoids tokenism and instead empowers marginalised groups to be active participants in both policy development and research.

The presentation details the experience of the INVOLVE project during its first 18 months. This includes an overview of PAHRCA and how it can be employed as a methodology, as well as outlining the findings from individual interviews and focus groups with seventeen lone parents covering themes such as education, work, housing, and health. The presentation will also feature details about next steps for the project including an exploration of lone parent aspirations, the co-development of policy recommendations that will be communicated to policy makers during cross talks, and a national campaign to advocate for change in key policy areas affecting lone parents.

### **Homeless Mothers and Affective Inequalities: Why a Relational Framework to Support Nurturing Matters**

*Dr Méabh Savage, Department of Social Care and Early Childhood, SETU, Waterford*

This paper aims to expand on the theme of promoting equality through family support by exploring why a relational framework to support nurturing matters for homeless and resource-poor mothers.

The presentation is based on a qualitative study conducted between 2016-2018, which involved two phases. Phase one included twelve in-depth interviews with seven homeless mothers with multiple and intersectional needs, who are unaccompanied by their children, using photo-elicitation. Phase two involved semi-structured interviews with twelve professionals working in the homelessness sector.

This paper explores some of the themes to emerge from the study which reveal how homeless motherhood is a site of intersecting inequalities including gender, class and affective inequalities. These inequalities influence the resources mothers have to care for their children and to access to housing. A key contention of the paper is that nurturing is a form of work which requires resources. When a caregiver is unsupported in their work emotionally, economically, politically and socially, she experiences affective injustices, which further depletes the resources needed to nurture. Yet, contemporary dominant ideologies of middle class motherhood position good mothers as individually

responsible for caring for their children. As a result of this, despite their desire and efforts to be 'good mothers' and protect their children, the actions of resource-poor homeless mothers are frequently misrecognised by significant others (professionals), with significantly negative outcomes for them.

A key finding from the study is the centrality of a relational framework for understanding and responding to the multiple needs of homeless mothers. A relational framework of care or doulia (Kittay 1999) appreciates that the caregiver has care needs that must be recognised and supported. This is because there is nothing inevitable about the contexts within which caring takes place, thus pointing to the role of family support in promoting affective equality.

## Parallel Session 6: G008

## Promoting Equality in Child and Family Support 2

### **From Under the Radar to Into the Limelight: What You Need to Know about Family Resource Centres and Family Resource Centre Networks**

*Fergal Landy, Chief Executive Officer, National Forum of Family Resource Centres CLG, Ireland, Andrew Russo, Director & Co-Founder, National Family Support Network, United States, Brenda McChesney, Associate Director & Co-Founder, National Family, Support Network, United States*

- What are Family Resource Centres (FRCs) and how are they networked nationally?
- What does research show about the positive outcomes FRCs have achieved for children and families?
- Why are so many public and private funders choosing to invest in FRCs and FRC Networks?

This session will address these questions, illustrating the growing prominence of FRCs in Ireland, England, Canada, and the U.S., and preview the launch of the International Association of Family Support Networks.

#### Context:

FRCs are community or school-based welcoming hubs of support, services, and opportunities for families that utilize an approach that is multi-generational, strengths-based, and family-centered. They reflect and are responsive to community needs and interests, provide support at no or low cost for participants, and build communities of peer support for families to develop social connections that reduce isolation and stress. FRCs provide, bundle, and co-locate many services to enhance parenting skills, foster healthy development and well-being, prevent child abuse, increase school readiness, connect families to resources, develop participant leadership skills, engage fathers, support healthy marital and couples relationships, and promote family economic success.

Research has shown that FRCs make a significant difference in supporting families to thrive, including yielding a US\$4.93 social return on investment for every dollar invested, and a 63% reduction in child maltreatment cases.

Family Resource Centre Networks (FRCNs) consist of two or more FRCs working together to ensure coordinated quality support for families. They have emerged organically at the municipal, county, state/province, and national levels.

In the last few years, primarily because of their impressive response to support families during the pandemic, FRCs and FRCNs have garnered an unprecedented level of attention and investment. This surge of support has spurred the formation of the International Association of Family Support Networks to foster the development of FRCs and FRCNs globally.

### **Participation in Decision Making: Inclusivity and Accessibility for Children and Young People with a Disability**

*Deirdre Reidy- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Kate Jones- Hub na nÓg*

This presentation will share the views and recommendations of children and young people with a disability on what adults can do to ensure that participation in decision-making is inclusive and accessible.

Hub na nÓg is a national centre of excellence and coordination in children and young people's participation in decision making. Hub na nÓg supports government departments, state agencies, public service, and non-government organisations in taking a rights-based approach to ensure children and young people's meaningful participation in decision-making, with a particular focus on those that are seldom-heard.

In 2023, in keeping with this drive for equality, Hub na nÓg collaborated with two Disabled Persons' Organisations to consult children and young with a disability on what works and what does not work when involving children and young people in decision-making. This presentation will showcase young people's views and recommendations as recorded in the consultation and outline their influence on the creation of resources for adults.

The young people's recommendations can be applied to everyday practice when including children and young people in decisions within the spaces they attend day to day. Their views may also be useful when considering how best to include children in decisions made in policy making and service and programme planning on a national and local level.

This session also aims to provide a brief overview of the relevant national policy perspective and signpost to further good practice resources that can be used by adults when they are giving due weight to children's and young people's views when decisions relevant to their lives are being made.

### **Supporting Young Migrants through the Fostering of Meaningful Mentoring Relationships in Rural Ireland: Challenges and Successes from a Practitioners Perspective**

*Jill Murray and Peter Duffy, Foróige*

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the numbers of young asylum seekers and refugees coming to Ireland. Mentoring may be viewed as a powerful tool to support these young people and to help them to integrate into their new communities. This session aims to explore the benefits and challenges associated with the provision of mentoring as a support for young asylum seekers and refugees. It will provide a case study of a community model of mentoring developed and implemented by Foróige to support young migrants living in the IPAS Centre in Ballyhaunis Co. Mayo, drawing on practice insights and stakeholder perspectives.

**Session main goal:** To raise awareness of how impactful mentoring relationships can support young migrants to integrate into their new local communities and to provide examples of learnings from a practitioners perspective.

**Session learning objectives:**

**Participants will have:**

- Enhanced awareness of how youth mentoring can be a supportive resource for young migrants
- Knowledge of youth mentoring models specifically developed to meet the needs of particular cohorts of young migrants
- Greater insight into the practice considerations and challenges in this field, especially in regards to supporting the development and maintenance of meaningful mentoring relationships

**Session content:**

- Context and rationale- Presentation on current situation in Ireland in relation to young migrants and recommendations to address needs
- Introduction to the mentoring models developed by Foróige to meet the needs of both young asylum seekers including Workshop title : Supporting young migrants through the fostering of meaningful mentoring relationships in rural Ireland: Challenges and Successes from a Practitioners Perspective
- A short video
- Practitioners findings – successes, challenges and practice considerations
- Q&A and Discussion

**Parallel Session 7: G009**

**Promoting Equality and Diversity in Family Support**

**Collaborating for Roma Inclusion in Roscommon**

*Dr. Caroline Duignan & Gary Nugent*

A diverse range of services collaborate on the Roma Subgroup of Roscommon Children and Young People's Committee, including Tusla Family Support and Education Support Services, Roscommon Youth Service, South Roscommon Family Resource Centre, Ballaghaderreen Family Resource Centre, Roscommon Leader Partnership and HSE Public Health Nurse, Health Promotion and Social Inclusion staff. Members of the group would like to share how our unique focus on engagement with marginalised and excluded Roma families, through family support & youth participation practices in Roscommon, has led to very successful engagement with the community.

Through a collaborative, flexible, and innovative approach to service delivery and the development of services based on giving space, voice, audience and influence to Roma young people, we have been successful in our application for a permanent, dedicated Roma Youth Service in Roscommon. This process was led by Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board, who have also developed a Case Study on our successful engagement with the Roma community in Roscommon, as an example of good practice for other services and areas.

Our aim for this parallel session is to share our approach and success with conference delegates, who are interested in hearing about ways to engage Roma and other marginalised communities.

Members of the Roma community in Roscommon, including Roma young people, will be supported to deliver this session alongside subgroup members, who are involved in delivering services to Roma young people and families in Roscommon.

### **From Pilot to Mainstreaming – a Process Evaluation of the Tusla National Traveller Parent Support Programme**

*Author; Neil Haran (2022). Bernie Laverty, National ABC Manager, Tusla*

Tusla established a Pilot Traveller Parent Support programme to address four separate though interlinked objectives, namely

- to increase cultural awareness and understanding amongst Tusla and key service partners of the challenges experienced by Traveller parents in accessing appropriate support services;
- to increase positive engagement between Traveller parents and families with Tusla and other key service partners – tackling fear and negative perceptions around these services;
- to increase the capacity of Traveller parents to receive Parenting support programmes in a culturally appropriate and supportive way; and
- to increase Traveller parents' knowledge of and engagement in wider parenting support services.

The programme was premised on a number of pillars of understanding, the most significant of which were:

- that building Traveller trust of Tusla required a commitment to increasing direct support to Traveller parents and families
- that early intervention and prevention supports were key to generating trust; and
- that there was a need for targeted actions to equalise outcomes for Traveller children and families.

The presentation will detail the Process Evaluation, its findings and recommendations and will explore the partnership approach in mainstreaming the family support project.

### **Pathways for the Implementation of a Positive Parenting Programme for Vulnerable Families: A Participatory Research**

*Dra. Lucía González-Pasarín, Alicia Borrego-Tarragó, Research Group of Excellence in Childhood, Adolescence and Families (GRIAF), Chair in Education and Adolescence, University of Lleida.*

The Spanish positive parenting program "Comprehensive care program for children, adolescents, and their families at risk" (Balsells et al., 2024) targeted vulnerable families, including mothers, fathers, children, and adolescents. Within the framework of implementation science, this programme was designed, implemented and evaluated, adopting a participatory, improvement-oriented methodology grounded in reflective practice. The programme is being implemented in the region of Lleida (Spain) by practitioners from family support services under the weekly follow-up of the research team within the research agreement between the Lleida Council policymakers and the Chair of Education and Adolescence at the University of Lleida, and a R&D project (PID2022-137305NB-C21). The aim of this communication is to present the strengths and limitations for the implementation of the programme mentioned above from practitioners' perspectives through the reflective practice methodology - an educational approach based on knowledge derived from personal and professional experience that considers contextual nuances. We have identified strengths and limitations related to a) programme's design; b) programmes' methodology and c) programme's implementation process. In addition,

practitioners' involvement in the research through reflective practice has enabled the determination of the necessary actions to be undertaken both within research and political spheres to address limitations and ensure programme sustainability.

Implications for policy and practice:

- Importance of establishing collaborative relationships between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners for the development of a new evidence-based and culturally sensitive model of work with vulnerable families within social services that responds to the rights of children, adolescents, and parents.
- Participatory research and reflective practice as useful mechanisms to establish an iterative dialogue between research and practice, enhancing evidence gathering.
- Identification of actions need to effectively transfer research into practice and ensure programme's sustainability.

**Parallel Session 8: Bioscience Building**

**Diverse Approaches and Responses to Promoting Equality in Child, Young Person and Family Supports**

### **Promoting Equality through Language, Terminology and Representation. Lessons for Current and Future Practice**

*Professor Caroline Mc Gregor, Dr Carmel Devaney & Dr Sarah-Anne Buckley*

This presentation is based on research about language, terminology and representation in relation to institutions in Ireland formerly known as 'Mother and Baby Homes'. The research related to experiences of persons who gave birth in, or who were born in special institutions run by the State and/or contracted to religious orders between approximately 1950 and 1980 in Ireland. Stigma surrounding birth outside of marriage was profound and far-reaching at this time. The specific need for a focus on language, terminology and representation and the subsequent commissioning of this research was identified by in the First Report of the Collaborative Forum of Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes and Related Institutions (2018, published Autumn 2023). The overall objective of the research was to consider how a critical understanding of the use of language in relation to the lived experiences and treatment of mothers and those who were children in 'Mother and Baby' and related institutions in Ireland can inform current and future public and media discourse, and the provision of welfare or other services which are central to the lives of survivors and others directly affected today. Participants had experience of either being former children, mothers or both within the institutions and were interviewed using an open narrative-inducing method. This presentation will highlight the knowledge and understanding gleaned through this research in relation to language, terminology and representation as it was used in the past & continues to be in the present with regards to the institutions & people with experience of them. Highlight messages will be considered with regard to promoting equality through Family Support policy, provision, and practice by practitioners working in this area.

### **Foróige's Youth Initiated Mentoring Programme : MentorMe**

*Mary Lynch, Mentoring Manager, Foróige, Yvonne McManus, Senior Youth Officer, Foróige and Lorraine Duffy, University of Galway*

Foróige's MentorMe programme is an innovative individual practice model that promotes equality in the context of youth support. This parallel session will detail how this approach to mentoring holds significant potential as a strategy to support vulnerable adolescents in Ireland into the future.

This session will present MentorMe as a model of natural mentoring from the Netherlands. In MentorMe the young person nominates a natural mentor from their existing social network to support them with a particular challenge. The role of the mentor is to be a confidant and spokesperson for the young person, and a partner for liaising with other adults in the young person's life. This Mentor may be a relative, neighbour, family friend, former coach etc...

The session will detail how Foróige staff work with the young person to explore their social network and identify a mentor who can support them with a particular challenge - this process maximises the young person's capacity to deal with challenges or stressful situations in their life. It will explain how this process can become a life -skill that the young person can use to source support when they encounter adversity in their life.

Facilitators will share the current implementation of the programme by Foróige staff; recruitment of young people; vetting, training and support of the volunteer mentor in their role and the support offered to participants, once matched in the programme. This session will also detail the underlying assumptions of MentorMe; the findings of international research into youth initiated mentoring and the preliminary findings of the Irish research; case examples of the benefits for participants and plans for future expansion by Foróige.

### **Preschools in the Workplace. An "S" in "ESG**

*Max Smyth, St. Nicholas Montessori College*

In 2020, millions of women in the U.S. left the workforce due to the pressures of childcare and, at the time, remote schooling (JLL, 2021). In the UK, 10% of mothers have handed in their notice because of the challenge of balancing parenthood and work with 13% single mothers taking the same action. (Fawcett Society, 2023 as cited in Wood, 2023). Further to this, 20% of mothers admitted to turning down a promotion because it did not fit in with their childcare arrangements (Fawcett Society, 2023 as cited in Wood, 2023). In Ireland, it has been recognised that "lack of affordable, accessible, quality childcare remains the single biggest barrier to women's equal participation in employment and public life" (McCarthy Flynn, 2022 as quoted by NWCI, 2022, pg1).

This presentation will examine the opportunity that exists for workplace environments to achieve the "S" (Social) of their ESG (Economic, Social and Governance) goals by providing onsite childcare facilities for employees. By drawing on information available through the Irish property industry and combining it with The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, it will explore the basic costs involved and the opportunities available. These opportunities include offering good health and wellbeing for employees; gender equality in the workforce; reduced inequalities overall; and the value of providing good education from birth in the workplace. Furthermore, it will examine previously published case studies of companies worldwide where onsite childcare already exists and the benefits experienced by these companies. This will enable a synopsis of how paying attention to social concerns will potentially enhance the financial returns of a company rather than being a large cost burden (Henisz et al, 2019).

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### **Promoting Equality and Integration for Migrant Children through Parental Involvement in Schools: Findings from the IMMERSE Project**

*Dr Shirley Martin, School of Applied Social Studies, Professor Deirdre Horgan, School of Education and Eibhlin Looney, School of Public Health, University College Cork*

This paper will explore the promotion of parental involvement for migrant parents in school environments in six-countries using data from the IMMERSE H2020 research project. While research has demonstrated a positive relationship between parental involvement and students' academic achievement across ethnic groups (Wilder, 2014), parents of migrant children can often face more barriers to becoming involved in their children's education than non-migrant parents (Turney and Kao, 2010; Alexander et al., 2017). Language barriers for example, can be a key obstacle to parental engagement in their children's education (Taguma et al. 2011; Antony-Newman, 2019). In addition, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) contend that parental involvement activities and programmes which are not inclusive of other cultures are less effective and impactful.

The research will draw on data from 149 School Principal Surveys in six countries (Ireland, Spain, Greece, Italy, Germany and Belgium). The data explores how schools engage with migrant parents including the variety of channels for parental involvement (homework support, information on children's progress, requests for parental volunteers and opportunities to participate in decision-making) offered by these schools. The research also explores whether these channels for parental engagement are adapted to migrant parent's needs. In addition, the paper will draw on qualitative and quantitative research with parents to further explore these issues. Findings from the Irish qualitative data indicated that the migrant parents were generally positive about their relationships and interactions with their children's teachers. Irish schools provided the highest number of channels for parental engagement with 90% of schools providing all four channels, compared to an average of 72% across the other countries. However, the Irish schools also reported the lowest levels of cultural and language adaptations of these channels for parental engagement indicating that migrant parents might face barriers in engaging in these activities.

**Encouraging Affective Family Communication to Develop New Generations Life Projects. Experiences of Young Argentines in Pandemic**

*Dr Cecilia Barni, School of Education. Universidad Austral, Dr Patricia Rodriguez Aguirre, Universidad Siglo XXI*

**Objective:** The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the way in which families can help their children through dialogue and affective communication, in the development of a life project based on goal seeking with responsibility, choices and coherence, a feeling of satisfaction and existential transcendence.

**Method:** Qualitative approach, grounded theory analysis, assisted by Atlas.ti software. 10 (ten) semi-structured interviews were analyzed with young people (18 and 21 years old), from urban and rural areas of Argentina, selected in a sample of extreme cases that focuses on participants with unique characteristics; based on larger research. Reflective analysis, centered on a socio-demographic questionnaire –previous to the interview (zoom)– about their Pandemic experience and family dialogues.

**Results:** The evidence shows (a) young people that during the confinement were able to reflect on their life project, manage their emotions based on their family characteristics, which helped to guide their lifestyle choices (study, work, friendships, including sexual orientation). It is noted that greater communication, sharing activities (games, exchanging life experiences - affective intergenerational dialogues) generated solid family bonds of support that improved the development of autonomy, self-knowledge and self-esteem; (b) and young people from more communicatively closed families (regardless of the rural/urban area) where such communication implied conflictive experiences in the confinement stage, which manifested in problems (i) emotional (depression/panic attacks), (ii) relational (friends, family, school), (iii) in vocational choice, (iv) decisional (living alone, far from their parents), (v) taking on risky situations (addictions/anxiety crisis/social isolation).

**Discussion:** Interdisciplinary spaces (pedagogy, sociology, psychology) for intergenerational dialogues have begun to be created, where the importance of affective communication is highlighted through podcasts and workshops for families to offer communication and support strategies.

Key words: life projects, affective family communication, experiences of young people, lifestyle choices

**ISPCC Services in the Digital Age**

*Aoife Griffin, Services Manager ISPCC South & West*

The ISPCC experience: How digital platforms and digital interventions can give families greater access to support where and when they need it.

This presentation will inform on how the ISPCC, using digital platforms and interventions, supports families and promotes equality of access to services. We will show how providing digital options can increase the access of children and young people experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties to services not available in their local area or which they are unable to access due to lack of transport, financial constraints and disability issues amongst other factors inhibiting access to services. These factors can add to the stress already being experienced by families and so by providing support on a

number of levels and at various entry points can really support children, young people and their families to build resilience and increase their coping capacity.

It is commonly accepted that interventions aimed at families identified as being at Hardiker levels 1 and 2 of need has long term benefits. Providing non targeted baseline services at an early stage has many advantages including acting as a step down from more targeted support and also in encouraging help seeking behaviour. This presentation will show how the ISPCC twin track approach of providing targeted services online alongside our traditional universal services i.e. Childline has benefits for the families engaging with us.

The presentation will include data from our services and also feedback from parents, children and young people who have engaged with services online.

### **Engaging Young People in Creative, Digital Learning Experiences to Navigate Online Spaces Safely**

*Jessica Murphy, Senior Youth Officer, Foróige, the National Youth Development Organisation*

This presentation outlines research conducted on online safety for young people, exploring essential insights crucial for effectively supporting them in navigating digital spaces securely. Additionally, it includes an overview of the Connect Safely Programme, tailored for young people aged 12-18 and details the online safety training available to volunteers and staff across the youth sector.

A report issued in August 2021 by the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science titled 'School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health', detailed the rise of cyberbullying and the impacts this has on young peoples' mental health. Moreover, the report states that a majority of young people reporting forms of cyberbullying, felt let down by the platforms they reported to. Furthermore, 1 out of 3 young people don't report when cyberbullying happens to them.

These are some of the challenges to safeguarding young people in the digital age. Children First (National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children), operates on the premise that it is the responsibility of everyone in society to keep children and young people safe from harm. This responsibility includes keeping young people safe from harm online. It's important that young people are supported and encouraged to develop safe and responsible online behaviours.

The Connect Safely Programme, supported by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, has been developed to engage young people in safe, creative, digital learning experiences where they can learn, connect, be informed and be creative. The programme covers a variety of topics including cyberbullying, digital footprint, screen time and well-being, gaming and gambling, online relationships and sexting.

Attendees will be given an overview of the impact of the programme to date and provided with insights into the latest developments in the programme, including a new resource tailored for young people aged 8 to 11 and resources for parental support.

### **Legal Prescriptions of Parental Responsibilities as a Reaction to the Modern Perspective of the Ghanaian Family**

*Nana Kwaku Boadu-Boadu, Renvoi Centre for Legal and Economic Research and Education and the School of Law, University of Limerick.*

Ghanaian cultural understanding of family is from patrilineal and matrilineal perspectives.

In the patrilineal home, the child belongs to the father and the father's family which encompasses the father's father and siblings. The mother is responsible for producing and nurturing the child. Thereafter, child rights responsibilities are that of the father and the father's family.

In the matrilineal home, the child belongs to the mother and the mother's family comprising of the mother's mother and siblings. They are the primary caregivers and maintainers of the child until adulthood. The father maintains the marital home with little to no specific upbringing responsibilities towards child rights.

The Ghanaian society was strategically woven to apportion child rights duties to a natural parent and other members of the society based on the cultural family association.

Presently, most Ghanaian couple are adopting the Europeanized nuclear family system. This family is composed of the father, mother, and the child, to the exclusion of other blood relatives. The gradual societal shift has generated questions for the traditional rights system concerning the apportionment of childcare responsibilities. In reaction, Ghana passed the Children's Act 1998 to provide a modernized regime for the constitutional rights of children. The statute imposes the duties on natural parents by reflecting the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child. This new system commendably meets modernity and international standards, but it deviates sharply from the customary law position thus resulting in struggles to ensure compliance.

The session will discuss the mediatory role of the law in bridging modernity to the reforming understanding of family and thereafter, expose the challenges posed to the acceptability of the law in cultural societies. The aim is to draw the attention of legislators, both international and national, to practical regulatory lacunae created through laws which sharply deviate from the idiosyncrasies of specific societies. The session shall suggest the need for a careful structural study before passing child-based legislation.

### **The Voice of the Child, Coercive Control and Child Contact in Ireland: An Intersectional Understanding**

*Dr Niamh Sheridan and Ms Emma O Callaghan-Mullins Togher Family Centre Cork*

When Togher Child Contact Centre was established in 2013 the goal of this service was to allow children an opportunity to maintain a relationship with their non resident parent while the issues, which created the need for supervised access, were explored and resolved. In 2023 Togher Child Contact Centre has been in operation for 10 years and while there are significant successes, there are also key ethical and practical challenges in meeting the aspirational goal put forward in 2013.

While the Togher Child Contact Centre has created an opportunity for children to maintain relationships with their non-resident parent, there is often intense conflict between parents. Parental issues are often played out in the access process and can be exacerbated rather than resolved.

Children are not only exposed to this intense conflict they can also be effectively utilised and manipulated in the access process.

This paper will explore and highlight the difficulty of navigating a system that remains inconsistent for all parties, especially the child. The spaces are utilised when the court, in the child's best interest orders that supervision is necessary. In reality the existence of these spaces is exploited, in a number of ways that include:

- Cancelling visits repeatedly
- Sending messages through the child
- Sending the child with pre agreed rules for visits (no photos, presents etc)
- Not arriving on time

There is also often a misconception of why the parents are coming to see their child in this type of service. The voice of the child is often not heard or even looked for when supervised visits are first ordered. This will be discussed.

This session will aim to provide the listener with real life scenarios and data that allows a better understanding how the voice of the child can be completely excluded or used in a coercive manner in a supervised child contact context.

### **Supporting the Child, Supporting the Family**

*Dr. Melissa Bonotto, Early Childhood Education and Care ATU – Atlantic Technological University, Mayo and Galway Campus*

This presentation will show results from a doctorate study that explored meaningful interactions for preschool children with additional needs in the context of early intervention and family support in Ireland. One research aim was to consider the role of Family Support (FS) preschool in early intervention with children deemed to have 'additional needs.'

An interpretivist epistemological paradigm and constructivist ontological perspective underpinned this research study. This study has a flexible design, with a predominantly qualitative methodology, including the following research methods: semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups for preschool teachers and parents, the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005) to capture children's views and one quantitative scale, the My Family Star Scale, only used with parents.

FS preschools emerged as a crucial source of support for families with children with additional needs. This study reaffirms previous studies which have placed preschool as an inclusive space for children to develop their social and cognitive competencies. Apart from that, this research reveals two very interesting findings in relation to the support offered by FS preschools: first, children themselves are coping better with their additional needs because they attend preschool. Secondly, this study has also identified that parents find support for themselves as well when their child with additional needs is in the FS preschool. These findings highlight the under-researched value of ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care programme supporting parents with practical, social and emotional support. The overall presentation will touch on the results of this study, indicating that once a Family Support preschool is supporting the child, it is directly and indirectly supporting the family as well. Therefore, the Family Support Model presented is a solid example of how Family Support programmes can promote equality with a focus on the early years.

## Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June – Abstracts

### Parallel Session 1: G023

### Inclusion through Narratives

#### **Preliminary Findings from a Scoping Review on Co-production of Accessible Digital Mental Health Tools in Collaboration with Young People from Marginalised Backgrounds**

*Carmen Kealy, University of Galway, Courtney Potts, Ulster University, Mulvenna, Maurice; University of Ulster, School of Computing, Donohoe, Gary; University of Galway, O'Neill, Siobhan; Ulster University, Psychology & Barry, Margaret M.; University of Galway*

Despite evidence that digital mental health supports can improve young people's access to mental health care, guidance on the most appropriate co-production processes for engaging youth in designing and evaluating these technologies is lacking. User input is critical in digital mental health solutions, particularly for marginalised young people who are often excluded from co-production processes.

The aim was to explore the extant literature on co-production processes with marginalised youth in digital mental health supports, ranging from mental health promotion to targeted interventions to serve as the basis for our wider, youth-led project, including a qualitative exploration of digital mental health challenges facing young people across the island of Ireland; identifying, with young people, appropriate digital mental health apps and interventions; validating, in partnership with young people, what digital mental health interventions work; and using these findings to inform policy and practice recommendations for health providers across the island of Ireland and beyond.

The scoping review was guided by Arksey and O'Malley's framework and PRISMA-ScR. The search spanned 12 databases, including studies from 2021 onwards, focused on co-production with young people aged 16-25 in different stages of designing and assessing digital mental health technologies, especially those who are marginalised. Twenty-two studies were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria. Preliminary findings suggest that young people are mainly involved in the initial design phase (n=8) or overall evaluations (n=5) of digital mental health supports and that studies use primarily qualitative (e.g. focus groups and interviews; n=10) or mixed methods (=7) rather than participatory design for co- production.

Implications of these findings will be discussed in light of feedback received from the wider project's youth panel and service provider advisory board to showcase a) the multifaceted concept of co-production and b) how to best translate it into practice to achieve truly youth-led results.

#### **Narratives of Lived Experience: Books in Irish Classrooms**

*Dr Becky Long, Children's Books Ireland*

The aim of this paper is to explore government and educational policy in Ireland in relation to the availability and impact of inclusive and representative books in Irish classrooms, with a specific focus on educational attainment and wellbeing for children and young people through equitable access to narratives that reflect and expand their lived experience. Children and young people deserve to encounter what Hollindale calls a "multiplicity of childhoods" in the literature produced for them, both in the experience of reading for joy, and in their educational journeys. But what happens when the books this cohort have access to in the classroom, simply do not reflect the lived realities of their nation and communities?

As a country, Ireland has experienced significant, invigorating, and positive change in terms of its cultural diversity in recent decades (Inglis, 2011). School communities all over the island are more diverse and multicultural than ever before and yet, this diversity is rarely reflected in the literary texts explored in classrooms across the island.

In contrast, Irish publishing for children and young people is now producing books that speak to the multiplicity of childhood experiences being lived in Ireland (Kennon, 2020). Authors such as Diana Anyakwo, Siobhan Daffy, Leon Diop, Aoife Dooley, Brianna Fitzsimons, Jarlath Gregory, Meg Grehan, Adiba Jaigirdar, and multiple others are producing literature for children and young people that reflects the diversity of childhood and young adulthood experience in an ever-changing Ireland. So, what can be done to diversify the literary texts that are embedded in the Irish education system? This paper will explore the evolving nature of literary culture for children and young people in Ireland and the potential this can and should have on the experiences of this cohort throughout their educational journeys.

**Parallel Session 2: Auditorium**

**Supporting Families and Communities in the Early Years**

**Connecting with and Valuing Family and Community: Updating Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework**

*Dr Sharon Skehill and Dr Mary Daly, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)*

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the role of the educator in the early childhood setting in supporting babies, toddlers, young children and their families through Aistear, the early childhood curriculum framework.

Aistear (NCCA, 2009) is currently being updated to ensure its continued relevance in contemporary Irish society as well as reflecting developments in the professional profile of early childhood educators. Consultation findings from Phase 1 noted the importance of the educator's role and the early childhood setting as a hub of support for families.

During the second phase of consultation, NCCA intentionally incorporated purposive sampling to identify babies, toddlers, young children, parents, and educators who could offer a broad perspective on what babies, toddlers, young children and their families want and need in the curriculum framework. Purposive sampling involved working with contacts and colleagues from organisations working with and supporting target groups, who acted as gatekeepers to ensure participants felt safe and valued in contributing to the consultation. Participants in the focus groups included parents living in Direct Provision, parents availing of Family Resource centre services, educators and managers from settings in areas of socio-economic disadvantage working with babies, toddlers, young children and their families, with a focus on Traveller families, minority groups, and children with additional needs.

This presentation will illustrate how these voices are incorporated into the updated Framework and emphasize the centrality of a slow relational pedagogy in building relationships and connections to support and empower babies, toddlers, young children and their families. In recognising the importance of nurturing care and education in early childhood, the presentation illustrates the valuable role of the educator in the continuum of family support.

## **Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Infant Mental Health Training Programme for Early Years Practitioners**

*Dr Shirley Martin and Aoife Lynch, School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork*

This paper will present findings on the development and impact of Infant Mental Health (IMH) training for Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) in Cork, Ireland. The project aims to make accessible the science of IMH and build capacity in the everyday practice of EYPs.

Pre and post training questionnaires measured changes in knowledge and practice. Pre-questionnaires captured existing IMH knowledge. Post-questionnaires captured IMH knowledge and skills acquisition. EYP and child interactions were observed and measured pre and post training using the Child Caregiver Interaction Scale (CCIS) Revised Edition (Carl, 2010).

Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG (LGT) is a community-based organisation located on the northwest side of Cork city. They aim to reduce child poverty and enhance child development (0 to 4 years) through prevention and early intervention. A growing body of evidence supports the importance of capacity building for those working with young children and their families (Priddas et al. 2017). EYPs who have a core understanding of IMH can support children to reach their social and emotional developmental milestones (Raver, 2002). A customised IMH training programme for EYPs was developed by LGT in 2019, which drew on the current IMH research and practice (Weatherston, 2017); the principles of the Nurture Programme; and the principles the National Early Years curriculum and quality frameworks of Ireland.

The IMH training was implemented in three roll outs in 2021 (a pilot and second round) and 2023/24. Evaluation of the programme yielded important initial results regarding the capacity building ability of the IMH training for EYPs (Martin et al., 2022). The current study compiled results from the three training programmes to obtain more in-depth findings on the impact of the training on EYPs skills and practice.

### **Parallel Session 3: Boardroom**

### **Promoting Equality through Parental Involvement**

#### **Family Support Ending Strife – Practitioners Perceptions on Innovations in Practice**

*Dr Declan Coogan, PhD, UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, University of Galway, Dr Tara Kelly, Tusla, Dublin, Eileen Lauster, PhD Candidate, Independent Social Worker, Galway*

Childhood aggressive and coercive behaviour towards parents/ carers brings exclusion, fear and isolation into the lives of families. It also impacts practitioners and researchers. We will begin this workshop with a clear definition of the problem which can help us make a difference between the usual stresses and strains of family life and abusive and violent behaviour that concerns us all. This workshop shares insights from a research project involving practitioners in Ireland in 2021-22 following their introduction into their practice of innovative methods of work with parents that fostered inclusion, equality and connection. We will share examples of the creative ways of working with families to end abusive and violent behaviour as practitioners used the Non-Violent Resistance model of intervention. There will be stories and strategies for hope that suggest how we can stand strong together with parents and children to end isolation and the trauma of abusive/ violent behaviour within families. Delegates will also have an opportunity to reflect on the relevance to their

own practice of the skills and insights shared during the workshop and to discuss the opportunities and challenges for introducing innovations in practice that enhance equality and inclusion.

### **Parental Experiences of Accessing Mental Health Services for their Adolescents in the Community**

*Ms Seána Nic Dhonnacha, Dr Des Cawley, Dr Lisa Kerr, Technological University of the Shannon Midlands Midwest, Ms Yvonne McCague (Registered Advanced Nurse Practitioner)*

This presentation explores one key theme parents' experiences of accessing mental health services for their adolescents with mental health challenges in the community identified as part of a wider scoping review. Arksey & O'Malley's six stage framework and PRISMA-ScR reporting guidelines were used. Five electronic databases Socindex, MEDLINE, CINHALL, Scopus, EBSCO were searched and reference list screening from 2015-2024.

The World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that health systems globally have inadequately addressed the burden of mental health disorders (WHO, 2021). Scheduled mental healthcare services for adolescents in Ireland currently operate Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, with limited variation of unscheduled community services available (McNicholas, 2018). Coyne et al. (2015) contend children are waiting up to eighteen months to be seen, resulting in parents considering accessing private mental health services or attending Emergency Departments (ED) due to the uncertainty about accessing community-based mental health care.

Internationally, prolonged waiting lists inhibit timely care for children (Crouch et al, 2019; MHC, 2023). Reardon (2017) spoke of the geographical variation of supports and the disadvantages for families living in rural areas to access services akin to the 'postcode lottery' as exemplified by the Mental Health Commission (2023). ED presentations for adolescent mental health challenges could be avoided through accessible and timely Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in the community (Coates, 2018; Crouch, 2019).

Our presentation will inform responses to the needs of adolescents and their parents in accessing community mental health services in Ireland, with findings anticipated to have implications for adolescent mental health services, future research, policy and practice internationally.

**Parallel Session 4: G006**

**Promoting Equality through Research and Evidence**

### **Growing Up in Ireland: Evidence-based Development of the New Birth Cohort Questionnaire and the Potential for Identifying Inequalities**

*Derek Nolan, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). Contributing authors: Dr. Clare Farrell, Dr. Eoin McNamara, Caolan Rooney, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)*

Growing Up in Ireland (GUI), the national longitudinal study of children and young people, was established in 2006 and tracks the lives and experiences of participants over time, helping to identify the factors that support or impede their development. The study is an invaluable national data and research resource for researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders interested in the effect of individual, family and context characteristics on current and future outcomes for young people.

In 2022, the Irish government approved the establishment of a new GUI infant cohort to commence in late 2024. This will be in addition to the two existing cohorts originally recruited along with their parents at the ages of 9 years and 9 months respectively in 2007/2008, and now aged 26 and 16 years. New survey data from infants who will be aged 9 months in 2024/2025 will provide much-needed up-to-date insights from the next generation, given the substantial change in the social and policy context since the early years of the older GUI cohorts.

The development of the questionnaires for the new cohort was informed by a scoping review of the literature, lessons from international surveys and best practices, and a series of consultations with Irish academics, NGOs and policymakers along with input from national and international experts. The survey fieldwork will be conducted by the Central Statistics Office in association with the Department of Children, Disability, Integration, Equality and Youth. This presentation will describe the process for developing instrumentation for the new cohort, and suggest ways in which data from both the new and existing GUI data collections could be useful for exploring themes of family support and equality.

### **Supporting Families in Conditions of Extreme Adversity – how the Greentown Programme Learned to Work with Complex Realities**

*Dr Jane Mulcahy (presenter), Dr Catherine Naughton & Dr Seán Redmond, University of Limerick*

Recent research undertaken by the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) team at the University of Limerick identified that up to one thousand children in Ireland are involved or at real risk of involvement in criminal networks at any one time. Such networks involve the sale and supply of drugs.

Child involvement in criminal networks can be classified as a wicked problem. The Department of Justice has funded the Greentown programme to operate two trial projects (in partnership with the Department of Justice, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, An Garda Síochána (the Irish police service), Tusla – the Child and Family Agency, Probation and community-based organisations) aiming to a) reduce criminal network effects on children in the local community (frustrating grooming behaviour of network based adults to entice children into criminal activity) and b) provide meaningful and practical ‘routes out’ for children involved in a criminal network.

This paper will provide a brief overview of the four programme pillars: Intensive Family Support, Network Disruption, Community Efficacy and Pro-Social Opportunities. It will focus on the Intensive Family Programme in the Whitetown trial site which has the world-renowned evidence-based programme Functional Family Therapy (FFT) at its core, including implementation barriers (data sharing and therapy readiness due to ongoing stress, trauma and overwhelm) and enablers (the value of therapeutic case management). The paper will discuss the value of having a reflective, iterative design process in place to respond to on-the-ground realities to augment the family intervention. Recommendations pertain to the importance of meeting participants’ basic physiological and safety needs for therapy[1]readiness, and relationship-building for effective interagency collaboration to address this wicked problem.

### **An Evaluation of a Barnardos Playground Service which Serves the Community of Ballybeg in Waterford, Ireland**

*Dr Eleanor Hollywood, Associate Professor, Maryanne Murphy, Assistant Professor, Sonam Banka Cullen, Research Fellow in Children's Nursing, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin & Catherine Comiskey, Professor in Healthcare Statistics, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin.*

The aim of this research was to conduct an evaluation of a Barnardos playground service and to explore the impact of the service on the children and families who avail of the service, and the local community. Case study research was employed to conduct the evaluation. Case study research is a type of empirical inquiry that sets out to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in-depth, and within its real-world context. The case in this research was the playground service and the context was the area where the service is delivered. Following ethical approval interviews were conducted with children, parents, staff, and stakeholders affiliated to, and involved with, the playground service. Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data.

The hallmark of case study research is that it uses 'multiple sources of evidence' to explore the phenomenon of interest. One of the main objectives of the evaluation was to explore children's experiences of their involvement in the service, what it means to them, and how it has impacted on their lives thus the voice of the child was a key component of the evaluation. Drawing from the 'multiple sources of evidence' gathered, the findings indicate that the Barnardos Ballybeg Playground service has an exceptionally positive impact on the lives of the children who use it. This is evidenced by the overwhelmingly encouraging accounts expressed by the children, parents, Barnardos staff, volunteers and stakeholders who participated in the evaluation.

The evaluation identified 4 main themes:

Theme 1: Supporting children now and into the future

Theme 2: Inclusion through play

Theme 3: Supporting families

Theme 4: Invested individuals

The Playground Service offered by Barnardos in Ballybeg is a unique and valuable service that impacts positively on the lives of the children and families who use it. This evaluation has created an understanding of "what works" for the children who attend the service in addition to identifying potential barriers to achieve service goals and areas for further development.

### **Foster Families' Learnings from a Positive Parenting Programme to Improve the Quality of Visits**

*Dra. Lucía González-Pasarín, Dra. Isabel M. Bernedo, Family Foster Care and Adoption Research Group (GIAFA), University of Málaga*

According to national and international recommendations, foster children have the right to maintain contact with their family of origin to preserve affective bonds. Scientific literature also recognizes the benefits of maintaining these contacts. However, research has shown that visits are a source of constant concern for foster families and suggested that support is necessary for all those involved.

Within the R&D project (EDU2016 77094-P), the Family Foster Care and Adoption Research Group has developed the first Spanish programme to improve the quality of visits, Visits: a context for family development (Bernedo et al., 2020). This programme targeted to both non-kinship foster families and birth families with the aim of helping birth parents and foster carers develop the specific parenting competences they need to put into practice, both during and as preparation for the child's visits.

In the pilot implementation with foster families, 6 foster carers of 5 children in long-term placement completed the programme. Semi-structured interviews were conducted before and after the intervention and analysed by content analysis. We identified improvements in the following aspects: (1) collaboration between families, (2) preparation of the child for visits, (3) awareness of the important role of visits and the birth family in relation to the child's well-being, (4) communication about visits, and (5) emotion management and parenting competences. In addition, one more theme emerged: (6) Perception of the programme as a parenting support resource for both foster and birth families.

The study provides potential evidence that the programme is a useful resource for child welfare professionals to support foster carers in accompanying children in contacts during long-term care. It achieves these by strengthening their parental, emotional and communicational competencies, promoting a comprehensive and inclusive look to the families of origin, and facilitating and optimising the relationship with the families of origin.

**Parallel Session 6: G008**

**Promoting Equality and Diversity in Family Support 3**

**A Demonstration Project between an Irish Child Welfare Agency (Tusla) and a UCD Systemic Family Psychotherapy Training Programme to Promote Access to Training and Therapeutic Service in a Statutory Child Welfare Agency**

*Valerie O'Brien, Niall Reynolds, Marina Everri, Diane Hanly, Catriona Redmond, Mattia Messina, School of Medicine, University College Dublin, Tusla, ACTS, Dublin*

In this paper we discuss the development of a project which commenced in 2021 between the UCD School of Medicine, Systemic Psychotherapy programme and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The vision for the project was multi-faceted with two central outcomes identified: (1) To increase access to the provision of systemic family psychotherapy for children and families who are involved with the child welfare agency, and (2) to develop capacity within a public sector service for the training of family therapists that on graduation would provide systemic therapy in a statutory child welfare agency. The clinical placement structure provided: (a) a team mode of service under the direction of a clinical supervisor working in situ and (b) an individual trainee therapists service to work with referrals in the agency.

The development of this project was informed by an action-based research approach using formative and summative evaluation methods to map the different phases of the project development.

In the presentation we will illustrate the different phases of the project from its ideation, planning, design, and implementation. More specifically, we will focus on the following aspects: referral pathways; clinical governance and Tusla/ UCD partnership structures; implementation and formative evaluation audit data taken from referrals received; number of completed interventions; and evaluation data collected from trainee, service providers, clinical supervisors and family members.

## **All Things to All People: The Inseparability of Quality and (In)equality in Meaningful Family Support**

*Dr. Maria O'Dwyer, Prevention & Early Intervention Network & Susan Brocklesby, Katharine Howard Foundation*

The fundamental question when designing, implementing and evaluating any family support intervention has to be 'what works for families?' In child and family services, we work to sophisticated logic models, work plans and evaluative frameworks and yet, quite often, this question remains unanswered. We gather data and metrics that can quantify everything from dosage to programme fidelity but are we tuning into how a family envisaged or actually experienced the supports that they were provided? How and why should we value practice over programmes?

The presentation shares learning from the field through snapshots of a variety of projects and studies that both researchers have undertaken. These include parental consultations as part of the review of a national home visiting programme, an operational review of an Early Years service and a co-produced playground design project. The selected snapshots demonstrate the need to locate family voice and choice in service design, delivery and evaluation, and probe contentious questions about who benefits from how we deliver family support - the 'system' itself, those families who need minimal support or those who need it most? This gets to the heart of equality as we strive for a system to be all things to all people.

The two decades that the researchers have spent working with child and family services trace the evolution of family support as both a discipline and a practice. It reflects the shift in cultural mindset from silo'd to collaborative working, and interrogates the consistently abstract concepts of both integrated working and evidence gathering.

By sharing lessons- sometimes difficult ones – and providing analysis on the distance between policy and practice, the presentation narrates the ups and downs of trying to ensure equality of access, opportunity and outcomes in family support.

**Parallel Session 7: G009**

**Workshop 1**

## **Developing Young Ireland, the new National Policy for Children and Young People (0-24), and Communicating Children's Rights**

*Janice Donlon, Assistant Principal Officer; Katie O'Dea, Administrative Officer, Child Rights Policy Unit, Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth*

Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028, was launched on 21 November 2023. The development of Young Ireland was informed by the extensive consultation with children and young people that took place in preparation for Ireland's report to the UNCRC, published as the 'What We Think' suite of reports. DCEDIY also carried out a public consultation online in early 2022, and a number of additional targeted consultations with specific cohorts of children and young people. The Children's Rights Alliance carried out a series of targeted consultations with civil society on behalf of the Department.

Young Ireland envisages an Ireland that fully respects and realises the rights of all children and young people. This Framework:

- sets out current issues impacting children and young people, identified by them, as demonstrated by the Children and Young People’s Indicator Set and as recently highlighted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,
- sets out work to create an environment to ensure that children and young people are a central part of everyone’s agenda,
- announces spotlight programmes to focus on the most significant challenges for children and young people, with resources from across government,
- re-establishes governance structures where the State will work with civil society partners to provide renewed leadership and impetus to realise new and existing policy commitments,
- identifies the priority areas requiring coordinated action across Government, and
- identifies a number of complementary actions to address issues that were identified during the development of this framework.

This session will further explore the aim to enhance awareness and understanding of children’s rights among children and young people, practitioners and professionals, and the public. An interactive discussion will explore different approaches to communicating children’s rights to a variety of groups. It will also explore how each group can support children’s rights, and how to communicate a children’s rights approach in a practical way.

<b>Parallel Session 8: Bioscience Building</b>	<b>Workshop 2</b>
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**Accepting Non-Neutrality and Walking Together: Exploring Liberation Praxis to Embrace Identity, Justice-seeking, and Equity in Family Support Practice**

*Becca Dove, University of Northampton, Faculty of Health, Education and Society/Camden Council, England*

Family support has long espoused values of partnership working and social inclusion (Canavan, Pinkerton, and Dolan, 2006). However, it is unclear whether the family support ecosystem currently has the theories, methods, and tools to fully translate those values into practice. This workshop addresses this dilemma and explores whether family support’s approach might be reimaged through the lens of liberation praxis.

Part one will consider the non-neutrality of family support practitioners who draw on their personal, professional, and social identities to inform their practice, and the ways in which these orientations interact with institutional or structural inequality, biases, and assumptions (Lindsay et al, 2014; Fisher-Borne et al, 2015). It will be argued that the historical, political, and ideological contexts in which family support practice is enacted (Lambert, 2019; Jordan, 2012) and the erasure of global majority social justice voices from family support education (Brady, Sawyer, and Perkins, 2019; BlackDeer and Ocampo, 2022) influence the authenticity of ‘working together’ with families, compounded when identity is ignored or omitted from practice.

Drawing on liberation psychology approaches, part two will explore two positionalities – accompaniment (Farmer, 2011; Wilkinson and D’Angelo, 2019) and collaboration (Graham and Barter, 1999; Sousa and Rodrigues, 2012) – as possible means to reorientate family support practice towards a liberation praxis, a ‘walking together’ with marginalised families and a stronger focus on anti-oppression, justice, rights, and equity. The social GRRRAACCEESS (Burnham, 2012) will be offered as

a systemic practice tool to explore identity and power asymmetry in support of a liberatory stance. A practice example from the London Borough of Camden will be provided.

Part three will provide participants with opportunity to form conversation circles and use four reflexive questions to explore their responses to these ideas. The workshop will close with a group reflective check-out exercise.

**Parallel Session 9: Bioscience Building**

**Workshop 3**

### **Enhancing Practice and Advancing Equity through the Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support**

*Andrew Russo, Director & Co-Founder, National Family Support Network, United States & Brenda McChesney, Associate Director & Co-Founder, National Family Support Network, United States*

This session will provide an overview of the [Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support](#) and illustrate how they can be utilized to enhance practice with and advance equity for families.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will understand that the Standards illustrate how to put the Principles of Family Support into action to support families to build the Strengthening Families Protective Factors.
- Participants will understand the structure, design, utility, and successful application of the Standards.
- Participants will understand how the Standards can structure and measure their work with diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Developed by Family Strengthening and Support organizations and networks, funders, and parent leaders in the U.S. and Canada, the Standards are based on two important frameworks in the Family Support field - the [Principles of Family Support Practice](#) and the [Strengthening Families Framework](#) and its research-based evidence-informed 5 Protective Factors. Since they were first issued in 2012, they have created a common language across geographic areas and different kinds of

Family Strengthening and Family Support programs such as Family Resource Centers, home visiting programs, and child development programs. They are used as a tool for planning, providing, and assessing quality practice by public departments, foundations, networks, community-based organizations, and families.

The Standards address 5 critical areas of practice for any Program or individual working with families - Family Centeredness, Family Strengthening, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Community Strengthening, and Evaluation. DEI is also intentionally infused throughout the Standards. There are 15 Standards, each with Foundational and High-Quality Indicators and implementation examples. The Standards and their implementation tools are available for [free download](#). The session will illustrate examples of how the Standards are being implemented at systems and program levels, including through the Standards Certification Training which more than 16,400 people have successfully completed across the U.S. and Canada.

## Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June & Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June – Poster Presentations

### Family Social Capital as a ‘Safety Net’ For Adolescents’ Well-Being: Lessons for Ghana’s Child and Family Welfare Policy

#### Scope for Enhancing Parental Engagement for Nigerian Mothers of Young Children in the Irish Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

*Florence Ajala, PhD Candidate and Assistant Lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Mary Immaculate College Limerick.*

Nigerian mothers have important insights into matters that concern their children’s early childhood care and education (ECCE) and, like other parents, benefit hugely from being active participants in their children’s ECCE. This paper, therefore, examines the scope for enhancing parental engagement for Nigerian mothers of young children attending Irish ECCE settings. Fifteen Nigerian mothers who had children availing of the universal Early Childhood Care and Education programme between the years of 2020 and 2022 were recruited through Irish ECCE settings to participate in an ongoing doctoral research titled ‘An investigation of the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers’ engagement with their children’s early childhood care and education’ used a qualitative enquiry based on one-to-one semi-structured interviews, and these were transcribed and coded using Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis (2019; 2022).

The mothers were asked to share what could be done to enhance the positive engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children’s ECCE within the preschool settings. The data showed that a return to face-to-face in-person interactions between Nigerian mothers and early years educators post-COVID-19 pandemic, more culturally inclusive preschool events post-COVID-19 pandemic, and support for African immigrant parents of young children in the form of seminars, parenting classes and parenting groups would encourage Nigerian mothers to take on active roles in their children’s ECCE within the preschool settings. These findings showed that to fully engage Nigerian mothers in their children’s learning and development; educators must ensure that opportunities to facilitate this stem from the Nigerian mothers’ interests and are planned and implemented with their support and feedback.

*Evelyn Aboagye Addae, Glasgow Caledonian University London and Stefan Kühner, Lingnan University Hong Kong*

While promoting equal well-being among young people has been pivotal in Ghana’s Child and Family Welfare Policy (CFWP), policy strategies targeting critical social indicators of quality of life are still largely missing from the policy agenda. The CFWP contains less concrete policy detail on how young people, alongside their families, can be effectively empowered through social dialogue and change. In this presentation, we take a health assets approach to extract policy lessons for Ghana’s present Child and Family Welfare Policy, introduced in 2014. In our research, we examined the role of Ghanaian adolescents’ socioeconomic status and family social capital in their subjective well-being using data obtained from a representative survey of adolescents (aged 13-18years) in Ghana’s poorest region. The results revealed that various sub- components of family social capital, including family sense of belonging, autonomy support, control, and social support, varied with adolescents’ self-reported life satisfaction and happiness after controlling for their family socioeconomic status and other personal characteristics. However, once family social capital was controlled for, socioeconomic status explained adolescents’ life satisfaction, but not their happiness. This research unveiled the potential of family social capital (‘health asset’) to function as a non-monetary ‘safety net’ and suggests how it may contribute to the current child protection efforts of the Ghanaian government. It prompts the need to

revisit existing primacies for social policies by promoting the 'social fabric', viz. family social capital within collectivist societies, as a complement to the present emphasis on 'economic empowerment' aiming to help young people build resilience against poverty and material deprivation. Policymakers in Ghana should deem family social capital as a critical socioeconomic risk absorber, and to develop Ghana's Child and Family Welfare Policy further, adolescent 'social empowerment' ought to be accentuated alongside its current focus on enhancing household 'economic empowerment' via social protection interventions.

### **How can Early intervention Happening 'Early in a Child's Life' with the Family Support Preschool Context Address Children's Additional Needs?**

*Dr. Melissa Bonotto, Early Childhood Education and Care ATU – Atlantic Technological University, Mayo and Galway Campus*

This poster presents an overview of the overall aim of this doctorate research: to identify how early intervention is experienced by children with additional needs through the use of an ecological framework.

This was a flexible design with a predominantly qualitative methodology, including the following research methods: semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups for preschool teachers and parents, the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005) to capture children's views and one quantitative scale, the My Family Star Scale, only used with parents.

The poster presents the elaboration of an ecological framework, based on this study's key findings and the relevant literature. The ecological framework serves as a guiding tool for policy and service users as well as contributes to the development of preschool children with additional needs in mainstream preschool. The framework is placed in the Ecological System Theory evolving contexts, from the micro-meso levels to the exo-macro spheres, including the influence of time. It is designed around four main agents: a preschool child with additional needs; the child's family, a Family Support preschool (FRC preschool) and support agencies. It also presents the main elements between each agent which are: communication, relationships, and meaningful interactions in a bidirectional way among the child, the preschool setting, the family and support services. Plus, the networking and interagency element between the FRC preschools and support services.

Overall, this research highlights the importance shown in this study of looking at meaningful interactions at multiple levels, recognising that there are a number of bidirectional interactions from the micro-meso to the exo-macro and vice-versa, influencing the child's development.

### **The Positive Parenting Triangle cycle (P+ Triangle)**

*Alícia Borrego-Tarragó, Dra. Lucía González-Pasarín, Research Group of Excellence in Childhood, Adolescence and Families (GRIAF), Chair in Education and Adolescence, University of Lleida.*

The Positive Parenting Triangle (P+ Triangle) is a graphical representation of how parenting is exercised, based on the ecological model of family and childhood development. It is inspired on the ecosystemic Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families (FACNF), and by three subsequent initiatives that use it as a tool for participatory group analysis with families (AIDES, Chamberland et al., 2012; PAPFC, Lacharité, 2017; and PIPPI Programme, Milani et al., 2013). It is documented on the FRAME+P model website: <https://modeloframe.com/triangulo-p/>.

The P+ Triangle represents the developmental needs of children, parental competencies, and the family psychosocial context. The wellbeing of each child emanates from the interaction between these three dimensions. It is a visual tool that foster active engagement of families during the process of individualised-family action, encouraging dialogue as a facilitator for analysis and reflection. It is an object of permanence, personalised under continuous construction involving the entire family in which guided reflections are collected, in different languages and formats, to comprehend their potentials, difficulties, and challenges to better respond to children and adolescents' needs. It is applied through a systematic process with four steps:

1. Ecosystemic analysis of children and adolescents needs.
2. Collaboratively establishment of family action plan.
3. Actions implementation.
4. Assessment of changes and improvements.

The P+ Triangle promotes:

- Equal opportunities and social inclusion of vulnerable families by providing support for positive parenting, rooted in their ecological context and facilitating the use of universal resources.
- Inclusion and active participation of and among all family members, giving them an active and leading role in their process of improving parenting practices.
- The adaptation of professional intervention to accommodate the characteristics of each family.

### **Online and Digital Resources and Support for Parents Delivered via Universal Modes: A Mixed Methods Study**

*Dr Harriet Churchill and Dr Jonathan Herbert, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield. Sheffield. UK; Joe Lane and Daisy Elliott, Action for Children, UK.*

The cross-disciplinary research evidence-base for understanding parental engagement with, and experiences of, universally available online and digital information, support and services has developed substantially in recent years but also remains patchy and poorly synthesised. Further, although online information and guidance for parents is widely accessed and utilised as part of everyday parenting practices, a diversity of platforms, providers and services in this sphere contributes to challenges in developing the evidence-base concerning 'what works, for whom and under what conditions'. Critical issues also influence the quality and relevance of online resources and support for parents including digital exclusion, parental involvement in service design, and the need for significant technical and service investment on the part of service providers and statutory agencies. This poster will set out the aims and mixed-methods approach of a study in progress, funded by the [Nuffield Foundation](#), which aims to review and advance the knowledge-base for 'virtual hubs' that provide information, guidance and support for parents via websites and apps, and are accessible universally for all and on a self-referral basis. Encompassing three phases, the study adopts scoping and systematic review methods, social survey and qualitative methods to better understand this sphere of provision and its fast-paced developments and explore parental perspectives and experiences. The study also aims to review and synthesise the emerging evidence-base, and to develop policy and practice resources and recommendations based on the research findings. The poster will provide details about the collaborative partnership that the study is based on between the University of Sheffield and Action for Children; and the ways in which 'a parents panel' group is assisting to shape the design and outputs of the project. It will details about the timeframe of the project and the delivery of interim and end of project outputs.

## **Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People**

*Janice Donlon, Assistant Principal Officer; Denis Ryan, Administrative Officer, Child Rights Policy Unit; Katie O'Dea, Administrative Officer, Child Rights Policy Unit Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth*

Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028, was launched on 21 November 2023. The development of Young Ireland was informed by the extensive consultation with children and young people that took place in preparation for Ireland's report to the UNCRC, published as the 'What We Think' suite of reports. DCEDIY also carried out a public consultation online in early 2022, and a number of additional targeted consultations with specific cohorts of children and young people. The Children's Rights Alliance carried out a series of targeted consultations with civil society on behalf of the Department. The framework is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it addresses issues raised by the UN Committee as well as our colleagues across Government.

Young Ireland envisages an Ireland that fully respects and realises the rights of all children and young people. This Framework:

- Sets out current issues impacting children and young people, identified by them, as demonstrated by the Children and Young People's Indicator Set and as recently highlighted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,
- Sets out work to create an environment to ensure that children and young people are a central part of everyone's agenda,
- Announces spotlight programmes to focus on the most significant challenges for children and young people, with resources from across government,
- Re-establishes governance structures where the State will work with civil society partners to provide renewed leadership and impetus to realise new and existing policy commitments,
- Identifies the priority areas requiring coordinated action across Government, and
- Identifies a number of complementary actions to address issues that were identified during the development of this framework.

We will be available to discuss the process of developing the policy framework, and the aims and objectives, especially as they relate to communicating the rights of children and young people.

## **How the Trauma-Response Wall in the Way of an Equitable Society Can Be Brought Down**

*Florence Koenderink*

The aim of the poster presentation is to show that to be able to achieve anything, whether at policy level or in working with individuals, there has to be an recognition that the resistance, push back, sabotage, and polarisation come from a trauma response. Therefore to accomplish anything, at any level, trauma-informed approaches must be adopted in all work to overcome the 'us versus them' divide. To create a sense of safety and belonging that helps remove barriers to collaboration and progress.

The poster presents a model showing how a lot of the resistance against and sabotage of social change and movement to a more inclusive and equitable society comes from a 'defense wall' consisting of trauma responses. To be able to move to a more diverse, inclusive, integrated and equitable society where families thrive, and to reach the conditions needed to make that change, the indicated causes of trauma need to be addressed. Moreover people need support to recognise and overcome their trauma. Through resolving trauma, the 'wall' of resistance and sabotage made

up of trauma responses crumbles. If it is not addressed, we will keep crashing into this wall. Furthermore, the trauma responses making up the wall are likely to cause trauma in others, perpetuating the obstacles.

The poster asks people to reflect on how they can contribute to breaking down this wall in their work.

### **GoVirtual: Connecting Young People, Overcoming Barriers and Supporting Families**

*Adam Leech, Senior Youth Officer and Tom Rickard, Development Officer, GoVirtual Foróige*

In Ireland, 93% of 8 - 12 year olds own a smart device and 100% of 12 - 16 year olds own a smart device. The virtual age is happening now, with 10% of 12-16 year olds owning a VR Headset ([Cybersafe Kids Annual Usage Report, 2023](#)). More young people than ever before are online and have access to technology in different ways.

Foróige's GoVirtual Initiative aims to overcome the barriers to access to Youth Work, enabling more Young People to connect with peers and prosocial developmental opportunities. Ultimately GoVirtual represents the philosophy of meeting Young People where they are.

The aim of this poster presentation is to explain what Foróige's GoVirtual programme is. In doing so, highlighting the beneficiaries of GoVirtual;

- Young Carers
- Young people with disabilities
- Young people on the Islands
- Young people who are rurally isolated
- Young people who are socially isolated
- Autistic Young people
- Young people who are LGBTQ+

Data will be shared on the numbers of young people using VR to access youth work in Foróige, highlighting outcomes as reported by youth workers, parents and guardians and young people themselves. The specific focus of this presentation is on the GoVirtual Youth Panel, Ireland's only fully remote, virtual reality (VR) youth group. The GoVirtual Youth Panel (Alternate Spacers), meets weekly in RecRoom through VR. Each young person joins us remotely, ensuring that we meet young people where they are.

Attendees will have an opportunity to learn about some of the young people from the GoVirtual Youth Panel, and what their thoughts are about their virtual youth group. Moreover, feedback will be shared from parents and guardians of the young people, to get a sense of how GoVirtual can be a mechanism to support families.

### **Understanding and Supporting Infant Mental Health: A Crucial Stage in Early Childhood Development**

*Catherine Maguire, Dr Caroline Heary, School of Psychology, University of Galway, Ireland.*

Infant mental health (IMH) is concerned with the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers. It is highly dependent on the nature and quality of the parent-infant relationship during the first three years. Research has documented the foundations for lifespan mental health are established during these pivotal early years. However, this knowledge is not easily understood by parents. This

doctoral research study aims to investigate first time Irish parents' knowledge and understanding of their infants' and toddlers' social and emotional health during the first 1000 days of life.

Using a mixed methods methodology, this research will comprise of three studies and incorporate a Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) framework. Study i) will involve the development of a PPI Parent Advisory Panel (PAP) to shape and inform decisions about the content and overall research plan. Study ii) Focus Groups, guided by the PAP will qualitatively explore the voice of first time Irish Parents and key parents groups in the community, including those of seldom heard communities regarding their perceptions and understanding of their infant's and toddler's social and emotional development, Study iii) guided by the PAP, will consist of a quantitative survey of first-time parents' knowledge, understanding and attitudes towards their infants and toddlers social and emotional development.

This study will provide high-quality evidence-based outcomes and contextually rich data that subsequent to this doctoral research, will allow alignment of information, knowledge, and service priorities to future family needs. This research will highlight the role of PPI participation and equality in IMH research studies and ensure parents' voice are represented in the data. It will also inform future practice and policy in Ireland and internationally.

### **Considering the Role of Family Support in Facilitating Post-traumatic Growth in Adults with Mental Illness**

*Brenda Wall & Dr.Larry Taylor, Northumbria University*

Past trauma is strongly associated with mental illness; 80% of Irish mental health service users have experienced lifetime trauma (Hyland et al., 2022). Retraumatization (Isobel, 2020) describes the hardships sometimes endured by people diagnosed with a mental illness resulting from the diagnosis itself (e.g. economic, social, or stigma). This suggests a cycle of trauma where mental illness is itself traumatising. Our quantitative study examined that suggestion and found an association between the experience of mental illness and subsequent post-traumatic stress disorder or partial trauma, specifically in relation to the experience of mental illness. Following that finding, we examined whether the completion of a recovery training programme could be said to have supported post-traumatic growth. This training programme provides social support to adults with mental illness diagnoses (Henson et al., 2021). Findings of our study showed a strong positive relationship between those completing the programme and increased post-traumatic growth versus those being referred to the programme but not yet having completed it. We show family are often ideally placed to provide that support. Post-traumatic growth emerges following deliberate rumination in the aftermath of a traumatic experience. Deliberate rumination is a deliberate and focused strategy of cognitive processing which may be facilitated by good social support (Xu et al., 2019). While our study concentrates on the social support offered by a training intervention; family may be ideally placed to offer these supports immediately and consistently. We suggest offering training to the family of people with a mental illness diagnosis who report that experience as traumatising so that they can offer the kind of social support that would facilitate post-traumatic growth and potentially reduce the negative impact of the trauma on the mental health of the individual. Further, we propose a qualitative study to examine the impact of that training on the facilitation of post-traumatic growth in this population.