

# EPPI - Building a resilient social services workforce

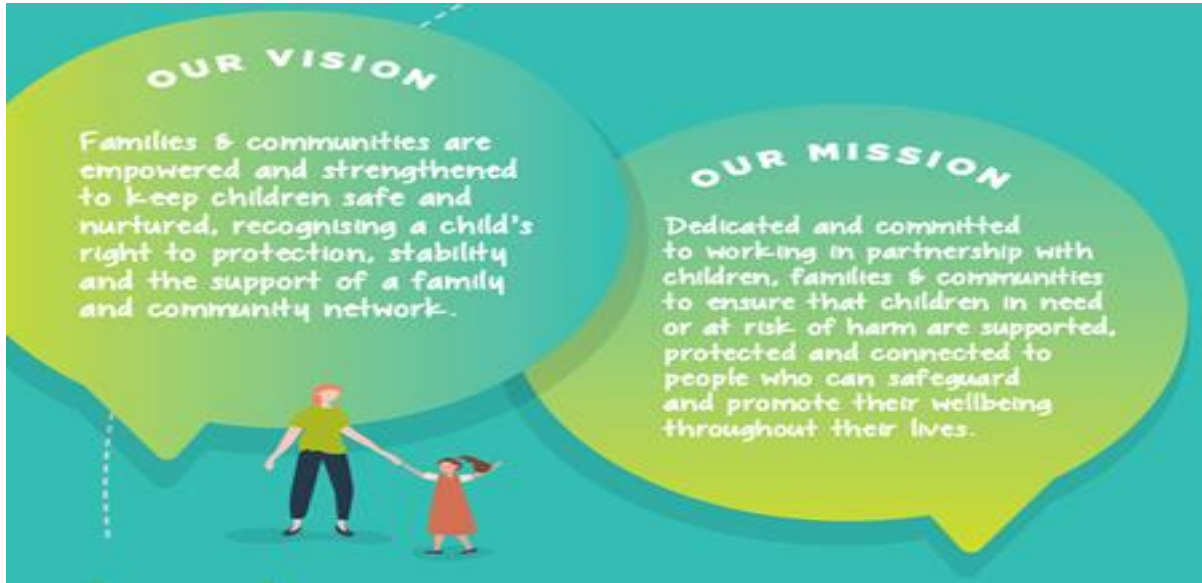
ESN Roundtable, Brussels

7<sup>th</sup> November 2023

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# Background



- Tusla is the dedicated State agency in Ireland responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children
- Established January 2014
- Six regions, 5000 staff
- Tusla People and Change strategy recruit/ retain/ train/ support/ knowledge



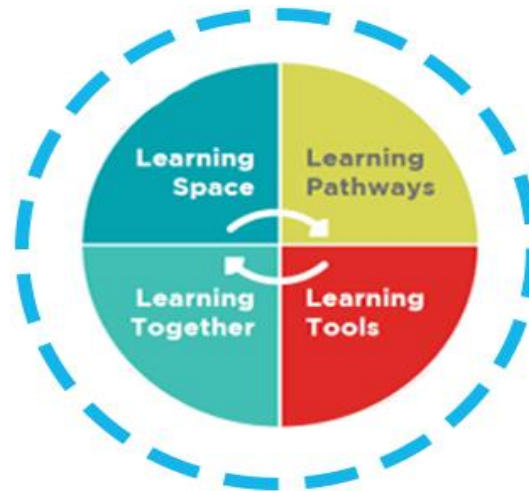
# Challenges

- Competition for social workers adult safeguarding/ mental health
- Cost of training and competition from other better paid careers
- Complexity of the job
- Expertise diluted

# Opportunities

- Reform of the structure
- Focus on practice and relationship
- Use of evidence
- Increase ICT support
- Develop new ways to qualify social workers - apprenticeship, online education
- Expand role of social care beyond residential

## What is EPPI?



*EPPI aims to develop evidence-using and evidence-informed practitioners in Tusla by increasing the knowledge levels and confidence of staff and improving the consistency and quality of practice across the Agency*

## The Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme

### Who has participated?



With support from:

**95 Mentors**  
supported Practitioners throughout the Programme

**4 Regional Managers**  
from Workforce Learning and Development provide input to the Programme

**Area Managers**  
attend/chair panel presentations at the end of the Programme

**Barnardos Library and Information Service**  
provide hands on support to participants in conducting their literature reviews

### Who delivers it?



### What teams were involved?



### What themes have come up in the literature reviews?



Other common themes included:

Reunification and Permanency  
Child Abuse and Neglect  
Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence

New themes emerging:

Female Genital Mutilation  
Supporting Foster Carers and their Families

Transgender issues

Pre-Natal Exposure to Alcohol

**Online Child Sexual Exploitation**

### What difference is it making?

To individuals

'entire process has been **empowering** & confidence building'

'informing my initial assessments, case conference reports and **court reports**'

'Being more **outcomes focused** in my work'

To Tusla

**Confident decision making**

Sharing evidence and knowledge within and between teams

**Positive feedback from judges on quality of court reports**

## EPPI on the Tusla Hub



EPPI Toolkit



**EVIDENCE  
INFORMED  
PRACTITIONER  
PROGRAMME**

**EIPP - Evidence Informed  
Practitioner Programme**





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EPPI Toolkit

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SharePoint

Search in SharePoint

Home

Services and Resources

Staff Directory

ICT Service Desk

Send to

Attachment

Child Development

Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Parenting Capacity

The Impact of Child Abuse

Critical Thinking and Analysis

Direct Work with Children and Families

Engaging with Children and Families

Separation and Loss

Healthy Sexuality and Relationship

Type here to search

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## Child Development

### Why is Child Development important in Social Work?



**The 'Still Face Experiment' shows how a child interacts with their social surroundings. To watch the video, click [here](#).**

In the first three years of life the brain goes through a process known as 'pruning and priming'.<sup>1</sup> 'Pruning' is a term used to describe how infants learn through the sights and sounds in the environment around them. Priming becomes more rapid at around three years of age, and this is where connections or 'synapses' between brain cells or 'neurons' which are not used enough are eliminated to help the brain absorb information more quickly. The infant develops a sense of understanding and expectation based on the social responses to their needs. These inform how babies then regulate their emotions; the sense they have of the world being somewhere safe and interesting or fearful and scary.

For some children the world holds little interest as they have been given few opportunities for interaction and exploration, and so have no curiosity about themselves or the world around them. These babies may appear listless or even depressed. From this, babies and toddlers then learn about the impact they have on the world, control, self-determination, a sense of self. They learn, to various degrees, how to predict and manage their world, either from a place of safety and curiosity, or danger and protection.

<sup>1</sup> Center on the Developing Child (2007). *The Science of Early Childhood Development* (In Brief). [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)



**Learn about how a baby's brain develops, and how a parent or carers interaction can influence brain development. Click [here](#).**

#### Stages of Development<sup>2 3</sup>

Each stage of development allows the child to achieve a set of specific skills that impact and expand how they can interact with the world. All of us revert and regress at times.



**Children should show the ability/capacity to complete these tasks at each stage of development but personality, temperament, circumstance and family dynamics all impact how consistently these are applied by children. Children who have been neglected or abused tend to be incapable or highly inconsistent in these tasks, rather than showing a preference or a reliance on one over another.**

#### Infancy (0-1 year)

The first year of life builds the child's relationship with their primary carer and ideally develops feelings of trust, security and safety. These are achieved through normal one to one interactions; feeding, dressing,

<sup>2</sup> Fahlberg, 1994

<sup>3</sup> [Health Service Executive 2011](#).



# Practice Development and Improvement Framework

Student Practice Placements



Practice Educator Development



Early Stage Practice Supports



Post Qualifying Practice Supports



- ☐ National student placement co-ordination system
- ☐ 260 students – all students provided with laptop and phone
- ☐ 320 new Practice Educators since September 2020
- ☐ Tusla Practice Educator Course in collaboration with social work education providers
- ☐ Supported first year in practice - [Virtual Support Pack](#) on Hub
- ☐ Mentoring for new staff/Team Leaders
- ☐ Traveller and Roma social work and social care Employment Support Scheme
- ☐ Endorsed and funded post qualifying courses
- ☐ Employee supported social work training



An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency



## Rationale

- Internationally accepted that the job of social workers is more complex and diverse than at any time in its history and therefore more demanding of individual professionals and of the organisations that support their work.
- Social Worker's **Confidence** eroded and their **Expertise** diluted
- New agency – an **opportunity to develop** the social work and other front line professions
- Reform of Child Protection and Welfare Systems internationally advocating **more child centred approach, direct work** with families
- Need for **relationship based** work, **consistency** in practice and better **use of evidence**



Thank You!

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