Children's Centre Leader

CHILDREN'S CENTRES POLICY

What chances for a new strategy?

We've had what seems like a long wait for progress and direction on children's centres from this and the previous coalition government. Maybe we are a little impatient, or maybe we are justified in needing some urgency. Do we need a national steer, or is this now wholly a local issue? We have been promised government consultations on children's centres; last summer, last autumn and this summer have all been cited as likely timescales. It is now autumn again.

In January 2016, the Prime Minister David Cameron announced a strategy to improve life chances, with the intention to announce details later in the year in June. We were told the summer's strategy was to include actions to address child poverty, expanding parenting provision/classes, and crucially future policy on children's centres. This seemed to be encouraging and potentially a positive reward for our patience. What stood out to Children's Centre Leader in the prime minister's speech in January was:

» The importance of personalised solutions for families and parents

» That security is a key desire for families, and once families and children feel safe they are much more able to grow and develop

» The idea that economic and social reform are intimately connected

» There has been a 480,000 reduction in workless households with children

» Employment is a women's issue as equal in importance to childcare and people thrive in environments of high

Welcome

Welcome to the October 2016 issue of Children's Centre Leader.
This issue asks questions of a new strategy for children's centres, considers the language of inclusion on p4 and reports on research charting the achievement of white working class boys (p12). Our focus on practice takes us to Southampton (p8) where partnership working has been delivering excellent outcomes.
Let us know what you think by emailing:
cclr@hempsalls.com

James Hempsall,
Editor, Children's
Centre Leader

expectations

» There needs to be a life-cycle approach from early years through to school, employment to adulthood

» That families are the best anti-poverty measure

» Parenting skills and child development should be supported together

All of which we whole heartedly support and endorse. The impact of the Brexit vote in June 2016 sent shivers down the spine of government, and has resulted in a dramatic overhaul of the way in which the government looks. It occurred in the very month we were expecting more details. Now the way government operates has changed from the top to the bottom.

On 22nd July Children and Young People Now magazine reported the government had said it was "committed to pursuing efforts to improve the chances of disadvantaged children" after confirmation the life chances strategy would not be published until September 2016 at the earliest. DWP were quoted asserting:

"We are committed to creating a Britain that works for everyone, not just the privileged few, and we'll only do this by tackling the root causes of poverty.

"That means taking action on education, worklessness and family breakdown – and that is exactly what we are doing, taking a whole life cycle approach."

When exactly in the autumn the strategy will emerge is open to speculation. We all know the autumn conferences and competing and distracting agendas like Brexit will make that a tough commitment to deliver. Something made even more challenging by the bedding-in of the new cabinet and ministerial teams. And on that matter, there are interesting signs of how children's and families' issues are shared and spread across government. However, where exactly children's centres fall in terms of ministerial responsibility is less apparent. But that may not be a bad thing, as long as this essential area of

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"supporting the economic circumstances and employability of families is something that should be fully integrated"

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policy is carefully integrated in all future strategy, and is not overlooked. Delays and changes do run the further risk of inertia, and combined with competing local agendas and resource needs, this places children's centres into the heart of uncertainty. And there is a real risk of becoming invisible too. In Ofsted's report Unknown Children Destined for Disadvangage (July 2016) there were scarce mentions of children's centres in the past tense. Was this an oversight or was it intentional?

The whole children's centre

programme could lose its focus, and experience casualties in the form of further closures, and a diluted purpose and impact. It can be a tough ask to run children's centres in the current climate, and the closure of 4Children and the transfer of their 80+ children's centres to Action for Children, and their host local authorities reminds us of the vital role and responsibility those do so take.

There are advantages to a universalised targeted offer, and by that I mean a standardised service that parents can rely on, and benefit from, without stigma. Something vitally important for the least advantaged families most likely to move frequently and access services beyond local authority boundaries. That's one big reason to have a national steer. Projects have shown how vital it is to personalise services, and take a whole family approach, to breaking the cycles of local disadvantage and economic inequality parents and children experience across multiple generations.

We welcome and endorse the All Party Parliamentary Group on Children's Centres' report: Family Hubs: The Future of Children's Centres (July 2016). This was a timely and well-informed message. To some extent the report returns to the core aims of children's centres, and some of those of their far too short-lived predecessors the Sure Start local programmes. It focuses on: the importance of health and development through early intervention; integrated wider services

for families; employment support and childcare; family stability; supporting complex needs; and the importance of staff resource, professional collaboration and inter-agency partnerships.

Supporting the economic circumstances and employability of families is something that should be fully integrated into all aspects of children's centres work and not pigeon-holed into the contribution of Jobcentre Plus. Links with Jobcentre Plus are essential, not desirable and string steer is required here. Personalised support and planning with parents can help families to make positive choices for their stability, economic health, and employability. That surely must be good for life chances.

Double Celebration for Children's Centre Leader

Children's Centre Leader, the free quarterly journal for everyone working in children's centres, early help and linked services is having a two-fold celebration this autumn.

First, we've grown subscriber numbers to 3,000 - an increase of over 1,000 in a year.

Second, the journal has now become a registered charity – with the aims of further growth in readership and content. Our aims are:

» Promoting education

» Promoting parental involvement in children's centres

» Promoting health, wellbeing and safety in children's centres

» Providing services to support children's centre leaders, and children, families and carers who access services

» Supporting and educating those in poverty or suffering economic or social disadvantage

Early years training, research and consultancy organisation Hempsall's announced in January 2015 their stewardship of Children's Centre Leader. At the time, director, James Hempsall OBE said adding the publication to their services brought an exciting and charitable dimension to their work in the children's centre arena.

Now, some 18 months later, James is quick to describe how "the publication is: an amazing, unique, and much needed resource; information sharing mechanism; spotlight on excellent work still being delivered by children's centres; and a thriving network of professionals and practitioners in the field."

He adds "It is our aim to continue to publish, FREE of charge, on a quarterly basis, and maintain the strong editorial legacy. We hope to continue with the amazing contributions from the group of dedicated writers and experts who have supported CCLR so far. Also, we want to invite and encourage new writers to get involved, especially those currently leading a centre or groups of centres, so please let us know your ideas and we will consider them for the next issues."

HAVE YOU GOT A VIEW?

We're looking for writers for future issues of Children's Centre Leader.

So, if there's something bothering you about policy or practice in children's centres or early help and you'd like to share your views, let us know.

Or perhaps you have a success story that deserves wider recognition.

Whatever it is, please email us to discuss your ideas: cclr@hempsalls.com

Making Exclusion Visible - Language, Labels and Attitudes

With an increased emphasis on the role of children's centres in early intervention and early help, it is timely for all those agencies and practitioners engaging with children and families to remind themselves of the influence of language and labels on values, beliefs and attitudes towards those identified as somehow different from perceived 'norms'. As the position of children's centres and linked services continues to evolve, there is an opportunity for leaders to develop their centres into hubs of high quality, diverse and inclusive practices, striving to reduce exclusion, and support each family so that children have the best possible chance to reach their individual potential.

Children's centre leaders are working in a context where as many as one in five children, are described by professionals as 'having' 'special educational needs' and/or disabilities (SEND). But what does this term mean in relation to your own role, who decides which children's needs are 'special', and what are the consequences of being identified as 'special'?

HISTORICAL REFERENCES

Various formal and informal labels have been assigned to children perceived as different from the 'norm' in an attempt, firstly to segregate, and later to integrate into existing patterns of provision. As seen in Table 1: The Changing Language of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, terms such as 'mentally defective' or 'backward', regarded as divisive and stigmatising, have gradually been replaced with ostensibly more enlightened labels. Have these new labels resulted in any fundamental change of attitude and approach to difference, or is it simply the same book with a new cover?

WHO HAS SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

The term 'special educational needs' was officially introduced in the 1981 Education Act, following a recommendation in the Warnock Report (DES 1978). In an attempt to move away from a narrow focus on labelling, categorisation and decisions about where children should be educated the Report recommended the abolition of the eleven official categories of 'handicap' established

in 1945 (Table 1), and the introduction of a broad more flexible umbrella term 'special educational needs' (SEN). The result was the expansion of the child population that came under the 'special' umbrella from 2% to 20% of the school population. Although viewed as a radical step forward, the term SEN was unclear, relative and contextual. Even Baroness Warnock herself, later admitted 'The concept of 'special need' carries a fake objectivity. For one of the main, indeed almost overwhelming difficulties, is to decide whose need is special and what 'special means' (Warnock, 1982, p.372).

Even without taking account of various sub-categories, not included in Table 1, for example, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia, there are more labels than ever before, and children can, of course, still fall into more than one category. Research is continually producing new labels within labels, for example Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) syndrome, a sub-category of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). How do these labels impact positively or negatively on the child and family

Table 1: The Changing Language of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Pre-1945	1945 Handicapped Pupils Regulations	SEN Code of Practice (DfE 1994)	SEN Code of Practice (DfES/2001)	SEND Code of Practice (DES/DoH 2015)
Retarded Slow learner Imbecile Backward Dull Remedial Educationally Subnormal	Educationally subnormal (mild, moderate and severe)	Learning difficulties Specific learning difficulties	Cognition and Learning	Cognition and Learning (Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD), Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD), Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD), Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD)
Maladjusted	Maladjusted	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	Behaviour, emotional and social development	Social, emotional and mental health difficulties (including ADHD)
Cripple Spastic Handicapped	Physically Handicapped Diabetic Delicate Epileptic	Physical disabilities	Sensory and/or physical	Sensory and/or physical
Deaf	Deaf/Partially deaf	Sensory/hearing impairment		
Blind	Blind/Partially sighted	Sensory/visual impairment		
	Speech defects	Speech and language	Communication and interaction	Communication and interaction (including Autistic Disorder (ASD), Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD))

and how do they influence your own professional values and attitudes?

A MEDICAL MODEL

Attempts to categorise children reflect the dominance of what is commonly known as the 'medical' or 'within child' model of disability, where the child is perceived as having a problem or defect, somehow abnormal. Mason (1992, p.23) summarises this view of SEND:

A medical problem, belonging to the individual concerned, which needs treating, curing or at lease ameliorating. It is fundamental to the philosophy of segregation which separates young children from each other on the basis of their medical diagnoses, and the designs of a curriculum aimed at 'normalising' the child as far as possible.

These quotes from my own interviews with professionals illustrate the influence of the medical model on professional attitudes towards difference: 'As soon as we realise the **children have obviously got problems** which will be over and above the average children'

'You can see those who aren't picking things up and you realise **they have got a problem**'

'Early identification is essential … if you don't catch it while it's young and sort it out, it becomes a bigger **problem** later on. You must get them up to the skills of their peers.'

A mother of a four-year old diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, was also influenced by the notions of 'special' and 'normal', emotionally stating that, 'I love him to bits, but I'd love him to be, I'll be crying in a minute,…I'd love him to be **normal** but…although it's years, I still find it hard.' (Jones, 2000)

Most categories in the SEND Code of Practice (DES and DoH 2015) are expressed in terms of 'difficulty' or disorder' re-inforcing the view that SEND comes from within a child rather than being associated with external factors.

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"inclusion is not the exclusive remit of special educational needs and disability…but social, cultural and linguistic diversity"

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A SOCIAL MODEL

The medical model fails to consider external factors, for example, the family context or interaction with learning environments as influential in the creation or exacerbation of 'need'. Alternative 'social' models of SEND suggest children's special educational needs may be caused or exacerbated by interaction with external environments, including schools, curricula, families, and communities. In spite of this there has been no change to the official definition of the term SEN since the Education Act (1981). The SEND Code of Practice, uses the original definition, stating that:'A

pupil has SEN where their learning difficulty or disability calls for special educational provision, namely provision different from or additional to that normally available to pupils of the same age…' (DoH DES 2015 para 6.15).

This definition remains unhelpful and depends on the provision normally available, as well as the 'learning difficulty' being relative to the abilities of the other children of the same age.

Nevertheless, the Code (DES & DoH 2015 para 6.15) does acknowledge that, in primary school, the quality of teaching may be a factor.

'Making higher quality teaching normally available to the whole class is likely to mean that fewer pupils will require such support.' (DoH DES 2015 Para 6.15)

This suggests that where there is appropriate support and provision, for all children, the numbers of children described as SEN will reduce. The move away from viewing SEND as an individual deficit to a model that considers the wider context is encapsulated in the concepts of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive practice'.

INCLUSION AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

It is now widely accepted that schools and early years' settings, including children's centres, should be inclusive of children described as having SEND. According to Booth and Ainscow, (2002) inclusion involves two complementary processes, firstly, increasing participation and secondly, reducing exclusionary pressures. They suggest organisations

promote inclusion along three dimensions, by creating inclusive cultures; developing inclusive practices and producing inclusive policies. However, it is important to remember inclusion is not the exclusive remit of 'special educational needs' and disability, but refers to the vast array of social, cultural and linguistic diversity, indeed the uniqueness of every child and family context.

HAS 'SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS' OUTLIVED ITS USEFULNESS?

Even by using the term SEND in this article, I am aware I am contributing to the survival of this outdated official label. Equally, I am not suggesting a non-labelling stance or denial of difference and disability but a reconsideration of how labels, language and 'problem' or 'vulnerable' children and families are constructed, and consideration of the contextual factors that lead to children and families being put in one pigeon hole or another. Children's centres are well-placed to develop an inclusive vocabulary based on the rights of every child and family. This leads to a situation where every child is special but 'none so extraordinary as to merit exclusion' (Hegarty, 1993, p.67).

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Village people

'It takes a whole village to raise a child' is the philosophy behind Southampton's comprehensive multi-agency approach; partnership delivery has always been at the heart of Southampton's children's centre programme and partners have been engaged at both strategic and operational level to maximise outcomes for all services, as many targets are shared.

Recently, the localities for the children's centres, Family Matters and health visiting localities have been aligned to further support partnership working. Further integration with health partners is being planned, according to Jason Murphy, Early Help and Children's Centre Lead for Southampton City Council.

Other partners include health visitors, hospital midwives, National Childbirth Trust, Workers Employment Agency, Portage, Speech and Language service, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Every Child a Talker (ECaT) project and the early years and childcare service.

HEALTHY CHILD PROGRAMME

These various agencies work together to deliver the Healthy Child Programme, helping parents to access lifelong learning and to improve outcomes for children.

The midwifery service in particular works towards reducing low birth weights, increasing breastfeeding initiation rates, improving the percentage of normal births and preparing parents-to-be.

The Workers' Education Association currently works with children's centres with outreach to parents and publicity around the two-year-old offer; they also support people who find services hard to reach.

The National Childbirth Trust work towards improving breastfeeding rates through use of peer supporters and breastfeeding cafes, plus a breastfeeding counsellor home visiting service.

Health visitors deliver the Healthy Child Programme, identifying any issues early on and working with the children's centres to ensure appropriate support is provided as part of early intervention and prevention. Family Point sessions, which are delivered across the city, are for "health, help and play", and are open access sessions for all parents and carers with under 5s; these are delivered jointly by health visitors and children's centre play practitioners

Children's centres in Southampton also work alongside the voluntary sector in offering a range of services to support families. This includes The Avenue Centre project which offers ongoing,

regular support to families with pre-school aged children who are living under pressure. The children's centres also work closely with community-based organisations, schools (especially over transitions), and police and housing departments. In the past few months a local public library has moved its base to within one of the children's centres bases, increasing access to books and other resources.

EVERY CHILD A TALKER

Many of the under 5s in Southampton live in areas of deprivation. Southampton's Every Child a Talker early language consultant works with early years settings and children's centres to identify where there might be delay in 2, 3 and 4 year olds communication skills

and helps to ensure support is in place for children with potential language delay. The early years and childcare team works with local providers to ensure sufficient high quality early years places are secured to meet parents' needs; this team also provides targeted and universal support to early years providers including those delivered by the children's centres.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results have risen year on year in Southampton, with 70% of all children achieving this in 2016, which Anne Downie, Early Years and Childcare Manager, Southampton City Council, says is due, "to the concerted, integrated support for families and the high quality of our early years' settings".

FAMILIES ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT

Over the past few years, children's centres in Southampton have also had a high success rate of families achieving employment, which is partly due to offering a rich programme of adult learning opportunities. These include English as an additional language courses, training for parents on a wide range of subjects, parenting courses, such as Webster Stratton Incredible Years, alongside various volunteering opportunities.

Each children's centre's advisory board has local community and professional representatives plus local parents who together review

the business plan and needs of that particular locality. Health visitors form part of the leadership structure of the children's centres along with local authority early years advisory teachers, which ensures local knowledge is used to inform planning.

"The joined-up working and information-sharing has helped to improve outcomes for children and allows us all to better focus on targeting support at those families who most need help and allows us to provide this support at the earliest opportunity," says Jason Murphy.

With effective information sharing, parents do not have to repeat their story to a range of professionals; and a more holistic overview of the family is created.

"The partnership working also enables us to provide an expanded offer which is cost effective and more efficient," explains Jason, "this has also led to more effective interventions and a more seamless service for families".

Southampton is planning greater alignment with health visiting services and the Early Help offer to increase efficiencies and to provide a whole family response for children of all ages, not just under 5s.

"Our ambition in the future is to have the children's centres operating as community hubs," says Jason.

JOINED-UP EVENTS

A good example of joined-up working is a series of events to promote the 2-year-old offer and to increase take-up.

Weston Children's Centre was the first Sure Start project in Southampton, and the area around the children's centre is dominated by local authority housing including several blocks of high-rise flats.

> "The joined-up working and information-sharing has helped to improve outcomes for children"

RISE IN 2-YEAR-OLD TAKE UP

In the summer of 2015, only 67% of eligible 2-year-olds in Weston children's centre area were accessing a funded place (63% across the city). Take-up has now risen by 11%.

The children's centre, housing staff, early year's team, Family Information Service, education welfare officers and schools all came together to provide joined-up information to families on the two-year-old offer, the importance of school attendance, children's centre services and Bookstart.

The events were held during the week on the playground

of two primary schools and in the children's centre.

Children's centre and early years teams spoke to over 50 parents about the 2-year-old offer; several of these parents had 2-year-olds who were eligible but they weren't aware of the offer.

Parents were also given up-to-date information on local early years provision where there were vacancies for 2 year olds.

For consistency, the team produced a crib sheet for all the practitioners to be able to promote the 2-year-old offer; this highlighted the benefits of the 2-year-old offer, for example, how it can offer parents opportunities to use the time to develop their own skills.

Parents were also given information on services offered by the children's centre, and several previously unregistered families signed up.

SAM (School Attendance Matters) and ODO (Odd Days Off) made an appearance to promote better school attendance.

"This was a successful approach to engaging parents which also raised awareness amongst partner agencies such as housing and schools," says Anne.

Build tower blocks not bungalows

"We need to be capable of juggling multiple agendas and outcomes in early years, and mature enough to value them with equal respect", says James Hempsall OBE.

It will soon be 20 years since the first ever national childcare strategy was launched. One of the main aims was to bring together early learning and childcare under the same umbrella; Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) to be precise. It was helped us all recognise the value of early learning and childcare in supporting children to reach their full potential and for parents to achieve their goals in learning and employment. Partnerships brought multiple agendas, specialists, and diverse aims around the table, equally, for the first time. But the development of such partnerships was cut short before true emulsification was achieved.

Since then, the nuances of the strategy, and its successors, have placed different emphasis on early years and childcare. This has both been a good and a bad thing. The benefits have been how the recognition of early learning has evolved and grown academically, nationally, locally, politically and parentally. We are transformed as a consequence. And it has enabled us to become more evidence-based, more high profile, better valued, and demanded as a public service. It has also driven an industry of the highest quality provision across all sub-sectors, with well-informed best practice guidelines and a whole raft of policies and expert approaches which support home learning environments.

There has been sector maturation. Yet, all is not fully mature yet. And the greater profile and recognition has been accompanied by a sense that everyone wants more from us.

What I am also passionate about is what children learn from observing the behaviours and motivations of their parents or significant adults, including their early years and childcare workers. Childcare has sometimes been viewed as more of the bridesmaid than the bride, perhaps of less value than early learning. This is because the motives of childcare can be all too frequently and exclusively attributed to parents' immediate needs, rather than outcomes of children. There are always exceptions and wonderful practice, of course, that counter my argument and I am always delighted when I experience it.

What has sometimes been lost is the contribution we make to the whole family across all other outcomes.

And by that I mean all the excellent role models parents become by being lifelong learners, developing new skills and enjoying the opportunities they bring. And with such skills come parents' employability, income, choices and opportunities, as well as routine and structure in the household. All ingredients for everyone's emotional and economic wellbeing. None of which can be achieved without the availability of high quality, affordable childcare.

Children and parents shouldn't notice the difference between early years and childcare when it is offered in the same building or linked services. There should be no discernible difference in targeted or universal services either. That is for us professionals to manage. We need to be addressing the remaining internal barriers that can often prevent us from achieving the most from our work.

It's the equivalent of building tower blocks with multiple layers and not single- storey bungalows. We have arrived at this point because many of us have had the luxury and the opportunity to develop specialisms driven by our own passion, enthusiasm and focus. Now we all have a responsibility to be more altruistic in our vision and outcomes-focused on early learning, as well as childcare provision, women's equality, social mobility, family learning and employment, and economic wellbeing and anti-poverty for all.

High Achieving White Working Class Boys

BACKGROUND

This project addressed the policy question of how we might enhance the educational achievement of young, white working boys (identified as boys growing up in low income households) in order to close the gap in their attainment on entry to compulsory schooling, improve access to the free early education offer and enable greater social mobility. The project worked affirmatively with a carefully selected cohort of 30 high-achieving, young, white working class (HAWWC) boys, their families and early education settings from 3 regionally selected urban, rural and coastal communities. The cohort provided positive role models to identify and then disseminate nationally through online platforms, home and setting behaviours and interactions that can enable underachieving, less advantaged, young, white working class boys to experience more positive home learning experiences, access a quality free early education place and improve their attainment.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The project aimed to produce new evidence about home learning conditions and early education characteristics which enhance white, working class boys' attainment. To achieve this it aimed to:

» work in an affirmative way with a cohort of 30 high-achieving, young, white working class (HAWWC) boys in three different communities across England, (urban, rural, coastal);

» identify and disseminate to parents/providers in these communities and nationally, the home and setting characteristics that enable less advantaged young, white working class boys to close the attainment gap;

» promote white working class engagement in the free early education offer in order to raise these boys' attainment on entry to compulsory schooling;

» develop and deliver online dissemination material in partnership with the cohort participants and develop a group of successful parents who might work as Parent Ambassadors within the local white working class community to provide positive role models from within these communities.

RATIONALE

The HAWWC Boys Project set out to address the policy question of how we might enhance the educational achievement of young, white working class boys in order to close the gap in their attainment on entry to compulsory schooling and so enable greater social mobility. White working class underachievement in education is real and persistent, (OfSTED, 2007, 2008, 2013, 2014; Select Committee, 2014; Perera et al, 2016) and evidence consistently shows that 'white British boys from low-income groups make less progress than most other groups' and that recent reforms have done little 'to lift the boats' of children from these communities. In 2008, an OfSTED survey gave a brief overview of the evidence and outlined some illustrative ideas to address the issue, predominantly focusing on primary and secondary schools. Yet Feinstein (2003) has demonstrated, the 'effects of class difference on cognitive development are apparent even before nursery school' (p.24). White children who are eligible for free school meals are consistently the lowest performing group in the country, and the difference between their educational performance and that of their less deprived white peers is larger than for any other ethnic group. The gap exists at age five and widens as children get older. The possible causes and contributors to white working

class underachievement are many and various, and include matters in home life, early education and care practices, and wider social policies. A major national cross-party review, (Allen et al, 2009) and a recent study for OfSTED by the authors (Pascal and Bertram 2012) argued that the overwhelming evidence is that early intervention (critically, birth-3 years) makes the greatest long term impact on this socially excluded group. Feinstein's research (2004) suggests complex interactions between contexts, behaviours and interactions with parents, carers, settings and practitioners and the dispositions of these young children lead to different outcomes, but currently there is very little qualitative evidence in the literature, as Springate et al (2008) confirm. This study aims to address this gap in evidence and target action on those involved in the 2 year old early education entitlement, the early years pupil premium and parent support programmes.

APPROACH AND PARTICIPANTS

The HAWWC Boys Project aimed to generate new knowledge, in a way that does not stigmatise or pathologise underachieving young children by capturing grounded, rich and constructive descriptions of the context of interactions, aspirations and expectations in the early lives of high achieving HAWCC boys. Adopting the strategy of appreciative inquiry from

Parent
Birmingham

Clark (1976) and Cooperrider et al (2008), the project looked at those who succeed despite the known negative predictive factors, and attempted to extend the protective factors identified to those who are less successful through a targeted home and settings enhancement strategy.

We were rather shocked to find that for most of our project parents there was an almost total lack of awareness of their son's status as a high performer in the schooling system. They were pleasantly surprised to have their son singled out as a high performer, and though many were aware that their son was making good progress at school, they had no idea that he was in the top 15% of achievement against the EYFSP scores in the country ie he was outstanding in his level of attainment on entry to school. The study boys were strong, highly competent, motivated young children who had high levels of social and emotional skill and an

ability to operate successfully in all areas of their life, at home and at school. Yet, this success (relative to peers) had largely passed these parents by in the feedback they had received in these formative years of the child's life. These highly attentive parents and competent parents were equally unaware of their parenting skills and had never had these affirmed, especially in the context of some of the life challenging personal circumstances they had, and continued to, face. Their lack of self-esteem around their parenting and their subsequent joy of having these skills acknowledged in a national project was transformative for many of the parents in the study, who we could see grow in confidence as the study process progressed. Some reported that it was the first time anyone had ever given them positive feedback on their parenting competencies and capacities, which were in all cases outstanding.

OUTCOMES

Key Concepts and Conceptual Framework

The project evidence suggests two key concepts which are useful when considering how to improve white working class boys' achievement. The case studies reveal that successful white working class boys demonstrate '**Academic Resilience**' and successful white working class parents demonstrate '**Parenting Resilience'**.

'Academic Resilience' is defined as '*a complex process involving internal and external factors, where a network of bi-directional relationships between child, family, school, peers, neighbourhood and wider society factors come into play to overcome environmental risk experiences*' (Rutter, 2012, p.335). (See also Ungar, Ghazinour and Richter, 2013).

'Parenting Resilience' is defined as '*the capacity of parents to resist and minimise the impact of risky contextual behaviours and conditions in the home and wider family to allow warm, boundaried parenting behaviours to predominate in their relationship with the child.*' (Pascal and Bertram, 2016).

The literature suggests that both academic and parenting resilience are dynamic and fluctuate within different domains and contexts, as well as within various stages of life, so a child or parent who demonstrates resilience at one stage may not necessarily display this at a different life stage. The issue this raises for the on-going development of the project is the sustainability of resilience conditions once the child enters primary schooling. We are aware that in the early years of the high achieving boy's lives, the child and parent have been successful in securing this resilience. The question remains as to how and if this can be sustained as the child moves through primary schooling

to their young adulthood.

The literature also points to a number of risk factors which surround young boys and their parents which are associated with educational underachievement and which there is a need for wider social policy to address. These include:

» Socio- economic background/poverty

» Parent unemployment

» Low parental education

» Single parenthood

» Lack of social support

» Inconsistent parenting practices

» Family conflicts

» Physical illness

» Caregiver psychopathology.

Several of our HAWWC Boy families were living with these risk factors, as the evidence below reveals. However, there is also evidence that protective factors are also in play which can mitigate these risk factors. These include:

For the Child
» Good cognitive skills (motivation, concentration, memory, self-regulation etc.)

» Easy temperament (socio-affective competencies: good social competencies, empathy, social cognition etc.)

» Child's behavioural traits.

In the Home
» Parents' ability to cope with stress

» Parenting style and behaviour

» Parents' emotional expression.

Key Message

Adult's **Parenting Resilience** and children's **Academic Resilience** are both made of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes. They develop in spite of adversity when basic protective systems in human development are operating to counteract the threats to development. In short, both of these types of resilience emerge from a process that involves ordinary, adaptable and transferable behaviours and resources which are available to children and their parents.

In the case of the HAWWC families:

The extraordinary is their capacity to give and receive excellent (ordinary!) parenting in sometimes deeply challenging circumstances.

In the Early Childhood Setting

» Positive and close Key Worker relationship

» Individualised parenting support with a focus on coping strategies and sensitive parenting skills

» Stimulating, child focused Early Education programme with a focus on improving children's social competencies, self-regulation skills.

In our project, these protective factors were very evident in the high achieving young boys' early lives, and were clearly active in in different degrees in enabling the study boys to develop academic resilience. The case studies reveal that the parents of these boys had managed to facilitate these protective factors in the face of quite considerable adversity in some cases, demonstrating high levels of parenting resilience.

Seen in this way, the evidence and actions we identified is optimistic, demonstrating that even in adversity, excellent parenting is possible and that the resilience the young boys and their parents in our project demonstrate shows the way for others to act. It is also evident from the case studies that this is not about dramatic or extraordinary capacities. Rather, that the required resilience is made of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes. This resilience develops in spite of adversity when basic protective systems in human development are operating to counteract the threats to child's development and parent's capacity to parent. In short, resilience for both young boys and parents

HAWCC Circles of Success

is a process that involves ordinary adaptive resources and systems. In short, it is in the grasp of everyone.

Our evidence from the project has been analysed and we have developed a conceptual framework which aims to capture and exemplify the complex network of inter-relationships which are involved in supporting the academic and parenting resilience that underpin young white boys high achievement. We have called this framework the HAWWC Circles of Success and this is represented diagrammatically above.

This framework has four inner elements and two outer elements, each of which can be seen as actively contributing to the ecological context (Bronfrenbrenner 1979) in which the high

achieving young boy is developing and which play a part in enabling (or inhibiting) their achievement. The four inner elements are:

» Child Temperament and Capacities

» Home Relationships

» Setting Strategies and Practices

Home Learning Environment

The two outer elements are:

» Complexity in Low Income/White Working Class Families;

» Approaches to Parental Engagement in Learning.

Click here to read the full HAWWC Boys report

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