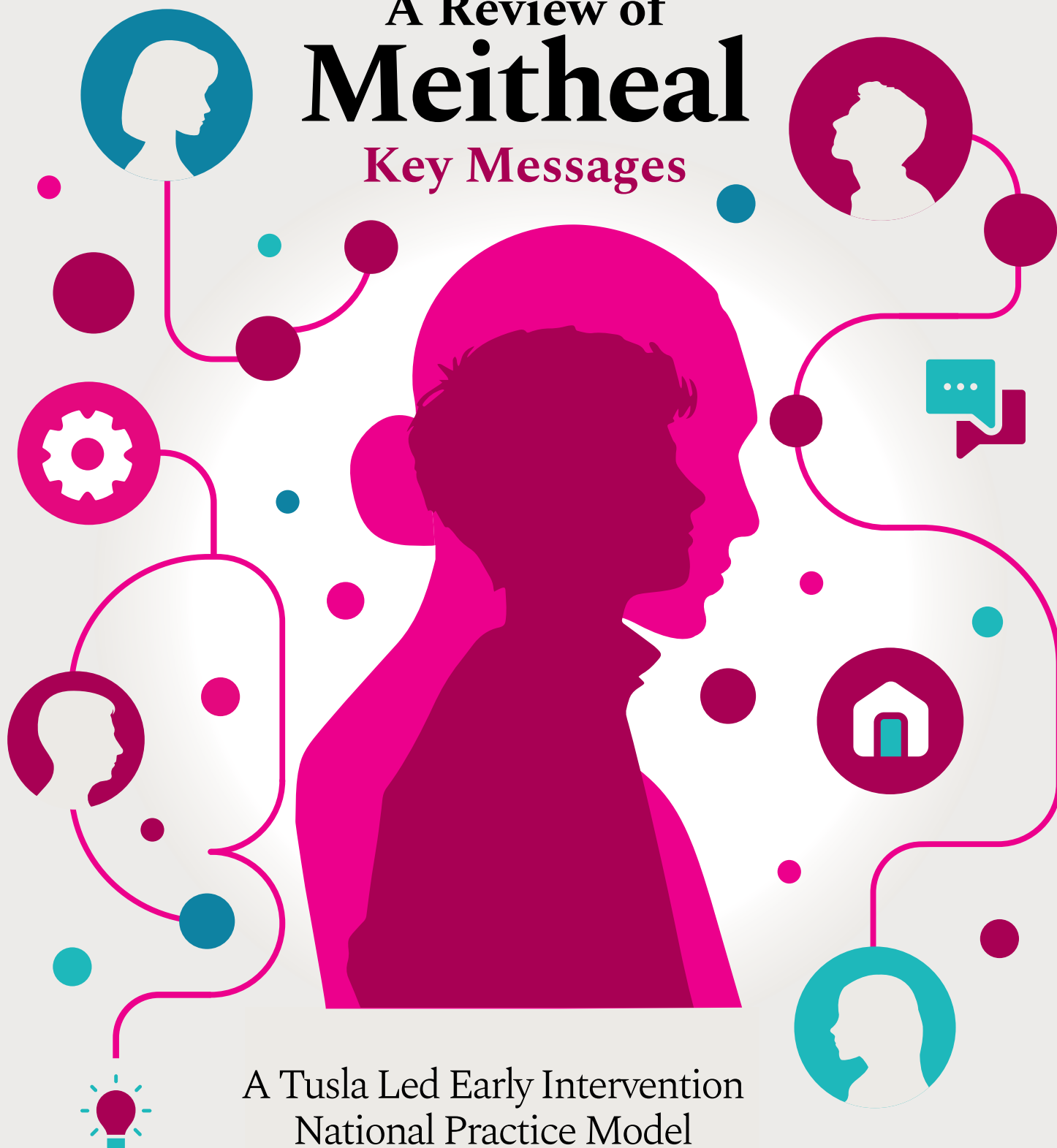


A Review of **Meitheal** Key Messages



A Tusla Led Early Intervention
National Practice Model

May 2025

- Meitheal is a Tusla-led early intervention practice model. It is designed to ensure that the strengths and needs of children and their families are effectively identified, understood, and responded to in a timely way so they get the help and support needed to improve children's outcomes and realise their rights.
- Meitheal is voluntary and can only be undertaken when the parent/carer agrees to cooperate, engage with, and actively participate in the process.
- The role of the Lead Practitioner (LP) in a Meitheal is instrumental in its delivery. The LP can be a practitioner who has or can develop trusting working relationships with the child or young person and their family. The LP can be drawn from the statutory or community and voluntary sectors.

- Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) include a number of state agencies and voluntary and community services who are working with, and supporting children and families in a particular catchment area.
- CFSNs help families experience services as easily as possible in their own area.
- The CFSN Coordinator supports the development of the Network and also oversees the Meitheal process.
- Both Meitheal and the CFSNs are part of Tusla's integrated response pathway responding to children and families with unmet needs.

Research Objectives



Research Design & Participants

A purposive sampling approach was used with an invitation to participate in the Review issued via Tusla managers to all practitioners and managers who had experience of the Meitheal model.

All families who had completed or were about to complete their Meitheal process within a six-month period (July - December 2024) were invited by their LPs to participate in the research.

Ethical approval was granted by Tusla's Research Ethics Committee & by the University of Galway's Research Ethics Committee.

Phase 1

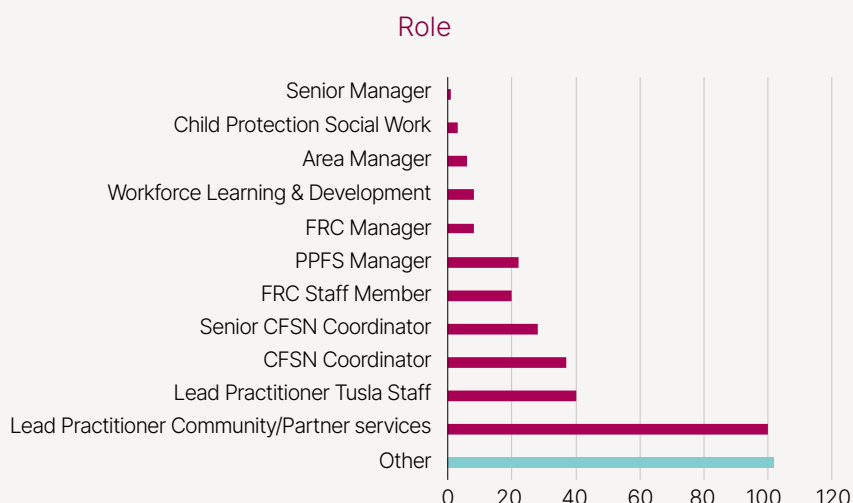
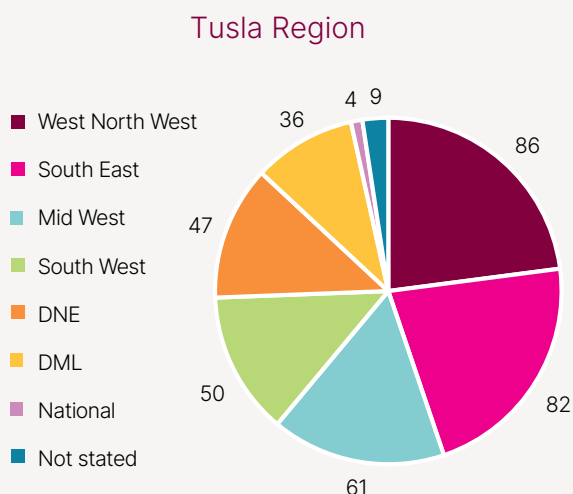
Tusla published Performance and Activity Reports analysed to inform phase 2.

Phase 2

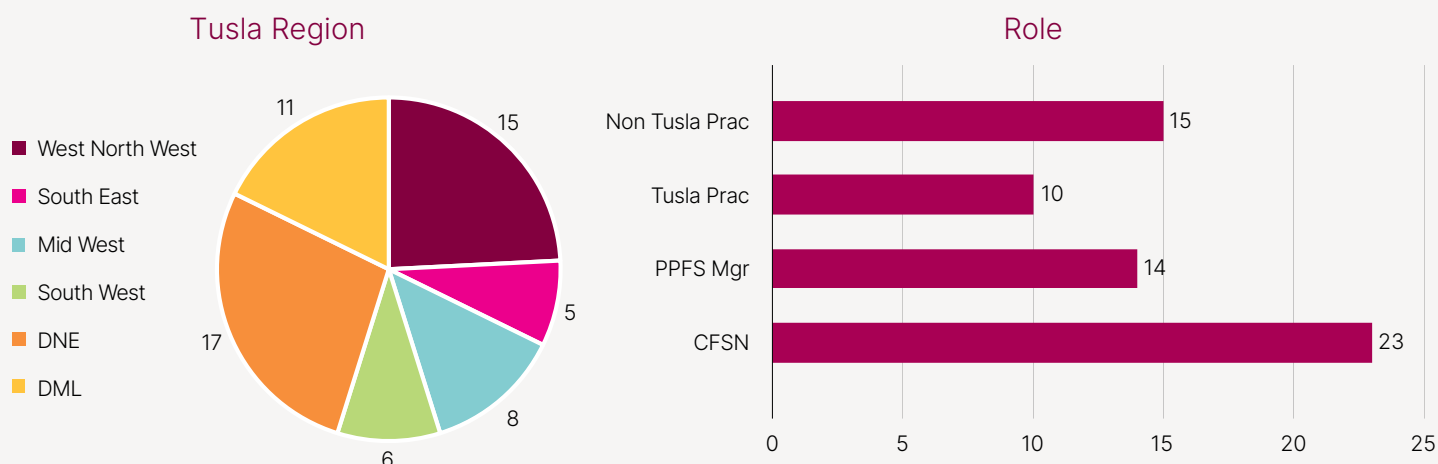
Online Survey with Practitioners & Service Managers (n=375)
Interviews with:

- Practitioners & Service Managers (n=62)
- National Managers (n=6)
- Parents (all mothers) and their Lead Practitioners (n=9)

Survey (n=375)

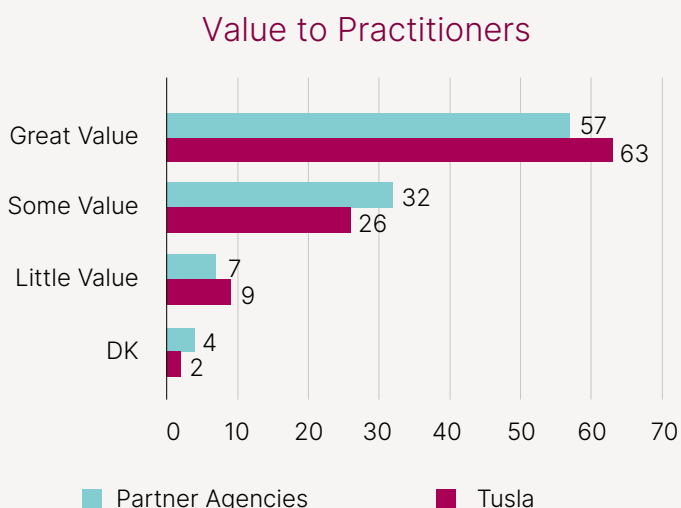


Interviews with Practitioners & Service Managers (n=62)



Findings

Promoting & Support Meitheal and its Role in Tusla Response Pathways (Objectives 1 & 3)



Meitheal is described by the vast majority of participants as being a worthwhile model of practice which adds value to the work of Tusla & its partner agencies.

63% of survey respondents described Meitheal as of great value to Tusla while 57% described the model as of great value to partner agencies.

- In the main Meitheal is well promoted and supported locally.
- There are varied local experiences of the extent to which it is integrated with Tusla's Child Protection (CP) Service.
- There is a mixed level of awareness of the model & its potential across sectors, disciplines & among the public.

Organisational Support

Just over half of survey participants across all Regions (55.5%) reported that there was a high level of support from their organisation for Meitheal.

However, 31% of respondents across all Regions rated organisational support for Meitheal as a 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale.

Aligned with this point, 41% of survey participants reported facing barriers in applying the Meitheal model in their work.

There is a disconnect in the data collection systems between Meitheal and other areas of Tusla's work. Despite the high level of local administration involved in Meitheal the range and level of work involved (particularly outside meetings) and its outcomes is not adequately captured.

The implementation & delivery of Meitheal (Objective 1)

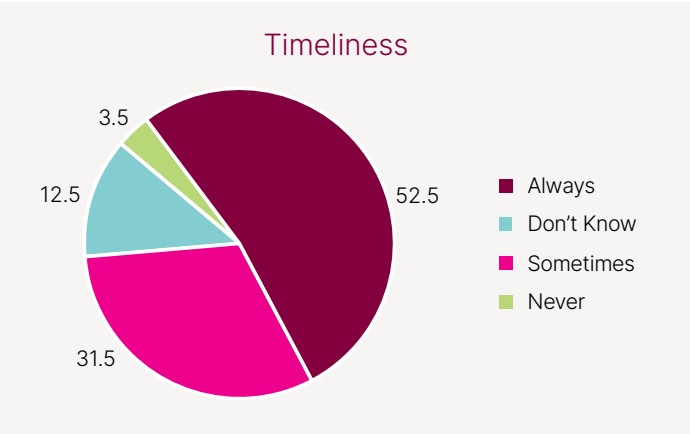
The principles of the Meitheal process are consistently applied nationwide with all practitioners familiar with and mindful of implementing the principles in each Meitheal. 81% of survey respondents reported a high level of implementation quality. However, There is variety in the systems and structures at Tusla Area level which results in nuanced differences in the operationalisation of Meitheal.

Meitheal Requests

- The majority of requests are for families with medium to high level of need. They are experiencing complex family circumstances with multi-faceted issues.

- Most families had previous involvement with CP Services and/or are just below the threshold for CP services.
- The majority of requests are *Direct Access* with requests coming from community and voluntary partner agencies and schools.
- Meitheal is also offered to families with lower levels of need, who due to the complexity of these needs require a multi-agency response.

52% of survey respondents indicated that the requests for a Meitheal are always processed in a timely manner (where timely is viewed as within 6 weeks), while a further 31.5% indicated that the requests are sometimes processed in a timely manner.



The LPs and CSFN Co-ordinators are a fundamental resource in the Meitheal process. Parents really value the support received.

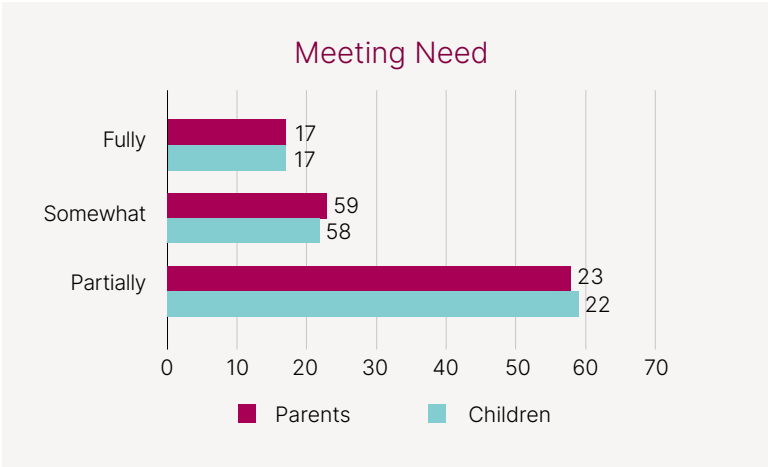
"He [the Lead Practitioner] is going beyond his responsibilities to help people...I haven't met someone like that ever in my life... that fights for us and to achieve what we achieved"

(Parent C)

However, the role of LP is seen as involving too much individual responsibility with a consequential reluctance to volunteer for the role. This is seen as a particular issue in the community and voluntary sector. Furthermore, the level and scale of the administration required for Meitheal is seen as overly onerous. There is a lack of a consistent, formalised business support for the implementation of Meitheal. Business support is provided in some Areas for scheduling meetings and minute taking while in others the CFSN coordinator or LP takes on these duties. Where it is in place, this administrative support is seen as invaluable for all involved.

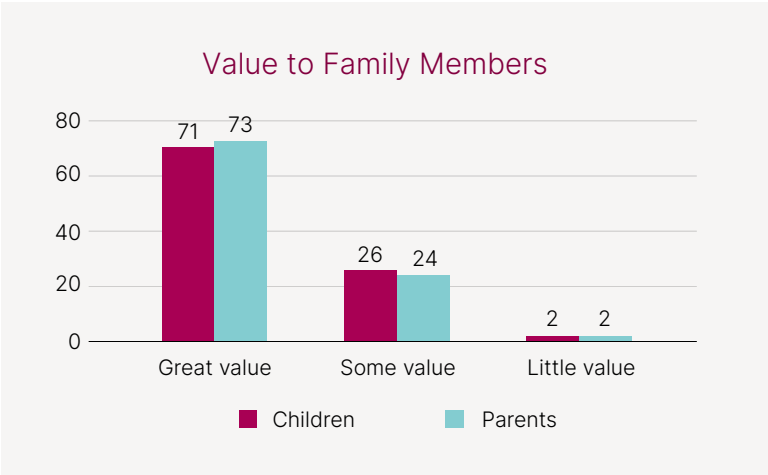
Meeting the needs of families & those working with them (Objectives 2 & 5)

In many instances Meitheal is viewed as successfully meeting its intended outcomes. However, the increasingly high level and complexity of need that families are experiencing results in many Meitheals being able to only partially respond to need.



17% of survey respondents felt that Meitheal was fully meeting the needs of children and parents with most (59% and 58% respectively) feeling that the model was partially meeting their needs.

The majority of survey participants reported that Meitheal was of great value to children (71%) and to parents (73%) with a further quarter of participants (26% and 24%) believing it added some value.

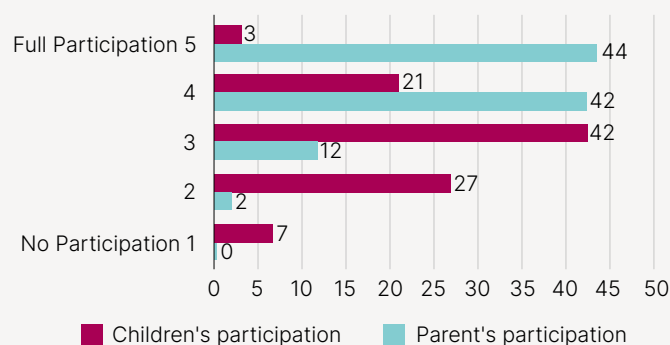


"My overall experience is just amazing. I was so glad I got to do it and I knew when the next meeting was coming and any problems that had arisen in the meantime or any questions I had I could keep them for everyone at the table, they always, always, no matter what, took the time to listen to me"

(Parent A)

Parents are reported as having high levels of participation in the Meitheal process with almost 86% of participants rating their involvement as 4 and 5 on a five-point scale. Children have lower level of participation. Many and varied efforts are made by practitioners to ensure meaningful participation, while also respecting the views of children, young people & parents in this regard.

Participation in Meitheal process



"It was great because everybody got listened to and I, Mum, got listened to too. I was for years fighting & there was nobody listening to me, but I got my voice in that room & I was an equal. I felt equal at that table even though I'm sitting with all professionals. I felt equal & I felt this is helping my son"

(Parent I)

The commitment to implementing meaningful participation in a statutory Child Protection and Welfare arena is highly commended.

The impact of Meitheal on interagency working & its connectivity to CFSNs (Objectives 4 & 5)

Meitheal exemplifies the importance of interagency collaboration. The model provides a valuable, effective framework for this collaboration.

Meitheal emphasises the value of creating a community of practice to respond collectively to the increasing complexity and demand in supportive services required for families.

Meitheal acts as a bridge between Tusla and its community & voluntary partner agencies. It provides an opportunity to highlight the current pressure on services while ensuring no one service is singularly responsible for responding to families' needs.

The CFSNs are well established nationwide & working well developing, strengthening & maintaining a solid awareness & understanding of current needs & resources in their catchment Area.

A wide range of disciplines and statutory & community & voluntary sector services are part of the Networks and attend scheduled meetings and events.

Meitheal is not a panacea and cannot compensate for the many structural inequalities and lack of resources in the current provision of services.

Particular sectors stand out as being severely under-resourced with families who require support in relation to disability, psychology or child psychiatry experiencing long delays in securing a response.

Recommendations

A continuation of Meitheal by Tusla as one of its agreed practice models to respond to families with medium to high levels of need is recommended. A focused campaign promoting the understanding and use of the model by Tusla and partner agencies in statutory and community and voluntary sectors is suggested. An awareness campaign for children, young people and parents is also recommended.

Consideration is needed to ensure seamless integration and continuation between Meitheal and the other supports and services offered to families.

Continuation and development of the CFSNs is recommended. Increased capacity among CFSN coordinators to support both the Networks and Meitheal is necessary. The provision of adequate business support for Meitheal is also required in order for the model to fulfill its potential.

It is necessary to further consider children and young people's participation in the process and if/how it can be enhanced. This includes the virtual participation or representation by children and young people. Active and meaningful participation by children and young people may be more readily achieved through their virtual participation as opposed to requiring them to be physically present in a meeting space.

Since Tusla's inception in 2014, there has been a welcome significant investment and a strong focus on early intervention, prevention and support within the statutory CP and Welfare service. This Review provides concrete evidence for the need for ongoing and sustained efforts to continue and further develop this orientation and to promote early and accessible help for all children, young people and their families.

Acknowledgements

Sincere thank you to all who participated in this Review. This includes Parents, Practitioners, Service Managers and National Managers in statutory, community and voluntary services. Thank you to the parents and young people who reviewed all data collection material and provided valuable feedback on the schedules, information and consent sheets. Thanks also to the Steering Committee overseeing this Review comprising representatives from Tusla – Child and Family Agency, the Department of Children, Disability & Equality and the University of Galway.

Scan the QR code to see the full Report



Authors

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