

The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme

*Collaborative leadership for
better outcomes*

TÚSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency



Low Prevention Services

The
A T L A N T I C
Philanthropies

The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme is a comprehensive programme of early intervention and preventative work which has been undertaken by Tusla - Child and Family Agency, with the support of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

The work is being made possible as a result of a once-off non-discretionary grant of €8.3 million from The Atlantic Philanthropies.

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Using this document

This document provides an overview of the PPFs Programme and introduces the measures for early intervention and low prevention in place under that programme. It will focus on Meitheal, the Tusla-led early intervention national practice model. Meitheal is a multi-agency approach and we invite all partners to collaborate with us as we implement this early intervention model.

Find out more

In some sections, 'signposts' will guide the reader to further information.

Low Prevention Services

This document is the first of three planned documents covering the continuum of care through the Low, Medium and High Prevention Services of Tusla. This is the Low Prevention Document.

A message from our CEO



The implementation of the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme, is focused on early intervention and will provide supportive, co-ordinated and evidence informed services that achieve positive outcomes for children. We want to share power, control and responsibility with children, families and communities, ensuring that our interventions maximise families' dignity, autonomy and self-determination. This can only be achieved through collaborative and inter-agency working across statutory bodies, the voluntary sector, community and children and families themselves.

This brochure will outline a specific component of the programme called Meitheal - the Tusla-led early intervention national practice model. Tusla is committed to increasing focus on prevention and early intervention through strengthening local partnerships and connections with other statutory and community providers through the implementation of Prevention, Partnership and Family Support and Meitheal around the country.

It can be challenging to get initiatives working to their full potential, and it takes time to embed these initiatives into practice; however the approach is generating real results and gaining momentum across the country. This initiative creates an opportunity to work collaboratively, share experience and knowledge, and learn from each other.

The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme represents a positive step in Tusla's approach to working with families, young people and communities to involve them in key decisions affecting children's lives, while providing services that are appropriate, proportionate and timely.

I look forward to seeing this programme, and specifically the 'Meitheal' approach being embedded into practice across the country, with the support of our partners and stakeholders around the country, as we work to expand this early intervention approach to improve outcomes for children.

Fred McBride
Chief Executive, Tusla

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The best way
to predict the
future is to
create it.

Peter F. Drucker

Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme overview

The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme is an evidence-led approach to prevention and early intervention work.

It is about delivering services within a coordinated, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency framework, from universal and community services, through to secondary and tertiary level services.

It is about working to ensure that families throughout the country receive preventative support and early intervention locally as part of one cohesive system through agencies identifying need early with children and families and working with others to provide practical help and support.

The development and implementation of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*¹ policy framework has created a single, cross-government platform for improved children's services and policies. It adopts a whole-of-Government approach, placing cross-sectoral priority on prevention and early intervention. Accessible, universal and open access services are underpinned by prevention and early intervention approaches, while more targeted, effective interventions are provided to further support children at risk.

Core principles of the Programme

Children, young people and families will be at the heart of everything that Tusla do. In order to do this, Tusla commits to the following:

1. To focus on the wishes, feelings, safety and well-being of children while abiding by the principles as set out in legislation.²
2. To provide support at the earliest point with focus concentrated on family strengths and capacities.
3. To focus, with all service providers, on improving outcomes for children and families and tracking progress and results.
4. To strike a balanced approach between developing primary prevention and early intervention services whilst maintaining services at other levels of need. Tusla will ensure that services at higher levels of need are adequately funded.
5. To be mindful of the latest research about what works well for families and what families need when planning, monitoring and evaluating services.
6. To work in partnership with children, families, communities, child and family practitioners and other agencies; statutory, community and voluntary.
7. To ensure services will be cost-effective and will demonstrate value in terms of promoting better outcomes for children.
8. To ensure practitioners and services will promote human rights and social inclusion, addressing issues around ethnicity, sexuality, disability and rural/urban communities.

¹ *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people, 2014-2020*

² *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2011*

Programme delivery

The Programme is implemented collaboratively by Tusla and partner organisations by way of five main work streams:

1. Participation

Supporting the participation of children in decisions that affect them.

Every time a decision is taken that directly affects a child or young person, one must ensure that their views are taken into consideration in the decision-making process.

As set out in national strategies³, the participation of children and young people is fundamental to a child-centred, rights-based approach to working with children and young people.

[Find out more](http://bit.ly/2fx86Sz)

<http://bit.ly/2fx86Sz>

2. Parenting

Supporting parents in developing parental skills.

Being a parent is a complex and important task, so supporting their parenting skills makes sense. Tusla is committed to enhancing existing parenting support provision and is actively working with parents so that together we can support all children and young people in being safe and achieving their full potential.

[Find out more](http://bit.ly/2fRcj0t)

<http://bit.ly/2fRcj0t>

3. Commissioning

Adopting a new approach to commissioning strategy.

Tusla endeavours to use the total resources available for children and families in the most efficient and equitable way in order to improve outcomes for all children.

The development of Tusla's Commissioning Strategy supports Tusla to decide how best to use its resources to achieve best outcomes for families, children and young people. It focuses on aligning resources and

evidence-informed services to address the varying needs of children and young people at different levels of service.

The Commissioning Strategy supports a wide variety of both statutory and voluntary local, regional and national services to ensure they are provided in a sustainable way. It is a vital lever for shaping the system of service provision throughout Ireland, and is particularly effective in incentivizing all agencies to adapt and work towards common goals.

[Find out more](http://bit.ly/2xFDDIp)

<http://bit.ly/2xFDDIp>

4. Child and Family Support Networks and Meitheal

Implementing an area-based approach to prevention and early intervention.

The development of an area-based approach to PPFs has been undertaken as part of Tusla's approach to supporting children and families across the continuum of need. Tusla is in the process of putting in place Senior Managers for PPFs, Senior Coordinators who are tasked with developing Child & Family Support Networks and Coordinators to facilitate the implementation of Meitheal and support parents and children to access support services locally. CYPSCs (County-Level Children and Young People's Services Committees) and CFSNs (localized Children and Family Support Networks) are working to ensure that all families in a locality receive easily accessible support. Members of CFSNs come from a variety of agencies or local voluntary and community services.

In practical terms, if a family presents to one service within the network and that service is not equipped to meet their needs, that network member can effectively re-direct the family to the most appropriate network member(s) or service.

To be able to do this, CFSNs need to develop a good understanding and become familiar with one another's work. Training together as an inter-agency group is a key method of developing CFSNs into a unified, cohesive and integrated support system. The CFSNs also facilitate the coordinated use of Meitheal, the Tusla-led early intervention national practice model that identifies a child's and their families' needs and strengths, and brings together a team around the child to deliver preventative support.

[Find out more](http://bit.ly/2hyCGYV)

<http://bit.ly/2hyCGYV>

5. Public Awareness

Implementing Programme awareness.

In order to successfully support children and families in a manner best suited to their needs, we must ensure that we continuously listen to, talk to and learn from everyone connected with support services, on both a national and local level. It is key that information about the range of community and family supports is available to service users directly, that service providers are familiar with the full scope of supports available to them, and programme managers are empowered to commission services based on feedback.

From internal awareness campaigns, stakeholder engagements and public awareness events, we are working to continue to support our partners, empower practitioners and enhance children and family participation in decision-making processes.

[Find out more](http://bit.ly/2fQB0tY)

<http://bit.ly/2fQB0tY>

³ National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making, Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA (2015)) and BOBF (2014). National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).

⁴ See page 9 for more details.

Evaluation of the Programme

The research and evaluation team at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway provides research, evaluation and technical support to the Tusla Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS).

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2xRoKDM>

The continuum of care

Families may need help and support at any level of need. It is important to coordinate support to help them, where the threshold for social work intervention has not been met, as well as during and after social work intervention, as needed. Integrated, high-quality services to children and families must be provided at the earliest opportunity across all levels of need. These services are delivered on the basis of low, medium or high prevention.

Low Prevention Services

At this level, a child or young person identified as having additional needs may require some additional support without which they would be at risk of not reaching their full potential. The additional support may relate to a variety of issues, such as health, social or educational issues.

Tusla, at the low prevention level, offer a range of parenting and family supports through the funding of community and voluntary sector programmes and services. Specifically, Tusla, in partnership with other agencies, is implementing Meitheal to identify needs and strengths and to bring together a team around the child to deliver preventative support. The participation and partnership based principles of Meitheal are entirely consistent with the principles of the Signs of Safety Practice Approach now being adopted by Tusla's Child Protection Social Work Services as part of our Child Protection and Welfare Strategy.

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2fKwVdW>

Medium Prevention Services

At this level, the aim is to support parents in their parenting role to better parent their children with targeted and intensive parenting, and therapeutic supports. Where problems are more entrenched, clinical guidance from social care and health care professionals can be provided.

Tusla is implementing the Signs of Safety Practice Approach, which is an innovative methodology designed to enable child protection practitioners to work through a rigorous focus on child safety in partnership with children, families and a wider network of support. It recognizes that constructive working relationships between professionals and family members, and between professionals themselves, are the heart and soul of effective practice in responding to situations where children suffer abuse. It fosters a questioning approach and delivers more skillful and constructive solutions.

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2hHFg2x>

<http://bit.ly/2ynWmJZ>

High Prevention Services

At this level, a child or young person who may be at risk of harm will require specialist assessment from a collaboration of experienced professionals.

Tusla is implementing Creative Community Alternatives, which provides alternatives to care for children, delivered by multi-disciplinary and highly adaptable teams and services, underpinning the process with Signs of Safety. This high level prevention approach is aimed at those children who are either on the edge of alternative care or currently in alternative care due to complex factors that may include neglect, parental separation, attachment issues, alcohol and /or drug misuse, mental health and economic disadvantage.

Creative Community Alternatives aims to develop the problem-solving skills, coping skills, and self-efficacy of young people and their family members. There is an emphasis on integrating the young person into their local community and building the family's social support network.

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2ya3bOr>

1. Prevention and the importance of early intervention

The best way to improve outcomes for children is to intervene at an early stage to resolve problems and prevent harm.

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There is a significant body of evidence available on the benefits of intervening early in children's lives when there are difficulties, in order to prevent problems escalating, to strengthen families' capacity to nurture children, and to encourage and enable families to solve their own problems.

Studies are increasingly identifying the importance of early life experiences to people's health throughout the life course. Individuals who have Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) during childhood or adolescence tend to have more physical and mental health problems as adults than those who do

not have ACEs and ultimately greater likelihood of premature mortality. ACEs that affect children directly include abuse and neglect. Indirectly, ACEs may occur through their living environments e.g. parental conflict, substance abuse, or mental illness. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are essential to enable all children to reach their full potential.

Early intervention and improved cooperation, means that apparent difficult issues can be dealt with quickly and effectively, getting a full picture of a child's circumstances and getting appropriate people involved early.

The role of prevention is not only to combat risk factors but also to enhance and promote the positives in a child's life as well as opportunities for child development. Changing the balance between risk and protective factors so that protective factors outweigh risk factors is an effective prevention and early intervention strategy.



Low-level prevention approach

This brochure sets out to explain Tusla's approach to early intervention and prevention. Tusla is putting in place an infrastructure to support preventative approaches to working with children and families at local level.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs' 'High Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families' (2015)⁵ gives a policy platform for Tusla to strengthen and grow parenting and family support as an effective

prevention and early intervention measure to promote best possible outcomes for children.

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2xQAkib>

Meitheal, the Tusla-led early intervention national practice model

Meitheal is a core low prevention component of the PPFS Programme that represents Tusla's commitment to working with all agencies that come in contact with children. It is a coordinated, multi-agency approach which aims to ensure that interventions maximise families' dignity, autonomy and self-determination.

Meitheal is a strengths-based tool that is used to identify the strengths of families and provide coordinated multi-agency support to families and children.

This 'joined-up' approach focuses on the child's developmental needs within their family and their community. Using this strengths and needs approach, the gap between a child's current state and the desired state are identified and a plan is agreed to support a child or young person to improve their well-being in partnership with their parents/carers, and the people and services in the child's community.

Best outcomes for children and families are promoted through sharing power, responsibility and control with children, families and communities. The strength of this approach is that it involves cross-sectoral partnership and

working with children and families to provide practical help and support at an early stage.

In order to increase our focus on prevention and early intervention, Tusla needs to strengthen partnerships and connections with other statutory and community providers through the implementation of PPFS and Meitheal at a local level. This requires all partners working with children to coordinate practical supports and help in each locality.

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2fKwVdW>

Tusla's Parenting Support Strategy

The Parenting Support Strategy has been designed in recognition of the key role that parents and parenting practice have in the realisation of better outcomes for children and families. The Parenting Support Strategy seeks to re-orientate practice within Tusla to enable practitioners to spend more time with families and in the community on promotional and preventative work.

As part of national policy, Tusla aims to enable areas to provide supports so that:

- Every parent in Ireland will know where to go to access information about parenting and parenting supports;
- Every parent will know where to get help if they need it;
- Every parent will be able to access friendly and effective parenting supports and services, if they wish;
- Parents will be encouraged to participate in local parenting initiatives.

The promotion of Parenting24seven key messages, the Parenting Support Champions project and other related initiatives are part of an evidence-led approach to supporting parents to improve outcomes and achieve family wellbeing.

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/1DZ59it>

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The ultimate goal is to enable parents and practitioners to work jointly together to achieve a better life for the child.

⁵ Department of Children and Youth Affairs' 'High Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families' 2015

Rationale for an early intervention approach

1. It follows Government Policy

The Government's *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* policy recognises that supporting parents to parent confidently and positively is one of the primary, universal and most effective supports that the state can provide. The Government is committed to rebalancing resources to place a greater emphasis on prevention and earlier intervention, the aim of which is to gradually transfer resources over time from crisis to earlier points of intervention.

To support this happening, the policy specifically identifies the responsibilities of various state agencies in achieving these objectives and requires all those who provide services to coordinate and deliver these services in an integrated way.⁶

Subsequent to the policy's publication, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published its 'High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families (2015)'. The Government identified Tusla to assume responsibility as a driving force for an integrated system of children's services that will have formal linkages with the providers of other services, with the necessity for positive and close working partnerships between State agencies and non-governmental organisations.

Key elements of achieving success in this endeavour include improved interagency working, workforce development, information and evidence to inform the targeting of resources, integration of service planning and delivery, and partnership with children and their parents. Evidence suggests that when children and young people are meaningfully engaged in child

protection interventions, it can lead to better outcomes, including better targeted services for children and their families and the empowerment of children and young people. The participation of children and young people is fundamental to a child-centred approach to transforming Ireland's child protection and welfare services and a key element of the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme. This approach is also harmonious with a rights-based approach to supporting families and protecting children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁷

2. It draws on available evidence

Prevention and early intervention draws on a range of well tested programmes which are low in cost and high in results and which can have a lasting impact on all children, especially the most vulnerable. Early intervention can support children in developing vital social and emotional foundations which will help to keep them happy, healthy and achieving throughout their lives.

International best practice supports early intervention as a means to make lasting improvements in the lives of children, to forestall many persistent social problems and end their transmission from one generation to the next.

3. It balances resources more effectively

Every child needs effective early childhood development to be successful, but not all children achieve this at the right time. It is proven

that investing in the early childhood development of disadvantaged children will produce great returns to the individuals and to society in terms of health, education, economic and social outcomes, and most importantly, helping children realise their full potential. Prevention and early intervention is also the most economical way to help children and families, reducing long-term dependency on a range of state services.⁸ The appropriate commissioning of prevention and early intervention initiatives will benefit children, and society at large. Everyone gains when we invest, develop and sustain the development of our most important resources: our children and families.

Prevention, Partnership and Family Support initiatives currently account for approximately 10% of Tusla's resources. Greater investment is needed if we are to prevent children experiencing abuse and neglect and/or requiring alternative care.

i Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2xiP8H1>

⁶ DCYA Interim Statement of Strategy (2011).

⁷ General Comment 13 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

⁸ <https://heckmanequation.org/>

2. The importance of partnership

An integrated approach using a common framework can help us all to achieve common goals.

In line with the *Children First Act, 2015* and *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014* we all have a collective, cross-departmental responsibility to ensure children achieve the Five National Outcomes, including safety. Statutory services, such as health, education, An Garda Síochána, local authorities and the community and voluntary sectors as well as Tusla, all have a responsibility and a contribution to make in the protection and welfare of all children.

Children and families are most likely to do well if they are provided with appropriate support in a timely fashion that is well coordinated, with good communication and partnership working between all professionals.

From both a policy and practice perspective, partnership with families and between key agencies is essential. There is a need for on-going dialogue between parents, children and service providers to ensure that all those involved contribute to common solutions.

The benefits of working together:

- less duplication of effort;
- improved understanding of service delivery options;
- better quality and more appropriate referrals;
- better service experience for children and families;
- a more child and family-centred approach;
- fewer assessments and less repetition;
- less bureaucratic access to a range of services.

📄 **Find out more**

<http://bit.ly/2xRCCgd>



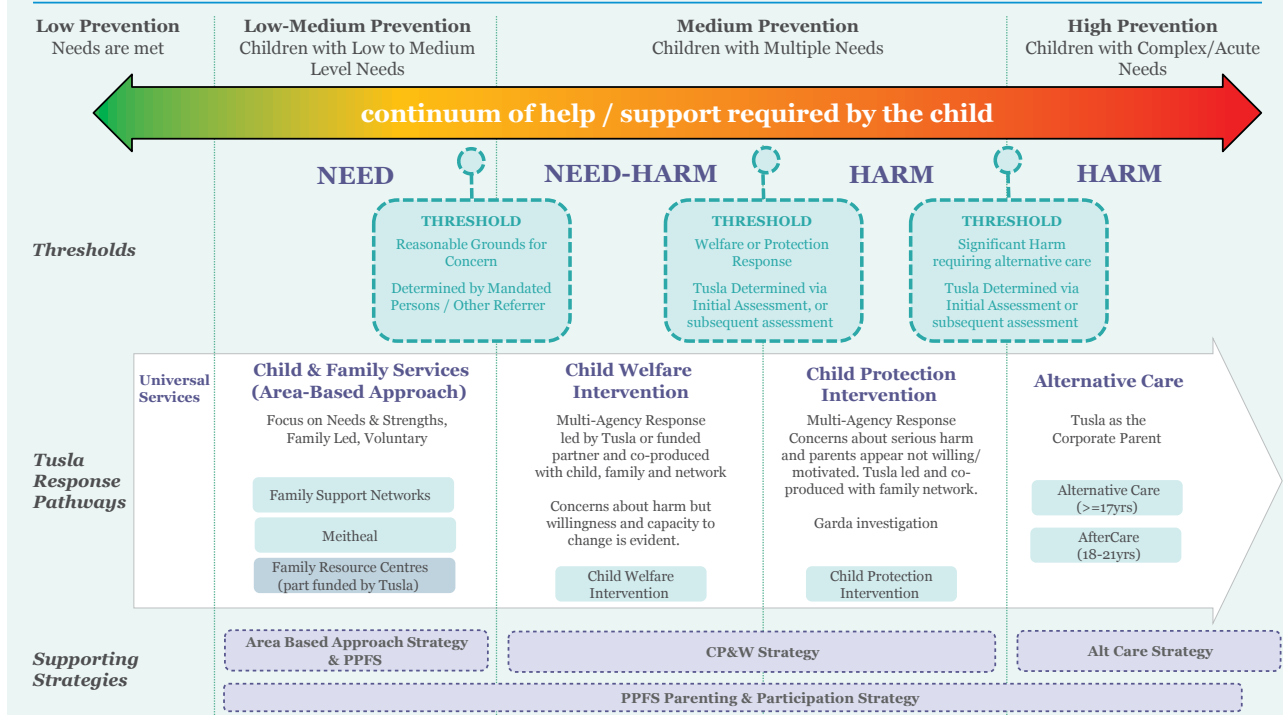
Adopting a coordinated universal approach



Strategic Objective #2

Clear Response Pathways along the Continuum of Need

Clear thresholds for child protection intervention, for transfer to/from alternative care, for closing cases, for diverting cases to other agencies, to area based approaches, etc. Clear and effective pathways through the system (end-to-end)



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Fig 1: Clear Response Pathways along the Continuum of Need.

Aligning services and coordinating delivery

When a child and their family need additional supports from a number of agencies, experience shows they benefit from the agencies taking a collaborative approach. Tusla is in the process of setting up Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) to support this collaborative approach and a number of CFSNs have already been established. Given the variety in population density, levels of need and service provision in different areas, CFSNs may serve geographical areas that are smaller than both Tusla Area Management areas and Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) areas in order to provide a cluster of support effectively.

To be successful, CFSNs need to work effectively in partnership with families to ensure there is 'no wrong door'

for families to access support and all families in their locality receive easily accessible, appropriate support to meet their identified needs.

CFSN Coordinators and Senior Coordinators are responsible for setting up the local networks which include statutory services e.g. HSE, Department of Education An Garda Síochána, local authorities and the community/voluntary sector. The role of the CFSN Coordinator is to implement Meitheal, to support colleagues to take on a role of Lead Practitioner, and to participate as members of the team around the child in Meitheal.

CFSNs meet to discuss the aggregate needs of children who would benefit from multi-agency input. They facilitate more engagement and outreach to vulnerable families in the

community, while bringing relevant information on initiatives, gaps and needs in the locality to discussions in relation to children's services planning through Children and Young Peoples Services Committees (CYPSCs). Their key role is to help ensure a continuum of support is available.

Child and Family Support Networks are the engine of Meitheal, as many members of the Networks participate as Lead Practitioners, with the support of the Child and Family Support Network Coordinator. Where there are active and engaged Networks in place, the implementation of Meitheal has been more successful, with a greater number of Lead Practitioners feeling sufficiently supported to initiate and lead Meitheals.

[Find out more](http://bit.ly/2xU77Ti)
http://bit.ly/2xU77Ti

Access to support for children and families

Support may be accessed by a family in a number of ways:

1. By accessing support directly from Family Support services at community level, where they do not require a Meitheal approach.
2. By accessing support from a CFSN. This may be single-agency help or multi-agency working that does not require structured coordination, and it may be required for families at any level of need.
3. By accessing support through a Meitheal, through directly initiating or through diversion or step-down from Social Work.
4. By referral to the Social Work Department under Children First and remaining open to the Social Work Department.

Successful early intervention depends on clear flow of information between service providers and service users. The PPFS public awareness and engagement work stream aims to support growing partnerships with stakeholders, funded agencies and partners, and to ensure the general public are aware of Tulsa's work to develop an early intervention approach.

A variety of public information material is available to download from the PPFS section of the Tulsa website.

The Parenting24seven website also serves as an online resource offering 50 key messages and advice for parents and families for different situations and at different stages of childhood.k

i Find out more
<http://bit.ly/1DZ59it>

<http://bit.ly/2fQB0tY>

CASE STUDY

Rural location, ongoing

Names in this Meitheal example have been changed to respect the anonymity of the family.

During the course of her work Martha McDonald, a HSE Disability Services Social Worker became a Lead Practitioner for Sharon a 14 year old girl who was living with her dad and siblings.

Martha said, "Sharon has a mild intellectual disability and can act impulsively. She has good family relationships and supports from older siblings and is well liked at school.

"Her behaviour can be very difficult at times and her dad finds it difficult to say 'No'. Lack of boundaries meant that she was texting her friends at all hours and was often too tired to attend school. Often she walks out of school and goes home when she feels like it.

"In order to achieve the best possible outcomes for Sharon and ensure she attends and remains in school, I realised she needed a team to support her. I established the team around her which included myself and a colleagues from Tulsa and other partner agencies. This included

The House at Cox's Demense, a Community Hub Project Worker, her School Principal and her father.

"The desired outcomes were:

- No longer feeling the need to leave school without permission;
- Attending and remaining in school until she is 18 years;
- Behaviour is to be less challenging;
- Engaging in positive activities in local community;
- Dad to look at time for himself.

"We have incentives in place for her to remain in school. And the HSE have provided support for the family around personal safety for Sharon.

"In the absence of a young peoples' group in the area, we worked to establish one specifically involving Sharon. She is engaging very well. She is also walking out of school less and her attendance in general has greatly improved. She no longer has her phone going to bed and her personal safety has improved. Sharon is also involved with social activities and much progress has been made."



Child and Family
Support Network

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In order to achieve the best possible outcome, I established a team around the child.

*Martha McDonald,
Social Worker*

3. Implementing Meitheal

Meitheal, the Tusla-led early intervention national practice model is an evidence-based early intervention tool that identifies a child's and their families' needs and strengths, and brings together a team around the child to deliver preventative support.

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It promotes early identification of strengths and needs so that the most appropriate supports for a child can be identified. Where more than one agency is required to deliver these supports it provides a standardised process for coordinating the delivery of these supports. It utilises a Lead Practitioner's role and a 'team around the child' approach and is supported by a CFSN Coordinator(s).

Meitheal is an old Irish term that describes how neighbours would come together to assist in the saving of crops or other tasks.

It covers all aspects that affect a child's development, from health, education and social development, through to housing and family relationships. It ensures families who do not require children and family social work intervention receive preventative support and early intervention in order to prevent potential problems escalating. Their needs are identified, understood and responded to in a timely manner.

Cooperation, engagement and leadership from all statutory and voluntary agencies supporting family and child is necessary in order to properly implement the Meitheal national practice model, as outlined under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

The principles underpinning the Meitheal model are:

- Parents are made aware at the outset that child protection concerns in relation to their child or children will be referred to the Children and Families Social Work service in line with *Children First Guidance, 2011*.
- It is a voluntary process. All aspects – from the decision to enter this process, to the nature of information to be shared, outcomes desired, support delivered agencies to be involved, to the end point of the process – are led by the parents/caregivers and child.
- A Meitheal meeting cannot take place without the involvement of at least one parent.
- The Meitheal model looks at the child in a holistic manner, in the context of his or her family and environment. It takes into account strengths and resilience as well as difficulties and needs.
- It privileges the voices of the parent/carer and child, recognising them as experts in their own situations and assisting them in identifying their needs and ways to meet them.
- The Meitheal model is aligned with the wider Child and Family Support Agency Service Delivery Framework.
- The Meitheal model is outcomes focused and should be implemented through a Lead Practitioner.

i Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2yCNH2u>



Supports available in carrying out the Meitheal process:

- **Training:**
A full training programme for prospective lead practitioners and participant partners is provided by Tusla trainers over two consecutive days.
- **Within your own agency:**
Support, supervision and line management remain the responsibility of the practitioner's own organisation.
- **Within the team around the child:**
Other agencies involved in the team around the child will identify how best they can support the process in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for the child and family.
- **From the Child and Family Support Network Coordinator:**
Support and guidance can be provided to all agency partners to carry out the Meitheal process effectively and to problem-solve issues that arise along the way.

i Find out more

More detailed guidance on governing the relationship between Meitheal, The Educational Welfare Services 'One Child' and Social Work Departments:

<http://bit.ly/2yCNH2u>

The role of the Lead Practitioner

A family is led through a Meitheal process by a trained Lead Practitioner. A Lead Practitioner is the single point of contact who takes a lead role in organizing Meitheal review meetings and liaising with the family and other participants in a Meitheal process. One of the most crucial dimensions of the Meitheal process is the relationship between Lead Practitioners and the families. A Lead Practitioner is a voluntary undertaking, the commitments of

which can vary. They can act as a conduit for families to access services they were previously unaware of, or simply provide a safe space for the families or children to discuss their own concerns. They give the child and their families a trusted, single point of contact to support them and communicate without jargon.

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After two days of training from the CFSN Coordinator, I became the Lead Practitioner.

*John Fitzgerald,
HSCL officer*

CASE STUDY

Rural location, 6 months

Names in this Meitheal example have been changed to respect the anonymity of the family.

John Fitzgerald is a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) officer covering several secondary schools in Monaghan. He explains how he became a Lead Practitioner after a pupil's parents approached the Principal about an alleged bullying incident in the school.

“Tim was acting out at home and difficult to manage and the Principal of the school contacted me about a possible bullying situation in school. Tim was continuing to do well academically but it was clear that his emotional and behavioural difficulties required support.”

After two days training from the Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) Coordinator of Tusla on how to use Meitheal, John became the Lead Practitioner on this case and could see the benefit of a structured approach with a written plan.

He organised an appropriate team including the School counsellor, Monaghan Blades; a voluntary organisation, Homework club, working alongside the parents and Tim. Meetings were held every

two weeks with the support of the CFSN Coordinator who chaired the meeting. He ensured that information was collated and distributed to all team members. This helped to make sure the team wasn't duplicating any work. Through holding fortnightly meetings with Tim's parents, John ensured the family was fully involved in what was happening.

Tim and his parents felt supported and listened to.

Planned interventions include:

- Young person disclosed bullying in school at first meeting – NBSS school counsellor support;
- Anger management support outside school – Monaghan Blades (Voluntary organisation);
- Parents Plus for teenagers – HSCL delivering programme in school;
- Referral to mediation service to address parent and young person relationship.

John concluded, “Tim is now engaged in supports and there are improvements in how he is coping.”

4. Recording, sharing and storing information

Knowing when and how to share information in a legal and professional manner is vital to this collaborative process.

Children, young people and families need to feel reassured that their confidentiality is respected, except where doing so puts the child or others at risk.

There is no impediment in law to sharing information between agencies working in the best interests of children and families where there is consent for the sharing of such information.

Guidance for both Lead Practitioners and partner agencies on storing and filing information gathered can be found in the Meitheal Toolkit.

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2yCNH2u>

For further assistance with recording, sharing or storing information within the Meitheal process contact your CFSN Coordinator through your local office.

Find out more

<http://bit.ly/2kpQ3zi>



CASE STUDY

Urban location, 6 months

Names in this Meitheal example have been changed to respect the anonymity of the family.

Mary Murphy is a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) officer in Dublin. She explains how integrated working contributed to making a dramatic difference to one young person's life.

Five-year-old James was living in emergency accommodation; a hotel room. His parents have mental health issues and extreme financial difficulties. James has a poor school attendance record.

“I was the main point of contact for James and the family and I initiated a Meitheal and liaised with the relevant agencies. I had access to the bigger picture and as a team we addressed James's needs and were able to provide services much more effectively,” says Mary.

“The parents needed access to mental health services and James needed access to counseling and psychology. We also looked at the practical needs when living in a hotel room, such as cooking facilities, which contributed to unhealthy eating and lack of social outlets for parents and children. There were also safety concerns including drug

use and other anti-social behavior in the hotel.

“With the old way of doing things James would have been in contact with a large number of people, which involved a lot of duplication of effort and was overwhelming for him and his family. By understanding his needs better I engaged the parents and put in place the appropriate team around the child. We were supported through guidance from the Tusla Child and Family Support Network Coordinator.

“Referrals were made to the Adult Mental Health Service for the parents and Primary Care Psychology for James. Social outlets were sought and accepted through a local Family Resource Centre for both parents and child. The local Family Resource Centre and I worked together with De Paul Ireland addressing practical needs arising through living in a hotel room. We also sought support with housing through the local Council Social Support Service.

“We developed a coordinated plan with which all services and family

“
The old way of doing things would have involved a lot of duplication of effort.

*Mary Murphy,
HSCL officer*

members were engaged and took responsibility for. All identified needs were addressed and there were significant improvements, although it was noted that waiting lists for some services were long and not all referrals were accepted. Where this occurred, alternative appropriate supports were sought.

“Through appropriate school supports James's school attendance has greatly improved.

“This Meitheal was open for 6 months, after which the family moved to a permanent home. I continued to contact the family post move to assist in the resettlement.”

It might look like some of the new tools and processes may increase your workload but this example demonstrates how time can be saved by focusing efforts, but Mary stated that “By completing a Meitheal and getting a full picture of James's needs and the agencies working with him, we were able to provide services much more effectively.”

Moving forward together – a personal note from the Chairperson of the Board



Studies clearly indicate that if we fail to intervene to deal with adverse childhood experience, children will grow into adults with lifelong difficulties and health problems. Therefore, late intervention will seriously impact on the child's health and well-being and will cost the State in terms of unnecessarily expensive adult services across health, justice and social protection.

Tusla is developing a transformation programme that aims to ensure children are protected and supported to fully achieve their potential. For Tusla to be successful, with early intervention, child protection or alternative care, our partnerships with like-minded individuals and organisations are essential. If you work with children, we need you to support, promote and champion our approach to Prevention, Partnership and Family Support. We need you to ensure that children, young people, families and communities and all those working with them are the centre of this transformation.

We need you to always put children first and help us to ensure their safety by alerting us and working with us to deal with harm. But we also need you to prevent children being harmed in the first place.

Specifically, we need you and the organisations under your remit to buy into Children and Young People's Services Committees; participate in Child and Family Support Networks; take on the mantle of Lead Practitioner in the Meitheal Model and help us to ensure that children and parents participate fully as active citizens in designing, delivering and evaluating the support they receive from the State.

On behalf of the Board, I'd like to say that we are extremely supportive of this work and would like to express the Board's appreciation for all the work done by staff in Tusla, and our partner agencies in this important area.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Norah Gibbons".

Norah Gibbons
Chairperson, Tusla

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Alone we
can do so little,
together we can
do so much.

Helen Keller

TUSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

① ***Find out more***

Contact your CFSN
Coordinator through your
local office.

[www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/
local-area-offices/](http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/local-area-offices/)