

# The Area Based Childhood Programme 2013-2017

## Learning from the National Evaluation (2015 – 2017)

What changed for children and parents and in service delivery?



# About the ABC Programme

The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is a national area-based prevention and early intervention initiative for families living in 13 local communities around Ireland.

## The ABC Programme aims to:

- Provide new and improved services to support improved outcomes for children and parents
- Support professionals to strengthen their skills and to improve the ways organisations work together.

The ABC Programme started in 2013 and was funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and The Atlantic Philanthropies.

The total amount of funds spent in ABC areas during 2015, 2016 and 2017 was €22.6 million. Since 2017 the ABC Programme has been funded by DCYA.

In each area, the ABC Programme is supported by a consortium of local organisations working together to deliver services and a lead agency which oversees day-to-day management, including funding.

## Services that are supported by the ABC Programme

Services to support children as they make the move from pre-school to primary school



Parent and family support services



Literacy and numeracy services for children in primary school



Services that support children and young people's mental health

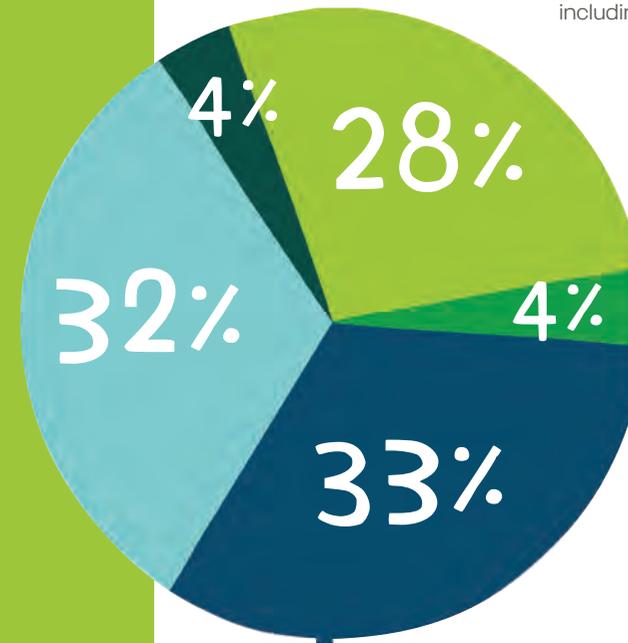


Training and other supports for professionals working with children and parents



Children's speech and language development services

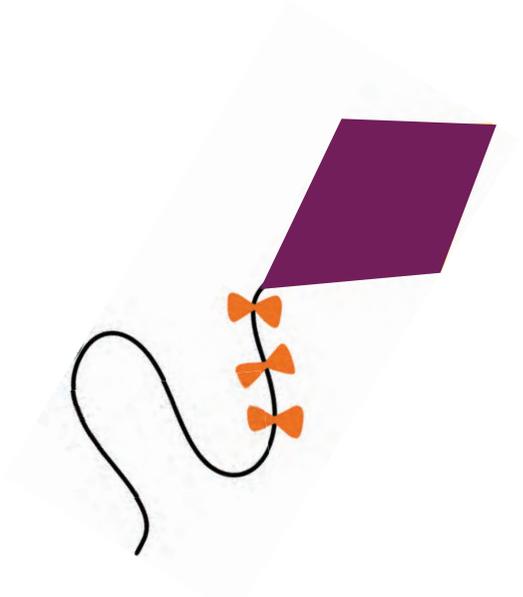
Services that support children's social and emotional well-being



Programme spend by areas on provision of each kind of service:

- 28% on parenting interventions
- 32% children's learning interventions
- 33% children's health and development interventions
- 4% interagency working
- 4% other





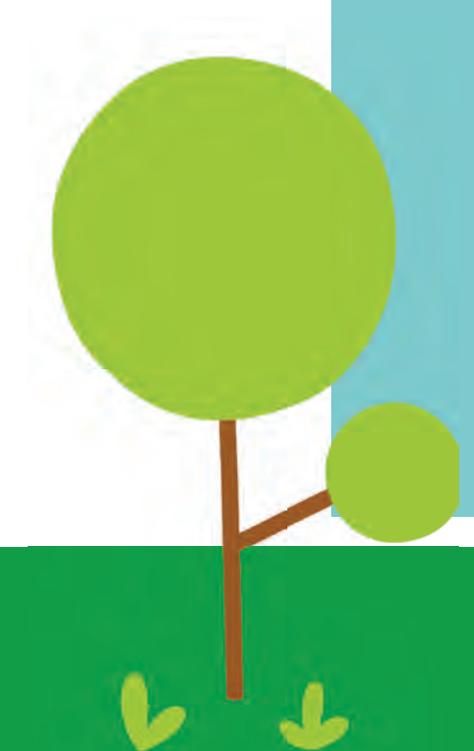
## About the Evaluation

The national evaluation looked at how the ABC Programme contributed to changes for children and parents, and in service delivery. Not all ABC services were included in the national evaluation.

The evaluation was carried out by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) between 2015 and 2017. More information can be found at [www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie).

### Who took part?

- More than 750 parents receiving parenting supports
- Over 2,600 children receiving school readiness interventions
- Over 2,000 children receiving health and development interventions
- Over 350 practitioners, 110 service managers and 190 consortium members took part in surveys and focus groups
- Interviews with 28 local, regional and national stakeholders.



## What changed for children and parents?

In the evaluation, parents, teachers and other professionals reported that the ABC Programme contributed to the following changes:

- Children were better prepared for school, and ready to learn
- There were improvements in children's social and emotional well-being.

Parents and practitioners reported that parents:

- Had better relationships with their children
- Were less stressed in their role as parents
- Were better able to manage their children's behaviour
- Felt their children had improved social and emotional well-being.

Feedback from practitioners provided useful insights into how changes in services can contribute to better outcomes for children and families.



## What changed for practitioners?

There were improvements in local service delivery as new services were provided and existing services changed or improved. Practitioners were also supported to use new or changed ways of working: over 60% of practitioners took part in training to provide ABC Programme services, and almost 50% received coaching and mentoring support.

There was evidence of:

- Better service coverage
- Greater coordination between service providers
- A greater range of services being available to better meet the needs of local people
- There was better use of evidence and data.



## What changed for practitioners?

continued...

# 91%

of service managers agreed that evidence and data were used to plan services.

# >90%

of consortium members agreed that the ABC Programme contributed to the development of valuable relationships. The development of local consortia was identified as important in fostering interagency working.



# 94%

of practitioners agreed that the evidence and data they collected informed their practice.



"We went through lots of processes, where we moved from thinking about individual services... to how could we find the things that are relevant to us all." – Lead Agency Representative



## What supports change? Learning from practice

Services need to get buy-in from families and the wider community. Outcomes for children and families can be better when services:

- Meet the needs of the community
- Are easy to access
- Are evidence-based/informed, with a proven track-record.

Interagency working requires dedicated resources, such as:

- A consortium with:
  - A shared vision and mission
  - An independent chair
  - Inclusive membership
  - Sub-groups to address specific issues or priorities
- A designated coordinator to support the implementation of shared vision, mission and objectives, and to connect practitioners and agencies in local communities
- Organisational commitment to building and strengthening relationships.



Service providers, funders and other stakeholders need to commit time and resources to support change in local service delivery.

Stakeholders can play their part through:

- Leadership from local and regional decision-makers, service providers and local champions
- Support from senior management
- Providing services that complement rather than duplicate.

A range of activities is needed to improve the use of evidence and data in practice and include:

- Training, coaching and mentoring to build the capacity of practitioners
- Involving staff in identifying the kinds of evidence and data useful for practice
- Giving staff the time to collect and use evidence and data
- Providing access to a research resource e.g. a qualified researcher or access to research expertise.

“The ABC project takes up a huge chunk of my working day... I feel like that, even though it's taking up a huge amount of my time, that it's a much more productive way of working.”  
– Consortium member



## Learning from the National Evaluation (2015 – 2017)

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### FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about the ABC Programme and access to the main evaluation report and other ABC Programme evaluation materials can be found at:

Department of Children and Youth Affairs  
[www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie)

The Atlantic Philanthropies  
[www.atlanticphilanthropies.org](http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org)

Centre for Effective Services  
[www.effectiveservices.org](http://www.effectiveservices.org)

Pobal  
[www.pobal.ie](http://www.pobal.ie)

