



Early years

Directors' summary **5** December 2009

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

“A child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right, and it provides the foundation for children to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up.”

Early Years Foundation Stage



C4EO's work on Early Years supports directors of children's services and their Children's Trust partners by providing the knowledge, data and tailored support they may need to help improve outcomes for very young children and their families. This summary provides a concise and accessible overview for DCSs of the three research reviews in the Early Years theme.

Please go to www.c4eo.org.uk to download the full and in-depth research reviews:

- **Narrowing the gap** in outcomes for young children through effective practices in the early years.
- Improving children's attainment through a better quality of **family-based support for early learning**.
- Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in **integrating early years' services**.

What do we know?

Narrowing the gap

- Poverty has the greatest influence on child outcomes in the early years. It affects certain ethnic groups disproportionately and has the greatest impact on young children's health and safety.
- A good home learning environment (HLE) can counter the effects of poverty on children's development and can be boosted by culturally appropriate outreach and family support.
- Transition to pre-school and school and unfamiliar cultural experiences can present particular challenges to children from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds and for children with English as an additional language (EAL).
- Attending *high quality* pre-school has a positive impact on children's cognitive and social development and has particular benefits for poor children and children with EAL.
- Language and literacy interventions can help to narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers and support children with EAL.
- There needs to be a clear focus on raising *quality* of early years settings; targeting interventions; training EY practitioners in language and literacy development and sustained shared thinking.
- Well-focused and sustained system level strategies aimed at tackling child and family poverty will significantly improve the range of ECM outcomes for young children.
- Workforce development is critical to raise skills levels for outreach workers and early years practitioners across the board.
- Overall there needs to be tangible support for young children and their families during transition to early learning provision and school.

Family-based support

- Effective family-based support combines strategies that minimise risk factors with strategies that maximise resilience.
- Key risk factors are poverty, poor early care, poor relationships with siblings and other children, illness and disability.
- Key resilience factors are maternal education, the quality of the home learning environment (HLE), attending a *high quality* pre-school, parental interest and involvement in early education.
- Positive relationships between parents and children are fundamental to good outcomes for children.
- Home visiting complemented by centre-based support are useful tools to improve child outcomes.
- It is important to engage grandparents and the wider family in developing family support programmes.
- Helping parents to improve their own education/ employment opportunities; supporting the whole family; and working with parents to stimulate their involvement in and access to early years education, including HLE, all work together to help improve children's attainment.
- Support needs differ for different groups of parents and carers, including families for whom services are hard to reach, parents from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds and fathers.

Integrating Services

- Service integration is seen as a key strategic tool for achieving the objectives of the *Every Child Matters* agenda and the *Children's Plan*.
- This is an area where practice leads policy, so there is little direct evidence of its impact in the literature and what evidence there is can be contradictory. However:
- Service integration is best understood as an ecological system centred on the child and family, served through service coordination, and supported through integrated organisations and agencies.
- There is robust evidence that the adoption of combined, two generation or family approaches to intervention is effective, providing indirect evidence of the effectiveness of integration.
- There is strong evidence that *high-quality* pre-school provision that integrates childcare and education benefits children in terms of cognitive and behavioural outcomes up to age 11.
- Pointers towards effective service integration include:
- *Quality* rather than *type* of integration is what matters in terms of improving outcomes.
- *Leadership training* and *participation of stakeholders* are characteristics of successful collaborations in a number of studies.
- There is a need to address gaps in the evidence base and begin to design research and evaluation that could provide hard evidence of the impact of service integration on children's outcomes. A good starting point would be consensus regarding what indicators to use.

What do you want to do next?

It is important to ensure that the links between child and family poverty, early health problems, ethnicity and the *Every Child Matters* ECM outcomes for young children are understood by everyone in your partnership. The following are based on the seven Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) questions and are designed as a catalyst for partnership action.

Q1 What is your vision in terms of the outcomes you want to achieve for young children in your locality?

For example, children of 0-5 in age are living in families where they receive the basic necessities to thrive; the families are supported by agencies when needed, they are nurtured at home and supported by their families to learn.

Q2 What would the outcomes look like if you could see or experience them?

For example, the numbers of young children living in poverty in your area are falling because more adults with children are in work, more of the young children in low income families are in child care, are healthy with a decrease in mortality rate (if appropriate) and achievement of these children is increasing.

Q3 What milestones are you setting to support the achievement of locally defined outcomes? And how can you measure them?

If not using these already, you may wish to look at a wide range of indicators from the National Indicator set to address the findings from the Early Years Research reviews, as well as NI 72 (improving outcomes) and 92, (narrowing the gap) i.e.

NI 116 the proportion of children in poverty
NIs 153, and 166, linked to parental employment

NIs 118 take-up of child care in low income working families

NI 92 Narrowing the between the lowest achieving 20% in the EYFS profile and the rest

NIs 72 Achievement of at least 78 points across the EYFS with at least 6 in each of the scales in PSED, Communication, Language and Literacy

NI 55 Obesity among primary school age children in Reception year

NI 120 All age all cause mortality rate

Q4 Where are you now? How are you currently doing on the most important measures?

The web-based C4EO Progress Mapping Tool provides relevant data on the indicators; and you may also be using your own local data and evaluations (e.g. children's centres' annual conversations; parenting programme evaluations; parent satisfaction questionnaires; listening to children events) to create data curves/charts and stories in order to compare performance with other local authorities.

Q5 Who are the partners for improvement? Who from the Children's Trust/Local Strategic Partnership should be around the table?

A broad range of partners have a role to play (see overleaf – 'Who has the information you need?')

Q6 What really works to improve the outcomes you want?

C4EO's in-depth research provides some evidence for what works, and this is being continuously supplemented by examples of local validated practice from across the sector.

Q7 What do you propose to do next?

Agree your outcomes with partners, draw up/ review your action plan and monitor progress on the selected indicators. A report card format can be used – available from the OBA toolkit on the C4EO website.



Who has the information you need?

It is important to include both statutory organisations and those from the private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI):

- families, carers, children and young people
- managers at strategic level, delivering services that include childcare, healthcare, CAMHS, education and training, housing, regeneration, family support, recreation, police
- Sure Start children's centres programme managers, childcare and play scheme providers
- job centres, local employers
- faith groups
- local colleges and education providers
- community groups, umbrella groups, third sector organisations
- local transport providers

Directors' summaries

This summary is a concise and accessible overview of C4EO's current work in this theme for directors of children's services.

Please go to www.c4eo.org.uk to download full and in-depth versions.

How can C4EO support your vision?

C4EO offers wide-ranging support, including:

- validated local practice
- knowledge and progression workshops
- sector specialists and tailored support
- knowledge and research reviews including key messages from research.

Please go to www.c4eo.org.uk to access full information.