

# Evaluation of the **Bringing It All Back Home** Programme Final Report



*At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents*

*Jane D. Hull (Governor of Arizona 1997-2003)*



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# Executive Summary

The Bringing It All Back Home Programme (BIABH) was established in 2011 in St. Michael's Estate and Lower Inchicore, Dublin. The programme is a funded project of the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) and is managed by the Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service who are the lead agency of the project. The purpose of BIABH is to improve the well-being of parents and their capacity to nurture their child's development through intensive parental education and support.

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the BIABH programme which was conducted with parents, the BIABH programme team and local stakeholders.

## BACKGROUND

The St. Michael's Estate area has a rich heritage of national significance. The adjacent Goldenbridge Cemetery opened in 1828 and was the first Catholic cemetery established after Catholic Emancipation. WT Cosgrave, modern Ireland's first head of government, is interred here. Also in this area stands the former British Army Barracks, Richmond Barracks, which is notable as the site in which the leaders of the 1916 Rising were held and court-martialled before their transfer to Kilmainham Gaol.

The area is categorised as disadvantaged and displays high levels of the indicators of deprivation when compared to the national average, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, welfare dependency, lone parent ratios, early school leavers, drug addiction, social renting and criminality. Social disadvantage significantly influences the development, health and wellbeing of young children and can have a negative effect on parent-child attachment. Children from vulnerable families which have a history of, for example, social disadvantage, parental health problems, substance abuse, are known to be at greater risk of atten-

tion, language, learning and behaviour problems.

Early intervention of support services and provision of education to families in these circumstances has been shown to improve the health, developmental and social outcomes for children (Field 2010). Home and community based child development programmes aim to improve children's developmental outcomes through educating and supporting parents to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for their child and mitigating the negative effects of social disadvantage.

The Canal Communities Family Welfare Initiative (CCFWI) is an interagency consortium composed of community, voluntary and statutory agencies that are concerned with child welfare and children's service delivery in Inchicore and Bluebell. In 2011, the CCFWI identified a gap in service provision in the area for children aged 0-4 years. The consortium recognised that there was a cohort of children and their parents who were not engaged with local services.

[children] who were not turning up to services, whose parents weren't engaging for whatever reason...the most marginal children of that age, there was a gap in the area' [Stakeholder].

We were very aware of the issue of attachment and the necessity of that evolving emotional relationship in very early childhood. That's why we thought that an early intervention project [was needed] [Stakeholder]

In 2011, the consortium was successful in its application for funding through the NEYAI and Pobal to deliver a three year community parent and family support and education programme, Bringing It All Back Home, which would run from 2011-2014. The Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service (DOCCFS) agreed to take on the role of the lead agency which involves the overall management and administration of the project as well as providing support and supervision to the BIABH team.

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## BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME (BIABH)

BIABH delivers an intensive outreach service to vulnerable and 'hard to reach' families of children aged 0-4 years in the St. Michael's Estate / Lower Inchicore Area. BIABH aims to ensure that children's basic needs are met and that each child meets their developmental milestones through strengthening the parent-child relationship. These strategies include:

- ◇ Home visits to families to help equip parents with the skills to develop an emotional attachment to their child.
- ◇ Education to parents about communication, play, positive parenting behaviours, nutrition, child development and other topics to enhance the parents' parenting skills
- ◇ Information and support about specific topics, including housing, mental health issues and accessing services
- ◇ Linking parents and families with community services, for example, GP, PHN, Community Drugs Team, Social Worker, hospitals, pre-school.
- ◇ Advocacy role to support parents and families
- ◇ Drop-in service to provide an informal support forum for parents and families
- ◇ Delivery of two intervention programmes, Marte Meo communications skills and Incredible Years, which focus on positive parenting methods
- ◇ Provision of the Cooperative Parenting programme to support children in families which have experienced separation

Capacity building through the provision of training to childcare services within the area

The service is provided by three Outreach Child Care Workers, who are managed by a coordinator. Two of the outreach workers are seconded by the DOCCFS. BIABH is a part time project with three staff working 2½ days per week and the fourth staff member working 4 days per week. BIABH works closely with childcare services and other groups in the area and the programme is also represented on the CCFWI.

## EVALUATION OF BIABH

In 2012, a researcher was commissioned to evaluate BIABH. The researcher was independent of the programme and any of its stakeholders. A proposal for a multi-method evaluation of BIABH was submitted to the programme Steering Group for approval.

The purpose of the evaluation of BIABH was to:

- ◇ Identify the perceptions of parents, stakeholders and the BIABH team about the programme
- ◇ Identify the strengths and challenges of BIABH
- ◇ Identify the influence of BIABH on the parent-child relationship

Institutional ethics approval for the project was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, in which the researcher is based. The particular ethical implications of researching a vulnerable and hard-to-reach group were considered and measures were implemented to protect participants' welfare during the study.

## METHODOLOGY

A variety of evaluation methods were used in this study to give greater depth and insight into the findings. Semi-structured interviews were held with nine key stakeholders from the Family Welfare Initiative and local childcare services. A focus group was held with eight parents who are engaged with BIABH and a further focus group was also held with the BIABH team. In addition, parents evaluated the Marte Meo Communication Skills and the Incredible Years programme and considered how the programmes influenced their role as parents. Demographic details were also collected on participants in the programme.

## FINDINGS: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF BIABH

Bringing It All Back Home has been in existence since 2011 and currently 28 families are engaged in the programme. The results of this evaluation show that BIABH has had a positive impact on the parents and children engaged

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with the service. BIABH is a needs led and strengths based programme and the recognition by the BIABH team that the basic needs of a family must be met before engagement can occur has been a crucial element in fostering engagement in this seldom heard population.

Of the 28 families engaged with BIABH, the majority (68%) are lone parent families led by mothers. Almost 70% of families have 1 or 2 children and no family has more than 4 children. Most families are Irish (82%).

The parenting programmes were highly valued by the parents and the attendance records showed that there was a high level of engagement with the structured Incredible Years Programme with 82% of participants attending 75% or more of the sessions. Parents reported improvements in their children's behaviour and statistically significant reductions in the parents' levels of stress following completion of the Incredible Years programme.

## Successes of BIABH

Overall, BIABH was rated highly by all respondents who identified many elements of the programme which have contributed to its success.

**Building relationships:** Establishing good relationships and trust with families from the outset was important. This is particularly relevant when working with a hard-to-reach community who may have a sense of mistrust towards services, especially those with a child welfare remit.

*Hard to reach doesn't just mean hard to find, it also means hard to gain trust [BIABH Team]*

**Meeting people where they are at:** The phrase '*meet parents where they are at*' was used numerous times by parents, stakeholders and the BIABH team to emphasise the importance of meeting '*the people and their children where they're at...and I mean this both physically and emotionally*' [Stakeholder]. This refers both to the readiness and capacity of the parents and families to engage and also the physical location in which that engagement will take place.

*...different families respond in different ways and at different times depending on whether*

*they are in crisis or not...we are able to meet them where they are at [BIABH Team]*

**Developing parenting and communications skills:** Parents valued the opportunity to develop their communication and parenting skills to enable them to develop a greater attachment with their children. As a result, the nature of parents' relationships with their children changed. Parents reported feeling more confident and empowered to care for their children.

*I'm a happier parent because I'm a more confident parent [Parent Focus Group]*

*Enjoying their children...for me, that's a development...they seem to be enjoying their children a lot more than when they first connected in with us...that's through a combination of recognising their strengths as parents and their lives becoming less stressful through having support and parenting education [BIABH Team]*

**Home Visits:** Home visits were identified by all respondents as an important means of supporting parents in real-life situations.

*Parents benefit from parenting role modeling... in the home and building up the relationship and the attachment between the parent and the child by seeing the BIABH worker practising this in the home, you know, in a more natural way [Stakeholder]*

Initially there was some anxiety about home visits as '*I think a lot of people feel...it would be an invasion of privacy, at first anyway*' [Parent Focus Group]. However, this anxiety resolved as the relationship between the team and families developed.

**Interagency collaboration:** There is a strong ethos of interagency collaboration in the area through the activity of the CCFWI. BIABH has also provided training to the local childcare services which has enhanced the care of children attending these services. However it was acknowledged by respondents that it has been challenging for services to release staff to attend training.

An important role of BIABH is supporting families to access services and agencies, for example, housing and healthcare, and to support parents who are learning 'how to ask questions



for myself' [Parent Focus Group]. The parents were unanimous in their approval of this resource as they reported feeling intimidated because 'you need to have a whole different vocabulary when you're talking to [professionals] ...just to be able to understand people' [Parent Focus Group]. The BIABH team also identified this advocacy role as a crucial element of the programme.

Having someone in your corner, saying 'I can help you with that, we'll go there together'...so that they're not there on their own, because it can be very intimidating when you're sitting there talking to professionals [BIABH Team]

**Leaving a legacy:** The BIABH team has delivered training to local childcare services in relation to Marte Meo Communication Skills and Incredible Years. This training was very highly valued by the childcare services and the word 'legacy' was frequently used by several participants to describe the long lasting effect of this training. However it was acknowledged by respondents that it has been challenging for services to release staff to attend training.

[Local children's services] have benefitted from the service [BIABH] being there, through training, through support, through advice, you know if you have a query or you're not sure about something you can ring them up and avail of their expertise [Stakeholder]

If BIABH is to continue, that if some of our workers [from childcare services] have to attend training, that there would need to be some consideration for supporting the agencies that have to release them' [Stakeholder]

## Challenges to BIABH

Respondents identified several challenges to BIABH, which focused primarily on fostering engagement and the limitations of the service.

**Fear of Engaging:** Participants identified barriers which might impede parents and families from engaging with BIABH. The most frequently cited reason was a fear of being judged and stigmatised through an involvement with a parent support programme. There was also a fear that the programme has a social work remit and could take children from their parents.

That sounds like it's for people who don't know how to parent their children. You think I can't parent my child and that's why you're sending me to these people [Parent Focus Group]

I think people are afraid that [BIABH staff] are coming into your house like the social workers and judge you on this, that and the other, and they're going to take your kids away [Parent Focus Group]

Participants agreed that good communication and explanations are necessary to ensure parents are fully aware of the role of BIABH in relation to child protection.

**Financial and Service Constraints:** The programme is resourced to deliver a service over 2.5 days per week. However, the need for the service is growing, particularly as there is an increasing awareness amongst the target population due to hearing about it through word-of-mouth. The part-time nature of the service can negatively influence a family's willingness to engage and parents spoke of the challenges of getting support when the BIABH programme is not available.

The challenge is to run a service like this as part-time when the expectation from the community is that they want a lot more...we don't have funding for a lot more [BIABH Team]

The time factor really affects building up a relationship with the families as well...it's difficult for parents to understand that we're here only 2.5 days a week [BIABH Team]

The BIABH team described the challenge of not having enough funding for certain activities which actually impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme. It was highlighted by several stakeholders that the DOCCFS were very supportive in absorbing some of the additional costs of the programme, for which there was no provision in the budget. The DOCCFS seconded two staff members to the BIABH team and also provided additional administrative support and funding for training and equipment. This contribution was highly valued and several stakeholders acknowledged that 'we couldn't have done this project without the Daughters [of Charity Child and Family Services] as they gave us so much support' [Stakeholder].

Uncertainty about the Future: The uncertainty about the future of the project gives rise to a dilemma – should the focus for the remainder of the project be on winding down or continuing on? This requires careful communication with families in the event that funding is not continued and is recognised as a challenge for projects which have a defined timeframe.

*What will we be doing for the next year...will we be winding down because there is a piece of work involved in doing that...we have to prepare our families for that if it is going to be winding down...we really need to help them and support them [BIABH Team]*

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Early childhood is a time of both great opportunity and considerable risk, and its influence can extend over a lifetime. Children's resilience is developed in early childhood and enhanced by a nurturing environment and an emotional attachment with their parents. Family background, positive parenting, and a child's opportunity for emotional and intellectual growth and stimulation are of greater significance than income in determining the child's potential in life (Field 2010, Kiernan & Mensah 2011, Nixon 2012). Therefore, early intervention strategies which support parents in their parenting role will enhance children's outcomes and reduce the need for later interventions. Heckman (2012) argues that *'the longer society waits to intervene in the life cycle of a disadvantaged child, the more costly it is to remediate disadvantage'*.

The report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, 'Right from the Start', was launched in October 2013 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2013a). This report, which will contribute to the development of the National Early Years Strategy, highlights the role of quality early intervention strategies in improving children's outcomes and specifically addresses the need to support families. At the launch of the report The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald, spoke of

the importance of investing in the early years of children's lives and stated that 'Put simply: early intervention works, the early years matter' (2013b).

Despite BIABH being a relatively new programme in the Lower Inchicore area, the evaluation of the project has shown that it has made a valuable contribution to supporting parents to develop and maintain nurturing relationships with their children. Parents have described numerous examples of how they and their children have benefited as a result of their engagement with BIABH. While it is still early to determine the impact of BIABH on the children's long-term outcomes, there is substantial national and international evidence to indicate that children's outcomes are improved through targeted early interventions which support parents in their parenting role.

This stakeholder describes the vision for the future of BIABH and child and family support in the area.

*The vision around children would be that we would continue this journey of this very effective continuum of services...and the earlier the better. Just getting in with early intervention and prevention ...the basic rights that children have. A lot of children here are incredibly poor, and we can't change the world economy or structures in society...but if we have good services in place that cushion the effects of [poverty]. [Stakeholder]*

BIABH was originally funded to run from 2011-2014. However, the challenges which existed in St. Michael's Estate and Inchicore in 2011 still exist today. The ongoing economic situation in Ireland has exacerbated many of the indicators of deprivation in the area, for example, unemployment, early school leaving, welfare dependence, criminality, addiction. These factors impact on parents' ability and resources to develop and sustain attachment with their children which then perpetuates the cycle of disadvantage. The circumstances which were the catalyst for BIABH in 2011 continue to prevail and thus make a compelling argument to continue the programme.





# Chapter 1: Introduction



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The Bringing It All Back Home Programme (BIABH) was established in 2011 in St. Michael's Estate and Lower Inchicore, Dublin. The programme is a funded project of the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) and is managed by the Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service who are the lead agency of the project. The purpose of BIABH is to improve the well-being of parents and their capacity to nurture their child's development through intensive parental education and support.

In 2012, the BIABH steering group commissioned a researcher from Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin (OLCHC) to undertake an evaluation of the programme. The researcher and OLCHC are independent of the BIABH project and the stakeholders in the area. The evaluation was conducted in 2013 and its aim was to determine the influence of the BIABH programme on the parent-child relationship and on the parents' capacity to nurture their children's development. This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the BIABH programme which was conducted with parents, the BIABH programme team and local stakeholders.

## Structure of the report

**Chapter 1** presents an overview of the structure of this report.

**Chapter 2** outlines the setting for BIABH and the demographic characteristics of the area. The importance of the parent-child relationship and the role and impact of parenting support programmes on children's outcomes are discussed. The origins of BIABH are described.

**Chapter 3** The BIABH programme is described. Consideration is given to the debate about so-called 'hard to reach' populations.

**Chapter 4** outlines the methodology used to conduct this evaluation, including details of the data collection instruments and methods used.

**Chapter 5** discusses the findings of the evaluation and places them in context with the national and international literature on parenting support and early intervention.

**Chapter 6** presents conclusions and recommendations drawn from the findings of the evaluation.

Throughout the report, the words of participants in the evaluation are used to support and substantiate the discussions. These words are indicated in indented italics with the designation of the speaker in square brackets along with the source of the words if multiple data was collected from a participant e.g. [Parent Focus Group] or [Parent Questionnaire].

# Chapter 2: Background



## St. Michael's Estate and Inchicore Area

The St. Michael's Estate area has a rich heritage of national significance. The adjacent Goldenbridge Cemetery opened in 1828 and was the first Catholic cemetery established after Catholic Emancipation. WT Cosgrave, modern Ireland's first head of government, is interred here.

St. Michael's Estate was originally the site of the former British Army Barracks, Richmond Barracks, which was built in the early 1800s. It was here that the leaders of the 1916 Rising were held and court-martialled before their transfer to Kilmainham Gaol. Richmond Barracks was handed over to Irish Free State in 1922 and renamed Keogh Barracks which was then decommissioned in 1927.

Following decommissioning, Keogh Barracks was handed over to Dublin Corporation and renamed Keogh Square. The area became synonymous with poor housing and high unemployment. In the 1960s, Keogh Square was de-

molished and St. Michael's Estate was built with almost 400 flats in two- to eight-storey blocks which were owned by Dublin Corporation. The flats were entirely social rented accommodation. Due to proximity to the city and the quality of the new buildings, there was '*huge optimism, huge hope at that time*' [Stakeholder] for the area.

During this time a strong sense of community and identity was cultivated and several key individuals were recognised as community leaders which further helped to develop this culture. However, in the 1980s, the heroin crisis had a particularly high impact on St. Michael's Estate and the '*balance of the community began to change*' [Stakeholder]. The government policy of the '£5000 grant' in the 1980s enabled people to move from St. Michael's Estate which changed the character of the area as many of those who were seen as community leaders left the area. With the loss of community leaders, it was difficult for the remaining residents to stand up against the heroin epidemic.

*'The thing that had started to undermine St. Michael's Estate was that people at that time,*

*the 70s and 80s, were given a grant to go buy their own home. So the families that could cope best moved out of St. Michael's Estate and that took a lot of the community leaders with it...a lot of the stronger families' [Stakeholder]*

*'So from a very hopeful start with a good...the conditions were good in the flats...then it was just destroyed'. [Stakeholder]*

During this time in the 1980s, services such as the Family Resource Centre and the Drugs Team were set up in response to the issues in the area. Campaigns were started to promote regeneration of the estate. Several regeneration plans failed or had limited success. Emmet Crescent and Bulfin Court were completed in 2003 on sites acquired nearby to re-house tenants from St. Michael's Estate. However, *'as the different regeneration plans failed, more and more people starting moving out'* [Stakeholder]. Beginning in 1998, the decision was made to demolish the tower blocks and the process of re-housing the tenants began. The last of the tower blocks was demolished in February 2013. There were mixed feelings in the area about the demolition of the tower blocks – some residents welcomed it as a means of regenerating the area whilst others found the demolition poignant as they had strong personal and familial links with the towers.

The St. Michael's Estate Regeneration Board was established in 2005 *to 'drive the social and physical regeneration of the area'* [Stakeholder]. The Board recognised the importance of learning from the mistakes of the past as it *'showed us that physical regeneration on its own really means nothing. It's the social issues that must be looked at'* [Stakeholder]. The regeneration board is committed to regenerating the area and secured agreement and funding from government for the first phase of redevelopment which is 75 new units in Thornton Heights. This includes a play ground and child care facility. This is due to open in 2013 and it is expected that families originally from St. Michael's Estate will be moving back to this area.

## Demographic characteristics

The catchment area for the BIABH programme falls largely within the Kilmainham C electoral district (ED). This area has some areas of affluence which in effect, disguise the areas of extreme disadvantage which exist in the ED and which are the target areas for BIABH. Inchicore is described as an area which contains a *'mix of advantage and disadvantage, using indicators such as early school leaving, lone parent households and social class'* (Saris & O'Reilly 2009:27).

The St. Michael's Estate and Lower Inchicore area is categorised as disadvantaged as per the Pobal Deprivation Index 2011<sup>1</sup> and displays high levels of the indicators of deprivation when compared to the national average, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, welfare dependency, lone parent ratios, early school leavers, drug addiction, social renting and criminality.

The target area has higher levels of unemployment compared with the national average. Census 2011 shows that the male unemployment rate stood at 22% and female unemployment rate stood at 15% in the State overall. However, in the Kilmainham C area, higher levels of unemployment are evident with 24% of males and 15% of females unemployed. However, these figures confound the picture in areas of particular disadvantage. For example, in one small area of Kilmainham C, the unemployment rates are much higher reaching 32% for males and 63% for females.

In Census 2011, the proportion of lone parent households nationally was recorded at 25.8%. However, in Kilmainham C the proportion of lone parent families 37% which is much higher than the national average. In a study of Irish families, Fahey *et al.* (2012, pg 33) found that with 'regard to poverty, deprivation and welfare dependency, two parent married families are best off, followed by step-families, then cohabiting couples and in the weakest position are the various kinds of lone-parent families'.

Since the 1980's, when heroin emerged with devastating consequences, drug related issues have been a particular concern in the target area. Increasingly, poly-drug use is become a

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<sup>1</sup>[www.pobal.ie/Pages/New-Measures.aspx](http://www.pobal.ie/Pages/New-Measures.aspx)



significant issue (Saris & O'Reilly 2009) and in many cases drug use is intergenerational. Children living in an environment of addiction where poverty, uncertain housing, mental health issues and high unemployment are prevalent, are at greater risk of poorer outcomes in terms of health, educational attainment, employment opportunities and engaging in drug use themselves.

Participants of this evaluation were asked to describe the area from their perspective to give a context to the statistics about deprivation scores, etc. They described a community which faces significant challenges in relation to poverty, indebtedness and rent arrears, unemployment, drug use and the impact of these on children.

*A child from St. Michael's Estate is traditionally disadvantaged by their address [Stakeholder]*

*St. Michael's Estate is a pocket in Dublin of terrible, intractable... generational... disadvantage, particularly for children [Stakeholder]*

*Local people live on very small incomes...a lot of people in this community plan their day, their week...they can't plan a year ahead [Stakeholder]*

*You shouldn't always have to be thinking about just managing...you should be able to think that you could go out on a night out without being judged [Stakeholder]*

Drugs remain a constant threat to the community, both in terms of drug use and also the gang culture and conflict which is proliferating.

*Drugs have a huge influence on the road you take...if you want to get away from drugs, you may have to go away from here, you know, make the choice to get away...or else you may go off drugs for a bit, but there will always be somebody to take you back into it [Stakeholder]*

*Drug use and poly-drug use is far more common and complex in communities [like this] that have been marginalised [Stakeholder]*

The level of inequality in the area arising out of generational poverty and unemployment creates distinct challenges for the community.

*[There is] an inequality embedded in this community...so you have generational unemployment...and you have a kind of dependency that*

*doesn't give people the confidence to go out and get work. So that's why you have to have the likes of [community services] trying to get people skilled up or educated enough to find choices in their lives [Stakeholder]*

*They don't work...it's not that they don't want to work. Some people do. But it's because the further away you are from the opportunity of work, the wider the gap becomes. Because if you have education, if any job comes up now, it will be those that are educated that will have the jobs. For those who are uneducated or who come from areas like here, they don't get the jobs. [Stakeholder]*

Parents expressed their concern about the level of crime in the area. In addition, they spoke of their fears for the peer relationships of their children now and into the future due to living in a community with high levels of drug use and antisocial behaviour.

*Who will he be friends with when he's older, will they be in trouble, will he get in trouble...I worry about that [Parent Focus Group]*

Despite the challenges associated with living in the area, parents and stakeholders spoke of a sense of community, particularly as many residents have lived in the area for a long time.

*People know each other...by and large, Inchicore is...a sociable area in the sense that people will talk to you...there's a sociability that [enables] you to approach people and the fact that it is a very close knit community in one way, and if one young person has a good experience, that will be transmitted to everybody and so people will know it's okay to go there [Stakeholder]*

*Lots of other single mothers live in the area so it is easier to make friends. [Parent]*

*Good that I've known my neighbours since I was a child [Parent]*

*I grew up here, everyone knows me and I know everyone [Parent]*

Some parents acknowledged that there was 'good access [in the area] to services and supports for my son who has autism [Parent] in the area. Similarly, the proximity of 'playgrounds, parks and the Luas' [Parent] was valued by other parents.





## Supporting parents

Early childhood is a time of both great opportunity and considerable risk, and its influence can extend over a lifetime. Children's resilience is developed in early childhood and enhanced by a nurturing environment and an emotional attachment with their parents. One of the most important stages in a young child's life is the development of attachment which is a strong emotional connection to at least one primary caregiver who is responsive and sensitive to the child's needs. It is recognised that attachment is necessary to promote the social and emotional development of the child and that it has life-long implications for the quality of the child's social interactions and relationships.

Children from vulnerable families which have a history of, for example, social disadvantage, unemployment, housing uncertainty, parental health problems, substance abuse, are known to be at greater risk of attention, language, learning and behaviour problems (Conroy *et al.* 2010, Every Child Counts 2010, Field 2010, Fauth *et al.* 2012). These problems have been linked with poor attachment and stimulation of the child's emotional and social development during the important early years of development.

Poor parenting exists across the social strata, but it would appear to have a less negative impact on children from more affluent families who may have other supports and outlets which offer some protection against negative outcomes (Field 2010). Odgers *et al.* (2012) argues that parents raising children in disadvantaged communities are faced with so many stressors that their ability to be responsive to their children's needs is compromised. The requirement to attend to a family's physical needs, such as housing and food, will undermine the parents' ability to respond to their children's social and emotional needs. Odgers *et al.* (2012) found that supportive parenting practices significantly mediate the influence of financial disadvantage and the effects of neighborhood deprivation. These practices include maternal warmth, communicating with children and concern for children.

Family background, positive parenting, parental

education and a child's opportunity for emotional and intellectual growth and stimulation are of greater significance than income in determining the child's potential in life (Field 2010, Kiernan & Mensah 2011, Nixon 2012). Positive parenting incorporates secure attachment with the child, authoritative rather than authoritarian parenting and an environment in which children experiences love and responsiveness from their parents. If the life prospects of vulnerable children are to be improved, it is important to build capacities and strengths within families to enable them to develop a nurturing relationship with their children which will help mitigate the influence of the negative stressors in their lives.

Early intervention of support services and provision of education and support to families in these circumstances have been shown to improve the health and developmental outcomes for children. Waylen & Stewart-Brown (2010) argue that those programmes which focus on improving parents' well-being and social support structures have a greater impact on parenting than strategies which focus solely on the reduction of family poverty.

In their evaluation of an early intervention programme for children from vulnerable families, Gwynne *et al.* (2009) reported positive outcomes in parent/child interaction with reduced parent stress, improved parental satisfaction, confidence and capacity and improved child well-being. The researchers also found that 71% of children who presented on initial developmental screening with delays in the clinical range were found to be within the normal range on post-testing and 41% of children had moved from the below average range to scores within the normal range in language development.

Similarly, McGilloway *et al.* (2012) conducted a community-based randomised controlled trial in highly disadvantaged urban areas in Ireland to test the effectiveness of the Incredible Years BASIC parent training program (IYBP) for children with behavioral problems. They reported statistically significant differences in child disordered behavior in those children whose parents had received the intervention. Positive effects on child hyperactive-inattentive behaviors and

social competence, as well as parent competencies and well-being, were also found.

Lindsay *et al.* (2011) evaluated the effectiveness of three parenting programmes delivered through a UK government initiative to support parents of children aged 8-13. Following the intervention the authors reported that parents reported higher levels of well-being and were more likely to feel effective as a parent and to have a higher level of satisfaction with being a parent. Parents also reported improvements in their children's behaviour as a result of the parenting programmes.

In a systematic review of the efficacy of group-based parenting interventions for improving child conduct problems, Furlong *et al.* (2012) found that the parenting interventions improved children's conduct problems, and improved parents' mental well-being and their parenting skills. The authors caution that the available evidence focuses largely on short-term improvements as there is little controlled comparative research exploring the long term outcomes. However, there are ethical challenges to withholding an intervention long-term from a control group in order to facilitate data collection from groups availing of the parenting intervention, particularly if it is known that the programme has positive outcomes.

There is increasing recognition in Ireland of the importance of early support and intervention for parents and families. In 2007, *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* (Office of the Minister for Children 2010) outlined 7 (now 5) national outcomes for children in Ireland in relation to their health and well-being. These outcomes indicate that children should be:

- ◇ healthy, both physically and mentally
- ◇ supported in active learning
- ◇ safe from accidental and intentional harm, and secure in the immediate and wider physical environment
- ◇ economically secure
- ◇ part of positive networks of family, friends, neighbours and community, and included

and participating in society.

In 2012, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) proposed the development of a National Early Years Strategy for children aged 0-6 years which will cover all aspects of children's early years, including health, family support, care and education. In addition, work is currently underway to provide the legislative foundations to establish the Child and Family Agency which will be a single state agency focusing on child protection and welfare and family support.

The report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, *'Right from the Start'*, was launched in October 2013 ((DYCA 2013a). This report, which will contribute to the development of the National Early Years Strategy, highlights the role of quality early intervention strategies in improving children's outcomes and specifically addresses the need to support families. *'Right from the Start'* has adopted the approach of 'progressive universalism' (DYCA 2013a, pg 2) which provides supports for all children and additional supports for children at risk or in need. This approach recognises that some people have specific needs which are met only through specific interventions.

Field (2010, pg 18) argues that *'the great driving force for deciding the future of children is their parents. No policy designed to break through the glass ceiling that is firmly in place over the heads of all too many children can succeed without parents.'* Thus, developing and implementing support and education structures which support parents in their parenting role, can in turn, enable and empower parents to provide their children with the best chance to achieve their full potential.

## National Early Years Access Initiative <sup>2</sup>

The National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) was launched in 2011 and is a collaboration between The Atlantic Philanthropies, Mount Street Club Trustees, Department of Children & Youth Affairs, Department of Educa-

<sup>2</sup> [www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/NationalEarlyYearsAccessInitiative/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/NationalEarlyYearsAccessInitiative/Pages/default.aspx)



tion & Skills (Early Years Education Policy Unit), and Pobal which manages the initiative. The NEYAI is a three project running from 2011-2014 and is focused on improving access to quality early childhood care and education services for children (birth to six years) and their families. The initiative aims to develop innovative community based models to respond to local needs and to increase the involvement in and participation of children and parents in service provision. The primary target population for the NEYAI is children aged 0-6 years and their families living in socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

The NEYAI is funding 11 local demonstration projects throughout the country and these projects were chosen on the basis that they had the capacity to:

- ◇ Develop innovative interagency models of collaboration and provision of early years care, education and development;
- ◇ Improve access to early childhood care and education services;
- ◇ Increase participation in early childhood care and education services;
- ◇ Inform a community-based model to underpin the local delivery of joined up services to children and families;
- ◇ Involve children and families as active participants in the programme;
- ◇ Contribute to the evaluation of the NEYAI to develop an evidence base which will inform national policy in relation to early years services.

A crucial element of the NEYAI is its goals to develop capacity and sustainability within an area by leaving a legacy of interagency collaboration, improved coordination of services for children and their families and increased participation of families in early years service.



## Identifying a gap in early years services – the origins of BIABH

The Canal Communities Family Welfare Initiative (CCFWI) is an interagency consortium composed of community, voluntary and statutory agencies that are concerned with child welfare and the delivery of children's services in Inchicore and Bluebell. The CCFWI was established in November 2009 and originated from the St. Michael's Estate Regeneration Board which had a social regeneration plan which *'prioritised health and wellbeing...that's where the FWI came in'* [Stakeholder].

*'A need was identified to bring together agencies who worked with vulnerable children ... if people sat around a table and worked on difficult cases, there would be shortcuts and it would be much quicker and much more effective [to get things done]'* [Stakeholder]

Several stakeholders interviewed during this evaluation cited the many reports into recent child welfare inquiries in Ireland which found limited interagency communication and collaboration and spoke of a commitment amongst all parties to *'stop the silo thinking in Inchicore'* [Stakeholder]. Part of the establishment of the FWI involved the development of a common standard and way of working across the various services. The members of the CCFWI meet monthly and *'work in a coordinated way, once a month, on the most difficult cases'* [Stakeholder] in the area and seek solutions and opportunities through interagency collaboration.

The CCFWI identified a gap in service provision in the area for families of children aged 0-4 years who:

*'were not turning up to services, whose parents weren't engaging for whatever reason...the*

*most marginal children of that age, there was a gap in the area'* [Stakeholder].

*There was always that piece, where you couldn't get to some of the young women, they were on the edges...part of this was in the drugs context...part of it was that they were just...they got pregnant early and they're more children than they are mothers...and then there are the ones who just don't choose to come in anywhere* [Stakeholder]

Other projects in the area addressed the needs of older children. However, the CCFWI recognised that the foundations for attachment, resilience and the social and emotional development of children are created in early childhood.

*'...the issue of attachment and the necessity of that evolving emotional relationship in very early childhood. That's why we thought that an early intervention project [was needed]'* [Stakeholder]

The CCFWI agreed that the families in the area with children aged 0-4 years had unmet needs which could be addressed with the development and implementation of an intensive parent support programme in the area. The identification of this gap in the provision of services in the Inchicore was *'how the idea for BIABH came about'* [Stakeholder] and the CCFWI proposed a parent support and education programme which was consistent with the philosophy and aims of the NEYAI.

In 2011, the CCFWI was successful in its application for funding through the NEYAI and Pobal to deliver a three year community parent and family support and education programme, Bringing It All Back Home, which would run from 2011-2014. The Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service agreed to take on the role of the lead agency which involves the overall management and administration of the project as well as providing support and supervision to the BIABH

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# Chapter 3: Bringing It All Back Home

In 2011, Bringing It All Back Home became one of the 11 demonstration projects of the NEYAI. BIABH was established as a three year project to run from 2011-2014. BIABH is a community based parent and family support and education programme, which delivers an intensive outreach service to vulnerable and 'hard to reach' families of children aged 0-4 years in the St. Michael's Estate / Lower Inchicore Area. The programme aims to improve the well-being of parents and their capacity to nurture their children's development through parenting skills and improved parenting support.

The NEYAI recognises that *Siolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*<sup>3</sup> and *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*<sup>4</sup> offer important tools and structures that the demonstration projects would use to guide the provision of their services. *Siolta* provides a framework to assess and support quality improvement across the spectrum of early childhood care and education [ECCE] services attended by children aged 0-6 years. *Aistear* is the early childhood curriculum for all children aged 0-6 years in Ireland. In keeping with the aims of the NEYAI, the delivery of BIABH is underpinned by these frameworks.

## Structure of BIABH

The Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service is the lead agency for the programme and its responsibilities include:

- ◇ overall management and administration of the project
- ◇ management of the project finances
- ◇ recruitment of the BIABH team
- ◇ provision of support and supervision to the BIABH team

Overseeing and supporting BIABH are the Steering Committee and the Monitoring Group.

**Steering Group:** the membership of this group is drawn from the Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service and key stakeholders from the CCFWI and local services. This is an independent group which is responsible for the strategic and operational running of BIABH, including the project evaluation.

**Monitoring Group:** The membership of this group is drawn from the Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service and key stakeholders from the CCFWI and local services. This is an independent group which is responsible for identifying the most at-risk children in the area, advising on individual cases and advising on practices and resources to support the delivery of BIABH.

The governance structure of BIABH is outlined in Appendix 1.

## The BIABH service

The service is provided by three Outreach Child Care Workers, who are managed by a coordinator. Two of the outreach workers are seconded by the DOCCFS. BIABH is a part time project with three staff working 2½ days per week and the fourth staff member working 4 days per week. BIABH works closely with childcare services and other groups in the area and the programme is also represented on the CCFWI.

The team reaches out to vulnerable children and families where the parent(s) may not have the confidence or capacity to link in with existing services. In addition, families can be referred to BIABH by the five childcare services in the area and also by other services including schools, HSE social work services, GPs and PHNS, and other providers of early years and family services.

BIABH is a needs-led and strengths-based programme which provides a spectrum of supports and interventions which are tailored to the

<sup>3</sup> [www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie)

<sup>4</sup> [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)

needs of families. The programme does not adopt a punitive approach of chastening parents for poor parenting practices. Instead, it focuses on the strengths and positive parenting practices which already exist in the parent-child relationship, and then supports and empowers

the parents to further develop their capacity to nurture and engage with their children. Figure 1 presents a logic model which summarises the goals, resources, activities and anticipated outcomes of BIABH. These elements are discussed in greater detail hereafter.

Figure 1: Logic Model for Bringing It All Back Home

Background	INPUTS (resources)	OUTPUTS (activities)	OUTCOMES
<b>Goal</b> To improve the well-being of parents and their capacity to nurture their child's development through intensive parental education and support  <b>Situational Analysis</b> Families are not engaging in local services  Children are not school ready  Evidence shows that improving parents' capacity will improve children's outcomes  <b>Strategy</b> Work with target group of families with children aged 0-4 years	Experienced, trained outreach workers  Dedicated venue for the provision of training  Financial resources to deliver programme  Access to local services through the CCFWI  Engagement of families	Relationship building with the selected children and families  Home visits  Delivery of two intervention programmes: Marte Meo Communication Skills and Incredible Years  Provision of education about play, parenting behaviours, nutrition, child development & attachment, boundaries, consistent parenting etc  Drop-In centre  Foster a culture of positive-parenting  Linking families with other agencies  Capacity building through the provision of training to local childcare services	<b>Short Term</b> Increased awareness amongst parents of the child's emotional and developmental needs  Increased emotional attachment between parent and child  Increased awareness of parenting in a nurturing manner  Parents will enjoy playing with and spending time with their children  Children will be happy  In cases of behavioural problems, there will be clear evidence of improvement  <b>Intermediate &amp; Long Term</b> Parents will have confidence and ability in helping child developmental milestones  Parenting will be nurturing and effective  Child will regularly attend an early years service  Child will access all health and other specialist supports as necessary.  Parents will bring children to appointments, crèches etc without support of case worker  Parents will have the confidence to attend parenting support and other groups outside of the home  Provision of training to local childcare services will leave a legacy of skills and knowledge in parenting support in the community

The BIABH team aims to strengthen the parent-child relationship and promote positive parenting practices through a variety of home and office based strategies, including:

- ◇ Home visits to families to help equip parents with the skills to develop an emotional attachment to their child.

- ◇ Education to parents about communication, play, positive parenting behaviours, nutrition, child development and other topics to enhance the parents' parenting skills

- ◇ Information and support about specific topics, including housing, mental health issues and accessing services



- ◇ Linking parents and families with community services, for example, GP, PHN, Community Drugs Team, Social Worker, hospitals, pre-school.
- ◇ Advocacy role to support parents and families
- ◇ Drop-in service to provide an informal support forum for parents and families
- ◇ Delivery of two intervention programmes, Marte Meo communications skills and Incredible Years, which focus on positive parenting methods
- ◇ Provision of the Cooperative Parenting programme to support children in families which have experienced separation
- ◇ Capacity building through the provision of training to childcare services within the area

## Home visits

Based on their experience of working in the Lower Inchicore area, the consortium members felt that intense home-based intervention was essential to improve and sustain access to the target group, without which this vulnerable group could become even more isolated and marginalized from services and the community. It was also felt that home visits would provide a real-life support structure to parents to help them build their skills and confidence in their role as primary carer for their children.

## Parent Education

The BIABH team provide education to parents on a variety of topics, all of which aim to support the parents and enhance their skills and capacity in their parenting role. These topics include, but are not limited to, communication, play, positive parenting behaviours, nutrition and child development. The education is delivered formally and informally, during home visits, group meetings and during any interaction the BIABH team has with the families.

## Interagency collaboration

A critical element of all NEYAI programmes is the development of sustainable interagency collaborations which improve communication and service provision to children and families. The CCFWI was in existence prior to the estab-

lishment of BIABH and provides a robust inter-agency structure within the area. BIABH further enhances this interagency collaboration by linking families with services in the areas about which the families may be unaware. Cluster meetings are held between relevant services if specific issues arise for a family which require an inter-agency response. The BIABH team also provides an advocacy role for families by liaising with agencies or supporting and empowering families to communicate with agencies, for example, housing services, health services.

## Drop-in service

BIABH provides a weekly drop-in service during those times when there are no scheduled training programmes. The purpose of the drop-in service is to provide an informal support and advice structure for parents. In addition, it was hoped that the service would provide a means for parents to link with other members of their community, thereby creating peer support structures. Parents can bring their children which eliminates non-engagement due to childcare concerns.

## Marte Meo communication skills

Maria Aarts developed the Marte Meo programme in the 1970's in The Netherlands to enable recipients to identify and develop skills to enhance their interactions and relationships. Marte Meo is derived from the Latin "*mars martis*", which means "On one's own strength". The programme encourages participants to use their own strengths to develop their relationship with their children and enhance their children's potential. The skills training is delivered in the home or in the BIABH offices, depending on the needs and preferences of the families.

A DVD is made of a parent-child interaction and is used as a means of developing the parent's skill and relationship with their child. At the end of the Marte Meo programme, the parent and child are again recorded to show the development of positive parenting behaviours. The DVD is optional and some families decide against this approach.

## Incredible Years

Incredible Years is a 12-14 week evidence-based parenting programme which was developed by

Carolyn Webster-Stratton and is now used internationally. The programme is group-based and focuses on the enhancement of effective positive parenting with the intention of enabling children's development and education and addressing children's behaviour problems where necessary. The underpinning assumption of the Incredible Years programme is that:

*'Children will work for attention from others, especially parents, whether it is positive (praise) or negative (criticism) in nature. If they do not receive positive attention, then they will strive for negative attention since that is better than none at all' (Webster-Stratton 2013).*

There is substantial evidence supporting the efficacy of Incredible Years in improving parent skills and reducing children's behavioural problems (Lindsay *et al.* 2011, McGilloway *et al.* 2012, Furlong *et al.* 2012).

## Capacity building within the community

The BIABH team facilitated the delivery of education for Marte Meo Communications Skills and Incredible Years for the five early years services. This element of BIABH will generate a legacy which will extend beyond the programme and will build capacity for the staff in these centres to provide a person-centred approach to care and intervention.

## Anticipated outcomes of BIABH

At the outset of the programme the CCFWI and the BIABH team outlined the anticipated outcomes for the project. These included outcomes for the child, the parents and the larger community.

### Anticipated outcomes of BIABH

<b>The Child</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ The most at-risk 0–4 year olds in Inchicore will be well looked after and will be closer to meeting their developmental milestones at the end of the project.</li> <li>◇ Their parents and carers will be involved in every aspect of raising their own child and will take responsibility for their child's physical, emotional and developmental needs.</li> <li>◇ These target children will be happy, healthy, sociable with their peers, engaged in appropriate services and school ready where appropriate.</li> </ul>
<b>The Family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ The families will be supported to look at issues preventing them from fully engaging with services and the community.</li> <li>◇ Problems within families will be identified at an early stage and responded to.</li> <li>◇ Parents will be more confident in their parenting ability and will have the confidence to reach out to avail of existing health, early years and family support services available to them outside of the home.</li> </ul>
<b>The Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ The services and expertise of all relevant agencies and stakeholders in the community will be harnessed to work in a coordinated, effective manner to flag problems at an early stage and to improve outcomes for the target children.</li> <li>◇ Professionals working in the community will be upskilled to better deal with the developmental needs of at-risk children.</li> <li>◇ The 5 childcare projects in Lower Inchicore will be on the road to full Siolta accreditation.</li> <li>◇ The children's services in the area will act as a referral pathway for families when additional support needs are identified to ensure early intervention services are accessed.</li> </ul>



## Maintaining programme fidelity through Peer Support

Fidelity to an intervention programme is defined as the degree to which the programme is delivered as it was originally devised and intended (Gearing *et al.* 2011). If fidelity is not maintained, the original essence and intention of a programme may not be met, thereby reducing its effectiveness and eventually leading to unsustainability. Peer support can contribute to fidelity of a programme by providing a forum for shared learning as facilitators share their experiences.

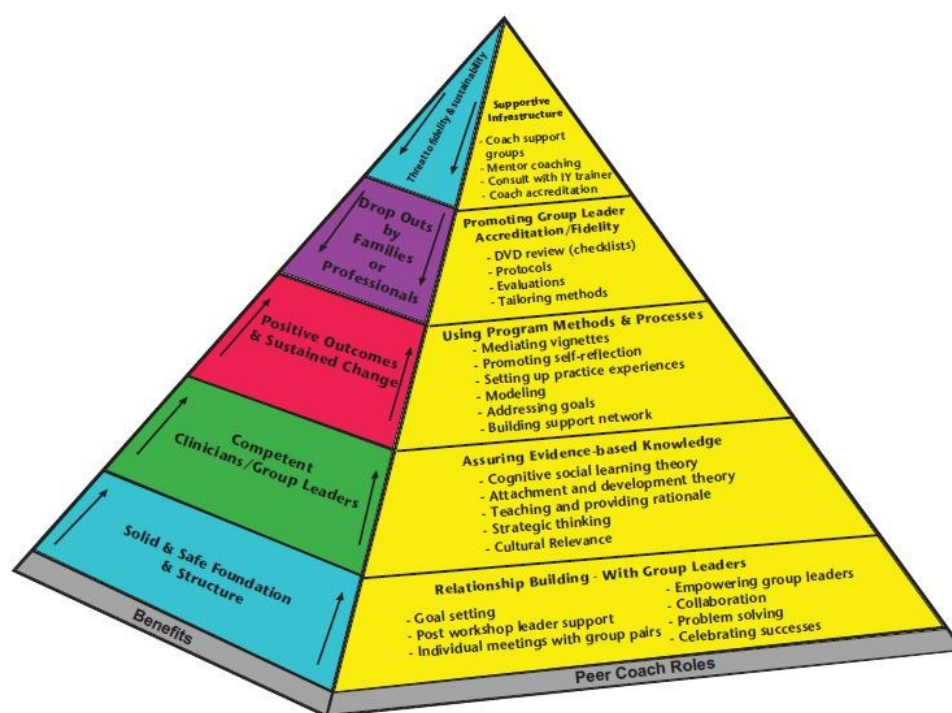
Peer support for Incredible Years facilitators is currently offered to all staff facilitating Incredible Years groups in the Dublin 8 and Dublin 10 areas by Patricia Fitzpatrick, HSE Parenting Skills Unit, who coordinates and leads this peer support. The BIABH team has availed of this group support which has helped them to explore such topics as fostering engagement, empowering parents, being compassionate and also some conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. The purpose of the peer support is to enable Incredible Years facilitators to further 'develop those

skills and knowledge base... which you only develop by delivering the programme' [Stakeholder]. In this way, the peer support structure helps to support, sustain and enhance the facilitators' skills and knowledge. The peer support structure also reinforces the practice of interagency work in the area by raising awareness of services and by enabling learning from the experiences of others.

Within the peer support structure, facilitators have the opportunity to share their experiences, vignettes and recordings of their Incredible Years groups to their peers and receive constructive feedback on how they have worked on delivering the programme. Feedback is given on whether the programme has been delivered with fidelity and that the key principles of positive parenting are being reinforced. Figure 2 illustrates the incremental benefits which can be achieved through the peer support structure. Facilitators are supported to become solid and competent leaders, to focus on positive outcomes, have the opportunity to plan future groups and learn from experienced Incredible Years facilitators and work towards becoming an accredited Incredible Years leader.

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Fig 2: Incredible Years Peer Coach Pyramid <sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> [www.incredible-years.com](http://www.incredible-years.com)

## Hard to Reach or Seldom Heard

The target population for BIABH are hard-to-reach families who are not engaged with services within the Inchicore area. The term 'hard to reach' is widely used to describe people or communities who, for a variety of reasons, do not or cannot engage with or avail of the breadth of services available from statutory or community agencies. Behaviours which may be indicative of disengagement include being late for appointments, diverting the conversation away from uncomfortable topics, lack of cooperation, hostility, confrontation or violence (HSE 2011).

However, the term 'hard-to-reach' is problematic as it does not reflect the complexities of peoples' circumstances or the multiplicity of reasons why they may not engage in services. Furthermore, the term 'hard to reach' and its many synonyms, including 'hidden population', 'vulnerable', 'socially excluded' amongst others, can create the impression that it is the families which are hard to reach (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou 2012).

An alternative perspective suggests that there may be factors which inhibit families from engaging in services and consequently, it is actually the services and agencies which are hard to reach (Landy & Menna 2006, Crozier & Davies 2007). If, for example, a family is living in poor housing with limited income, their focus will be on addressing their basic needs which limits their opportunity to engage with services. Families may be fearful that engagement with community or government services will involve scrutiny of their lives and may result in their children being removed from them (HSE 2011).

*Depending on how stable or chaotic that parent might be, they mightn't prioritise their appointment [...], you know, they've other things going on [Stakeholder]*

*For someone running around trying to get accommodation or trying to get money to pay a month's rent, they have huge stress and it's very hard for them to settle into a space and concentrate on something [Stakeholder]*

Increasingly the term 'Seldom-heard' is used to describe populations who are under-represented in health and social care delivery and who experience barriers to their engagement in services (Robson *et al.* 2008). These barriers may be perceived or actual but nonetheless inhibit the individual or family from engaging with a service. This changes the nature of engagement as it charges the agency with the responsibility to provide a service which is accessible to people, encourages participation and enables people's voices to be heard.

BIABH recognises that there are a myriad of reasons which may inhibit parents and families from engaging in services. The team also recognises that a crucial element of parent support interventions is the building of relationships with parents and families and with the community. Therefore, while the term 'hard-to-reach' has been used to describe the target population for BIABH, 'seldom-heard' offers a more accurate description of the population. It is within this context that BIABH focuses on providing a service which reaches out to parents and *'meets them where they are at'* [BIABH Team] and supports families to overcome barriers to engagement with BIABH itself and with other services.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

A national evaluation of NEYAI is currently being conducted by a team of researchers, Dr. Kieran McKeown (Project co-ordinator), Trutz Haase (Data Analyst) and Professor Jay Belsky (Research Director of the UK's National Evaluation of Sure Start Research Team). The inclusion criteria for the evaluation is children aged 3.5 years and older. The target population for BIABH is children aged 0-4 years so the project is to a large extent not included in the national evaluation. It was as a result of this that the Steering Group agreed that an independent evaluation of BIABH was required, the findings of which would contribute to the national evaluation. The evaluation of BIABH commenced in 2013 using a multi-method approach to give greater depth and insight into the programme.

## Aims of the Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation of BIABH was to determine the effectiveness of BIABH in terms of its influence on the parent-child relationship and the parents' capacity to nurture their children's development. This would be achieved by identifying:

- ◇ the perceptions of parents, stakeholders and the BIABH team about the programme
- ◇ the strengths and challenges of BIABH
- ◇ the parents' perspective of the influence of BIABH on their parenting role and their relationship with their children

## Target Population for the Evaluation

**Parents:** All parents involved in BIABH, including both mothers and fathers, were invited to participate in the evaluation. The inclusion criteria was that the parents must have been engaged in the Marte Meo and/or the Incredible Years strands of BIABH

**BIABH Team:** The BIABH coordinator, the Outreach child care workers and a senior manager from the lead agency for BIABH, the Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service, were invited to participate in the evaluation.

**Local Stakeholders:** Nine key stakeholders from the Canal Communities Family Welfare Initiative and local childcare services were invited to participate. See Appendix 2 for details of these stakeholder services.

Written or email invitations were sent to all prospective participants outlining the purpose of the evaluation and inviting them to participate in the project.

## Data Collection

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data was collected to evaluate the BIABH programme.

### Quantitative Data

No additional quantitative data was sought other than that already routinely collected during the delivery of BIABH. The BIABH attendance records were reviewed to determine the scale of the service and to identify trends in attendance and non-attendance. In addition, two measurement instruments are used as part of the delivery of Incredible Years component of BIABH and it was anticipated that these could inform the quantitative element of the study. Parents are expected to complete the baseline questionnaires before they engage in the Incredible Years programme and to complete the post-test questionnaire on completion of the programme. A reduction in the score between the pre- and post-test questionnaires could be used to measure the effectiveness of BIABH.

**Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI) (Eyberg & Ross 1978):** a parent rating scale assessing child behavior problems. It includes an Intensity Scale, which measures the frequency of each

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problem behavior and a Problem Scale which reflects parents' tolerance of the behaviours and the distress caused. The ECBI is intended to assess both the type of behavior problems and the degree to which parents find them problematic.

**Parenting Stress Index – Short Form (PSI-SF):** a screening and diagnostic self-administered assessment tool designed to measure the relative magnitude of stress in the parent-child relationship (Loyd & Abidin 1985). The PSI-SF contains 36 items which are divided into categories representing parent and child characteristics. The PSI-SF is used for early identification of dysfunctional parent-child interactions, parental stress and family functioning.

ventions and their perceptions of how they influenced their role as parents.

## BIABH Team

The BIABH Team and a senior manager from DOCCFS participated in a focus group at which they discussed their experiences of running BIABH, their perceptions of the strengths and challenges of the programme and how it could be developed further.

## Stakeholders

The nine stakeholders participated in semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face or by telephone during which they were asked to discuss their experiences of engaging with BIABH, their perceptions of the strengths and challenges of the programme and how it could be developed further.

## Qualitative Data

### Parents

**Focus Groups:** Focus groups are a useful method of collecting data, especially when dealing with sensitive topics (Streubert and Carpenter 2010) or hard-to-reach and vulnerable communities (Liamputtong 2006). Families involved in the BIABH project are from disadvantaged and marginalised communities and it is recognised that there are challenges to encouraging participation of such groups in research projects. A focus group provides a forum in which participants can discuss their experiences with their peers in a safe environment and can provide group support for expressing fears, opinions and experiences (Burns and Grove 2012).

Parents were invited to attend a focus group in Summer 2013 at which they were asked to discuss their experiences of joining BIABH, the challenges they anticipated and experienced, their expectations of the programme and whether these have been met, and the benefits of BIABH. Parents were also asked to consider how the programme could be developed further for future participants.

**Marte Meo Communication Skills training and Incredible Years Programme:** Those parents who took part in one or both of these programmes were subsequently invited to complete questionnaires to evaluate the inter-

## Ethical Considerations

Institutional ethics approval for the project was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, in which the researcher is based. The particular ethical implications of researching a vulnerable and seldom heard group were considered and measures were implemented to protect participants' welfare during the evaluation.

**Voluntary participation:** It was recognised that parents may feel obligated to participate in the study because they are participating in the BIABH project. The participation information leaflet assured them that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to at any time without prejudice. Consent to participate was obtained from all participants including the parents, the BIABH team and the stakeholders, before they were included in the evaluation.

**Children's Health and Welfare:** Protocols were established in the event that during the evaluation it was identified that a child had a health issue which required further management or if a disclosure was made about child protection concerns.

**Facilitation of the Parent Focus Groups:** The challenges of conducting research with 'hard-to-reach' populations are well documented in the





literature (Sydor 2013). Due to the vulnerabilities of the parent group and the challenges associated with developing trust with outsiders, it was agreed that a member of the BIABH team would sit in on the parent focus group. While this raises the question of bias and the risk of influencing the participants, it was important to balance the need to protect the welfare of participants with the need to ensure the rigor of the evaluation. The use of peer moderators and chaperones for focus groups can enhance access to hard-to-reach or seldom-heard communities and may contribute to overcoming mistrust of researchers who are perceived to be socially removed from the participants' life experiences within vulnerable communities (Liamputtong 2006, Halcomb et al. 2007, Emmel et al. 2007).

## Data Analysis

### Quantitative data

The attendance logs were analysed to determine trends in attendance and non-attendance. The Key Issues Logs maintained by the outreach workers were also analysed to identify the most frequently occurring issues reported by parents.

The scores from ECBI and the PSI-SF were entered into a data analysis software package, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and descriptive statistics were applied. In total, 32 families have received Incredible Years training from the BIABH team. Of these, thirteen families are actually engaged with BIABH. The remaining families were linked with other local services and were able to avail of the Incredible Years training delivered by BIABH. These other families were not the primary target population for BIABH, and therefore any data collected about them within their own service could not be used for this evaluation. Of the thirteen families who were linked with BIABH, the completed pre- and post-intervention ECBI and PSI-SFs of 11 of these were available for data analysis.

### Qualitative data

The focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed using a process of thematic analysis. Core issues, phrases and statements were highlighted and coded. These codes were grouped into

sub-themes on the basis of repeated patterns of presentation of information. When this process is complete, organising themes or final categories were identified. The results of the thematic analysis along with the participants own words to support the analysis were returned to individual participants for member-checking, in keeping with the measures used to assure rigour in qualitative research. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify or correct items at this point.

The parent evaluations of the Marte Meo Communications Skills training and the Incredible Years Programme were analysed using thematic analysis based on the process outlined above.

The quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to generate a comprehensive picture of the BIABH programme and evaluate its effectiveness.

## Validity & Trustworthiness

As this is a mixed method study, two approaches are required to assure the objectivity of the research process and the findings.

### Validity

Validity is the term used to determine the objectivity of quantitative inquiry. The ECBI and PSI-SF are widely used tools which have undergone testing for validity and reliability. The tools have been used extensively in similar populations, nationally and internationally.

### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the term used to determine the rigor of qualitative research, and is judged on the basis of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Credibility is achieved when a study produces descriptions of an experience which are recognisable to those with similar experiences. Participants were asked to review and validate the themes which emerged from their interviews. Similarly, participants of the focus groups were asked to review the themes which arose, with the caveat that the themes represented participants' collective experiences. Transferability is achieved when the research findings fit or have meaning to people in areas beyond the study set-

ting and this is aided by the provision of descriptions of the study setting and the population.

Confirmability refers to the process of ensuring that the research findings are derived from the data. This is achieved by using direct quotes which are anonymously attributable to individual participants to substantiate the findings. Dependability is measured by the extent to which readers can follow the decision-making processes and is enhanced by providing a decision trail which justifies the methodological choices made throughout the evaluation.

## Limitations

This evaluation was conducted early in the final year of the BIABH project. At that point, not all parents had completed the Incredible Years training. As a result, there is some incomplete data as not all parents had the opportunity to complete the ECBI and PSI-SF questionnaires. In addition these scales were only completed by parents engaging in the Incredible Years programme and not by parents engaging in any other element of BIABH. Future projects would benefit from collecting this data on all participants in a project to generate greater volumes of data about the effectiveness of the programme.

This evaluation focuses on the impact of BIABH on the parent-child relationship and the contribution of the programme to enhancing parents' capacity to nurture their children's development. As the programme is targeted towards

families of children aged 0-4 years, it is not possible to measure the impact of the programme on children's long-term outcomes, including their educational outcomes. A longitudinal study which would follow the children would be useful to determine the impact of BIABH on their school readiness and their progress in terms of health and developmental outcomes. This type of study was beyond the scope of this evaluation due to the timeframes involved and the cost and resource implications.

The author acknowledges that there are numerous stakeholders involved in or associated with the BIABH programme. It was beyond the scope and resources of this evaluation to include all stakeholders. Therefore, it was decided to invite participation from the childcare services which refer children to BIABH, in addition to key individuals who had a significant role in the development of BIABH.

There is no control group against which to measure the outcomes of the BIABH programme. This was a three year support and intervention programme. It was not within the scope of the project to identify a control group who would not be offered the supports and services of BIABH in order to facilitate a comparative evaluation. Also there would be ethical challenges to identifying a cohort of families who are at risk or seldom heard, and not offering them access to a service designed to support families like theirs.

# Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter outlines the results of the data collected from the parents, BIABH team and the stakeholders. This data yielded a rich insight into the BIABH programme, its strengths and successes in addition to the challenges which were encountered.

## Profile of families engaged with BIABH

Forty-three families in the St. Michael's Estate and Lower Inchicore area have been referred to the BIABH programme, through a combination of self-referral and referral by early years services and other agencies. Of these, 28 families are engaged with BIABH, and the BIABH team is currently linking with a further nine other families to encourage them to engage with the pro-

**Table 2: BIABH Activity**

Referred to BIABH	43
Engaged with BIABH	28
Families referred but not yet engaged	9
Families who declined to engage	6

gramme (Table 2). Six families have declined to engage with the programme.

Table 3 below outlines the demographic characteristics of the families who are engaged in BIABH. Most families (68%) are lone parent families led by mothers. Almost 70% of families have 1 or 2 children and no family had more than 4 children. Most families are Irish (82%).

**Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of the families engaged with BIABH (n=28)**

		<i>n</i>	(%)
<b>Family Type</b>	Both parents resident	8	(28%)
	Mother only resident	19	(68%)
	Father only resident	1	(4%)
	1 child family	10	(36%)*
	2 children family	11	(39%)*
	3 children family	5	(18%)*
	4 children family	2	(7%)*
<b>Nationality of parents</b>	Irish	23	(82%)
	Rest of Europe	1	(4%)
	Africa	2	(7%)
	Mixed nationality	2	(7%)
<b>Principal Economic Status</b>		<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Fathers</b>
	Employed		5 (18%)
	Unemployed		10 (36%)
	Looking after family	27 (96%)	1 (4%)
	Unable to work (illness or disability)		1 (4%)

Parents involved in the Bringing It All Back Home project identify the key issues which impact on their ability as parents. These issues are identified during home visits, in the parenting programmes, in the drop-in service and during one to one contact with the BIABH staff. The following are the ten most frequently cited issues which the parents and their families encounter.

1. Housing/Rent/Bills Arrears/ Financial Difficulties-Accessing supports of same
2. Behaviour Management
3. Children's Health & Wellbeing
4. Impact of Mental Health Issues
5. Domestic Violence
6. Parenting after separation
7. Confidence in Parenting
8. Accessing Pre-school and crèche places
9. Difficulties accessing services for children with Special Needs
10. Difficulty in finding a voice to access services

Odgers *et al.* (2012) argue that parents raising children in disadvantaged communities are faced with so many stressors that their ability to be responsive to their children's needs is compromised. The requirement to attend to the physical needs of the family such as housing and food will undermine the parents' ability to respond to their children's social and emotional needs. If the life prospects of vulnerable children are to be improved, it is important to build capacities and strengths within families to enable them to develop a nurturing relationship with their children which will help mitigate the influence of the negative stressors in their lives. The development of this relationship with the child and how this is achieved is crucial as it is now accepted that it is *'what parents do with their children rather than who they are or where they live'* (DYCA 2013a, pg 9) that is important.

## Encouraging engagement

Of the 43 families referred to BIABH, six families declined to engage with the project. A further nine families have been referred but, as yet, have not actively engaged with the project.

Boag-Munroe and Evangelou (2012) argue that services need to consider ways of initiating and sustaining contact with families to facilitate the building of relationships and trust which may then encourage families to engage in that service. BIABH have been actively involved in maintaining contact with the nine families who have not yet actively engaged in the project, to ensure those families are aware of the supports and education which is available. While the families are not formally engaged with BIABH, there is a significant level of involvement and contact between the BIABH team and these families, which is outlined in Table 4. In some cases, this involvement is led by the BIABH team while on other occasions it is initiated by the family.

**Table 4: Contact between BIABH and families not engaged**

Type of Contact	Number of
Referral Meetings Offered	42
Street Contact / Drop in	21
Telephone calls	136
Letters	20

## Attendance profile

Table 5 outlines the uptake of the various elements of the BIABH programme. The majority of families (96%) engaged with Home Visits. In total, 32 families have received Incredible Years training from the BIABH team. Of these, thirteen families are actually engaged with BIABH. The remaining families were linked with other local services and were able to avail of the Incredible Years training delivered by BIABH. There was a high level of engagement with the Incredible Years Programme with 82% of participants attending 75% or more of the sessions.





**Table 5: Attendance Profile for elements of BIABH programme**

ELEMENT		No of families engaged/attended 2011-2013			
Home Visits		27			
Marte Meo Communication Skills		11			
Incredible Years Group		32 (of these 13 families were from BIABH)			
Engagement with Incredible Years Programme (n=32)	Attended all sessions	Attended 75%-99% of sessions	Attended 50%-75% of sessions	Attended <50% of sessions	
Number of families	0	26 (82%)	2 (6%)	4 (12%)	

The drop-in service is run when there is no education programme being delivered. In total, there have been 28 drop-in held with 19 parents from the 28 families attending (Table 6).

**Table 6: Attendance Profile at Drop-in Service**

Total number of drop-in sessions held 2011-13	Total number of parents who attended drop-in service 2011-13	Average attendance at each drop in service
28	19 (125 total attendances)	5 per week

## Impact of Parenting Programmes on Parent Stress and Children's Behaviour

Parents completed two self-report measures before and after their involvement in the Incredible Years Programme. The *Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI)* (Eyberg & Ross 1978) is a parent rating measure of behavior problems in children. It includes an Intensity Scale, which measures the frequency of each problem behavior and a Problem Scale which reflects parents' tolerance of the behaviours and the distress caused. The ECBI is intended to assess both the type of behavior problems and the degree to which parents find them problematic. Scores >132 on the Intensity scale and ≥15 on the Problem scale are considered to be clinically significant.

The *Parenting Stress Index – Short Form (PSI-SF)* is a screening and diagnostic self-administered

assessment tool designed to measure the relative magnitude of stress in the parent-child relationship (Loyd & Abidin 1985). The PSI-SF contains 36 items which are divided into categories representing parent and child characteristics. The PSI-SF is used for early identification of dysfunctional parent-child interactions, parental stress and family functioning. Total Stress scores of >90 are considered to indicate clinically significant signs of parenting stress.

A paired samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the Incredible Years programme on the parents' reports of their stress and the children behaviour (Table 7). Improvements were seen between the mean scores of the ECBI Intensity scale recorded prior to ( $M = 116.6$ ,  $SD = 50.8$ ), and following the programme ( $M = 95.4$ ,  $SD = 51.7$ ). Similarly there were reductions in the mean ECBI Problem score prior to the Incredible Years programme ( $M = 14.2$ ,  $SD = 10.8$ ) compared to the score following the programme ( $M = 8.6$ ,  $SD = 11.0$ ). The improve-

ments observed in the ECBI Intensity Scale ( $p = 0.12$ ) and the ECBI Problem Scale ( $p = .106$ ) were not statistically significant.

There was a statistically significant decrease in

the PSI-SF Total Stress scores recorded prior to the programmes ( $M = 98.1$ ,  $SD = 28.4$ ) and the scores recorded following the programmes ( $MD = 71.2$ ,  $SD = 29.3$ ),  $p = 0.011$  (two-tailed).

**Table 7: Parent Report Measures (n=11)**

Measures	Pre intervention		Post intervention	
	Mean $\pm$ SD	% in clinical range	Mean $\pm$ SD	% in clinical range
ECBI Intensity	116.6 $\pm$ 50.8	36%	95.4 $\pm$ 51.7 $p = 0.12$	18%
ECBI Problem	14.2 $\pm$ 10.8	36%	8.6 $\pm$ 11.0 $p = 0.106$	18%
PSI-SF Total Stress	98.1 $\pm$ 28.4	66%	71.2 $\pm$ 29.3 $p = 0.011$	18%

*ECBI: Eyberg Child Behaviour Inventory* *PSI-SF: Parenting Stress Index – Short Form*

## Evaluations of the parenting programmes

Parents were asked to evaluate the Incredible Years programme and the Marte Meo Communication Skills training and to indicate how the programmes have helped to develop their parenting skills.

### Incredible Years

In total, 32 families have undertaken the Incredible Years programme. Of these, 13 families are engaged with BIABH. The remaining families are attending other services in the area and availed of the Incredible Years training facilitated by the BIABH Team. Parents described the

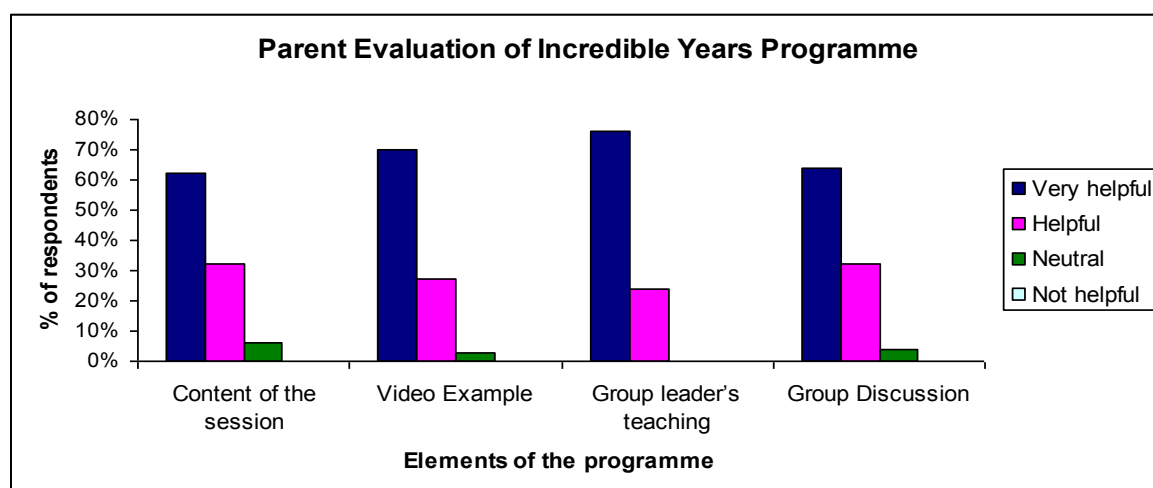
skills and strategies they acquired during the programme.

Using a 4-point scale of **Not helpful**, **Neutral**, **Helpful**, **Very helpful**, parents were also asked to rate the helpfulness of four elements of the 14 sessions in the Incredible Years programme:

- ◇ Content of the session
- ◇ Video Example
- ◇ Group leader's teaching
- ◇ Group Discussion

Overall, most respondents rated the programme as **Helpful** (29%) or **Very Helpful** (68%). No respondents indicated that they found any element of the programme **Not Helpful** (Fig 3).

**Fig 3: Parent Evaluation of the Incredible Years Programme**



## Parent evaluation of the Incredible Years Programme

I learned to ask questions, listen and ask [my child] can he come up with problem solving

This course has helped me to achieve so much with my children

I found this session to be really helpful for me to try and get a stable routine in my home

Today I learned about putting a positive to a negative situation

Enjoyed listening about praising and using it for everything and the effects it has long-term effects it has on children

I have learned how labeling praise and acknowledging my child's good behaviour rather than their negative behaviour, has a positive effect on my child and on my child's self-esteem

Today I have learned how positive feedback and praise to my child can encourage their confidence

### Marte Meo Communication Skills training

Eleven families completed the Marte Meo Communication Skills training and of these, six families completed questionnaires. The recording of the parent-child interaction during this skills training was particularly valued by parents.

Most parents felt nervous and shy about being recorded at first, but they were unanimous in their assertion that the recording helped to develop their parenting skills. Parents described how the recording helped to reassure them they had already had many positive parenting behaviours.

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## Parent evaluation of the Parent-Child Recording (Marte Meo Communications Skills Training)

At first I was embarrassed to watch it as I didn't know what to expect. But when I watched it, it wasn't bad at all. I saw how good I was playing with my child

It made me realise I was doing a lot well

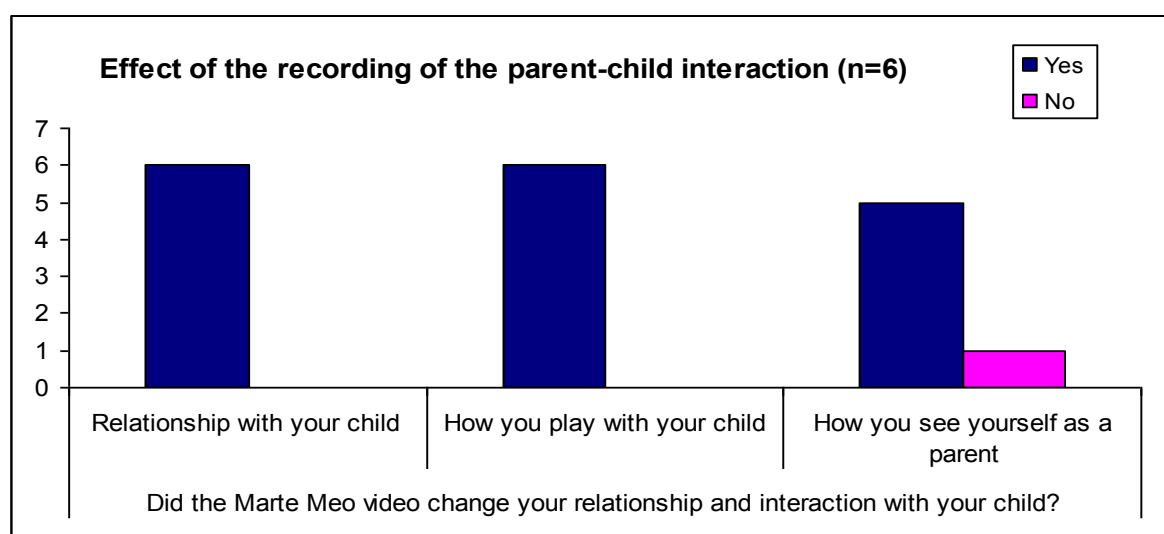
[I was not aware before] that I'm a good parent / father to my child

I liked hearing feedback about my relationship with my son

I could clearly see what I was doing right and where I needed a bit more work

It made me feel that I am doing the right thing with my child

**Fig 4: Did the Marte Meo DVD change your relationship with your child**



## Findings from the focus groups and interviews

The qualitative data collected through focus groups and interviews generated a large

amount of data which permits an insight into BIABH through the lens of several different perspectives. Through a process of thematic analysis, the data yielded four overarching themes, with several sub-themes:

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Making it Work	Reaching out to the seldom heard Meeting parents where they are at Interagency collaboration
2. Becoming a confident parent	Building capacity Develop parenting and communication skills Advocacy
3. Challenges	Fear of engaging Financial and service constraints Uncertainty about the future
4. Leaving a legacy	Building capacity in the community

### 1. Making it work

The BIABH team and stakeholders were very aware from the outset of the need to create a service which reached out to families and they identified several aspects of the programme which were essential for making it work and helping it to be accepted in the area.

#### *Reaching out to the seldom heard*

In order to engage so called hard-to-reach communities, Boag-Munroe & Evangelou (2012) argue that service providers must be innovative in how they initiate first contact. The BIABH team and all

the stakeholders recognised that they had to build a reputation and a relationship within the community in order to gain acceptance for the programme and to be able to reach out to their target population. This is particularly relevant when working with a hard-to-reach community who may have a sense of mistrust towards services, especially those with a child welfare remit.

*Hard to reach doesn't just mean hard to find, it also means hard to gain trust [BIABH Team]*

Initially the BIABH team physically went out in the local area to meet people and raise awareness



about the programme. This street contact and informal communications with families became a building block for BIABH, helping to raise awareness of the programme in the community and generating referrals. It was important to value this interaction as work and to recognise that it is a critical first step to fostering engagement of a family.

*We had sat down on a wall and talked with a family for about an hour and [we thought] 'I'm so glad people see this as work'. [In other services] this might not have been seen as work but it was the building blocks to our work [BIABH Team]*

*These are families that really don't link in with anyone else, they may not go to preschools, They need people to knock on their door and say 'this is what we're doing. Would you like to come'. That's how much...that's how far you have to go to connect certain families into the community [Stakeholder]*

Similarly the drop-in service became an important means of fostering engagement in a non-threatening way. Parents are encouraged to attend and may bring their children, which alleviates the challenge of finding childcare for that time.

*The perception that the families have is that [the drop-in service] has an open door policy, that's it's low-key and that it's laid back. They can come in and it's no threat...it's a way of getting that initial, difficult contact [BIABH Team]*

*If you want to engage with [BIABH], you can drop in to our centre and see what it's like, test the water and decide whether or not you want to engage [BIABH Team]*

Parents valued this opportunity to meet in an informal way and spoke of how they *'learned loads from listening to other people at it'* [Parent Focus Group]. They also spoke of the benefits of being able to bring their children as they felt it was important for their children to be able to mix with other children.

*I love to see [my daughter] here playing and chatting with all the other kids' [Parent Focus Group]*

As BIABH became known in the community, word-of-mouth and positive feedback within the community helped to encourage engagement. Word of mouth was recognised by parents, stakeholders and the BIABH team as an important means of establishing the credibility and acceptance of the programme.

*You'd hear about this around the place, from other mothers, from other parents and if they said it was good, you'd believe them [Parent Focus Group]*

*A lot of people do go on what they hear about a service from people that they trust themselves, you know, from their own group....yes, I think it makes a huge difference' [Stakeholder]*

*A couple of people have said to me 'When are you doing [training] again, my sister wants to do it' or other people in the programme who have met these mothers [who have done the training] during the coffee mornings are hearing about it and saying 'Oh I've missed it, I want to do it' [BIABH Team]*

### **Meeting parents where they are at**

A critical success factor for any parent support programme is the establishment of good relationships and trust with families from the outset, and adopting a needs led approach which acknowledges where a family is at and tailoring the service to their needs.

*We went in with the idea that even before we can start training, it's about building relationships and trust, it's about helping the person on a one-to-one before we can go to a group situation...it was about fostering confidence before we moved on [BIABH Team]*

*And it's the 'What do you need, what can I help you with' as opposed to the 'This is what you need, this is what you should do' and telling them what they should do...if you took that approach, you'd never get anywhere [BIABH Team]*

The phrase *'meet parents where they are at'* was used numerous times by parents, stakeholders and the BIABH team to emphasise the importance of meeting *'the people and their children where they're at...and I mean this both physically and emotionally'* [Stakeholder]. This refers both to the readiness and capacity of the parents and families to engage and also the physical location in which that engagement will take place.

Odgers *et al.* (2012) and Heckmann (2012) argue that families cannot focus on engaging in a programme or intervention if there are other competing demands. For example, a family who is under threat of eviction will have limited ability and resources to engage until such time as their housing issues are resolved. The team and the stakeholders

spoke of the importance of meeting the practical needs of families in order to encourage engagement.

*When working with families, if you don't start doing the practical things, you're not going to get engagement...so until the roof is fixed the family isn't going to be able to come to sessions or they're not going to be able to go to a parenting group or until their rent arrears is sorted, they can't think about anything else [BIABH Team]*

*It's Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs...you know, you hear that in college and you think, 'Ah, I'll never use that again' but it's very much the basis of what we do here...you can't get anywhere with parenting until the basic needs are met [BIABH Team]*

BIABH uses a variety of approaches to meet families' needs and parents may choose particular elements of the programme at different times.

*The approach we take is specific to different families. With one family, one approach will really work.*

*For other families another approach, like Marte Meo or Incredible Years will work so its back to being flexible...because we get to know the parents and because we build relationships with them so*

*we are able to offer them what they need... we're not just offering one programme or a set of steps they have to follow...that's important because different families respond in different ways and at different times depending on whether they are in crisis or not...we are able to meet them where they are at. [BIABH Team]*

For example, home visits were valued and welcomed by some parents:

*I have so many appointments with [my child], having to go different places for assessments and things, so for somebody to call in, it's much less stress. It's not another place that I have to drive to, so it's so much handier [Parent Focus Group]*

However, the parents recognised that home visits would not suit everyone and they felt that BIABH team respected this and was flexible in meeting parents' needs.

*the drop-in is good for [that mother]...when she came up here, she was able to come up and talk. Then when we came to do the parenting course, she started to come out of herself [Parent Focus Group]*

One parent whose child had difficult behaviour...he would be responding to a lot of the stresses in his life and his mother would have found his behaviour really difficult to manage so they just got into a cycle...and just by taking on board some of the information we had given her through the training and by looking at what was really positive in her parenting and by doing joint play sessions with her and her son...she started to feel in control and she started to feel like she knew how to deal with his behaviour so she started to enjoy him then a lot more. And she would play with him everyday, she would say that makes all the difference and when he's stressed or things are going bad, she'll sit down and play with him. So she was in a place where she wasn't just in crisis but she didn't know how to manage her child and she has now moved forward to where she is now implementing a lot of the Incredible Years learning. And the relationship she has with her children is really warm and loving. That's where she was coming from all the time as a warm loving mother, but her life situation was a...barrier to that.

**[BIABH Outreach Worker]**



## Interagency collaboration

The report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, Right from the Start (DYCA 2013a), which will contribute to the development of the National Early Years Strategy, highlights the importance of interagency partnership and calls for greater collaboration of services to avoid duplication of services and to enhance engagement of stakeholders, including families. The Expert Advisory Group argue that collaboration is necessary to ensure the successful implementation of programmes and services. There was already a strong ethos of interagency collaboration in the area through the activity of the CCFWI. BIABH has contributed to this culture of collaboration and cooperation by being a link for services. The CCFWI meets monthly to enable all children's services to:

*Work in a coordinated way, once a month, on the most difficult cases and from that....now, we can refer our cases to BIABH [Stakeholder]*

These monthly meetings provide a useful opportunity to communicate with and learn from the experiences of other services. Several members of the CCFWI and the steering and monitoring groups have been involved in other local projects which has given them an invaluable insight and experience of the issues which may arise.

*Because some of us were involved in setting up two or three projects...it's been easier...there was already interagency working and an ability to communicate [Stakeholder]*

*We had a case recently around safety of our staff going into a home and there's a whole protocol around this in the Council and even sharing this information and learning from the staff there was great [BIABH Team]*

*We're not in this alone and we need to access the services that can help us so that we're not carrying it all on our own [BIABH Team]*

Some families are linked with several services in the area. Through the CCFWI, if there is an issue for a family or if a specific response is needed, a cluster meeting of the key services can be arranged so *'rather than four or five professionals going in with different plans, we just call one cluster meeting'* [Stakeholder] which allows a

coordinated response or action to be developed.

From the outset of BIABH, the consortium hoped that engagement with BIABH would enable parents to have the confidence to reach out to and engage with other health, early years and family support services available to them. Several stakeholders reported that the involvement of parents with BIABH has had a positive impact on their engagement with other services.

*By linking them in with BIABH, we see parents attending [our service] more regularly as a result [Stakeholder]*

Some stakeholders expressed the concern that there is a risk that those families that need the service most, may fall between services. To be referred to BIABH, somebody must know about the family. *'The 'hard-to-reach' families are really hard to reach'* [Stakeholder]. However the stakeholders agreed that BIABH has shown some success in reaching these families who had not previously been engaged in local services. Before BIABH, children in this age group *'might just not have been noticed, might not have been picked up'* [Stakeholder].

## 2. Becoming a confident parent

### Building Capacity

A principal aim of BIABH is to support parents in their role and to enhance their capacity to develop a warm and responsive relationship with their child. The team and stakeholders described their role as:

Helping parents to be the most effective parents. We don't look at it as being bad or good parents. It's about being the most effective parents...it's about helping our children to grow and develop in the best possible way [Stakeholder]

The emotional regulation piece is huge. For parents to be able to help children to develop an emotional intelligence, an emotional language and to be able to regulate their emotions. Parenting programmes can do this. [Stakeholder]

While the BIABH team and the stakeholders recognised that there were some aspects of the families' lives which BIABH could not correct,

they felt that the programme gave the parents a toolkit with which they could manage their circumstances and reduce the impact of these stressors on the lives and outcomes of their children. By empowering parents to nurture and communicate with their children, parents could be supported to break a cycle of negative parenting behaviours, which in some cases is intergenerational. Parenting practices are influenced by the type of parenting experienced by people themselves during their childhood. However, intergenerational cycles of negative parenting practices can be altered through parent support and intervention, and in doing so, a legacy of positive behaviours is created for future generations (Halpenny et al. 2010, Byford et al. 2012, Conger et al. 2013) This legacy arising from the changes to their parenting style is recognised by the parents.

‘When my other kids were small, there wasn’t anything like this, so you just did the best that you could and you learned from your parents. When I had [my son] I heard about [BIABH] and I thought I’d like to do that. When I did the course....I feel more in control now as a parent. I don’t lose it whereas before I would have lost it and then I’d be feeling terrible afterwards. I’ve got more skills, I’ve got more strategies now that I know are working. I’ve got a plan A, B, C that I can try and that work and it keeps me stress free, and it keeps him stress free....and the day runs smoother. And I’m grateful that I’ve learned all those skills....I feel I can let all the old stuff go and bring in the new stuff. And I know that when he gets older, he’s going to take these things on board in his own relationships with other friends...and please God when he’s a dad himself that he’ll have [these skills] .... that he won’t be bringing my old [habits] [Parent Focus Group]

There is a lot to be said about breaking the cycle of...parenting that might not have been effective through generations...encouraging people to break that cycle and trying to change their own children’s future [BIABH Team]

Even though BIABH is targeted at children aged

0-4years, participants recognised that the skills learned through the parenting programmes also benefit older children in the family.

I think I deal with my eight year old better. Whereas I’d lose it with him or shout at him before to do things, now I just talk to him and I think I say things to him in a different tone than I used to, as well, When I’m asking him to do something, it’s not like I’m telling him to do something, it’s like ‘Will we do this, why don’t we try this’, just put it to him differently....and he responds much better [Parent Focus Group]

Many of the stakeholders and the parents spoke of the sense of community in the area. This community support is something to be harnessed and developed to provide a support structure for families in the area. The drop-in service in particular has been useful in raising awareness of the shared experiences of people living in the area. Parents spoke strongly about the value of meeting their peers and availing of support and encouragement from them.

A lot of people think they’re on their own ..... but then you come up here and you find out that you’re not on your own [Parent Focus Group]

It was good to talk to other people and realise these things happen to them too [Parent Focus Group]

It’s also a way of building their supports in the community because these mothers are all from the community and if they can see each other as a support as parents, they’re very good at reinforcing each other’s skills and commenting on what other parents are doing well [Stakeholder]

My clients tell me that they link in with BIABH once a week for the drop-in service on a Tuesday. This wasn’t on the plan in the beginning... then they’ll talk and then they’ll share informally, and it really seems to work...the drop-in really builds up strong links with the parents and [building up] trust and care with the parents. We really do see a difference in the parents that attend [Stakeholder]



The Bringing It All Back Home project has done wonders for our parenting abilities. There was a parenting course and only [mother] could go because I minded the children. But when she came home everyday, we would do the class work and homework together. Our parenting is much more structured now because a couple of years ago it was chaotic with the children. We are learning more...all the time and the kids nearly always come home with certs for student of the week and other certificates of achievement. The schools keep telling us how good the children are doing.

[BIABH Outreach worker] is literally part of our family and the kids and us look forward to seeing her every week and whenever we need to see her. If it wasn't for the [BIABH team] I think things would still be chaotic here. I just had to write this to show the project that we do need them and so do many other families.

(Father of three children)

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## Developing Parenting and Communication Skills

BIABH is a strengths based programme which reinforces positive parenting practices and equips the parent with a set of skills to communicate with and manage their children. Parents valued the opportunity to develop their communication and parenting skills to enable them to develop a greater attachment with their children. As a result, the nature of parents' relationships and their interactions with their children changed.

I'm a happier parent because I'm a more confident parent. I know that if something does boil up in the house, I know what to do. I don't jump in and get myself boiled up with it. I can stand back and apply what I've learned. But I wouldn't have known all that if I hadn't learned it through the course [Parent Focus Group]

Enjoying their children...for me, that's a development...they seem to be enjoying their children a lot more than when they first connected in with us...that's through a combination of recognising their strengths as parents and their lives becoming less stressful through having support and parenting education [BIABH Team]

I have a child with ADHD and I found I couldn't deal with her until I came to [BIABH]...and now I can handle it differently through [BIABH] and the groups we do. Before, if she had a meltdown, I'd have a meltdown with her. If she'd scream, I'd scream. If she lay on the floor, I'd lay on the floor. But through here, if she lay on the floor, I learned to walk away until she's calm and then I'd come back and talk to her [Parent Focus Group]

As part of the Marte Meo Communication Skills training, some parents had a recording made of their interactions with their child. This was analysed and then reviewed with the parent. Parents found the videos a positive experience as it highlighted their good parenting behaviours, of which they were not aware prior to the recording.

When I watched it first I couldn't see what I did good, but when I watched it [with outreach worker], she said 'Look you did that well, and you did this well, and you could have done this a bit better' and it was nice to hear' [Parent Focus Group]

'It's nice to hear that as well, that you're not doing all that wrong, that you're good here and this is what you can do a bit better, but you can work on that' [Parent Focus Group]

All participants spoke of the value of the home visits as an important means of supporting parents in real-life situations.

Parents benefit from parenting role modeling... in the home and building up the relationship and the attachment between the parent and the child by seeing the BIABH worker practising this in the home, you know, in a more natural way [Stakeholder]

You get a very different perspective as well. A parent might say 'God, that child is driving me mad' and if you go into the house and maybe the child is screaming the whole evening, then you think that the mother is coping very well considering what she is having to deal with... [BIABH Team]

visiting the home helps you understand where the parent is coming from and hopefully your interventions are more appropriate as a result because you have a better understanding of what is going on in the family home [BIABH Team]

Initially there was some anxiety about home visits as 'I think a lot of people feel...it would be an invasion of privacy, at first anyway' [Parent Focus Group]. However, for most people this anxiety resolved as the relationship between the team and families developed. Parents recognised that the purpose of the home visit is to support them in their parenting role but the BIABH team will only engage in home visits if the parents want this element of the programme.

My house isn't spotless, but it's my home, but that's not what they're looking at. They're focused on what they're doing when they come out, seeing how the kids are, how they are with their mother [Parent Focus Group]

We will be totally flexible. If the parent doesn't want us to visit the home, we won't, but if you can do the work in the home, I always think it is much better because it's on the parents' territory [BIABH Team]

I'd just like to say a few things about Bringing It All Back Home and [our BIABH outreach worker] since they came into our lives. We wouldn't be doing as well as we are if [outreach worker] hadn't been involved. She chased up our payment claims which were supposedly lost. She deals on the phone better than we ever could. When we would ring up we would be told call back another day. By helping us, she is helping our kids. She is like part of the family now. She's not just here once a week cos she's always on the phone if we need her.

*(Mother of three children)*

## Advocacy

An important role of BIABH is supporting families to access services and agencies, for example, housing and healthcare, and to support parents who are learning *'how to ask questions for myself'* [Parent]. The parents were unanimous in their approval of this resource as they reported feeling intimidated because *'you need to have a whole different vocabulary when you're talking to [professionals]...just to be able to understand people'* [Parent Focus Group]. The parents cited several examples of occasions when the BIABH staff supported them to communicate with and access services when their own efforts were not successful or when they needed support.

If I don't understand the teachers I come back to [Outreach worker] and say 'They're after saying this, I don't know what they're talking about' and she'll say 'Do you want me to ring them' and she will explain to me in my talk, not their talk [Parent Focus Group]

I attend the hospital [with my children] and if they say something to me I just say 'Yeah'. Then I ring [Outreach worker] and she'd ring over to them and then tell me what it means. She talks my language and the doctors' language [Parent Focus Group]

I might not have the words or I might lose it with them but they [BIABH staff] know how to talk to these people, they go between us and them [agencies etc] [Parent Focus Group]

The BIABH team also identified this advocacy role as a crucial element of the programme.

Having someone in your corner, saying 'I can help you with that, we'll go there together'...so that they're not there on their own, because it can be very intimidating when you're sitting there talking to professionals [BIABH Team]

The [focus] of BIABH is helping families that don't feel supported, who feel they're on their own, they have had to fight for everything...it's about having someone there to advocate or help them in that...[BIABH Team]

Parent of children with special needs spoke of the challenges of accessing services, not just from a treatment perspective but also accessing diagnostic services and experiencing problems with 'red-tape' and delays etc.

'I was helpless. I had no idea where to go or what to ask..... and then I came here, and they [BIABH staff] guided me in what to do' [Parent Focus Group]

You're an ordinary person and you're having to deal with all this red-tape. And then there are no facilities for the children and they can't access the things that other children can.....and it's all dumped back on you.....and the only shining light is something like this...to know that someone is coming to talk to you every week and giving you advice [Parent Focus Group]

One family that I worked with, the referral would have come from the preschool based on his behaviour so I went in and we did play for about six or eight weeks and as we got chatting with the mother I found out that the child had had an Assessment of Needs but that the whole process had stopped so we got that back on track. But in the meantime she had done the Marte Meo training and the feedback was amazing...You could see how in love she is with her child and how she adores her child...when the assessment of need came back and a diagnosis [of autism] was given that she wasn't happy with and I think the Marte Meo really helped as she saw what a good relationship she had with her child and how his behaviour was in the videos, she was able to say 'No, my child doesn't have autism, I really don't believe that diagnosis'. And then, between herself and myself, she had the power to go back and argue her point. I went back to the doctor with her. The child has been reassessed and she has been more or less told that it was a misdiagnosis. It's quite frightening to think about what road that child could have gone down.

[BIABH Outreach Worker]

### 3. Challenges

Respondents identified several challenges to BIABH, which focused primarily on fostering engagement and the limitations of the service.

#### ***Fear of Engaging***

Participants were asked to identify barriers which might impede parents and families from engaging with BIABH. The most frequently cited reason was a fear of being judged and stigmatised through an involvement with a parent support programme. Participants felt that parents might perceive a referral to BIABH as an indication that they are bad parents. Boag-Munroe and Evangelou (2012) found that families may be reluctant to ask for help as they interpret this as a sign of weakness and inadequacy.

*Are you saying I'm a bad parent? [Parent Focus Group]*

*That sounds like it's for people who don't know how to parent their children. You think I can't parent my child and that's why you're sending me to these people [Parent Focus Group]*

*....they shy away from [BIABH] because they might think that it's a service that...you only go up there because you're not minding your kids.*

*This feeling is not there now....because girls [BIABH staff] and the work they have done has kind of squashed all that [Stakeholder]*

Consequently, certain elements of a programme such as BIABH could be seen as intrusive, for example, the home visits or the recording of the parent-child interaction. However, if a parent agrees to engage in home visits, the participants felt that this was a very strong indication of the parent's willingness to engage and to accept that their parenting style will change as a result of the intervention.

*Well I just thought that if you can get in there and do that kind of work, it would be the beginning of transformation because it is totally different to anything else. If you are in a professional atmosphere in any of the projects...the person in control is always the professional person. If you're in the home, the parent is in control – it's their space. And the fact that they have allowed you into their space is a significant indication of their willingness to invite you into*

*their system and therefore to change their system. If a parent agrees to a home visit, they're saying something to you about their willingness to open their system... and that is the beginning of change [Stakeholder]*

All participants spoke of the fear held by people in the area that parent support programmes or other similar projects held a social work remit and could take children from their parents. The BIABH team and the stakeholders acknowledge that people's suspicion and fear is, in some respects, a legacy of the Goldenbridge orphanage in the area. The fear of one's children being taken from the family home is widely recognised as a significant impediment to fostering engagement.

*I think people are afraid that [BIABH staff] are coming into your house like the social workers and judge you on this, that and the other, and they're going to take your kids away [Parent Focus Group]*

*What if I tell them I did this, and it was wrong, will they report me [Parent Focus Group]*

*It's hard work convincing some people that things are different now...there's been a few cases where a child protection notification would have to be made and the automatic response is 'Are they going to take my children off me'. That's [a] view that a lot of people don't seem to have lost. Unless your children are in danger right now, the chances of your children being taken off you are much much slimmer than they ever were before...trying to convince families that social workers want to work with families and not against families [BIABH Team]*

Programmes which adopt a non-judgemental approach which supports rather than stigmatises parents and families will be more successful at fostering engagement (O'Mara *et al.* 2011, Boag-Munroe & Evangelou 2012). The participants agreed that good communication and explanations are necessary to ensure parents are fully aware of the role of BIABH in relation to child protection. Working hard to establish positive and respectful relationships with families from the outset helps to create an environment in which child protection can be discussed

*It takes a while to build up that relationship to go into someone's home because of the old fear*



of, you know, social workers coming into the home, seeing what you're doing, taking your kids...Whereas now they know that [BIABH] are here to help them, to support them, to guide them and answer any questions they might have [Stakeholder]

That's the one thing they say to you 'If I see something that isn't right, then I have to report it, and I will report it' and that's only right [Parent Focus Group]

We're very clear from the start about our boundaries and the limits of confidentiality...that's crystal clear from the first meeting. When you explain to families that your job is to make sure that the children are safe and that if I don't do what I have to do to make the children safe, then...people generally accept that. [BIABH Team]

The BIABH team felt strongly about the need to provide parenting support to all parents in the community, not just those who are defined as 'hard-to-reach'. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, *'Right from the Start'*, for an approach of 'progressive universalism' (DYCA 2013a, pg 2) which provides supports for all children and additional supports for those children at risk or in need.

We were set up to work with hard to reach parents but one of our families is a middle class family and they needed our service just as much as any of our hard to reach families. The difference the project [BIABH] has made to this family is huge and I would advocate for the likes of those families because they don't know about [services and supports] so they were just as much in need as our other families [BIABH Team]

I think it's really important not to single out people or say that [service] is for people who are not good parents or that it's for a particular kind of person. I think a service is more welcoming and has less stigma attached if it is there for everyone in the community [BIABH Team]

### **Financial and Service Constraints**

The programme is resourced to deliver a service over 2.5 days per week. However, the need for the service is growing, particularly as there is an increasing awareness amongst the target population due to hearing about it through word-of-mouth.

The challenge is to run a service like this as part-time when the expectation from the community is that they want a lot more...we don't have funding for a lot more [BIABH Team]

But we have to be mindful that it is a part-time project, we cannot give the type of service that people are asking for, because we are not funded for that and there is only so much we can do as a project [BIABH Team]

The part-time nature of the service can negatively influence a family's willingness to engage and parents spoke of the challenges of getting support when the BIABH programme is not available.

The time factor really affects building up a relationship with the families as well...it's difficult for parents to understand that we're here only 2.5 days a week [BIABH Team]

Just for support, on a Thursday or Friday, if I need anything, I can't call up here...I'd love to call up here [Parent]

The BIABH team described the challenge of not having enough funding for certain activities which actually impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.

To have a photocopier would be huge...or close access to one...two of us spent all last Tuesday morning photocopying for the Incredible Years programme [in another Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service (DOCCFS)] ...that cost is absorbed by the DOCCFS [BIABH Team]

It was highlighted by several stakeholders that the DOCCFS were very supportive in absorbing some of the additional costs of the programme, for which there was no provision in the budget. The DOCCFS seconded two staff members to the BIABH team and also provided additional administrative support and funding for training and equipment. This contribution was highly valued and several stakeholders acknowledged that *'we couldn't have done this project without the Daughters [of Charity Child and Family Services] as they gave us so much support'* [Stakeholder].

The team described how they fundraised to provide parent and family activities and social events.

We have some very good friends of the project that have provided us with a lot of free things, like the hairstyling for the mothers...we've been promised reflexology...things donated for the new offices...a lot of kindness is given to us  
[BIABH Team]

BIABH does not fit in with the inclusion criteria of the national NEYAI evaluation which is directed at children aged 3½ years. There was a significant workload associated with the collection of data for the national evaluation and this led to a feeling of frustration that BIABH can't partake in the research despite contributing data to it.

*The NEYAI evaluation didn't fit [with BIABH] so that brought its own stresses. This research piece can be very time consuming, filling in questionnaires and attending meetings* [BIABH Team]

*That was difficult for us to understand as well because...we had a few meetings with the researcher and...we were assured that it was ok and that one size fits all...but one size doesn't fit all and the projects are so different that...we're the only ones providing a direct service, the rest are upskilling staff and working on child literacy and numeracy or introducing speech and language therapy but they're not providing a whole service like us...so it was highly unlikely that the research was going to cover all the different types of projects and it certainly didn't fit with what we wanted to capture and that's why we're doing the local evaluation* [BIABH Team]

There is a significant volume of work associated with the funding agencies and often this requires a quick turn around which can be challenging given the part-time nature of BIABH

*From a Pobal perspective I don't think there is enough acknowledgement of the time that BIABH takes up...I manage other projects as well but there's a feeling that 'this should be your priority, that you should get those reports in*  
[BIABH Team]

*For example, Pobal may send an email on Wednesday at one o'clock, saying they want an answer by Friday whereas I'm gone at that stage and I may not have access to my email*  
[BIABH Team]

### **Uncertainty about the Future**

BIABH is a three year funded project which is due to cease in April 2014. Proposals have been submitted to relevant funding agencies to continue and extend the project. However, the uncertainty about the future of the project gives rise to a dilemma – should the focus for the remainder of the project be on winding down or continuing on? This requires careful communication with families in the event that funding is not continued and is recognised as a challenge for projects which have a defined timeframe.

*What will we be doing for the next year...will we be winding down because there is a piece of work involved in doing that...we have to prepare our families for that if it is going to be winding down...we really need to help them and support them* [BIABH Team]

The duration of a project can influence the level of engagement by the target population. While a short term project will meet parents' short term needs, there is a risk that its defined timeframe will become a barrier to engagement (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou 2012). Parents may feel disillusioned and let-down by a service and can intentionally disengage, particularly if they have had previous negative experiences of services in the past. Therefore, it is important that parent support programmes empower parents rather than create a dependency whereby the parent will find it difficult to function without the programme.

## **4. Leaving a legacy**

### **Building capacity in the community**

The BIABH programme is a three year project and the CCFWI and the BIABH themselves were very aware of the need to creating a lasting effect for the community which would outlive the project itself.

*We have been learning about those legacy pieces from [other projects] in the community...important that if a [a project finishes] that there is a legacy there and that the skills will be in the community* [Stakeholder]

There is a need to learn from the experience of the development and implementation of BIABH and use this learning to inform future projects

and future interagency work. This learning will occur through the sharing of experiences from the perspectives of all stakeholders, including the parents.

*There will need to be a sharing of knowledge... there has to be a series of conversations from different people involved in [BIABH]...the management need to be able to talk about it, the monitoring group, the [BIABH team] and some of the young parents themselves...they need to share all their learning over time with all of the agencies. And out of that would evolve a [way of looking at what we have learned] and then 'how do we best go forward, what do we need to do differently, what do we need to do the same'...because everyone there will have things to say and every agency will then be able to go back and say what impact [the project] has had on them, if any...I'd love to see that happening, that process happening on an interagency basis with all the parties involved [Stakeholder]*

The BIABH team has delivered training to local childcare services in relation to Marte Meo Communication Skills and Incredible Years. This training was very highly valued by the childcare services and the word 'legacy' was frequently used by several participants to describe the long lasting effect of this training.

*We're more aware of what we're doing, more aware of our interactions...more professionalised [Stakeholder]*

*[Services] have benefitted from the service [BIABH] being there, through training, through support, through advice, you know if you have a query or you're not sure about something you can ring them up and avail of their expertise.....things like that I really found valuable [Stakeholder]*

The BIABH team acknowledged this as important aspect of the project and agreed that the upskilling of local services creates a long lasting impact. The provision of training has also helped to develop interagency connections.

*We have organised training, Marte Meo communication skills and Incredible Years, for staff in the community...these were very positive for the community and have received positive feedback [BIABH team]*

*These also helped with interagency work as we were spending time in training with the same people that we are now...we are all helping each other to support the families, getting information or making referrals...so that's been really good too [BIABH team]*

However, the participants spoke of the challenges experienced by childcare services to release staff to attend the training provided by the BIABH team. There was agreement that the training was a valuable resource but that provision was required to support services who wished to engage in the training.

*If some of our workers [from childcare services] have to attend training, that there would need to be some consideration for supporting the agencies that have to release them' [Stakeholder]*

*What we [need] is a relief post so that we could free up services more to attend training...we always knew that was going to be a difficulty, even more so as resources have been pulled from services due to budget cuts [BIABH Team]*

Similar projects in the future will require sufficient resourcing of this activity to enable relevant services to avail of the training which is available.

# Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Early childhood is a time of both great opportunity and considerable risk, and its influence can extend over a lifetime. Children's resilience is developed in early childhood and enhanced by a nurturing environment and an emotional attachment with their parents. Family background, positive parenting, and a child's opportunity for emotional and intellectual growth and stimulation are of greater significance than income in determining the child's potential in life (Field 2010, Kiernan & Mensah 2011, Nixon 2012).

Parenting and the parent-child relationship are important determinants of the well-being of children. Therefore, early intervention strategies which support parents in their parenting role will enhance children's outcomes and reduce the need for later interventions. Bringing It All Back Home has been in existence since 2011 and currently 28 families are engaged in the programme. The results of this evaluation show that BIABH has had a positive impact on the parents and children engaged with the service. BIABH is a needs led and strengths based programme and the recognition by the BIABH team that the basic needs of a family must be met before engagement can occur has been a crucial element in fostering engagement in this seldom heard population.

Parents described how their parenting styles have been influenced and have changed in response to the information, education and training they have received. Parents also recognised that the acquisition of positive parenting behaviours creates a legacy whereby their children will be influenced by the positive relationship they have developed, and will bring these behaviours to their relationships with their own children. The BIABH team has also created a legacy of skills and knowledge within the early years services in the area through the provision of education and training.

## Recommendations for practice and policy

The evaluation of BIABH has highlighted areas of learning for both it and for future similar parenting support and education services.

**Meeting people where they are at:** Services need to consider innovative ways of engaging with seldom heard communities. Cognisance must be given to a family's readiness to engage and also the level of support and intervention they want and need. Services which adopt a needs led and strengths based approach can capitalise on the positive practices and behaviours within a family. The basic needs of a family must be met before they can engage with a service in a meaningful way.

**Interagency collaboration:** a model of collaboration such as the CCFWI maximises the efficacy of services by avoiding duplication, coordinating a response and enhancing communication.

**Evaluation of all interventions:** to create an evidence base for all interventions, it is important that the efficacy and outcomes of an intervention can be measured, even if only in the short term. Measuring parent reports of stress and child behaviours pre and post an intervention can contribute to greater understanding of its effect.

**Building capacity:** the need to build capacity is two-fold. Firstly, a programme must aim to build parents' capacity to parent and to establish a meaningful relationship with their child. Secondly a programme must build capacity within the community to create meaningful and sustainable change. This can be done, for example, through education and training within the local area or through the establishment of informal peer support structures within a community.



**Resourcing of projects:** Similar parent support and education programmes in the future should consider the benefits of providing a full time service which will enhance the programmes' capacity to adequately support parents and families. Furthermore, there is a need to resource projects with sufficient non-pay funds to deliver additional activities which contribute to a project's effectiveness, for example, additional training, as well as activities which enhance a project's accessibility, including social outings, family and community events, guest speakers, celebrations of achievements etc.

## Planning for the future

The report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, *'Right from the Start'*, was launched in October 2013 (DYCA 2013a). This report, which will contribute to the development of the National Early Years Strategy, highlights the role of quality early intervention strategies in improving children's outcomes and specifically addresses the need to support families. At the launch of the report The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald, spoke of the importance of investing in the early years of children's lives and stated that *'Put simply: early intervention works, the early years matter'* (2013b).

Despite BIABH being a relatively new programme in the Lower Inchicore area, the evaluation of the project has shown that it has made a valuable contribution to supporting parents to develop and maintain nurturing relationships with their children. Parents have described numerous examples of how they and their children have benefited as a result of their engagement with BIABH. While it is still early to determine the impact of BIABH on the children's long-term outcomes, there is substantial national and international evidence to indicate that children's outcomes are improved through targeted early interventions which support parents in their parenting role.

This stakeholder describes the vision for the future of BIABH and child and family support in the area.

The vision around children would be that we would continue this journey of this very effective continuum of services...and the earlier the better. Just getting in with early intervention and prevention ...the basic rights that children have. A lot of children here are incredibly poor, and we can't change the world economy or structures in society...but if we have good services in place that cushion the effects of [poverty]. [Stakeholder]

BIABH was originally funded to run from 2011-2014. However, the challenges which existed in St. Michael's Estate and Inchicore in 2011 still exist today. The ongoing economic situation in Ireland has exacerbated many of the indicators of deprivation in the area, for example, unemployment, early school leaving, welfare dependence, criminality, addiction. These factors impact on parents' ability and resources to develop and sustain attachment with their children which then perpetuates the cycle of disadvantage. The circumstances which were the catalyst for BIABH in 2011 continue to prevail and thus make a compelling argument to continue the programme. Boag-Munroe and Evangelou (2012) argue that sustained programmes which are adequately resourced and which offer long-term support and interventions are crucial to ensure families continue to engage.

In this current climate of economic constraint, it is challenging to find resources to support the delivery of intervention and support programmes, particularly when the effects of those programmes may not be measurable for several years. However, early intervention strategies which support parents in their parenting role will enhance children's outcomes and reduce the need for later interventions. Heckman (2012) argues that *'the longer society waits to intervene in the life cycle of a disadvantaged child, the more costly it is to remediate disadvantage'*.

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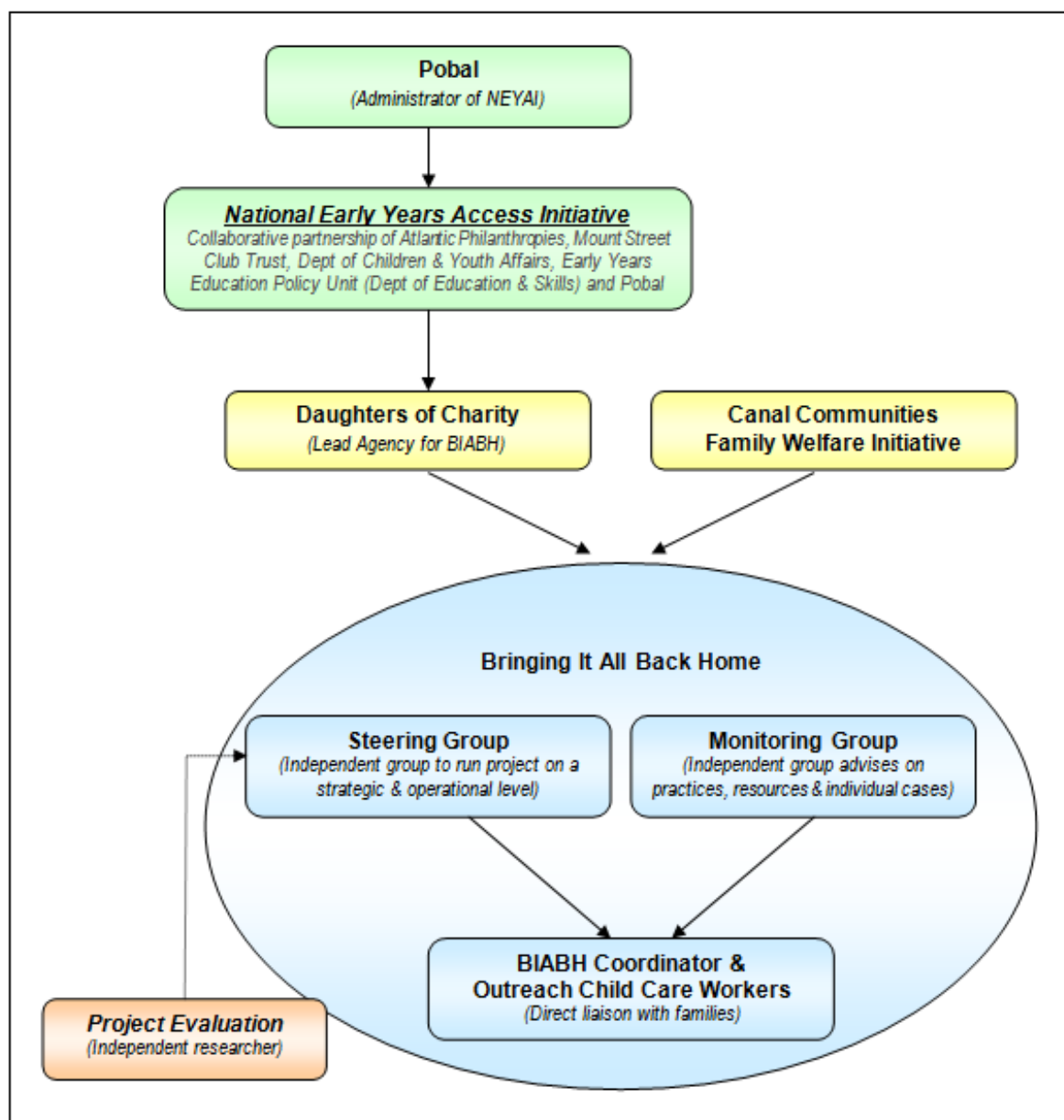
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# Appendix 1: Governance of BIABH Programme





## Appendix 2: Stakeholders included in the Evaluation of BIABH

Stakeholder		Description
<b>Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service</b>		Lead agency which involves the overall management and administration of BIABH as well as providing support and supervision to the BIABH team.
<b>Canal Communities Family Welfare Initiative</b>		An interagency consortium composed of community, voluntary and statutory agencies that are concerned with child welfare and the delivery of children's services in Inchicore and Bluebell. The CCFWI was established in November 2009 and is the consortium which applied for and received funding for BIABH
<b>St. Michael's Estate Regeneration Board</b>		Established in 2005 to drive the social and physical regeneration of St. Michael's Estate. Coordinated the establishment of the Canal Communities Family Welfare Initiative IN 2009
<b>R e f e r r a l  s e r v i c e s  t o  B I A B H</b>	<b>Inchicore / Bluebell Community Addiction Service - Children's Project.</b>	Childcare facility which enables parents to access counseling, educational and therapeutic resources within the service. Provides preschool, afterschool and teenage group facilities.
	<b>Eala Og Crèche</b>	Preschool service for 2-5 year olds with morning and afternoon sessions
	<b>Goldenbridge Early Childhood Development Service</b>	A Daughters of Charity Child and Family childcare service for families with children aged 2-6 (sometimes to 7 years of age). Provides a toddler group, pre-school groups and an afterschool programme.
	<b>St. Michael's Estate Family Resource Centre Crèche</b>	Provides a crèche service for children aged 3months – 3 years. Enables mothers to engage in educational and developmental programmes delivered in the Family Resource Centre
	<b>Inchicore Intercultural Parent/Carer &amp; Toddler Group</b>	<p>The Parent/Carer Toddler Group is a group where parents/carers from different nationalities can come together with their children to live, learn and grow together in the community.</p> <p>The group offers developmentally appropriate play opportunities for the children and also an opportunity for parents/carers to socialise and share experiences around parenting.</p>

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## **Bringing It All Back Home**

Golden Bridge Integrated Services Complex, St. Vincent Street West, Inchicore, Dublin 8.

Tel: 01 842 5100



**Daughters of Charity**  
**Child and Family Service**

