

# CAAB Research Briefing Note: No. 5

## *Organisational Case Studies of Inter-agency Co-operation in the Delivery of Children's Services*

### 1. What is this study's purpose?

This study was commissioned by the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) to produce six organisational case studies of inter-agency co-operation in the delivery of services to vulnerable children and to identify key findings in terms of motivations, approach, benefits and lessons. The study was produced by Mary Rafferty and Anne Colgan. It was guided by a steering committee and was independently peer reviewed.

This 'twin track' approach set out to capture the experience and learning about the processes and benefits of inter-agency working from within each of the six projects in the study and, in tandem, to collate, integrate and pool the learning across all the projects. Using a structured approach to documenting the case studies, and distilling the essential features and underpinning themes, enables this learning to be made available for use by others.

### 2. How was this study undertaken?

The study focused on six case studies of inter-agency co-operation in the delivery of children's services, three Irish and three international. The Irish case study sites are located in urban areas of Dublin and Limerick. Two of

the international case study sites are based in the United States, one in Miami-Dade, Florida, and one in Minnesota. The third international study differs from the other sites, in that it is a nationwide UK intervention, made up of a national policy and legislative framework for service delivery to children, delivered through the network of Children's Trusts in each of 150 local authorities.

The methodology used for the case studies was a combination of desk research and qualitative research. For the purpose of the desk research, documentation provided by CAAB on each site was examined, and supplemented where relevant with additional documentation and internet searches. The documentation was analysed with reference to an analytical framework agreed with the steering committee.

The qualitative elements of the research included: development of a semi-structured questionnaire to be completed by the partners in each location (Irish and US projects); interviews/discussion with key personnel in each site; group meeting with participants in each Irish case study site; inter-group meeting with members of the combined Irish projects; a study visit to Peterborough Children's Trust, involving meetings with Trust senior management, and staff from a range of service delivery systems.



*Mural of the school grounds painted during the Londubh Project summer camp*



Following the completion of the desk research and the consultation phase, an initial draft of the case study from each project was prepared and circulated to each project for feedback. The material from all of the case studies was analysed, and the cross-project learning identified.

### **3. What services were used for the case studies?**

#### **Ballymun Network for Assisting Children and Young People, Ballymun, Dublin, Ireland**

The Ballymun Network for Assisting Children and Young People was formed in 2005 as an initiative of Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force (BLDTF). The initiative emerged from concerns that agencies were not responding effectively to the needs of young people at risk in Ballymun. A consultation process held in 2004, which involved about 30 people from organisations and groups who work face-to-face with young people in the area, gave rise to two particular sets of issues:

1. concerns about a growing number of young people who were engaged in negative and risky behaviours including drug use, drug dealing, prostitution, anti-social behaviour;
2. concerns that, despite the large number of agencies and support services in Ballymun, there was not an adequate response to the needs of vulnerable young people, especially in the 12–18 age range.

The Network brings together key statutory and community organisations in an inter-agency approach to delivering services to vulnerable children and their families. The Network members have been successful in developing ways of sharing information, working together to identify needs, putting new programmes in place and designing robust processes for inter-agency working.

The Network has brought together key service delivery agencies in the community sector and the statutory sector, and has developed ways of working on joint assessment and case planning with children and families, and has captured these inter-agency service delivery strategies in its protocols. The protocol governing information sharing about vulnerable children and ways of doing inter-agency casework guides the relationship between the agencies, both in terms of vision and process. The Network is now working on programmes and strategies that can

support parents and children, and move the focus from crisis intervention to prevention and early intervention.

#### **The Londubh Project, Inchicore, Dublin, Ireland**

The Londubh Project is a community-based primary school-delivered initiative in Inchicore (a community in the west of Dublin with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage) aimed at supporting children to stay in school, to enjoy and benefit from school and to reach their full potential. The project emerged from the Integrated Services Process (ISP), a Government-led initiative started in 1998. The aim of this process was to 'develop new procedures to ensure a more focused and better co-ordinated response by statutory authorities to the needs of the communities with the greatest disadvantage'.

Now in operation for 10 years, the Londubh Project addresses the needs of children in relation to factors affecting attendance and participation in school, including self-esteem, anger management, protective behaviours and a range of learning skills. These supports are delivered directly by project staff through one to one and small group work and indirectly through supports for parents, school staff and access to a range of services outside school.

The use of formal committee structures to clarify and separate management of the inter-agency group from the service delivery helps to ensure clear roles and relationships within the inter-agency group, to maximise the use of the inter-agency resources and to identify problems at an early stage. These structures also help to ensure that project workers can easily access specialist support and advice in assessment and planning.

An evaluation of the project in 2006 identified significant benefits to children and considerable co-operation between agencies involved in the project. The Londubh Project was the overall winner of the Children Acts Advisory Board 'Awards for Services to Children and Young People' in 2008, and was the category award winner for 'Effective Practice in Inter-agency Working'.

#### **Southill Youth Forum, Co. Limerick, Ireland**

Southill Youth Forum was set up in 2003 to provide 'intensive, co-ordinated, multi-agency support packages to vulnerable young people in the Southill area' of Limerick city. The Forum promotes active collaboration between the many agencies working in the area, especially those providing services to children and

young people. The Forum focuses especially on targeting the needs of young people whose needs are not met through existing services.

The Forum was set up in recognition of the need for, and potential value of, an inter-agency group to create a co-ordinated response to the large number of young people at risk in the area. The approach to inter-agency working has evolved over time under the active leadership of the chair. The membership of the Forum has expanded to include a wide range of agencies working with young people and their families. A significant effort has been made to maintain a focus on individual children and young people and the inter-agency structures are organised to support this focus.

The model developed by the Southill Youth Forum has been influential in the development of other local youth fora in Limerick City, and these groups are working closely with the Children's Services Committee on developing a city-wide model.

### **The Juvenile Assessment Centre, Miami-Dade, Florida, America**

Miami-Dade, Florida, has developed a world-class system of juvenile justice, which has a strong focus on preventing juvenile crime. The Juvenile Assessment Centre (JAC) is a core element of the juvenile justice system in Miami-Dade. The partners in the setting up of the JAC describe multiple motivations for its establishment including: the need to respond more effectively to juvenile crime rates; the need for consistent arrest processes; the need for efficiencies in the use of police time; improving the effectiveness of the court process; and making use of the range of expertise and the range of mandates.

The JAC, which opened in 1997, is a centralised processing, referral and evaluation centre for young people arrested in Miami-Dade County; it is an integral part of the Juvenile Services Department (JSD) in Miami-Dade. The JSD allows representatives from law enforcement and social services to work together under one roof to provide a complete range of services for both at-risk youth and youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

The JSD has been recognised by the White House as a model for juvenile justice in the United States. It has also received international attention for the Miami-Dade County Juvenile Justice Model. The Director, Wansley Walters, has been requested to present Miami-Dade's achievements at international conferences in Belgium, Ireland, and Spain. Several European countries are seeking to replicate this internationally recognised

model of juvenile justice. The kingdom of Thailand has embarked on a three year reform of their juvenile justice system which will be modelled after Miami-Dade County.

### **Minnesota Child Protection Services, Olmstead County, Minnesota, US**

Minnesota Child Protection Services are a public-private collaboration aimed at increasing the safety, wellbeing and stability of children, youth and families in Olmsted County. This motivation shapes the planning, funding, delivery, recording and measurement of services provided. Minnesota has invested considerable time, energy and resources in developing a Differential Response System for accepted reports of child maltreatment. This system has statutory force, supported by a strong legislative framework, policy and practice requirements and focused funding. This approach, delivered through active collaboration between a range of community service providers and the statutory authority, seeks three important kinds of outcomes for children, in the areas of child safety, permanency and well-being.

The Differential Response Model (also called Alternative Response) replaces the traditional investigation and need for determination of maltreatment with a family assessment focusing on family and community strengths as well as needs. Co-operation between public and private agencies ensures that a wide range of services are available to meet the range of needs and supports appropriate for children and families.

In the 10 years that Olmsted County has used the Differential Response Model, the percentage of reports of child maltreatment accepted for formal investigation has dropped from 100% (in 1998) to 15% (in 2008). Significantly more services, particularly services addressing basic financially-related and household needs, were delivered to low-risk families under the Differential Response Model approach than under the traditional approach. Recurrence was lower for alternative response families generally and, specifically, services to low-risk families made a difference in outcomes. Services to low-risk families improved family outcomes and were, in the long term, judged to be cost effective.

### **Every Child Matters, England**

Every Child Matters (ECM) is a programme of change to improve outcomes for all children and young people in England. It takes forward the UK Government's

vision of radical reform for children, young people and families. ECM aims to integrate services for children from 0 to 19 years, with agencies working across professional boundaries to co-ordinate support around needs, using common processes and language to meet those needs in the best possible way. It is focused on prevention and early intervention and providing better support to parents and families. Work on this national strategy began following the publication of the report carried out by Lord Laming into the death of Victoria Climbié, a young girl who was abused, tortured, and eventually killed by her great aunt and the man with whom they lived.

This case study describes key features of the ECM programme, drawing on documentation available on the Every Child Matters programme. In addition, the case study describes how these key features are being applied in one Children's Trust, the Peterborough Children's Trust. The examples of the work being done in Peterborough are aimed at showing how particular aspects of ECM are operating at local level, including inter-agency governance, the Children's Plan at Trust level, processes to support inter-agency working, and the strategy for integrated front-line delivery.

#### 4. What are the key findings?

The report provides a chapter on each case study presenting findings and insights in relation to each one. It also provides a chapter discussing learning from across the case studies in areas such as motivation, approach and benefits of inter-agency working. The

final section of the report discusses issues arising for policy, management and practice and these are discussed here.

#### Issues Arising

This section discusses issues arising for policy, management and practice (as requested in the Terms of Reference). Issues are discussed under seven headings:

1. is interagency working always best?;
2. mandate and leadership;
3. casework standards;
4. protocols and formal agreements;
5. resources;
6. measuring outcomes for children;
7. support frameworks.

It is important to point out that the issues raised are not recommendations. Rather, they represent a series of issues for consideration for policy, management and practice that emerge from the learning from the six case studies undertaken. As with any case study methodology it would not be appropriate to generalise the issues or to assume the issues automatically apply across all inter-agency co-operation settings or contexts. Nevertheless, the six detailed case studies provide a rich source of experience and learning and therefore the issues arising should be given careful consideration.



*Signing the protocol for the Ballymun Network for Assisting Children and Young People*



## 1. Is Inter-agency Working Always Best?

Issues for Policy	Issues for Management	Issues for Practice
<p>From a policy perspective, and in the light of the investment of time that can be required in order to develop effective inter-agency collaboration, the case studies highlight that agencies and professionals would benefit from policy guidance regarding the contexts in which inter-agency work is most appropriate as a service delivery system for children.</p>	<p>In any future developments of inter-agency working in Ireland on either a small local or larger national scale, there is value and need for robust interrogation of the rationale for the project before beginning. The questions that warrant examination by any group or set of agencies are those posed in the literature review, namely:<sup>1</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What outcomes for children are we seeking?</li> <li>■ How will inter-agency working contribute to achieving those outcomes?</li> <li>■ Are we clear that an inter-agency approach is the best one to address this issue?</li> </ul> <p>By undertaking such an examination, people can, if they decide to proceed, move a good distance towards constructing a shared meaning for inter-agency working in their particular context.</p>	<p>Any new group beginning on an inter-agency process can benefit by exploring what model of intervention will guide the work, and where the balance of investment of time and resources will be made.</p> <p>By making this question explicit from the start, and locating their work in explicit shared understandings on such significant issues, the scope for healthy inter-agency work is likely to be strengthened.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Duggan C. and Corrigan, C. A Literature Review of Inter-agency Work with a Particular Focus on Children's Services

## 2. Mandate and Leadership

Issues for Policy	Issues for Management	Issues for Practice
<p>The case studies suggest that the success of an inter-agency project can be assisted by a clear and well communicated mandate in settings where inter-agency work is seen by government or government departments as an essential form of service delivery. This study suggests that a mandate is an important requirement to enable leaders at agency level to take up their lead.</p>	<p>These case studies suggest it is important that any management group with responsibility for the set-up and running of an inter-agency project recognises the significance of the various forms of leadership required both within participating agencies and for the inter-agency collaboration. By giving leadership roles and tasks to people with the skills that are needed, management can maximise the chances that the project will be successful. It is also important to acknowledge the time taken for particular leadership roles such as a chairing or facilitation role, and to ensure that any person doing that job can devote time to it.</p>	<p>These case studies suggest that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ All participants in an inter-agency initiative are likely to benefit from a clear understanding of the nature and scope of their role within the inter-agency project and within their own agency.</li> <li>■ Representatives from agencies are likely to benefit from being assured that they have management support to carry out their role in the project.</li> <li>■ It is important that representatives have the standing and permission within their own agency to agree how their agency will co-operate and collaborate with other partners.</li> </ul>

### 3. Casework Standards

Issues for Policy	Issues for Management	Issues for Practice
<p>The case studies suggest that formal and explicit policies, standards and guidelines for inter-agency casework, as in the English and American examples, can support an integrated and coherent approach to planning and practice. These may not eliminate the differences in 'world views' of different organisations.</p> <p>Nevertheless, they can be a key 'platform' from which agency management begin to construct agreement as to how inter-agency casework would be planned, delivered, supervised and monitored. Without explicit norms and standards, there may be an understandable reluctance on the part of agencies to participate in joint assessment and casework.</p>	<p>Different organisations have different priorities, values and practice norms, and different understandings of concepts like 'risk', 'need' and 'involvement'. These are important differences to negotiate in arriving at a single set of agreed actions for a particular child or family. Such negotiation would ideally involve the acknowledgement of the value of these different perspectives. The Irish projects suggest that these points of difference give rise to both potential for tension and difficulty between organisations and organisational views, and also the potential for shared learning, where the experience of working together gives rise to understandings that are a product of several different perspectives rather than a choice between them. There is a case to be made for senior management in agencies about to begin inter-agency work to work together and agree the norms, standards and procedures that will be followed in casework, and how the inter-agency casework will be supervised and monitored.</p>	<p>Inter-agency casework can present a huge challenge for practitioners as it involves a great deal of negotiation at practitioner level.</p> <p>These case studies suggest that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guidance about the practice of casework in an inter-agency setting and support in recognising and working with different approaches across different disciplines and agencies can help to maximise the benefits to children of an integrated and consistent approach.</li> <li>■ Effective management and supervision systems for inter-agency casework can facilitate a coherent and consistent cross-organisational approach that supports good practice in providing services to children.</li> </ul>

### 4. Protocols and Formal Agreements

Issues for Policy	Issues for Management	Issues for Practice
<p>The case studies suggest that groups setting out to begin an inter-agency work project, would benefit in having access to a guide on how to develop a protocol that could set out areas needing to be covered, legislative requirements that must be adhered to, and describe good processes for working out a protocol in a timely way.</p>	<p>The case studies suggest that the 'pro forma' adoption of a protocol is best avoided as it is better to generate a protocol in each setting because of the uniqueness of every inter-agency context.</p> <p>Nevertheless, it can be useful to review other protocols as a starting point, and to take what is relevant from them for the particular context in which a new inter-agency project is beginning.</p>	<p>The case studies suggest that protocols, of themselves, do not necessarily construct a new way of working; they could reduce lead-time but do not take away the requirement to have a space and time to build relationships of trust and shared vision.</p>



## 5. Resources

Issues for Policy	Issues for Management	Issues for Practice
<p>The case studies suggest that in setting timeframes for nationally mandated inter-agency projects to begin, and in deciding on resource allocation, it is important to provide for the investment of time, expertise and resources in the various processes that are integral to the success of inter-agency working.</p>	<p>The case studies highlight that management in collaborating organisations are likely to benefit from allowing staff to have ring-fenced time and resources for the development of the kinds of relationships and processes that lead to effective inter-agency work. Management could also benefit from providing essential supports such as joint training, and safe spaces to explore fears and build trust.</p> <p>This study suggests that the management of inter-agency projects is likely to benefit if there is a clear and explicit view on the part of participating agency management as to their service policy regarding the disposition of resources as between prevention, early intervention and crisis intervention. An agency policy on this significant issue is likely to help to ensure that staff do not have to negotiate this important issue on a day-to-day basis in the course of inter-agency work.</p>	<p>The case studies suggest that practitioners engaging or preparing to engage in inter-agency work would benefit from having time and opportunities to explore and develop shared understandings about the nature and concept of inter-agency work, and how it differs from their traditional way of working.</p>

## 6. Measuring Outcomes for Children

Issues for Policy	Issues for Management	Issues for Practice
<p>There was a clear view among Irish case study participants that resources, research, and capacity would help to measure outcomes for children and that such a commitment at national/governmental level, in the first instance, would be beneficial.</p> <p>There is a case for dialogue among those with a stake in the future development of inter-agency working in children's services to explore the issues around outcome measurement and measuring the effectiveness of inter-agency working. The contribution that could be made by the work already done on child well-being indicators, and in the National Children's Strategy could be considered in the course of that dialogue.</p>	<p>Even if there is no national framework and infrastructure for measuring outcomes from inter-agency work, there is a case for senior management in collaborating agencies to come together at the start of an inter-agency project to agree on expected outcomes for that project, to select indicators, in consultation with participants, including children and families who are expected to benefit, and to agree as to what processes can be put in place to gather outcome data.</p>	<p>Research shows that absent, inadequate, vague or contradictory outcome measurement is a weakness of existing practice in relation to child welfare and protection.<sup>2</sup> This can only be compounded in an inter-agency setting, unless clear measures of effectiveness and success in terms of outcomes for children are specified.</p> <p>These case studies suggest that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Practitioners would benefit from knowing what specific outcomes make a difference to children's lives, what kinds of interventions lead to those outcomes, what the indicators of progress towards those outcomes are and how this progress should be measured.</li> <li>■ It would be beneficial if practitioners have a key role in developing and testing such measures, with responsibility or authority to do so taken up by policy or management and within the broader context of evidence from research and good practice.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Eustace Patterson, Thematic Analysis of Irish Literature on Children in Detention and Out of Home Care in Ireland

## 7. Support Frameworks

Issues for Policy	Issues for Management	Issues for Practice
<p>The case studies suggest that inter-agency projects may benefit if they are located within a wider planning framework for services to children and families.</p> <p>For example, in the English case study there is a formal legislative support such as that put in place through the Every Child Matters policy and legislative framework, and supported by statutory guidance.</p> <p>The case studies highlight the importance of giving careful consideration to the form of legislative support and statutory guidance that can best support inter-agency co-operation and service integration in Ireland.</p>	<p>The case studies point to the elements of a support framework that can help practitioners maximise the chances of effective inter-agency practice. These points are relevant to both management and practice. Important elements of a support framework include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ opportunities to build relationships of trust;</li> <li>■ skills and capacity for joint working;</li> <li>■ a framework and guidance for joint assessment, planning and practice;</li> <li>■ ways of making use of a range of perspectives and resources;</li> <li>■ ways of addressing disparities in power, influence and responsibility;</li> <li>■ shared and common models and standards of practice;</li> <li>■ supports for engaging in review and evaluation of shared/joint practice;</li> <li>■ ways of addressing possible tensions between practice in the inter-agency environment and in member organisations;</li> <li>■ a protocol for information sharing.</li> </ul>	

## 5. What is the benefit of this study?

This study has three broad benefits. First, this study complements the literature review and consultation process with stakeholders on inter-agency co-operation in children's services also commissioned by the CAAB and together they provide a wealth of information in relation to inter-agency working, creating the evidence base for the CAAB document, 'Guidance to Support Effective Inter-agency Working Across Irish Children's Services'.

Second, it fills, in part, a considerable gap in research evidence on inter-agency co-operation by providing detailed practical examples of six services/projects using inter-agency co-operation to deliver services for vulnerable children and provides the reader with practical details of what can be expected from inter-agency working.

Third, the learning from across all of the studies and the issues arising gives detailed insights into the key areas for policy, management and practice that should be considered in the future development and application of inter-agency approaches.



Constructive activities in Southill, Limerick

### For more information:

- ✓ Phone 01-6724100 to speak to Robert Murphy or Marion Martin.
- ✓ Check out [www.caab.ie](http://www.caab.ie) to see this study's Summary Report, Full Report or Web-conference.