

**Summary:
Briefing Document on Early Interventions
and Public Childcare Approaches**

5TH October 2023

Introduction

This briefing document aims to:

1. Collect and analyse research and international evidence on equality of participation and access models within early learning and care, and school-aged childcare services.
2. Collect and analyse research and international evidence on models within early learning and care, and school-aged childcare services that tackle poverty and disadvantage.
3. To offer an overview of effective participation models within early childhood.
4. To offer an overview of effective models that tackle poverty and disadvantage within early childhood.

This briefing document outlines established mechanisms of support internationally. The parameters of the support provided are different depending on the country in question, the level of need and the funding available. Consequently, as there is no uniform approach to providing support for children at risk of poverty or those who are experiencing poverty, direct comparisons cannot be drawn.

It should also be noted that the various mechanisms of support discussed are at varying levels of maturity. Head Start in the United States was established in 1965, and so outcomes have been documented to a greater extent than programmes which have been established recently, for example, EarlyON Child and Family Centres in Canada have only been established since 2018.

The projects/ approach outlined in the briefing document are:

Country	Project / Approach
United States	The Abecedarian Project. The Perry Preschool Study. Chicago Child Parent Centres. Head Start.
United Kingdom (England)	Sure Start. Sure Start Children's Centres (SSCCs).
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC).
Canada (Ontario)	EarlyON Family Centres
New Zealand	Engaging Priority Families

The following is a brief summary of the projects/approaches and where available a summary of the impact of such programmes on children and their families.

The Abecedarian Project and Approach

The Abecedarian Approach is an established early intervention programme which involves a complementary set of teaching and learning techniques and strategies for children aged 0 to 5 years. The Abecedarian Project is one of the very few controlled longitudinal studies in which children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have been provided with high quality early educational programmes and have been subsequently followed-up with throughout their adult lives in order to gauge the life-long impacts of early years educational programmes.

The main goal of the project was to create an educational, stimulating, and structured environment to promote growth and learning and to enhance school readiness. The programme was offered in a centre setting, and the curriculum was designed in a way to enhance cognitive and linguistic development. Children also received healthcare, nutritional and, if needed, social supports. Children attended the centre for 6-8 hours per day, 5 days per week, 50 weeks per year.

There have been regular follow-ups with the participants of the Abecedarian Project over the past 40 years – at ages 5, 8, 12, 15, 21, and 30 with the most recently published follow-up when the participants reached age 35. The attendees of the project have consistently shown:

- increases in IQ scores,
- increases in reading skills,
- increases in mathematics skills,
- increases in social competence,
- increases in years spent in the education system and employment,
- decreases in the proportion of participants repeating years in school,
- decreases in the proportion of special education placements,
- decreases in the proportion of teenage parenthood, and
- decreases in smoking and drug use.

The participants were more likely to complete high school, complete degrees and be in full-time employment.

There were also a number of outcomes for parents also:

- Trusting relationships with centre staff were built and strengthened through attendance at the centre. Due to parents' own experiences, there is a general mistrust of people perceived to be in positions of authority.
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- Parents had increased awareness of their children's early development and their role in it. Parents noticed and were proud of their children's development and their abilities around language development, problem solving and creativity. There was also an increased understanding of how parents could support the ongoing development of their children's language abilities through an increased incentive to read with their children.
- Parents had opportunities to pursue education, employment opportunities or to work on their own personal issues and challenges. In Manitoba, according to Koshyk *et al* (2021), childcare subsidies are only for parents who are either working or in education and many of the parents were not eligible to apply.

The Perry Pre-School Project

The purpose of the project was to investigate the influence of high-quality early years education on the children of African American families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The programme consisted of 2 ½ hour classes, in the mornings 5 days per week for children and 1 ½ hour visits 5 days per week to each mother and child in the afternoons, 5 days per week, and lasted for 30 weeks each year.

Children who took part in the programme had significantly higher results in intellectual and language tests up to the age of 7; school achievement test at ages 7, 8, 9 and 14; and literacy tests at ages 19 and 27. Female participants in the programme group had almost double the proportion of people completing high school. They were more likely to be employed and less likely to spend time in prison.

Chicago Child-Parent Centres

The Chicago Child-Parent Centre Programme (CPC) was established in 1967 and is a centre based early intervention programme which provides high quality education and family support for children and families who are living in poverty. Children attend between the ages of 3 and 9 and the centres focused on four elements:

1. Parental involvement in the early years of education
2. Educational approaches to language development tailored to individual children's learning styles.
3. Low student-teacher ratios.
4. Providing health and nutritional services.

Children who participated in the programme were more likely to graduate high school, have lower rates of depressive symptoms and reduced likelihood of adult obesity. They also have improved cognitive skills, increased parental engagement, an increase in lifetime earnings, a reduction in crime and number of lifetime arrests, improved mental health and improved socioemotional skills.

Head Start

Head Start provides early childhood education and learning, nutrition and health services to children among low-income families from birth to five years. Using a "whole child approach", the programme supports children's optimal development and well-being in preparation for the transition into a school-based environment.

The programme has many positive impacts on multiple aspects of children's readiness for school during their time in the programme, with benefits for the four-year-old group at the end of the Head Start year being "concentrated in language and literacy elements of the cognitive domain, including impacts on vocabulary (PPVT), letter-word identification, spelling, pre-academic skills and colour identification, letter naming, and parent-reported emergent literacy."

Sure Start

Beginning in 1999, the Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP) were developed to address child poverty and deprivation in the UK via the provision of wraparound supports for children and families. The SSLP focussed on the 20 per cent most economically deprived areas. Sure Start has continued to evolve with an increased emphasis on service integration through the children's centres (SSCCs). The services and supports depend on the needs of the community and include:

1. Outreach services and home visiting
2. Support for families and parents
3. Good quality play, learning, and childcare
4. Primary and community healthcare

The programme has been shown to have a positive impact on family functioning, including a reduction in child externalising behaviour, which is linked to the previously mentioned improvements in home learning environments.

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is a policy initiative in Scotland, United Kingdom aimed at providing children, young people and families, with a consistent framework and shared language for promoting, supporting, and safeguarding wellbeing. GIRFEC's primary objective to improve child welfare is implemented via "early intervention, universal service provision, and multi-agency co-ordination across organisational boundaries".

Based on GIRFEC's values and principles on the rights of children, eight wellbeing indicators are promoted under the SHANARRI acronym: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included.

EarlyON Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres based in Ontario, Canada are free drop-in centres available inside elementary schools. The centres cater for children aged between birth to six years, their parents and/or other caregivers.

Children who regularly attended EarlyON Child and Family Centres four or more times a month before starting school, performed better than peers who did not attend, or did not regularly attend, in whole child development, academics in the primary grades, cooperation, and school engagement.

EarlyON was also demonstrated as having effective impacts for parents and has been noted as having aided in empowering parents with confidence and knowledge, leading to positive "interactions with others in the school and aiding them in advocating with school staff for their children's future in a positive and more informed way". Parents' early experiences within the centres help to "conceptualise what learning through play looks like."

Engaging Priority Families

The Engaging Priority Families (EPF) is a New Zealand initiative for families with children aged between three and five years who did not regularly attend an early learning service or who are not participating in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Engaging Priority Families is funded by the New Zealand Ministry for Education. The aim of the programme is to "increase participation of these low-income 'priority' children in 'quality' ECE". EPF offers free supports to whānau (an extended family / community of related families that live together in the same area) and targets Māori, Pasifika, low socioeconomic families / whānau and migrant families to "help them achieve strong, early learning foundations through sustained early childhood education."

To read the full Briefing Document, visit www.childrensrights.ie