

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT BEING IN THE RIGHT
PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME BUT KNOWING
WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF
THERE

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AIM OF PRESENTATION

- ◉ Early intervention has ‘few known enemies’ (Pithouse, 2007)
- ◉ This presentation will try to provide an overall sense of what early intervention looks like on the ground
- ◉ It will first problematise the notion of early intervention and then address some of the ‘wicked issues’ that impede progress, referring to an Irish programme (Prevention, Partnership and Family Support)



PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING PPFS

- ◉ Children, young people and families will be at the heart of everything that we do
- ◉ Official policy and guidance as well as legislation must always be adhered to;
- ◉ Appropriate supports will be provided at the earliest point of engagement using a strengths based perspective that is mindful of resilience
- ◉ Service providers will focus on improving outcomes for children and families and will track progress and results
- ◉ There will be a focus on a progressive universalist approach to providing a continuum of support to all children and families
- ◉ Plans will be informed by evidence on effectiveness
- ◉ The agency will work in partnership with children, families, communities, child and family practitioners and other agencies.
- ◉ Practitioners and services will promote human rights and social inclusion



PROBLEMATISING THE CONCEPT

- ◉ Early intervention as a ‘warm and fuzzy’ concept, lacking specificity and always portrayed in high level, ideological language
- ◉ Terms like ‘parenting support’ can be defined in numerous ways and different context
- ◉ Its strength is the way it reflects the informal nature of people’s lives but this is also its weakness as it may not be valued, and its invisibility makes it politically vulnerable
- ◉ Moral hazard associated with universal provision - diverting resources from high to low risk families?
- ◉ Targeted programmes ; assumption that early intervention means early years
- ◉ Requirement for evidence base may exclude home grown projects
- ◉ ‘Add-ons and ‘plug-ins’; programmes may not translate readily from one context to another;



UNDERPINNING ASSUMPTIONS

- That inter agency cooperation is always forthcoming in early intervention programmes and is sustainable in the long term
- That all the network members aspired to will have a positive disposition
- That families are passive agents, insightful about their own difficulties and ready to engage with programmes
- That young people are easy to engage
- That 'participation' is a realistic goal



ADDRESSING THE OBSTACLES ON THE GROUND

- ◉ Using reticulists to build strategic alliances:
 - “the fixation at the inter-organizational domain level understates and neglects the pivotal contribution of individual actors in the collaboration process” (Williams, 2002:106).
 - A reticulist is a ‘boundary spanner’ and/or a ‘skilled convenor’
 - Such people might not be located at the top of the formal organisational hierarchy but typically have good access to it, their positions should be that they do not represent an explicit threat to top management but are tolerated in the expectation that they can deliver solutions to complex problems (Challis, 1988)



INFORMATION SHARING AND TRUST BUILDING

- ◉ Building networks by strategically engaging hard to reach professionals, particularly those that do not operate in clusters
- ◉ Using an honest approach that acknowledges past histories
- ◉ Avoiding a top down approach (it's your responsibility)
- ◉ Reaching a mutual understanding of goals



THAT INCORPORATES DIVERSE NEEDS

- ◉ The effectiveness of certain initiatives may be evidenced, but other options should also be available
- ◉ Young people may benefit more from a service that is acceptable within their own social norms
- ◉ A network approach which acknowledges the issues most pertinent to families is likely to be more engaging



DOVETAILING

- ⦿ Permeable boundaries that still retain clarity of purpose will be required
- ⦿ Best achieved by mutual responsiveness and formal mechanisms for sharing information



GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT

- ◉ Cascading structures with a clear line of accountability
- ◉ Based on principles of egalitarianism and mutual respect regardless of hierarchy
- ◉ Efforts at mutual attainment of goals rather than top down imposition
- ◉ Tying up loose ends to sustain confidence



CONCLUSION

- ⦿ High level principles will only come to fruition if key elements are operationalised at a micro level
- ⦿ Well integrated systems have more chance of withstanding pressures, from austerity to scandals
- ⦿ Early intervention is only one stratum in a multi layered system and unless the foundations are strong, its chances of success are limited.

