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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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
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
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)
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
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.
Permeable boundaries that still retain clarity of purpose will be required

Best achieved by mutual responsiveness and formal mechanisms for sharing information
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
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.