



Children's Services Reform

Key learning and messages about:

- Child welfare and protection systems in other countries
- Interagency and cross government working



Key Messages

Section 2: Child Welfare and Protection Systems

1

Most child protection and welfare systems are in **constant change**

2

The **catalyst for reform** has been child abuse inquiries, with emerging recommendations emphasising the need to get the **child protection system 'right'**

3

Information sharing systems, and associated IT systems to support this, are being developed in most jurisdictions

4

Most jurisdictions have specific child protection services which operate in parallel to local interagency planning structures that focus more broadly on **child well-being**

5

All reform initiatives, programmes or policy frameworks have an increased focus on **early intervention and prevention**

6

All reform initiatives, programmes or policy frameworks are provided on a cross government **departmental basis** and almost always include **children's services, health, education and justice**

Section 3: Interagency and Cross Government Working

1

All reform initiatives, programmes or policy frameworks emphasise a **collective/shared responsibility** for the welfare and protection of children, with **interagency and cross government collaboration** central to improvement and progress

2

Most jurisdictions have local/regional structures in place for children and family services which are **part of or aligned to wider local authority services** e.g. health, education and justice

3

All reform initiatives and programmes have an **implementation plan, change management training, interagency guidance and a workforce development strategy**

Section 1: Introduction

This briefing paper contains the key messages and learning from a high level comparative analysis of international and regional jurisdictions undergoing children's services reform. The research and information was primarily gathered by CES at the request of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and was used to inform the work of the Task Force on the establishment of the Child and Family Agency and the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy.

Rationale for Jurisdictions Selected

Information was gathered on six jurisdictions. Jurisdictions were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Subject to comparative analysis in research publications as recently as 2011
- Undergoing children's services reform, relevant and comparable to Ireland
- Reasonably comparative in terms of population/scale
- Familiarity with, and established contacts within government, services or academia

Country and Key Reform Programme

- **New South Wales, Australia** (population 7 million)
Keep them Safe: a shared approach to child well-being 2009-2014 (2009)
- **Scotland** (population 5 million)
GIRFEC Getting It Right For Every Child (2006), is Scotland's overarching policy for children's services (2006)
- **Ontario, Canada** (population 13 million)
Realizing Potential: Our Children, Our Youth, Our Future, Ontario Ministry of Children & Youth Services Strategic Framework 2008 -2012 (2008)
- **Norway** (population 4.8 million)
'Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Welfare for Children' (2000)
Large scale organisational reform of child welfare system in 2004
- **England** (population 54 million)
Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme (2004). Every Child Matters is a strategy for integrated children's services to improve outcomes (five) for all children
- **Northern Ireland** (population 1.5 million)
Children and Young People-Our Pledge: A Ten Year Strategy for Children & Young People (2006)

Section 2: Child Welfare and Protection Systems

Orientation of Child Welfare and Protection Systems

Most child protection and welfare systems are in constant change. Historically child protection and welfare systems were oriented towards either **child protection or family service**.

Child Protection Orientation	Family Service Orientation
<p>In this system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Abuse is conceived as an act which demands the protection of children from harm by parents or carers.Response is to investigate in a highly legalistic and adversarial way.Placements in care are compelled through the coercive powers of the state. (UK, US & Canada)	<p>In this system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Abuse is conceived as a problem of family conflict or dysfunction which arises from social and psychological difficulties.The response involves addressing family needs much more therapeutically and the initial focus is the assessment of need. Partnership with parents is emphasised.There is a high rate of voluntary placement in care by parents. (Nordic countries and continental Europe)



However, more recently approaches to protecting children from abuse have become much more complex than those operating in the early/mid 1990s. Child protection oriented countries, e.g. UK & Canada, have taken on some elements of the family service orientation and there is evidence to suggest that countries operating according to a clear family service orientation are responding to increasing concerns about harm to children e.g. Nordic and continental European countries. This has led to the emergence of a third orientation, **child focused**, (Gilbert et al, 2011) described below.

Child Focus Orientation
<p>In this system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The focus is on the child as an individual with an independent relation to the State. The object of concern is the child's overall development and well-being, rather than narrow concerns about harm and abuse. If there is concern about a child's development the state seeks to intervene early to offer support or more authoritative intervention if this is required.Overall this orientation puts children's rights above parent's rights and emphasises parental obligations and responsibilities as carers. The child welfare systems provide services to promote children's needs and well-being, often with and through parents and carers, but in return demands change and 'outcomes' for the child.

Key Message 1

Most child protection and welfare systems are in **constant change**

Key Trends Shaping the Development of Child Protection Systems Internationally

- Child welfare systems have expanded their domain: more children and hence more families receive services and interventions from the child welfare system
- Child protection is operating in a volatile atmosphere, where practices and professional qualifications can come under critical public scrutiny. This has presented problems for the recruitment and retention of social workers
- Due in part to this professional vulnerability, as well as the sensitive and complex nature of the work, increased emphasis has been placed on legalistic and systemic thinking in most child welfare systems. More tools are based on procedure manuals, and methods are increasingly evidence based
- Growing recognition of the issues posed by racial and ethnic disparities in child welfare systems
- Extension of services to children leaving the care system (18 to 22 years)

Key Message 2

The **catalyst for reform** has been child abuse inquiries, with emerging recommendations emphasising the need to get the **child protection system 'right'**

- Increased use of assessment tools (e.g. Common Assessment Framework) and evidence based programmes like family based interventions (e.g. Multi Systemic Therapy) and parenting programmes (e.g. Incredible Years)
- Information communications technologies (ICTs) are being introduced and developed to support evidenced based practice and sharing of information
- The Ecological Framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is more readily used to contextualise and explain complexities of family life
- Although interagency collaboration is increasingly seen as important and the necessity for different organisations and professionals to work together acknowledged, social work continues to exercise primary responsibilities for child protection work.

Key Message 3

Information sharing systems, and associated IT systems to support this, are being developed in most jurisdictions

Child Protection Structures and Services

Each country or region has **specific interagency child protection structures in place**

- **Child Protection Committees (Scotland)**
Non-statutory Child Protection Committees are locally-based, inter-agency strategic partnerships responsible for the design, development, implementation and evaluation of child protection policy and practice across the public, private and wider third sectors in their locality and in partnership across Scotland
- **Local Children’s Safeguarding Boards (England)**
Statutory interagency Local Children’s Safeguarding Boards with an independent chair established and delivered through 152 Local Authorities
- **Local Safeguarding Panels (Northern Ireland)**
Independently chaired Safeguarding Board which reports directly to the Minister and 5 independently chaired Safeguarding Panels, one in each of the five Health & Social Care Trust areas
- **Children’s Aid Societies (Ontario)**
53 Children’s Aid Societies are mandated to provide child protection and welfare services for under 16s. Each society is an independent non-profit organisation run by a voluntary board of directors elected from the local community
- **Keep Them Safe ‘Community Services Centres’ (New South Wales)**
Statutory child protection services focused on children and young people who are at ‘risk of significant harm’
- Both **municipalities & State agencies** (Norway) have duties and responsibilities related to child welfare and protection

Key Message 4

Most jurisdictions have specific child protection services which operate in parallel to local interagency planning structures that focus more broadly on **child well-being**

Early Intervention and Prevention

Examples of early intervention and prevention initiatives include:

- Brighter Futures early intervention programme to support vulnerable families with children aged 0 to 8 years (extended to 9-14), with a priority for 0 to 3 year olds (New South Wales)
- Delivery of Nurse Family Partnership or adapted equivalent (England, Northern Ireland)
- Sustained health visiting – intensive involvement of specialist child and family health nurses with high needs families in pregnancy and in the first 2 years of the child’s life (England, New South Wales)
- Roll out of Triple P Parenting Programme to all parents with children aged 3 to 8 years in New South Wales and on a population health basis in Scotland
- Increased use of a broad range of evidence based and evidence informed programmes and practices (All jurisdictions)

Key Message 5

All reform initiatives, programmes or policy frameworks have an increased focus on **early intervention and prevention**

Child Protection Structures and Services

Example: Child Protection Services, New South Wales, Australia

Keep Them Safe: a shared approach to child well-being 2009-2014

Five year action plan to build stronger more effective child protection system in NSW. The key objective is to create an integrated system that supports vulnerable children, young people and their families. Managing and working with families where children and young people are at risk of harm is no longer seen as the sole responsibility of Community Services. The responsibility is now shared with a number of agencies including Health, Education and Training and Human Services, Police and Justice and Attorney Generals, as well as non government bodies.

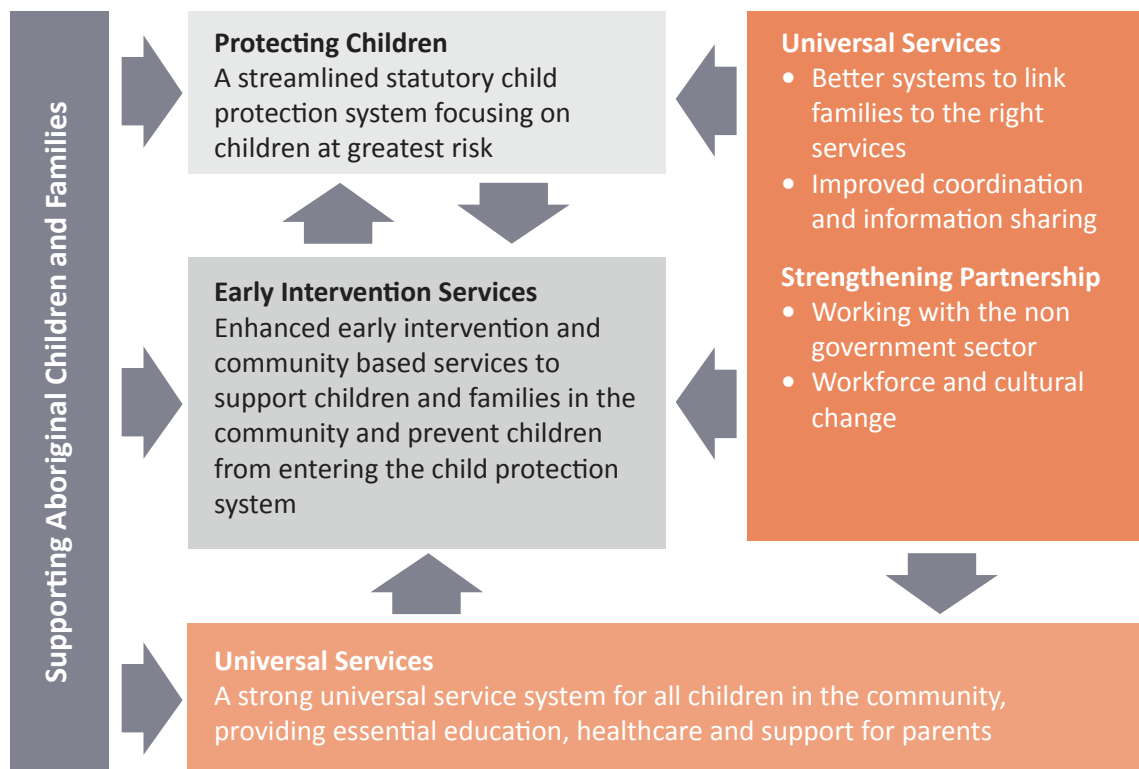
Key Features

Community Services Centres – statutory child protection services focusing on children and young people who are at ‘risk of significant harm’

Child Well-Being Units – located across the four government agencies – NSW Police Force, Department of Education and Communities (DEC), Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) and NSW Health

Joint Investigative Response Teams – interagency collaborative response to serious cases of child abuse

Family Referral Services – link vulnerable children, young people in need of assistance, and their families, with the most appropriate available support services in their local areas



Source: Keep Them Safe (2009)

Key Message 6

All reform initiatives, programmes or policy frameworks are provided on a **cross government departmental basis** and almost always include **children’s services, health, education and justice**

Section 3: Interagency and Cross Government Working

Interagency Working to Improve Outcomes

Frost (2005) distinguishes between four levels of partnership working beginning with the least joined up.

Four Levels of Interagency Working

1. Co-operation

Services work together toward consistent goals and complementary services, while maintaining their independence

2. Collaboration

Services plan together and address issues of overlap, duplication and gaps in service provision towards common outcomes

3. Coordination

Services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals

4. Integration

Different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery

Outcomes are the changes for service users or other targets of change, that happen as a result of an intervention or service being provided. Outcomes fall along a continuum from **immediate** (initial; short-term) to **intermediate** (medium-term) to **final** outcomes (long-term), often synonymous with impact.

A Chain of Outcomes

Short-Term Learning	Medium-Term Actions	Long-Term Conditions
<p>Changes in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Knowledge • Attitudes • Skills • Opinion • Aspirations • Motivation • Behavioural intent 	<p>Changes in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour • Decision-making • Policies • Social action 	<p>Changes in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditions • Social (well-being) • Health • Economic • Civic • Environmental <p><i>Source: Taylor-Powell (2011)</i></p>

Key Message 1

All reform initiatives, programmes or policy frameworks emphasise a **collective/shared responsibility** for the welfare and protection of children, with **interagency and cross government collaboration** central to improvement and progress

Levels of Impact of Interagency Working (Easton, 2010)

Interagency working processes can lead to changes at four different levels.

Level 1

Changes to inputs/processes such as the introduction of new tools and management structures

Level 2

Changes to routines, experiences and practices of practitioners and service managers (based on professional perceptions)

Level 3

Changes to outcomes for children, young people and families

Level 4

Institutional/systematic embedding of the changes across organisations

Impact of Interagency Working on Outcomes (Statham, 2011)

Where evidence of the impact of interagency working does exist, it is mostly positive

For Service Users	For Professionals	For Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved access to services and speedier response Holistic approach leading to more seamless services Improved outcomes e.g. child able to remain at home, improvements in attainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved enjoyment and well-being in their working lives Enhanced knowledge and understanding of other professional roles More opportunities for personal and career development and skill acquisition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater efficiency and greater involvement with service users Less duplication of services

Challenges to Interagency Working

Commitment Obstacles	Organisational Challenges	Contextual Barriers/Political Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of explicit commitment to interagency working Differing levels of 'buy-in'; some agencies reluctant to engage Where managers do not experience interagency working as part of their core work, it is vulnerable to changes in work priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different agency policies, procedures and systems Agencies have different remits and do not collect the same data Professional, technical and ethical obstacles to information sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in political steer Financial uncertainty A climate of constant organisational change Agency boundaries not co-terminous

Local Interagency Planning Structures with a Focus on Child Well-being

Examples

- **Children's Trusts (England)** Children Act (2004) places a 'duty to co-operate' on all services, departments, agencies working in children's services by setting up Children's Trusts, a local area partnership bringing together the key local agencies to improve child well-being
- **The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (NI)** has responsibility, through Outcomes Groups located in each of the Health and Social Care Trusts, to bring together all of the key agencies, including the community and voluntary sector who have responsibility for children, to plan and deliver services. A key component of these partnerships is the development of family support hubs providing early access to intervention and preventative services in the community
- **Getting It Right For Every Child (Scotland)** is an outcomes led approach to delivering children's services based around a common co-ordinating framework for assessment, planning and action across all agencies working with children and young people which focuses on all children through to those at risk
- **Keep Them Safe Regional Implementation Groups (New South Wales)** are multi-agency strategic initiatives to locally implement Keep Them Safe and related NSW Government priorities relating to child protection and well-being and improved service coordination for children, young people and their families

Key Message 2

Most jurisdictions have local/regional structures in place for children and family services which are **part of or aligned to wider local authority services** e.g. health, education and justice

Common Features of Interagency Planning Structures

- All services/agencies within these local planning structures contribute to an integrated services plan for children and young people in their region/local authority area
- Staff in all services working with children participate in joint interagency training across sectors
- Most jurisdictions have a national strategy/plan for children's workforce development

Key Message 3

All reform initiatives and programmes have an **implementation plan, change management training, interagency guidance and a workforce development strategy**

Key Sources

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Taylor-Powell, E. (2011) *Logic Modelling: Supporting clear and achievable outcomes. Presentations to the Centre for Effective Services, Public Seminars on Logic Modelling, 8-10 February 2011, Dublin, Cork and Belfast*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin

Relevant Government websites

Canada www.sustainingchildwelfare.ca/

England www.education.gov.uk/

New South Wales www.community.nsw.gov.au/

Northern Ireland www.hscboard.hscni.net/ and www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/

Norway www.bufetat.no/engelsk/bufdir/

Scotland www.scotland.gov.uk/gettingitright



For further information contact Dr Stella Owens at sowens@effectiveservices.org

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