

Executive Summary



Together 4 All
Family Support Project
Better Lives
for Children & Young People



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Together 4 All is a ten-year strategy to improve mutual respect and understanding, improve behaviour and reduce bullying for children and young people in the areas of Brownlow, Lurgan, Aghagallon and Bleary.

Background and Context

The strategy is the result of a partnership between the Children and Young People's Committee at Southern HSS Board, a Planning Group comprised of statutory, voluntary and community representatives committed to better outcomes for children and the Atlantic Philanthropies. The emerging focus of the work reflects local needs and Government aspirations for children.

Community Context

The areas of Lurgan, Brownlow, Aghagallon and Bleary are a microcosm of Northern Ireland in terms of need, demography and socio-economic mix.

There are substantial communities of Protestant/Unionists and Catholic/Nationalists, and a growing population of people from minority ethnic backgrounds, principally Chinese, Asian, Irish Traveller, Portugese and Eastern European.

The combined population of the Together 4 All area is just over 37,000 people living in 12,706 households. The child population in 2004 was 11,514, nearly a third of the total.

Evidence Base for the Outcomes

The strategy is based on widespread community consultation; the project engaged with over 700 adults - parents and professionals – and more than 1,600 children and young people, using appropriate media including art and drama. In addition a rigorous epidemiology was undertaken in 19 of the 24 schools in the target areas, engaging 2,246 children and young people aged 7 to 16 years. The work of Professor Paul Connolly 'Too Young to Notice' and the EPPNI study has had a strong influence on the emerging strategy.

The epidemiology study indicated that, in general, the physical health of children in the Together 4 All areas is not significantly different from that of their peers in U.K. and other European countries. It also suggested that most children are doing as well at school as other children in the European Union.

However, there were areas of concern. One in 25 children in the Together 4 All areas have seen grown-ups in their home hit one another. Nearly a third (30%) have heard grown-ups in their home yell at one another several times, while one in ten (11%) feel their parents 'hardly ever' praise them.

There are other grounds for concern about the mental health of children in the Together 4 All areas. One in four children often get very angry and lose their temper and levels of conduct disorder are six per cent higher than in the U.K. The behaviour of the average child in the Together 4 All areas was found to be significantly worse than elsewhere in the U.K. and one in six (16%) have been bullied in the last week.

Better Outcomes for Children

In light of these findings, the Together 4 All project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Increased mutual respect and understanding
- Improved behaviour and
- Reduced bullying.

The strategy has identified five new services that evidence suggests will impact on these outcomes.

Innovation to Improve Children's Lives

First, Together 4 All will develop a whole-school curriculum to be delivered to all primary school children, initially to seven year olds (primary four) rolling out annually until all 7 to 11 year olds are engaged. Consultation with children showed this to be an under-resourced age group and a difficult transition period for a child's development. Primary Four requires an extra hour in school and getting ready for the move to Post Primary.

The proposed whole-school curriculum has the support of all 14 local primary school principals who see it as complementary to the new personal development and mutual respect curriculum, and to the strategic plan for education and the extended schools programme. As such, the strategy will promote the priorities of the Department of Education.

Second, Together 4 All has consulted with experts at Penn State University in the United States and at the University of Bergen, Norway about programmes proven to reduce bullying and improve behaviour. Professor Mark Greenberg's Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) and Professor Dan Olweus' anti-bullying programmes fit well with the curriculum to improve mutual respect and understanding. Greenberg and Olweus will work with Together 4 All to make programmes appropriate for Northern Ireland. School principals are confident this work will support the Government's 'Shared Future' strategy and promote the objectives of OFMDFM.

Third, Together 4 All will work with local organisations to develop the work of Professor Felton Earles at Harvard University on collective efficacy. His approach seeks to train groups and communities to take group responsibility for promotion of good behaviour. Together 4 All will promote an adaptation of this approach both in schools and through the youth sector. This part of the plan links directly with the Department of Education's aspirations for youth provision and Department of Social Development's focus on community capacity building

The fourth and fifth services will help schools better identify the one in six children who will develop a conduct disorder. Those identified as at high risk will be supported through a programme designed to assist them and their parents so they can maintain their place in mainstream education. Those with conduct disorders will be assisted to access the existing Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). This activity will complement the policies and priorities of DHSSPS and the family support strategy, and with the other initiatives contribute to the Government's '10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People'.

In addition to commissioning services in schools and the communities, Together 4 All will work with local organisations to develop an integrated approach to children's services. Better approaches to the design and implementation of services will be tested, and attention will be paid to the training of people working with children. All initiatives will be manualised to ensure consistent delivery and ready transfer to other communities if they are successful. Rigorous evaluation will be another mark of Together 4 All's work, including precise estimations of impact on child outcomes, and monitoring of trends in well-being over time. All results will be regularly disseminated to the community, funders, government and other interested bodies.

Governance

The work of Together 4 All will be managed by a Board of Directors representing all interested parties – statutory, voluntary, community, youth, minority ethnic communities, as well as representatives of another Community Engagement Site and a senior Civil Servant.

An Expert Advisory Committee is being formed to ensure quality in implementation of the strategy. It will comprise international experts, including Professor Ted Melhuish, Birbeck College (Principal Investigator of the EPPNI study and lead evaluator of SureStart); Dr. Ann Phoenix, Open University and a leading thinker on ethnicity; and Mark Dynarski from Mathematica.

It is intended to look to leading Northern Ireland academics to lead on the stringent evaluation of the project.

The Atlantic Philanthropies has already committed almost £750,000 to the development phase and is undertaking due diligence prior to releasing £3.2 million to the first four years, of Phase 1, of the ten year strategy. If initial evaluation results are promising, the Atlantic Philanthropies will look to further funding for Phases 2 and 3 of the work.

Together 4 All is seeking matched funding from Regional Government. Although priorities have already been set, Government will recognise the opportunity to engage with a major investor in the Province and to use learning for development of services across Northern Ireland.

