



EVALUATION OF THE LIMERICK CITY HOMEMAKER FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

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Executive Summary

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Introduction

The Homemaker Service was established in 2013. The purpose of this evaluation is to establish whether the Homemaker Family Support Service is an effective early intervention service; and whether the Service improves parental capacity, thereby contributing to positive outcomes for children and parents.

The Homemaker Service

The Homemaker Family Support Service:

- is an early intervention, home-based family support service across Limerick city and environs;
- works with parents in a practical way to support them in their parenting capacity and with household routines;
- works with parents of children aged eight years and under;
- is distinct in its delivery of one-to-one practical support for parents, underpinned by providing essential support in a real-life, naturalistic setting;
- provides short, intensive interventions for up to a maximum of 24 weeks, with reviews every 8 weeks to assess whether the outcomes have been met;
- works with families with additional needs (Levels 2-3 on the Hardiker Model¹), with the goal of intervening early in order to prevent difficulties escalating;
- recognises the importance of relationships in the style of delivery, while adopting a strengths-based, capacity building approach in order to achieve sustainable change;
- is integrated with the ABC Start Right Community Wraparound model of service delivery in the City Centre and

Northside of Limerick city, to ensure effective, easy-to-access support for children and families.

Families referred to the service engage in an assessment, which identifies needs, defines specific desired outcomes, and agrees a service plan with parents to achieve them.

The service is delivered by a team of one full-time Project Co-ordinator and three Homemaker Family Support Workers (one full-time and two part-time). The Homemakers work flexible hours in order to meet the needs of families, typically a service is offered between the hours of 8am and 7pm.

The Homemaker Service is overseen by a multi-agency Management Committee, comprised of stakeholders, which guides the overall direction of the service.

The Research Design

The evaluation took place from Jan – Feb 2017.

Secondary data analysis was carried out on outcomes data collected and collated by Barnardos' staff working for the Homemaker programme. Data was collected for 32 families, comprised of 110 children whose cases closed within 2016. Comments at case closure were also collected. Quantitative outcomes data was collected and analysed under the six Barnardos domains. Qualitative outcomes data was analysed based on five identified service outcomes which correspond to the five national outcomes.

A survey of referrers to the Homemaker Service was undertaken - including early intervention services (disability), family support, Tusla family

¹ The Hardiker Model (Hardiker *et al.* 1991) is a widely used planning framework outlining four levels of intervention.

services, Health Service Executive (HSE) psychology, HSE medical, Tusla education and welfare, and schools – to determine referrers' understanding of the Homemaker Service, their reasons for referral, their views of the referral process, and their comment on service outcomes.

Quantitative Outcomes

The quantitative data reviewed demonstrates the impact and effectiveness of the Homemaker Family Support Service across multiple domains. 297 outcomes were recorded across the six Barnardos domains of:

- Living Environment;
- Relationships and Attachments;
- Behaviour and Social Participation;
- Health- Physical and Psychological;
- Learning, Education and Employment; and
- Identity, Self-Care and Self-Esteem.

The highest number of positive outcomes was recorded for improvements in Behaviour and Social Participation (n=85), followed by positive outcomes/improvements in Living Environment (n=65).

For the 32 **families**, outcomes were recorded across the domains, and many families achieved across multiple domains.

- 63% (n=20) achieved positive outcomes in Learning, Education and Employment;
- 59% (n=19) achieved positive outcomes in Health- Physical and Psychological,
- 59% (n=19) achieved positive outcomes in Behaviour and Social Participation; and
- 56% (n=18) achieved positive outcomes in Living Environment.

Of the 110 **children** for whom outcomes data was analysed:

- 55% (n=60) achieved positive outcomes in Learning, Education and Employment;
- 53% (n=58) achieved positive outcomes in Health- Physical and Psychological;
- 52% (n=57) achieved positive outcomes in Behaviour and Social Participation; and
- 51% (n=56) achieved positive outcomes in Living Environment.

Qualitative Outcomes

Qualitative outcomes data recorded by Homemaker staff at closure meetings with parents was analysed by the researcher in the context of the five identified service outcomes, as adapted from the five national outcomes. This study analysed the recorded comments and documented outcomes achieved for 32 families whose cases closed in 2016. Given that the comments and outcomes were documented by Homemaker staff in the presence of family and referrers at closure meetings, conclusions must be treated with caution.

Children's Physical and Mental Health

Outcomes data for children demonstrate:

- improved wellbeing;
- better understanding and expression of needs and feelings; and
- improved behaviour management.

Children identified feeling happier, better able to express their needs and, as a result, experiencing less frustration. Children further identified adopting new strategies to manage any frustration that may arise.

Parents reported:

- learning to support emotional development by acknowledging feelings and naming them for the child;
- feeling better able to manage stressful situations and keeping on top of appointments; improvements in the home environment, including diet and nutrition and hygiene;
- positive outcomes from signposting to a range of additional services.

Children's Education and Active Learning

Families recounted for children:

- better daily routines, with children attending school regularly and on time; including one report of significantly reduced school detentions for their child;
- wearing the appropriate uniform;
- achieving within their capacity; including one reporting better reports from the school principal and teacher in relation to the child.
- improved attitudes to homework, with children interested, engaged and concentrating better; including one child reported to be more relaxed and more ambitious in the school environment.
- increased take-up of new activities, including sports classes for kickboxing and football.

Families reported for parents:

- improved educational outcomes, including receiving guidance, advice and information; attending parenting programmes; and attending English classes.

Children's Economic Security

Outcomes recorded reflected:

- improvements in the home environment e.g. –
 - organisation of financial assistance and budget management;
 - support with bill paying and communicating with landlords was recorded;
 - exceptional financial assistance for one family;
 - another family supported to obtain food;
 - new sofas in one family home;
 - a new electricity meter for one family; and
 - a television license secured for another.

Additional outcomes align more closely to signposting and referral:

- one family was referred to a local housing organisation,
- a second family was supported with a place on a housing list;
- another was linked to a homeless persons' unit;
- support with accessing allowances and entitlements was provided where possible.

Children's Safety from Accidental and Intentional Harm

Outcomes recorded included:

- an improved indoor and outdoor home environment - examples provided included
 - secure and clean back yards and gardens for children to play in - one family required the completion of garden work, including drain covers and a gate;

- a secure front door to prevent the child from exiting the house easily;
- secure windows on the home; and
- one family reported a cleaner, tidier home with a laundry routine in place.
- improved access to support services which were needed –
 - one child is in receipt of support to understand a family separation;
 - one mother connected to a local domestic abuse service; and
 - support with guardianship and visitations.

Children's Participation in Positive Networks of Family, Friends, Neighbours and the Community

Outcomes for children recorded:

- better relationships inside and outside the homes – e.g. one child recorded as demonstrating improved eye contact and engagement, hugging, laughing and smiling more. Another child was better able to overcome difficulties interacting with other children; and
- improved social participation, contributing to improved wellbeing of families accessing the service.

Outcomes for parents recorded:

- better relationships with their children, with improved behaviour and improved techniques to manage behaviour.

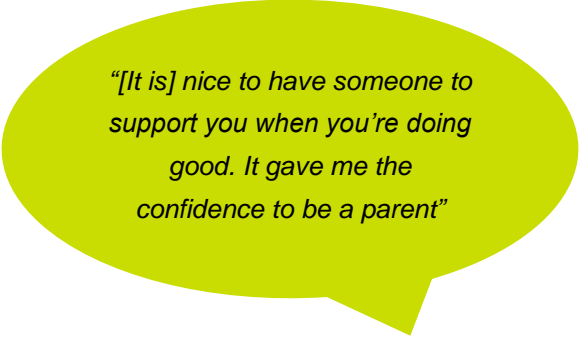
Additionally, better relationships outside the house are reported:

- Children are connected to local sports clubs and enjoying training and meeting other children.

- A number of families are recorded as benefiting from attending a child and toddler/ mother and baby programme.

Parents' Comments at Closure:

Parents typically set out feelings of improved self-efficacy and agency, in addition to improved confidence in managing the household and relationships inside and outside the household. This feedback was coupled with a sense of gratitude, often aimed at emphasising the one-to-one relationship with the practitioner and how this contributed to positive outcomes for parents and children.



"[It is] nice to have someone to support you when you're doing good. It gave me the confidence to be a parent"

A strong emphasis emerged on the service user/practitioner relationship and the benefits of the one-to-one support. Some of the comments include:

"I enjoyed having another pair of eyes who can see things I can't"

"[I am] better able to work things out for myself"

"[I am] more confident with home and going out and about"

Children's Comments at Closure:

A small number of children's comments were collected at closure. Many children were too young to comment or provide feedback.



Children's comments were encouraging and spoke to the positive experiences of children and the impact a parenting support service can have on outcomes for children and families.

"I'm good now, doing my homework and it's easier"

"We went to the library and didn't know about it before"

These views attest to the advantages of the service in offering a flexible, tailored approach.

Survey of Referrers

A total of 22 referrers were contacted, with 13 responding, a response rate of 59% - referrers were from early intervention (disability), family support services, Tusla family services, Health Service Executive (HSE) psychology, HSE medical, Tusla education and welfare, and schools.

Respondents provided positive feedback on the Homemaker Service, highlighting the following:

- the 'hands on' work of the service in contributing to the home environment;
- parents supported with routines and practical aspects of their roles as parents;
- the approach of the staff team in ensuring parents felt comfortable with the process, noting their commitment, professionalism and consultative style- referrers felt that the approach was 'very positive', and that 'meeting parents where they are at' is particularly effective;
- the value of early intervention work and the strengths-based approach of the service, "encouraging families to solve their own problems"; and
- improved confidence and 'empowerment' of parents - demonstrating how the service contributes to improved self-efficacy, supporting parents to better manage pressures or crises as they may arise.

"This is a great service, with staff providing support based on each family's needs"

"I firmly believe the service is a lifeline for many families as it is home-based, goal-based and professional"

Referrers described observing a range of outcomes for **children's physical and mental health:**

- making and keeping hospital appointments;
- improved engagement with health services including specialist services; and
- improved diet and food and meal preparation in the home. One referrer found that referred children 'made strides' and were less anxious, nervous

and withdrawn by the end of their engagement with the service.

Referrers described observing a range of outcomes for **children's education and active learning**:

- the benefits of the service in supporting parents with home routines and preparation for the school day;
- improved attendance and engagement at school;
- children were less likely to miss school; and
- children were exhibiting improved behaviour in the school environment.

Referrers described observing a range of outcomes for children's **economic security**:

- parents managing their income and their weekly budgets; and
- the tailored approach for each family, with signposting and onward referral to appropriate services helpful in supporting families with their economic and financial needs.

Referrers described observing outcomes for **children's safety from accidental harm**:

- improved parent awareness of safety, and home security.

Referrers observed outcomes for **children's participation in positive networks**:

- families supported to engage with the local community;
- children were socialising and building friendships, attending afterschool and social clubs;
- parents often referred, or signposted, to classes or mother and toddler groups to support their socialisation; and
- parents were encouraged to be more aware of, and link in with, extended family, neighbours and community resources for support.

In terms of barriers, referrers described how a family may have a preconceived idea about what the Homemaker service offers, and what is offered by Barnardos. The referrers indicated that, while most families were receptive once fully aware of the service provision, others did not overcome this "*perceived stigma*".

Summary of Findings

Is the Homemaker Family Support Service an Effective Early Intervention Support Service?

The research demonstrates that the Homemaker Family Support Service is an effective early intervention support service. Outcomes data from closure forms, in addition to referrer commentary, confirms the success of the programme in improving family trajectory and self-efficacy across a range of domains.

- The service provides families with tangible, practical help, supporting parents to establish routines, manage household budgets and be better prepared for their day, contributing to improved confidence within and outside the home environment; with the follow-on effect of enabling their children to be better prepared for their day, and better able to participate.
- Improved confidence can lead to increased autonomy and self-efficacy within families. Parents in this study felt better able to handle existing challenges, and better prepared for circumstances that may arise.
- The one-to-one, strengths-based approach ensures families have a tailored experience and can build a relationship with their family support worker, working in partnership towards goals. Referrers and parents emphasised relationships as key to outcomes.
- The home-based delivery provides a beneficial naturalistic setting, matching the nature of the work while also supporting the family to build positive networks in their community.
- Homemaker families in this study experienced improved social networks, with children engaged in new activities and clubs, and parents more likely to

attend programmes, groups and classes.

- Signposting and onward referral to appropriate services ensures parents are accruing benefits in a range of areas, which can be sustained and extended beyond the service delivery.

Does the Homemaker Family Support Service Improve Parental Capacity?

The evidence demonstrates that the Homemaker Family Support Service improves parental capacity across a number of domains, contributing to positive outcomes for both parents and children.

- Families are at different stages, and will to continue to experience different needs at different times. The tailored, needs-led approach reflects recognition of the need to account for the diversity of families and focus on achieving outcomes within the capacity of the family.
- Data from the study indicates that children were better able to express their needs and manage their behaviour, which carries the potential for accumulative effects in other areas of their lives.
- Data indicates that parents were better able to communicate with their children, building improved relationships, and were better able to respond to their needs.
- Homemaker families experienced improved understanding of health and wellbeing, were more likely to attend appointments or referrals and practice self-care.
- Families were more aware of diet and nutrition, establishing better routines and meal planning within the home, the benefits of which have the potential to accrue over time.

- The quality of the home environment improved for families engaged with the services, with spaces tidier, safer and more secure. Parents were better placed to address practical safety and security issues in the home.

Challenges

A small number of challenges were identified through the course of this study. It is evident that some are capacity issues and therefore addressing such concerns would be dependent on improved funding and resources.

- Some parents faced outstanding issues at closure. Where possible, the team provided onward referral or support. Parents may present with a range of needs, some of which require long-term intervention by other services (for example, mental health). In these cases, the outstanding needs were beyond the scope of the service.
- Some obstacles to engagement were associated with the perceived stigma of accessing family support. Improved funding has the potential to increase capacity and support the team in considering how to overcome this perceived stigma, potentially by expanding service delivery and improving public awareness.
- Improved funding also carries the potential to reduce waiting lists and referral times, while also contributing to improved outcomes for a greater number of families in the area.

Concluding Remarks

This study demonstrates that the Homemaker Family Support Service is an effective early intervention support service. Outcomes data from closure forms, in addition to referrer commentary, confirms the success of the programme in improving child and family trajectory and self-efficacy across a range of domains. In addition, the evidence demonstrates that the Homemaker Family Support Service improves parental capacity across a number of domains, contributing to positive outcomes for both parents and children.

