

# THE NATIONAL AREA BASED CHILDHOOD PROGRAMME

Vision, Mission and Principles  
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An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth

**TÚSLA**  
An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

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## Context

The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is a national Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Programme funded by Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration (DCDEI), delivered through the Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) within Tusla. The programme invests in effective services to improve outcomes for children and families living in areas of disadvantage. The ABC Programme sees the direct implementation of evidence-based approaches and creates learning opportunities to enhance workforce and service capacity within the PEI children and family sector.

*Early Experiences can last a lifetime.* ‘Virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain’s evolving circuitry to the child’s capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning early in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early childhood years’ (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).

## ABC Programme Background

Between 2007 and 2013 The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) and Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) jointly resourced the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) in three areas, with each area meeting regularly with both funders. Significant investment was allocated over a six-year period to the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of evidence-informed practice in children’s services to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes. An extensive programme of research was undertaken to gather learning on the processes of implementation and outcomes achieved.

In 2013, PEIP transitioned to the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme which was established under a commitment in the Programme for Government to adopt an area-based approach to tackling child poverty and extended with large programmes in a further nine areas as well a smaller initiative in the Midlands.

The DCYA and AP funded the ABC Programme between 2013 and 2018 with an investment of €34 million. Since November 2018, the programme has been aligned with Tusla (Prevention, Partnership and Family Support), with funding from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

## Prevention and Early Intervention Rationale

- Prevention is about identifying potential problems before they happen and putting supports in place to prevent them.
- Early Intervention is about intervening early to prevent difficulties escalating and helping children become more resilient and to realise their full potential.
- PEI is essential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and disadvantage.
- PEI can have life-long positive effects on outcomes for children and young people, such as achievement of developmental milestones; educational attainment; better mental health and reduced juvenile crime’, (PEIN, 2019, p.3).
- PEI has proven financial benefits. Kilburn et al. (2008) found a return on investment of between €1.26 and €17.92, with the higher return associated with a greater level of targeting.
- Heckman & Masterov (2007, p.2) highlight the benefits of PEI within disadvantaged communities stating, ‘early interventions that partially remediate the effects of adverse environments can reverse some of the harm of disadvantage and have a high economic return’.
- Disadvantages in early childhood have a direct impact on health and well-being, as well as on children’s learning ability and educational outcomes. This not only impacts on future earnings but also has an indirect influence on future health (RCPI, 2017, p.14).

## Prevention and Early Intervention Programming

The Area Based Childhood Programme is aligned to the Prevention and Early Intervention in children and young people's services Report (Rochford et al., 2014). This identifies eight key lessons:

- Supporting parents pays real dividends in terms of better outcomes for children
- Due to the importance of early brain development, a strong focus should be placed on supporting children's development from birth to three years.
- Initiatives to support children's learning must promote a love of learning and be clear how they will integrate into the school setting.
- Supporting key transitions such as moving from an early years' service to primary school can make a significant difference to a child's life outcomes.
- Programmes that support social and emotional learning and promote inclusion should be supported by wider school structures and policies.
- The development of personal skills and aptitudes should be a part of formal and ongoing training for all professionals working with children.
- Consulting with local communities helps to ensure that prevention and early intervention services and programmes fit with the needs of children, young people and their families.
- Effective inter-agency structures are vital to ensuring better services for children, young people and families (DCYA, 2016).

## Policy Context

The DCDEI is the lead Government Department responsible for the ABC Programme and the Programme is informed by Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (BOBF, 2014). The ABC programme implement strategies to seek improvements in five outcome areas across six key transformational goals.

With a significant focus on pre-birth to 6 years old, the ABC programme is also aligned with and supports implementation practices embedded in First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children, and their Families 2019-2028 as well as Tusla's Investing in Families: Supporting Parents to Improve Outcomes for Children (Tusla, 2013).

The Area Based Childhood Programme is multi-sectoral and multi-layered and is also aligned to, supports and informs government policies such as Healthy Ireland, Sláintecare, Connecting for Life (2015-2020), Action Plan for Education (2016-2019), DEIS Plan 2017, Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018-2023, Revised October 2019), and the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, Department of Social Protection (2020-2025).

## ABC Programme Vision

An Ireland where no child is impacted by poverty and all children are supported to reach their full potential.

## ABC Programme Mission

Through prevention and early intervention approaches, the Area Based Childhood Programme aims to work in partnership with families, practitioners, communities, and national stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for children and families living in areas where poverty is most deeply entrenched.

## ABC Programme Objectives

- Support children at critical stages of their development and wellbeing and through key transitions, with a particular focus on pre-birth to six years of age.
- Translate the science of early childhood development and evidence-informed practice into locally appropriate programmes and approaches.
- Mitigate the impact of intergenerational poverty and improve outcomes for children and families.
- Take a progressive universal approach to addressing child poverty.
- Actively support and work in partnership with parents as the primary carers and educators in their children's lives.
- Enhance the provision of quality prevention and early intervention approaches by developing workforce capacity (education, training, coaching, mentoring and reflection) across children's services.
- Utilise and enable whole-systems, multi-stage processes to enhance children's services and practice at local and national level to improve outcomes for children.
- Use monitoring and evaluation systems to inform our practice and measure impact.
- Share the learning and work to embed effective practices in all children's services.  
Inform policy development at local and national levels where ABC areas are utilised to test, evaluate and disseminate intervention processes and outcomes.

## ABC Delivery Approaches

ABC sites operate at three levels of change:

- **Frontline delivery** of PEI services for children and families which support early child development
- **Capacity building**, facilitation, and support to other service providers to implement evidence-based ways of working
- **Systems change** efforts with managers and decision makers at local, regional and national level.

## ABC Programme Intervention Themes

- Pre-birth to three supports including home visiting and group-based supports for parents, care givers and families.
- Programmes to foster positive parenting and improved child and family social and emotional wellbeing.
- Supporting quality and capacity in early childhood care and education.
- Increasing knowledge and skills for early childhood development, including Infant Mental Health across child services.
- Interventions for language, literacy and numeracy development in preschools, schools and with families.
- Promoting social, emotional wellbeing and improved behaviour; youth mental health and positive relationships.

## ABC Underpinning Principles

The following principles underpin the work of the ABC Programme:

- To work collectively across the ABC areas and with national and local interagency and community stakeholders to bring about best practice developments to support better outcomes for children.
- All children have a right to be heard, to have their needs met and to have equal opportunity to reach their potential.
- ABC sites recognise the long-term impact of trauma on child development and this informs programme development and implementation.
- ABC commit to and believe in the principle of working with parents as equal partners with regard to all aspect of their children's development and learning.
- ABC sites take a progressive universal approach, targeting areas of most disadvantage and prioritising resources within those areas.
- ABC sites take a holistic approach to working with children, families, and communities.
- Local needs analyses and evidence-informed practice guides the planning and delivery of ABC areas.
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of our work informs planning, development and sustainability.

## ABC Locations

NAME	LEAD AGENT	GEOGRAPHIC AREA	WEBSITE
<b>Family Matters</b>	Ballyfermot Partnership	Ballyfermot, Dublin	<a href="https://www.bcpartnership.ie/">https://www.bcpartnership.ie/</a>
<b>Youngballymun</b>	Young Ballymun	Ballymun, Dublin	<a href="https://youngballymun.org/">https://youngballymun.org/</a>
<b>Grangegorman ABC Programme</b>	Technological University, Dublin	Grangegorman, Dublin	<a href="https://www.dit.ie/ace/grangegorman-abcprogramme/">https://www.dit.ie/ace/grangegorman-abcprogramme/</a>
<b>Supporting Parents and Early Childhood Services (SPECS)</b>	Bray Area Partnership	Bray, Wicklow	<a href="https://www.specsbray.com/">https://www.specsbray.com/</a>
<b>Blue Skies Initiative</b>	Archways	Clondalkin, Dublin	<a href="https://blueskiesinitiative.ie/">https://blueskiesinitiative.ie/</a>
<b>Early Learning initiative</b>	National College of Ireland	Dublin Docklands and East Inner City	<a href="https://www.ncirl.ie">https://www.ncirl.ie</a>
<b>ABC Start Right</b>	Paul Partnership	Limerick	<a href="https://www.paulpartnership.ie/abc-start-right/">https://www.paulpartnership.ie/abc-start-right/</a>
<b>Childhood Development Initiative</b>	CDI Tallaght	Tallaght, Dublin	<a href="https://www.cdi.ie/">https://www.cdi.ie/</a>
<b>Let's Grow Together! Infant &amp; Childhood Partnerships, CLG</b>	Let's Grow Together! Infant & Childhood Partnerships, CLG	Cork	<a href="http://www.letsgrowtogether.ie">www.letsgrowtogether.ie</a>
<b>Preparing for Life</b>	Northside Partnership	Dublin 5 and Dublin 17	<a href="https://www.preparingforlife.ie/">https://www.preparingforlife.ie/</a>
<b>Better Finglas</b>	Barnardo's	Finglas, Dublin	<a href="http://betterfinglas.org/">http://betterfinglas.org/</a>
<b>The Genesis Programme</b>	Louth Leader Partnership	Louth	<a href="https://louthleaderpartnership.ie/service/genesis-programme/">https://louthleaderpartnership.ie/service/genesis-programme/</a>

## ABC Programme Development Timeline

2006	Prevention & Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) Commences
Apr 2013	ABC launch and call for submissions
Nov 2013	Successful ABC Sites Announced
Jan 2014	Design Phase of ABC Commences
2014/15	ABC Programmes Commence Across Sites
Mar 2015	DCYA establishes ABC Mainstreaming Group.
Mar 2016	Mainstreaming paper presented to Interdepartmental Group.
Sept 2016	Presentation to DCYA by ABC Managers on Consolidating and Extending the ABC Programme
Feb 2017	Open Policy Debate Hosted by DCYA and including ABC Managers & IDG
Nov 2017	Minister for Children and Youth Affairs hosts meeting re Future of ABC Programme
Jan 2018	ABC Managers response re future structures submitted to Minister.
Feb 2018	National ABC Transitions Group established
May 2018	CES Evaluation consultative Forum
Sep 2018	ABC funding transfers from Pobal to Tusla
Dec 2018	National Evaluation of the ABC Programme (CES) Published
Apr 2019	NUIG Facilitated ABC Workshops
Oct 2019	ABC Showcase Event and Outcomes Framework Presentation
Nov 2019	Outcomes Framework Report completed by S. Brocklesby & M. O'Dwyer
Dec 2019	DCYA document on the Vision for ABC / Implementation Plan presented to the ABC Transitions Group
Jan 2020	ABC National Project Manager Appointed
Jan 2020	Final meeting of the National ABC Transitions Group



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