

# BASELINE EVALUATION OF THE DUBLIN DOCKLANDS PARENT CHILD HOME PROGRAMME

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# CONTENTS

List of Figures .....	4	<b>Chapter 5: The Home Visitors</b> .....	78
List of Tables .....	4	The pathway to becoming a Home Visitor .....	79
Acknowledgements .....	5	Being a Home Visitor .....	82
Abbreviations .....	6	Home Visitor Perspectives on who can benefit most from PCHP .....	88
Summary .....	7	Challenges in the role of Home Visitor .....	91
Introduction .....	12	How Home Visitors see the future of PCHP .....	95
<b>Chapter 1: Background</b> .....	16	Summary .....	96
<b>Chapter 2: Implementation of PCHP in the Docklands</b> .....	27	<b>Chapter 6: Discussion and Recommendations</b> .....	98
Programme reach .....	27	Programme Implementation .....	98
Programme delivery .....	35	Programme delivery .....	102
Programme organisation .....	44	Parents' experience of PCHP .....	105
Summary .....	50	Programme Outcomes .....	106
<b>Chapter 3: Child Outcomes</b> .....	52	<b>References</b> .....	114
Assessment of child development .....	53	<b>Appendix 1: PCHP Curricular Materials</b> .....	117
Characteristics of PCHP child sample .....	54	<b>Appendix 2: Sample of PCHP participants</b> .....	118
Presentation and interpretation of results .....	57	<b>Appendix 3: Methodology and Instruments - Child Outcomes</b> .....	119
An Overview of the Children's Development .....	66		
Summary .....	66		
<b>Chapter 4: Parents' Programme Experience</b> .....	69		
Motivation for involvement .....	69		
Benefits from programme participation .....	70		
Programme improvements .....	74		
Summary .....	76		

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1:</b> How much parent enjoys reading (baseline) .....	31
<b>Figure 2:</b> Time parent spends watching TV daily (baseline) .....	32
<b>Figure 3:</b> How often child watched TV daily.....	32
<b>Figure 4:</b> Age when child first read to by family member (baseline).....	33
<b>Figure 5:</b> How often parents buy books for child.....	34
<b>Figure 6:</b> Cohort A: Frequency of Home Visits .....	36
<b>Figure 7:</b> Cohort B: Frequency of Home Visits .....	36
<b>Figure 8:</b> Cohort A: Number of Books and Toys Received.....	42
<b>Figure 9:</b> Cohort B: Number of Books and Toys Received.....	42
<b>Figure 10:</b> Cohort A: Do records indicate that book or toy was used between visits?.....	48
<b>Figure 11:</b> Cohort B: Do records indicate that book or toy was used between visits?.....	48

## List of Tables

<b>Table 2:1:</b> Characteristics of PCHP parent sample (n=23).....	31
<b>Table 2.2:</b> Home Visit Records: A sequence of missed visits .....	37
<b>Table 3:1:</b> Characteristics: Cohort A and Cohort B child sample (n = 25).....	54
<b>Table 3:2:</b> Developmental Tests Administered ..	55
<b>Table 3.3:</b> Categories of Percentile Scores .....	57
<b>Table 3.4:</b> Cohort A Denver II Percentile Scores at programme commencement (Y2).....	58
<b>Table 3.5:</b> Average Improvement in Percentiles on BAS II subtests, Cohort A .....	59
<b>Table 3.6:</b> Cohort A's gain in test performance in months on BAS II subtests .....	59
<b>Table 3.7:</b> Cohort A Child scores above that expected for age (BAS II) .....	60
<b>Table 3.8:</b> Cohort A School Readiness Percentile Scores programme end .....	61
<b>Table 3.9:</b> Denver II Percentile Scores at Start Cohort B.....	62
<b>Table 3.10:</b> Average Improvement in Percentiles on BAS II subtests by Cohort.....	62
<b>Table 3.11:</b> Cohort B's gain in test performance in months on BAS II subtests .....	63
<b>Table 3.12:</b> Cohort B Child scores above that expected for their age (BAS II).....	64
<b>Table 3.13:</b> School Readiness Percentile Scores at Programme end Cohort B.....	67
<b>Table 5:1:</b> Home Visitor Evaluation .....	81

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## Abbreviations

<b>AIRO</b>	All-Ireland Research Observatory
<b>BAS</b>	British Ability Scales
<b>CRC</b>	Children's Research Centre
<b>DDDA</b>	Dublin Docklands Development Authority
<b>ELI</b>	Early Learning Initiative
<b>FETAC</b>	Further Education and Training Awards Council
<b>IFSC</b>	Irish Financial Services Centre
<b>KEEP</b>	Key Elements for Establishing Programme
<b>M</b>	Mean (average)
<b>NCI</b>	National College of Ireland
<b>PCHP</b>	Parent Child Home Programme
<b>PSS</b>	Parental Stress Scale
<b>SD</b>	Standard Deviation
<b>SRC</b>	School Readiness Concept
<b>TCD</b>	Trinity College Dublin

# Summary

**This study evaluated programme implementation and outcomes for the developmental phase (2009-2011) of the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) in three domains: the programme, the Home Visitors, and children and their parents.**

## Background

The PCHP home visiting programme aims to improve school readiness of children at risk of educational disadvantage. A trained Home Visitor calls to a parent and child twice a week over two years. Each week the Home Visitors interact with the children, using the books and toys provided, and model oral language, reading and play. Parents are encouraged to continue this practice between visits.

The Dublin Docklands PCHP, operating in four Liffeside parishes, commenced in autumn 2007, based on a model developed in the United States. Unlike the US PCHP, the Docklands programme is delivered by local women, all mothers, rather than professionals. This was important to programme success: if not accepted locally it would have had difficulty reaching its goals.

## Methodology

We undertook a longitudinal study of the Dublin Docklands PCHP that examined programme implementation and outcomes during PCHP's pilot phase (2009-2011). Programme implementation records for two cohorts of children were assessed against the PCHP programme replication standards. Twenty-five children (two cohorts, one in programme year 2 and another commencing year 1) were administered developmental assessments on four occasions (three for those in year 2) at programme commencement, during and at programme end. Seventeen parents were interviewed about their programme experiences. Eleven Home Visitors participated in semi-structured interviews on three occasions. These interviews explored their pathway into and through the home visiting programme, experience of programme delivery, understanding of their job and its impact on their personal and professional lives. Two focus groups were conducted at the end of each programme year, where Home Visitors were asked about the experience of implementing the programme. In the final focus groups the Home Visitors were asked for their perspectives on the key issues arising from the research.

Descriptive data shows how the PCHP has operated in the Docklands in its pilot phase. It also highlights outcomes, at the end of a two-year programme cycle, for parents and their children and for home visiting staff.

The study findings can provide guidance on the future development and evaluation of the PCHP in the Docklands and elsewhere.

We addressed the following questions:

## **A. Programme implementation**

### *Programme delivery*

- Has the programme been delivered according to the programme replication standards?
- What are parents' experience's of programme delivery?

### *Programme reach*

- What is the profile of families receiving the PCHP in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, home literacy and parenting practices?

### *Programme satisfaction*

- How do parents experience their involvement in the PCHP?

## **B. Programme outcomes**

### *For children*

- Does child participation in each year of PCHP improve child cognitive development?
- Does child participation in PCHP improve school readiness?

### *For Home Visitors*

- How has the PCHP impacted on the personal and professional lives of the Home Visitors?



## Key findings

### Programme implementation

#### *Programme delivery*

- The Docklands PCHP aligns with the US replication standards that require the programme be delivered in a 'non-didactic' way using a graded curriculum and with weekly supervision sessions for Home Visitors.
- Parents were very happy with programme delivery and materials. But, particularly in the early stages, they were a bit unsure about what was expected during and between visits. Some thought of the Home Visitor as a teacher.
- Records indicated clearly how the children and families progressed throughout the two years. However, some written files were incomplete, making it hard for the researchers to gauge the full extent of the programme for particular children. The programme could benefit from a record-keeping system that could better inform programme monitoring and evaluation. Other improvements might include an electronic system to account for books and toys, and an improved text-messaging system for contacting families.
- Analysis of programme records showed that most children received the number of books and toys specified in the PCHP replication guidelines. While not all children received the recommended number of visits there was evidence of year-on-year improvement. Missed visits occurred for a variety of reasons including illness, holidays and bad weather.

#### *Programme reach*

The theoretical base and body of evidence that has underpinned the PCHP since its original development specifically call for delivery of the programme to children at risk of educational disadvantage.

In its developmental phase the Docklands PCHP concentrated on securing buy-in from the local community and on making sure Home Visitors were confident and competent. This, and the diversity of the local population, has seen the PCHP operate as a universal access programme. This is reflected in the range of social class groups represented in this study.

A non-targeted approach has allowed the programme to be welcomed among all social class groups in a non-stigmatising way. But, now that the programme is established, a more nuanced means of delivery that combines universal and targeted approaches could be adopted, thus ensuring that the programme reaches those most in need.

#### *Programme satisfaction*

Parent experiences of PCHP have been largely positive. These derive from:

- the warm relationship with their Home Visitor
- having a different and more enjoyable approach to reading and play
- more focused and quality time for parent and child
- the bond that developed between Home Visitor and child.

All parents were happy with the books and toys provided. Some suggested there were too many; others commented about the topic areas; and some would have welcomed guide sheets about how to use the materials between visits and after the programme ends.

The PCHP benefits also extend to other family members. Some older children participated in reading with their PCHP sibling and some PCHP children read to their very young sibling 'PCHP' style'.

## Programme outcomes

### *For children*

Most children were developing normally for their age but owing to the wide age-range and variation of family types involved in this study it is not possible to attribute child outcomes to participation in the PCHP. Nevertheless, the assessment of child outcomes provides important information for the future direction of PCHP and for the future assessment of programme outcomes:

- PCHP guidelines suggest that children start as young as 18 months. However, this makes it difficult to measure cognitive development and school readiness at the start of the programme. On the other hand, ensuring that children are close to each other in age and old enough to assess school readiness outcomes (minimum age: 2.5 years on programme commencement) risks missing the early learning window and the early modelling of interactive reading and play for parents.
- Children with English as a second language benefit from interaction with a native English speaker but these children cannot be expected to perform as well on tests administered in English rather than their native language.
- Formal assessment of children's suitability for the programme in terms of cognitive development, socio-economic status, educational background and home literacy environment at programme recruitment stage would help to ensure the programme reaches children in need. It also would make it easier to subsequently evaluate the programme for effectiveness.

### *For Home Visitors*

The PCHP Home Visitors expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their role. The PCHP has generated considerable personal and professional benefits that extend beyond them to their families. These include:

- How they now approach parenting, and how this ultimately benefits their own child's development
- Achieving accredited qualifications offered to them through the NCI has increased their confidence and professional development
- They feel respected by parents of all social groups and by their own families when they are asked for advice
- Enhanced social inclusion: Home Visitors now have the capacity to link groups such as immigrants, professionals and marginalised families to other activities in the community and the Early Learning Initiative.

Home Visitors do experience some challenges in carrying out their role, mainly cancelled visits. This can impact on their pay and make financial planning difficult. There is also a need to have more certainty about the Home Visitors' employment contract so that it is not construed as a casual contract.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The study shows how the PCHP in the Dublin Docklands has been implemented over the course of two years and examines outcomes for children and families. It is intended to serve as baseline information to inform the programme's future development. As with any community-based intervention it is clear that, in this programme, there has been a need to harness local interest and acceptance so that it can become recognised, wanted and established in the Docklands area. There has been a concentrated investment in this aspect of programme development; this augurs well for the long-term viability of PCHP in the Docklands.

The PCHP serves a diverse area and a non-targeted approach has brought benefits and elicited a high degree of satisfaction amongst all parents. Nevertheless, there is merit in ensuring that more children in educationally disadvantaged circumstances receive the programme.

For programme implementation, current systems for monitoring programme recruitment and delivery could be enhanced. This should ensure a more effective information management system.

Some unanticipated programme outcomes have been highlighted by this study, particularly for Home Visitors. Employing local women rather than para-professionals has helped the PCHP get off the ground and has created opportunities for them to grow in confidence, personally and professionally. Their involvement in the programme benefits their children as they now approach reading and play differently. They also feel they receive greater respect in the community and from their families. To a large extent they have become the public face of the ELI in the Docklands community.

# Introduction

**The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) at the National College of Ireland (NCI) seeks to address educational disadvantage in the Dublin Docklands. One of its activities is the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP), a home visiting programme that aims to enhance school readiness among children at risk of educational disadvantage. The programme originated in the USA.**

**This report presents the results of a baseline evaluation of the PCHP conducted over two-years between September 2009 and June 2011. This evaluation is one element of the Trinity College Dublin (TCD) Children's Research Centre's overall evaluation of the ELI's suite of child and family programmes<sup>1</sup>. The PCHP baseline evaluation examines programme implementation and outcomes across three domains: the programme; the Home Visitors; and children and their parents.**

## The Implementation Evaluation

The implementation evaluation aimed at an in-depth assessment of the PCHP through an examination of: organisation of programme delivery; reach; and stakeholder satisfaction. The following broad research questions outlined below guided the implementation evaluation:

Programme organisational aspects	Research questions
Programme delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the programme been delivered according to the programme replication standards?</li> <li>• What is the Home Visitors' experience of programme delivery?</li> </ul>
Programme reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the profile of families receiving the PCHP in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, home literacy and parenting practices?</li> </ul>
Programme satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do parents experience their involvement in the PCHP?</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> An evaluation of the ELI's professional development programme in community childcare centres in the Docklands was completed in July 2010. Share, M. Kerrins, L & Greene, S.

(2011). *Developing Early Years Professionalism*. Available at: [www.childrensresearchcentre.ie](http://www.childrensresearchcentre.ie)

### The Outcome Evaluation

The main aim of the **outcome evaluation** was to examine how participation in the PCHP impacts on children’s school readiness; a secondary aim was to examine the impact on Home Visitors of their involvement in the PCHP.

Outcomes	Research questions
For children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does child participation in each year of PCHP improve child cognitive development?</li> <li>• Does child participation in PCHP improve school readiness?</li> </ul>
For Home Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has the PCHP impacted on the personal and professional lives of the Home Visitors?</li> </ul>

The evaluation used a mixed-methods longitudinal design to assess programme implementation and outcomes<sup>2</sup>. We collected primary and secondary data between September 2009 and June 2011 during the PCHP pilot phase from a range of sources using multiple methods. Some data were collected at repeated intervals to assess progress over time. Data collected included:

- Standardised child development assessments
- Parent socio-demographics, parenting attitudes and home literacy environment
- Parental satisfaction interview at programme end
- Qualitative interviews with 11 Home Visitors over two programme years
- Focus groups with Home Visitors
- Programme Co-ordinator interviews
- Secondary analysis of programme records

The data presented in this report are mainly descriptive and relate how the PCHP has operated in the Docklands during its pilot phase (September, 2009-June, 2011). Furthermore, the report outlines outcomes achieved during this period for a sample of children and their parents and for the Home Visitors. It also provides detailed programme operational data. This is important to understanding the context in which outcomes have been achieved and the programme’s strengths and weaknesses. Through the use of descriptive case studies we hope to reliably portray the PCHP as it was conducted and to illuminate areas of strength and areas for further development.

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 2 provides more detail on research methodology

## Report structure

*Chapter 1* sets the stage on which this evaluation unfolds. We describe the local context in which the PCHP is delivered - the Dublin Docklands – an area that has been undergoing a programme of regeneration over the last decade. We then illustrate the three domains considered in this evaluation: the programme; the home visiting staff; and the families. We trace the background of the PCHP, how it was developed for delivery and its key components. We then introduce the programme staff – the Home Visitors and other programme staff who are vital to programme delivery. Finally, we introduce the families that have informed this study.

*Chapter 2* examines how the PCHP has been implemented in the Dublin Docklands. We draw on a range of source material derived from interviews, focus groups, programme records, programme manual and research literature to detail organisational and delivery aspects and level of satisfaction with the programme.

*Chapter 3* examines the PCHP in terms of the outcomes for children and their families during its pilot phase. Here we consider the children's development at programme commencement, how they progressed and how they fared on school readiness assessments at programme end.

*Chapter 4* provides an account of parents' experiences of the PCHP. It examines what they see as the programme's benefits and their suggestions for improvements.

*Chapter 5* details the personal and professional impact of the PCHP on Home Visitors. We trace their pathway into and through the PCHP and its impact on their lives.

*Chapter 6* discusses the evaluation findings. It draws some conclusions and offers some recommendations for future programme implementation and evaluation.



C H A P T E R

1

# Background

**This chapter sets the stage on which this evaluation unfolds. First, we describe the Dublin Docklands where the ELI delivers its Parent Child Home Programme. We then introduce the three domains considered within the evaluation of programme implementation and outcomes: the programme; the home visiting staff; and the children and families.**

## The Dublin Docklands

### *Physical regeneration*

The Dublin Docklands is an area of 526 hectares lying on both banks of the Liffey estuary. Formerly a heavily industrialised area, it has been undergoing a programme of urban regeneration for more than a decade. Like many other areas of inner-city Dublin, and other port neighbourhoods across the world, the Docklands faced the challenges of technological change across traditional industries. During the 1970s the area underwent significant change as a result of mechanisation and containerisation of shipping. The physical transformation of the Docklands to a large extent now masks the area's history and its rich cultural heritage as a vibrant port (Moore, 2008).

Deindustrialisation was evident in the long-term decline of traditional manufacturing industries, such as textiles, brewing and biscuit-making. Irish government industrial policy supported decentralisation and many companies were incentivised to relocate to the suburbs. The economic decline of the 1970s and 1980s saw wide-scale unemployment, particularly in inner-city communities, with associated widespread social problems. The decline of such areas continued into the early 1990s. They were considered undesirable places to live as a result of anti-social behaviour, drug-use and the activities of feuding criminal gangs.

In the 'Celtic Tiger' years (since the mid-1990s), government tax incentives and redesignation of planning zones changed the potential of the Docklands. With increased property values in waterfront and inner city areas a programme of regeneration was initiated, as in many other similar urban locations across the developed world (Barcelona, Cardiff, Melbourne, Boston etc). Regeneration has resulted in significant changes to the built environment. Public housing has been demolished and replaced by mixed private and social housing complexes and large-scale business development.



Today the Docklands contains a mixture of housing types: there are modern apartment complexes with mixed housing tenure; purpose-built duplex-style housing has replaced some of the traditional flats occupied by Dublin City Council tenants; and there is a remaining concentration of 1930s semi-detached and terraced housing. The Docklands has thus changed from a marginalised area to one with new communities of well-educated people who work and/or live there, resulting in a varied socio-demographic population.

The ELI catchment lies on the north and south of the River Liffey within four parish boundaries. On the north side, St Joseph's East Wall and St Laurence O'Toole's, Sheriff Street, and on the south side St Mary's, City Quay and St Patrick's, Ringsend. While much of the ELI catchment incorporates areas that have been physically transformed as a result of the Docklands regeneration, it also includes a small area in the north inner city that has been considered one of the most disadvantaged in inner city Dublin (Haase, 2009) with high levels of drug addiction, criminality and social services provision. Levels of educational attainment in this small area are generally low. In 2006 60% of residents were early school leavers.<sup>3</sup> Unemployment figures for the same period indicated that 32% of residents in this community were out of work.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the south inner city concentrations of socio-economic and educational disadvantage are also evident. One Enumerated Area (EA) in this locality had an unemployment level of 21% in 2006 with a staggering 64% of its residents listed as early school leavers for the same period.<sup>5</sup> These areas are in stark contrast to the sophisticated office buildings, shopping centres and gated apartment complexes that characterise the adjacent regenerated Docklands streets.

### *Social regeneration*

The first phase of the Dublin Docklands development (in the late 1980s) focused on technical infrastructure, with the development of the International Financial Services Centre [IFSC]. Planners and community members then acknowledged the need to attend to the social infrastructure or the 'social regeneration' of the area. It has been recognised that the first phase of development failed to adequately consider local residents' needs: with physical segregation and increased alienation of the local community due to the influx of professionals associated with the financial services sector, manifested in gated apartment complexes, high-rise office buildings and usurped community recreational spaces.

Furthermore, the supposed economic benefits of private investment had not extended to those who had, for decades, lived in circumstances of socio-economic marginalisation. As in other similar waterfront developments, state action had effectively supported a neo-liberal agenda of private rather than public-sector development (Moore, 2008).

It was in this context that the IFSC-based National College of Ireland (NCI), through its Early Learning Initiative, aimed to address educational disadvantage among those in the Docklands who had not benefited from the regeneration process. The NCI commissioned research to assess the level of need in the community. Axford and Whear (2006) surveyed parents (n=101) in disadvantaged pockets of the Docklands. That research found that while many parents have

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3 EA data from Census 2006 compiled by AIRO at the request of the CRC

4 EA data from Census 2006 compiled by AIRO at the request of the CRC

5 EA data from Census 2006 compiled by AIRO at the request of the CRC

high educational aspirations for their children – they want them to succeed where they failed (or feel they were failed) - they are not always sure what they can do to make this happen. Most parents reported that the information and support that they had received about parenting came through informal channels such as family, friends, books, magazines and television. Just under a quarter had attended a parenting course and they found this to be a positive experience; 77 per cent said they would attend a course on early learning if one were provided locally.

Many other stakeholders, as well as the NCI have been involved in efforts to address educational disadvantage: local schools that operate a range of programmes under the auspices of the DEIS programme; local community partnerships; and community organisations and other government-funded social inclusion measures. Since 1997 the Dublin Docklands Development Authority [DDDA] has played a significant role in the social regeneration of the area, through provision of educational programmes and funding to schools and community organisations. Recent economic decline has resulted in cuts to such programmes, though the DDDA continues to fund some child psychological tests in local primary schools. Some international companies have, for many years, supported programmes in Docklands primary schools that aim to tackle educational disadvantage: these are ongoing.

## **Introducing the Parent Child Home Programme**

### *Background*

The PCHP (previously the Mother Child Home Programme) was initiated in the United States in 1965 by Phylis Levenstein. It is a home visiting programme that supports parent-child interaction through the use of books and toys. Trained Home Visitors call to a mother-child dyad for 30 minutes twice-weekly over a two-year period (total of 46 visits per year) starting when the child is around two years of age. Each week the Home Visitor brings a toy or book (stimulus material) that is used to promote the child's language development. The Home Visitor sits with the mother and child and uses guidelines that have been developed for each set of stimulus materials, to engage the parent and child in the book or toy. The toy or book is left with the family as a gift and is reviewed in the second visit of the same week. This pattern continues for each year of the programme. The programme is free of charge to programme families.

The PCHP operates in 150 sites in the US and in Bermuda, Canada and, in recent years, Ireland. In Ireland the ELI has been the parent organisation for the development and operation of the PCHP in the Docklands. The programme has also been adopted by the Canal Communities Partnership based in the Bluebell/Inchicore area of Dublin, albeit on a much smaller scale than in the Docklands.

The PCHP differs in its approach to many other home visiting programmes. Home Visitors adopt a non-didactic style and do not counsel. They encourage play and verbal interaction between child and parent. The role of the Home Visitor is to promote the parent's involvement and they should 'fade into the background as soon as the parent begins to take over' (Levenstein et al., 2002: 334).

### *Theoretical foundations*

The PCHP has a strong interdisciplinary theoretical foundation, informed by the disciplines of psychology, linguistics, anthropology and sociology. It has been influenced particularly by the work of Vygotsky (1978) who emphasised the role of language and learning and social interaction in a child's development. It is also underpinned by theoretical works on child attachment, particularly Bronfenbrenner (1974), Ainsworth et al., (1978) and Bowlby (1951) and has been influenced by the research of Bernstein (1961) into the development of learning styles in UK working class families (Levenstein et al., 2002).

### *Target group*

The Parent Child Home Programme has been specifically designed for children and families at risk of poor educational outcomes. According to Levenstein and Levenstein (2008: 97-8) 'the goal of the PCHP is to close the achievement gap between poor and middle class children (and) Program site co-ordinators generally recruit participants who are considered to be at risk based on income, occupation and education'. Children who enter the programme are generally around age two but, according to the PCHP guidelines, can be as young as 16 months on programme commencement.

According to the PCHP national centre in the USA, the programme aims to reach families in which the parents are characterised by any of the following:

- Low-levels of education
- Low-income families
- Single-parent families
- Families who have cultural and/or language barriers that may inhibit school Involvement and success
- Families with teen parents
- Families whose children are deemed at-risk for low academic achievement and behavioural problems
- Families who do not have access to centre-based early childhood or parenting programmes
- Homeless families
- Families in which there is limited language stimulation at home
- Families with multiple risk factors.

### *Evidence of programme effectiveness*

A substantial body of US research evidence exists on the impact of the PCHP on children's academic attainment. A South Carolina PCHP programme examined the school readiness test results of four successive cohorts of children (n = 84) that had completed the two year programme. They were deemed to be at risk of low levels of cognitive development as a result of family poverty which could impact on their future success in school. When their school readiness test results were compared with the results of children for the state as a whole, the PCHP children had a slightly higher passing rate. State-wide school readiness results of children who received free school meals were compared to PCHP children who also received this entitlement. In this case the PCHP sub-group of free school meal children performed significantly better than their state-wide counterparts.

In addition to its impact on children's school readiness, the PCHP has also been shown to have a positive influence on programme participants' high school completion rates. Significantly higher rates of high school graduation, and lower rates of dropping out, were found among students who had completed two full years of the programme compared to a control group (Levenstein et al., 1998).

Recent US evaluations of the PCHP continue to indicate its positive impact on at-risk groups of children's school readiness. Allen et al. (2007) assessed the impact of the PCHP on children who resided in the eastern suburbs of New York. PCHP children and a comparison group who attended the same classes were assessed for early literacy, early reading ability, social emotional development and parental involvement. The study found that the PCHP children were *more socio-economically disadvantaged* than the comparison group. The programme was considered successful as the PCHP children were on the whole faring as well on school readiness indicators as their more advantaged peers.

Evaluation results also emphasise that the PCHP is mainly effective when it reaches its intended target group and has more limited success amongst children who enter the programme with normal cognitive development and educated parents (Levenstein et al., 1998). An evaluation of PCHP in Bermuda found that two-thirds of the parents in both the intervention and control group had a middle or upper class income and higher than twelfth grade education (Scarr & McCartney, 1988). Such results have led the programme developers to declare the 'futility and wastefulness' of attempts to prevent educational disadvantage among children who are not at risk (Levenstein et al., 1998: 271).

While evaluation results demonstrate that the PCHP can impact on at risk pre-schoolers' school readiness and later school achievement, individual programme components that specifically contribute to this impact are not easily identified. Nevertheless, according to Levenstein et al., (2002) a key strength of the programme is its success in sustaining parents' engagement over two years (Levenstein et al., 2002). The programme elements of bi-weekly visits help to sustain parent-child interaction as the child develops and after the programme has ceased. As Levenstein notes:

The PCHP itself fosters conceptual growth through both verbal interaction and by the constant discussion of specific attributes of the toys and books, and their relations to each other, leading to concepts and thus to cognitive development essential to attaining literacy and numeracy (Levenstein et al., 2002: 346).

## Bringing the PCHP to the Docklands

### *Background*

The PCHP in the Docklands commenced in 2007, initiated by the current Programme Director who had been involved in the organisation of the PCHP in the US. In the Docklands, apart from visits by the Public Health Nurse there was no local experience of home visiting programmes. In the Docklands, in contrast to the US, the PCHP is delivered by local women who are all mothers, rather than professionals. For these reasons the programme is considered by the programme designers to be innovative. As the Home Visitors came to their jobs with no prior experience of home visiting and because there was no history of home visiting in the community there was a good deal of sensitivity about the approach that could

be taken. It was, therefore, deemed to be important to get 'community buy-in' and the trust of enough families to start the programme: if it was not accepted locally then it would have difficulty in reaching its goals. Over time this approach has proven successful for the organisers, but it has also been realised that this has also resulted in unarticulated goals that relate to community development and the empowerment of Home Visitors (discussed in Chapter 6 of this report). The programme started out with just seven Home Visitors and sixteen families and operates in four parishes north and south of the Liffey.<sup>6</sup>

In autumn 2009 the ELI became an official PCHP replication site. In order to maintain this status an organisation must adhere to a set of programme standards known as Key Elements for Establishing Programme (KEEP) (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008). This consists of 41 items that deal with:

1. Before replication of the PCHP
2. The first two years of the PCHP
3. Home Visitor qualifications and training
4. Home Visitor in-service training and supervision
5. Parents and children in the PCHP
6. Home Sessions
7. Books, toys and curriculum
8. Co-ordinators administration of the PCHP
9. Maintaining data in the PCHP management information system

### *Staff recruitment*

The approach to attracting suitable staff differs to usual recruitment practices. An initial training session that takes place over five mornings is conducted with a pool of potential Home Visitor applicants. Over the past four years on average 25 participants have attended each of these sessions. At this time applicants can get a sense of whether or not they see themselves in the home visiting role. Following the initial training session participants are invited to apply for a job as a Home Visitor. Not everyone who attends the initial training session submits an application. This approach gives the Programme Co-ordinator a chance to see how the potential candidates interact and to evaluate applicants' literacy skills.

Overall there has been a high retention of home visiting staff. In 2007 six staff joined the programme and four have remained with it. In 2008 just one Home Visitor was recruited and remains with the programme. Four staff joined the PCHP in October 2009. Two Home Visitors were employed in September 2010 but are not included in this evaluation. Two of the first cohort of Home Visitors now hold the position of Co-ordinator (job-sharing arrangement) in addition to carrying out some home visits. These 11 Home Visitors have served a total (in 2009-2010) of 48 families, yielding an average of 4.3 families per Home Visitor. The range of families per Home Visitor served is two to seven but this can vary across a programme year. On average Home Visitors are employed for 10 hours each week, to include a weekly two-and-half hour group supervision session.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Families living within the boundaries of four parishes north and south of the Liffey: St Laurence O'Toole's Sheriff Street, St Joseph's, East Wall, St Mary's, City Quay and St Patrick's, Ringsend.

7 Prior to June 2010 supervision sessions were for two hours per week.

## Home Visitors

Rather than a specific educational requirement, PCHP selection guidelines focus on the personal qualities needed to be a successful Home Visitor. Home Visitors will be going into someone else's home, bringing a book or a toy to model and encourage reading and play – therefore they need to enjoy playing and reading with children; relate well to parents; demonstrate warmth and patience; and show themselves to be non-judgemental and adaptable. Ideally, they are recruited from the local community and have similar cultural backgrounds to the families being visited. They are there, not to teach, but to foster enthusiasm for learning and verbal interaction and encourage quality play and reading between parents and children. They should have personal views and qualities that fit with the ethos that underpins the Parent Child Home Programme and the ELI.

The Home Visitors are mothers who live in the Docklands area. Whereas in the US Home Visitors are regarded as para-professionals and are likely to have a third level education, in the Docklands the staff are less likely to hold degree level qualifications and some have not completed secondary education. Nevertheless, they have undergone a rigorous training and selection programme. They have, during the period of this evaluation (2009-2011), undertaken three accredited FETAC Level 5 training modules (Family and Community Studies; Personal Development; Health and Safety) in addition to other training in communications and speech and language. The PCHP training itself is not currently accredited. They participate in a further round of training at the start of each programme year.<sup>8</sup>

## Advertising and recruitment of participants

In the Docklands parents find out about the programme through a variety of channels: local pre-schools, road shows, word of mouth, public health nurses, primary schools and community centres. To date the PCHP has been offered to any family that expresses an interest and lives within the geographic area targeted by the ELI. This has been done to achieve local buy-in and to ensure that the programme was not stigmatised as a programme for disadvantaged people.

During the first training session in December 2007 for the recruitment of Home Visitors it was also made clear by the participants that many of the US PCHP's recruitment criteria would be inappropriate in the Docklands, especially those referring to income, marital status and education levels. The participants felt that families would be reluctant and/or refuse to answer 'personal, private' questions on income and education levels etc. There was the potential to generate negative word of mouth about the programme that would result in refusals. To ensure the success of the programme, it was deemed important that it be viewed by the local community as being *for them*, not imposed on them but also available to all.

During the period of this evaluation PCHP has not operated explicit selection criteria around educational disadvantage.<sup>9</sup> As the level of awareness about the programme has increased families that make contact are placed on a waiting list. The Programme Co-ordinators visit the families to ensure that they understand what the programme is about and what will be expected of them. If the Programme Co-ordinators consider that the family is suited to the programme they will be assigned a Home Visitor. The Home Visitor, accompanied by a Programme Co-ordinator undertakes an introductory visit. Families are asked to sign a contract and are provided with guidelines on how the programme operates.

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8 A comprehensive overview of the impact of the PCHP on the personal and professional lives of the Home Visitors is presented in Chapter 5.

9 It is noted that following the CRC's interim report submitted to the ELI in April 2010 that the ELI Review Board made a decision to review PCHP selection criteria.

## Introducing the children and parents

### *Background*

We aimed to find out what impact the PCHP had on children's school readiness. It was also important to understand who the programme reached in terms of socio-economic profile, home literacy environment and parenting practices, and how the children and families experienced involvement in the programme overall.

Knowing how stakeholder groups experience interventions is particularly important to understanding programme impact. Such evidence may provide insights into how unintended outcomes are achieved (Urau, 2001); furthermore, such an approach acknowledges the emergent and dynamic nature of programmes and the importance of understanding the context in which they are implemented and change in response to stakeholder perspectives (Sridharan & Naikama, 2010).

Two cohorts of children and their families provided their informed consent to participate in the evaluation:<sup>10,11</sup>

**Cohort A** (n = 14) comprised a sample (66%) of children and their parents in year two (their last year) of the PCHP (2009-2010).

**Cohort B** (n = 13) comprised a sample (76%) of children and their parents who were new programme entrants to the PCHP in September/October 2009. This Cohort completed the two year programme in June 2011.

For each cohort we obtained data at baseline and at programme end on: socio-demographic characteristics; home literacy environment; parent attitudes<sup>12</sup> toward parenting; and child physical and cognitive development.

### *Parent types*

To aid in the interpretation of the evaluation findings we use a parent typology, drawing on Levenstein and Levenstein's identification of two PCHP parent types: *Hesitators* and *Strivers*. They note that while the PCHP has served a diverse range of families over four decades, the vast majority come from low-income backgrounds with children at risk of educational disadvantage. Over the years and across all programmes they see consistent evidence that parents can be considered as one or other of these types.

*Striver* parent types are those who are socio-economically disadvantaged but who have a desire for their children to achieve. They are more likely to have graduated from high school. Such families do not differ greatly from middle class families other than in their socio-economic circumstances. Strivers are parents that the PCHP can access without too much difficulty:

If a parent-education or a pre-school program of almost any kind is offered to Strivers, they will enrol – although this does not guarantee that they will stay enrolled if the programme does not seem to be living up to its promise (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008: 37).

10 The study received ethical approval by the TCD School of Social Work and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee.

11 All families enrolled in PCHP in September 2009 were provided with information about the study by the PCHP Co-ordinator. Families were asked for permission to have their

contact details provided to the researchers. Twenty-seven families gave their permission. Further detail on the selection of the sample is at Appendix 2.

12 Baseline data only.

*Hesitater* parents are also socio-economically disadvantaged families but are much harder to reach. They, in contrast to the Strivers, are unlikely to join parenting programmes. Their home circumstances are likely to be highly pressured and they have their own problems to contend with, so they have little capacity to attend to their child's intellectual, social, emotional or physical needs. Levenstein and Levenstein portray Hesitater parents as differing from Strivers in terms of their motivation and in how they engage in the programme:

Their inertia was manifested in their lack of interaction with their children in the early Parent Child Home Program sessions and sometimes throughout the first year of the two-year program (Levenstein & Levenstein, 1998: 172).

While the typology used by the Levenstein's is useful, it is somewhat limited in the context of this evaluation and must be treated with a degree of caution. We must also consider that the PCHP in the Docklands has been delivered in a very different socio-economic and cultural context. The parents presented as Strivers in this evaluation consistently align with the motivation characteristic of the Striver families used by Levenstein and Levenstein but they are not highly socio-economically disadvantaged as they are in the US PCHP.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in order to capture the range of parent types involved in PCHP in the Docklands we have added a third category: Pedagogue. The Pedagogue parents have achieved third-level education and one or both parents are employed as professionals/ lower professionals. These parents have a strong interest in their child's academic attainment and expose their child to numerous structured learning opportunities.

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<sup>13</sup> According to Levenstein & Levenstein (2008), in 2005 the US PCHP had 65% of participating families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000; in 35% of families incomes were less than \$10,000; 65 % were single parent families. They describe the programme as having participants that have 'multiple strikes against them'.



## *Children*

To get a sense of the PCHP families in this evaluation some insights may be gained from introducing Felicity, Terry, Síofra<sup>14</sup>.

### **Felicity – Child of Hesitater parent**

Felicity is a girl aged two. She lives with her mother, six-year-old brother and four-year-old sister in a council flat. Sometimes Felicity spends time with her grandmother who lives in another flat in the same complex. Felicity attends the local crèche on three mornings a week to give her mother a break. Felicity's mother finished school after her Junior Certificate and attended a Youthreach Centre for two years until she had her first baby. Felicity's mother has been involved in a range of local community services. Felicity performed below average on her developmental assessments at programme commencement.

### **Terry – Child of Striver parent**

Terry is a boy aged three. His mother lives with him and his two older siblings aged ten and seven in a social-housing complex. Terry has a good time playing with his older siblings and learns a lot from them. Terry's mother left school early but has taken lots of courses and worked in the local childcare centre. She is very interested in children's learning and development. Terry performed well for his age on his developmental assessments at programme commencement.

### **Síofra – Child of Pedagogue parent**

Síofra is 19-month-old girl and an only child. She lives with her mother and father in a new apartment that they are purchasing. She attends a crèche on three mornings when her mother attends work as an administrator. Síofra's parents are interested in reading and have been reading with Síofra since she was born. Síofra attends a Gymboree on Saturday mornings and her mother from time-to-time attends a toddler group with her. Both of Síofra's parents have a third-level education. Síofra performed above average on all of her developmental assessments on programme commencement.

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<sup>14</sup> These names are pseudonyms. Each refers to a composite and representative participant and not to any individual child.



C H A P T E R

2

# Implementation of PCHP in the Docklands

**This chapter focuses on the implementation of the Docklands PCHP. It examines programme reach; how the programme was delivered; and programme organisation. We also assess parent satisfaction across these domains. In this chapter we draw primarily upon our analysis of PCHP programme records, supported with data from interviews conducted with programme staff and the PCHP parents. We make reference, where appropriate, to the PCHP replication standards, *Key Elements for Establishing Program (KEEP)* (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008) that have been outlined earlier to assess the extent to which the Docklands PCHP aligns with these standards.**

## Programme reach

17. Programme is provided to target populations with low-income or low level of literacy education or cultural/language barriers

19. Co-ordinator (occasionally an experienced Home Visitor or translator) conducts initial interview with parent

Here programme reach is considered firstly through an analysis of the approach to the recruitment of programme families. Following this we provide some detail on the families in this evaluation.

### *A targeted or universal programme?*

Any parent of a toddler, living in the Docklands can enquire about the programme. If the child is in the right age group their name is put on a waiting list. A Programme Co-ordinator interviews every family in their home and makes an assessment based on whether there are books and toys without batteries in the home. If the family is interested, and there is a place available, they join the programme. If a family is not accepted by the Co-ordinator it is likely the child is in full-time childcare or there is no Home Visitor available to take the family.

The Docklands PCHP has viewed its target as a spatially-defined catchment area rather than a particular socio-demographic target group. The catchment area, which has been defined by the ELI's funders, has a wide socio-demographic mix that can make it difficult to attract the 'target population'. The demographic situation in the Docklands can be considered more complex than in many of the communities where the PCHP is delivered in the US.

In the US, all children who enter the programme must undergo an IQ test and parents are required to provide income and education data. In the Docklands, as noted earlier, staff raised concerns about stigmatising people and the programme and so do not collect this data. There is a degree of discomfort about asking parents for personal information with concerns around social and legal issues. As a consequence the data collected on programme intake forms does not provide sufficient or reliable information to determine programme recipients' socio-economic profile or level of need for the programme; the absence of this data does not allow for the measurement of programme outcomes or accountability.

Interviews with programme staff have revealed that during the set-up phase of the programme the main aim was to get people interested: 'while we were getting the programme up and running, we basically took anybody that was interested. Now we are running ... we would be a bit more discriminating'.<sup>15</sup>

Further insight into promotion and recruitment derives from interviews with parents and Home Visitors. Recruitment has taken varied forms over the years – through Public Health Nurses, local schools, crèches, but now is mainly by word-of-mouth. Neither PCHP notices nor its website indicate a specific target group, so understandably parents have had the impression that it is a universal programme.

At their end of programme interview some parents expressed concerns about whether they should be receiving the programme and said they did not want to be taking the place of someone who may have needed it more. Nonetheless, they did see it as beneficial to them:

*Interviewer: So then what was it that made you say 'Yeah I want to do that', how -, what was the next thing that happened?*

*Participant: I rang (name) and spoke to (name) and (name) told me about the programme, and then she came down, she called in and we had a chat about it and she told me a bit more about it and I remember even at the time thinking 'Is this really for me?' because I was thinking I'm sure there's lots more people who are more deserving of this, like at that stage I was already reading with (child)*

*Interviewer: Yeah, I remember you saying you had done various things.*

*Participant: and so I was a bit kind of like 'Ohh' and I actually voiced it to (name), I said 'You know, I'm not sure' and she said 'Well look' she said 'you know, you're within the catchment area, you're very welcome to come and do it, there's no reason why you shouldn't', and so I was like 'Okay' I said 'Well, if somebody else more deserving comes along, let them have the place' because I do think it's an amazing programme and it was a privilege to kind of be a part of it, but I do, I do think, especially there was the American lady over who founded it and from what she was saying I'm thinking 'I don't fit that' –*

*Interviewer: You don't fit that?*

*Participant: erm, you know, that a child has never seen a book or a child has never come across a book, you know, I grew up in a house full of books and my kids grew up in houses of books, so even then I felt a bit guilty going 'Have I taken somebody else's place?' (Y1P4, Striver).*

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<sup>15</sup> The ELI reports that it is currently addressing this issue.

Here a similar level of anxiety was expressed by a Pedagogue parent who wanted it to be known that they were not in it for the free books and toys:

*but I don't want it, it's kind of we're not in it to get the stuff if you know what I mean?. . .We're in it for the experience. So I don't want to be taking stuff that should be going to other people (Y2P8, Pedagogue).*

Table 2.1 provides some detail about the socio-economic profile of the families involved in this evaluation. 16 Cohort B families (those who had completed a full programme cycle) were followed up at programme end to check on any changes to their living circumstances and adjustments have been made where necessary.

**Table 2:1** Characteristics of PCHP parent sample (n=23)

	Total
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	1
Female	22
<b>Age</b>	
Range	24-59
Mean age	36.1
<b>Parent status</b>	
Two-parent household	19
Parenting alone	4
<b>Education</b>	
Degree	4
Postgraduate (Masters/PhD)	5
Leaving Certificate	8
Lower secondary	6
<b>Nationality</b>	
Irish	16
Other	7
<b>Housing tenure</b>	
Owner occupier (with/without mortgage)	12
Local authority rental	5
Private rental	6
<b>Employment status</b>	
Employed	14
Unemployed	2
Home Duties	7
<b>Largest source of income</b>	
Salary/wages/self-employed	13
Social Welfare	10

16 The sample of parents (n = 23) does not align with the child sample. Although 25 children were administered developmental

assessments, two parents were unavailable to participate in the parent interviews.

Apart from one grandmother and one father the vast majority of parents were mothers. The average age of participating parents/carers was 36.1 years with ages ranging from 24 to 59 years. The majority reported that they were owner-occupiers (with a mortgage). The majority of PCHP children reside in two-parent households (19; 83%) with parents that have attained Leaving Certificate or a higher qualification (19; 83%). Four (17%) have obtained an undergraduate degree and five (21%) have a postgraduate qualification (Masters/PhD). Seven parents (30%) were born outside of Ireland. Most parents (14; 60%) were employed outside of the home either full or part-time, while seven reported that they were involved in home duties, and two reported that they were unemployed. Just over half of the parents reported that their largest source of income was obtained from wages/salary or self-employment (13; 52%), while the remainder were in receipt of social welfare payments (10; 43%). In many instances there was evidence that receiving social welfare was a recent experience.<sup>17</sup>

When we consider the parent sample in terms of the parent types identified earlier we find Strivers in the majority, followed by Pedagogues and Hesitators. In Cohort A there were seven Strivers, two Hesitators and three Pedagogues, (2 parents not interviewed). A similar profile was found in Cohort B: Striver: 7; Hesitator: 2 and Pedagogue: 4. To a large extent the profile of the families reflects the non-targeted approach to recruitment and is also reflective of the socio-demographic mix of the Docklands.

The programme has attracted participants from other cultural groups/nationalities, in line with the PCHP standards. Many of the Home Visitors have noted how they have found the programme to be beneficial for families whose first language is not English:

*Yeah, but I mean like, even with non-national families, I mean they're getting a great impact out of that by learning English. (HV2, Time 3)*

*I think it really benefits, you know, foreign families... Yeah, that don't have the English, I think that really, really benefits them. (HV7, Time 3)*

Nonetheless, some Home Visitors consider that although the programme has attracted families that come from other cultural backgrounds these families are not necessarily economically disadvantaged:

*Yeah, I think there's more of a foreign intake in the programme than there is an Irish intake in the programme. Now I'm not saying anything about that, I'm just talking about that they're middle class, whether they're foreign or Irish, and they're all – not wealthy – well off, and their kids are getting what they have to get from crèche, preschool and Montessori, and I'd just love to see it go in a different direction. (HV6, Time 3).<sup>18</sup>*

17 This evaluation was carried out during a period of economic decline owing to the Irish debt crisis and the property crash. This has been accompanied by a rapid increase in unemployment levels.

18 The Home Visitors' perspectives on this issue and the impact this has on the PCHP are outlined in more detail in Chapter 5.

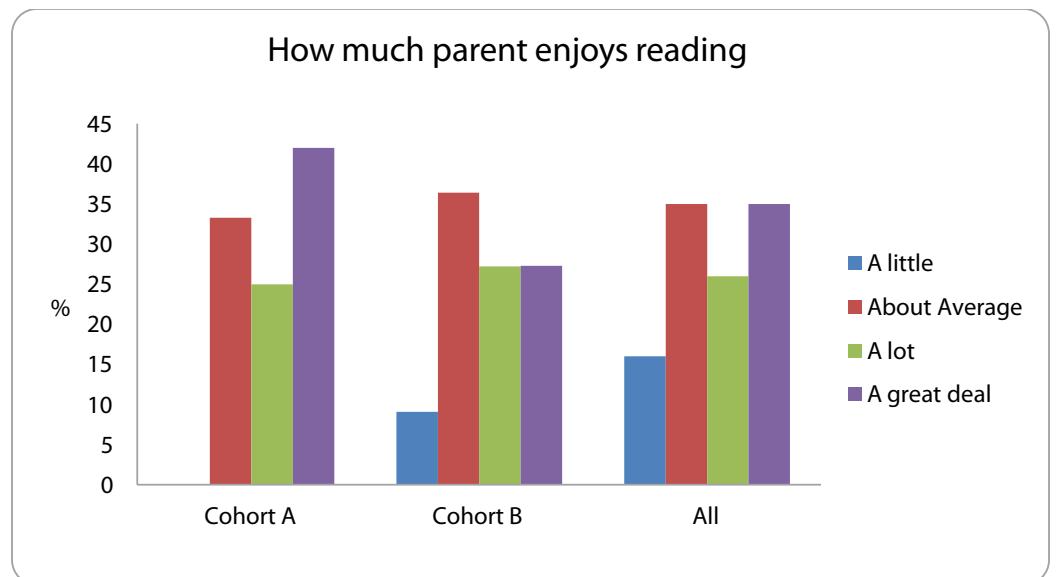
### Home Literacy Environment

As noted in the PCHP guidelines the programme is also designed to be offered to families with a low level of literacy. We have used the Home Literacy Environment questionnaire (Weigel et al., 2006) to elicit information on support for literacy practices in the home at baseline.<sup>19</sup> We administered the questionnaire to 23 parents in Cohort A and Cohort B of the PCHP. We asked parents about their own reading practices and the frequency of their interactions with their child in a number of areas that included reading, story-telling, rhyming, and playing games. We also examined other aspects of the home literacy environment such as television viewing, number of books in the home and visits to the library. In addition, parents were asked about their views on their child's educational progress. In the following we describe the Home Literacy Environment for the whole sample (n = 23) and by each cohort.

### Parents' reading practices

Parents were asked how much they enjoyed reading and how much time they read each day. Just over a quarter of parents (6; 26%) reported that they enjoyed reading 'a lot'; equal proportions (6; 35%) enjoyed reading 'about average' or 'a great deal'. Just one parent felt that they enjoyed reading a little (Figure 1).

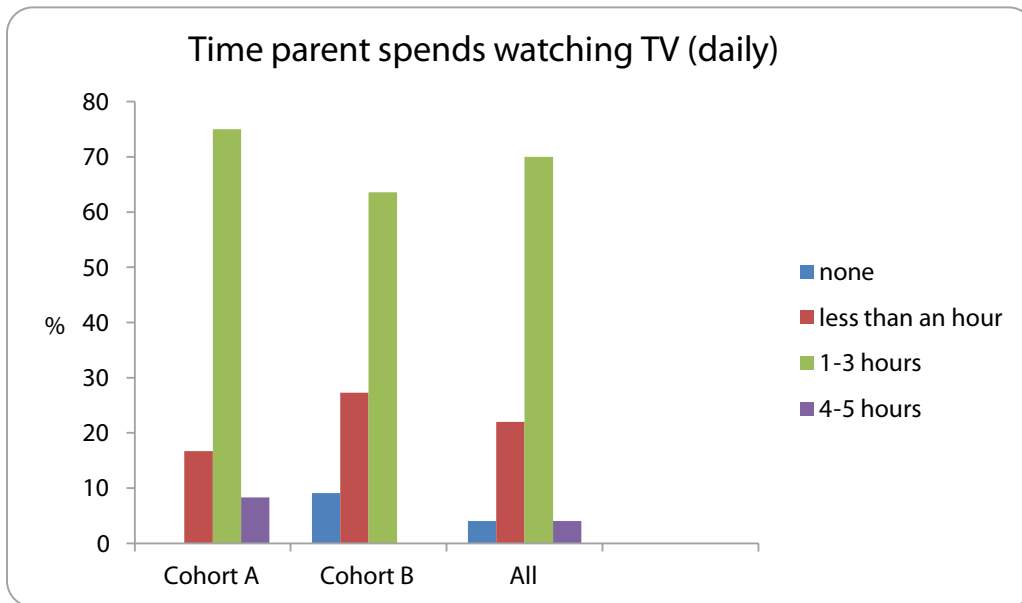
**Figure 1:** How much parent enjoys reading (baseline)



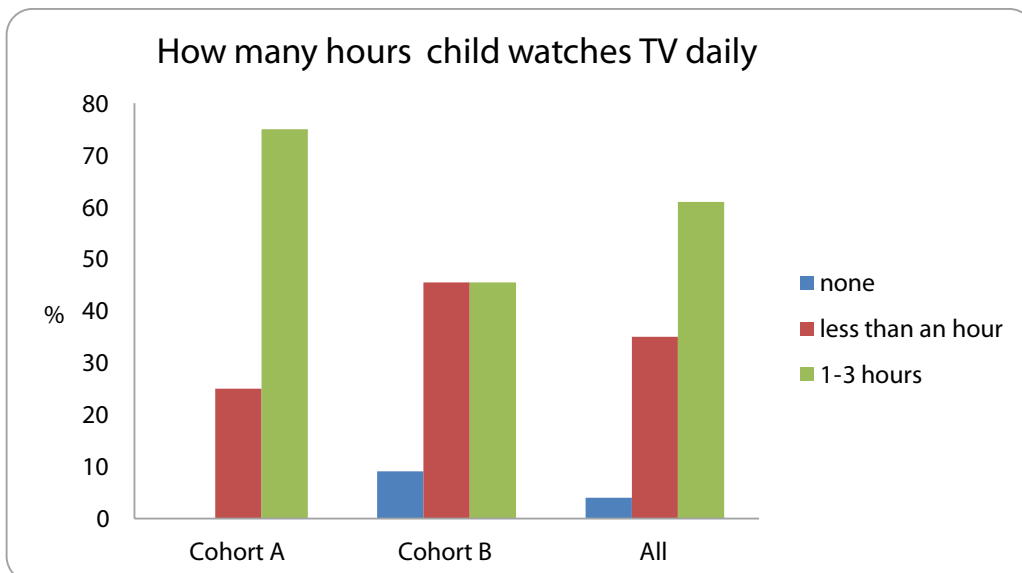
Just over two-thirds of parents (70%) reported that they watched television each day for between one and three hours; around one fifth (5; 22%) indicated that they watched for less than an hour. Equal proportions (4%) watched between four and five hours and none each day (Figure 2).

<sup>19</sup> This questionnaire was adapted from the Stony Brook Family Reading Survey (Whitehurst et al, 1994). It has been used in a US study of 79 parents to examine parental literacy

beliefs and how these were associated with literacy practices in the home and pre-school children's literacy development (Weigel et al., 2006).

**Figure 2:** Time parent spends watching TV daily (baseline)

In terms of overall television viewing, the majority of parents reported that their children watched between one and three hours each day (All: 61%; Cohort A: 75%; Cohort B: 46%); around one third (All: 35%; Cohort A: 25% Cohort B: 46%) watched television for less than an hour each day, while one parent reported that their child did not watch any television at all (Figure 3).

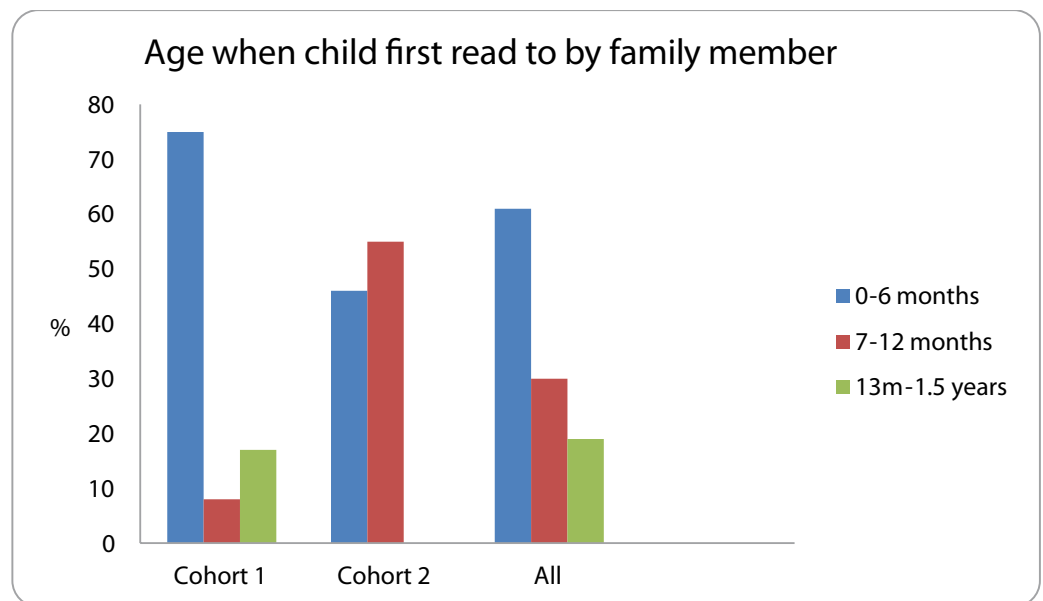
**Figure 3:** How often child watched TV daily



*Parent-child home literacy practices*

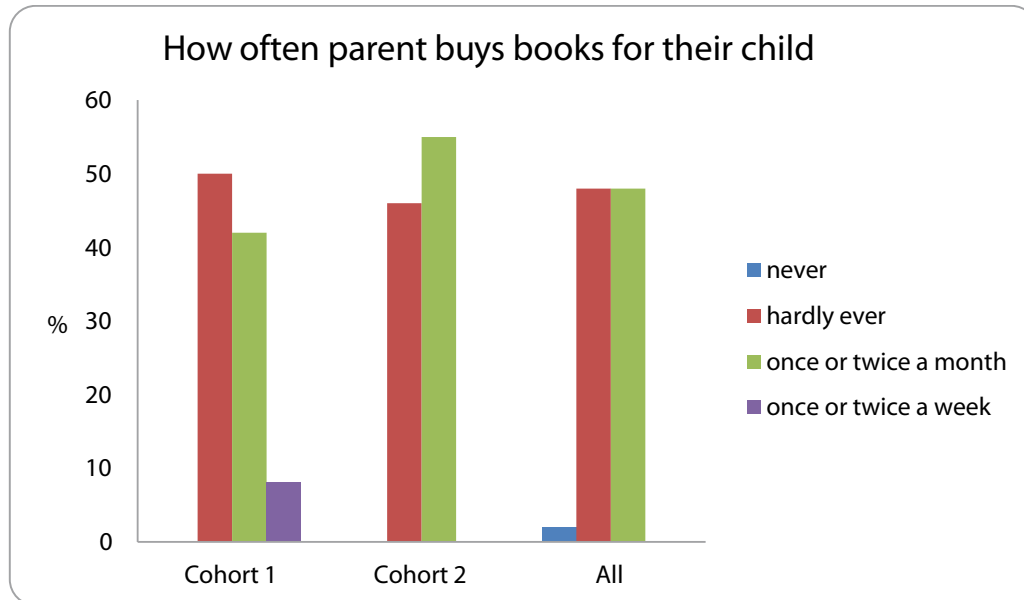
Most of the PCHP children were first read to by their parent or another family member when under six months old (61%). Some of these parents volunteered that they had read to their child when they were ‘still in the womb’. Around one third of parents (30%) reported that they (or another family member) began reading to their child when between seven and 12 months old. Just two parents indicated that reading with their child commenced when their child was aged 13 months to one-and-half years old. A greater proportion of Cohort A (75%) versus Cohort B children was first read to at the age of 0-6 months (Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** Age when child first read to by family member (baseline)



Parents were asked whether they had a regular reading time with their child. Almost all indicated that they had a regular reading time (All: 92%; Cohort A: 100%; Cohort B: 82%). In many instances this took place at the child’s bedtime.

We asked parents about the number of picture books they have in the home for their child’s use and how often they bought new or used books. Most reported that they have in excess of 20 picture books for their child’s use (All: 83%; Cohort A: 83%; Cohort B: 82%). They do not buy books very often: just under half reported that they ‘hardly ever’ bought books (48%). The same proportion (48%) indicated that they bought books once or twice a month (Figure 5). There was little difference between Cohort A and Cohort B with approximately half of each group reporting that they purchased books hardly ever or once or twice a month.

**Figure 5:** How often parents buy books for child

### *Parental beliefs about child's language and educational progression*

We asked a number of questions to gauge parental attitudes to their child's language development and future progression in the education system. Almost two thirds of parents considered that compared to other children of the same age, their child's language development was somewhat or way above average (15; 65%). Six parents (26%) reported that their child was about average and two felt that their child's language development was somewhat below average.

When they go to school the majority of this sample of PCHP parents expect that their child will enjoy school very much (13; 57%) and that their child will fare very well in school (61%).

Just over half of the parents expect their child to complete a college university degree (12; 52%) and around a quarter (6; 26%) expect that their child will undertake a post-graduate qualification. Four parents (17%) expect that their child will complete the Leaving Certificate, and one predicted that their child would complete the Leaving Certificate and undertake training for a trade.

### *Attitudes to parenting*

Attitudes and values towards parenting were assessed using the Parental Stress Scale (PSS). The PSS is a self-report scale that consists of 18 items that aim to capture positive components of parenthood (emotional benefits, self-enrichment, personal development) and negative components (demands on resources, opportunity costs and restrictions). Respondents are asked how much they agree or disagree with each item on a five-point rating scale (strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, strongly agree).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Berry & Jones (1995). Lowest possible score is 18 - highest score 90. High scores indicate high level of stress.

There was little difference between Cohort A and Cohort B parents at baseline in terms of their mean scores on the PSS: Cohort A: (M = 36.00, SD = 7.27); Cohort B: (M = 35.81, SD = 3.84). The difference was not statistically significant.

Overall these results indicate that the parents in this evaluation were positive about their parenting role.

## Age, gender and childcare experience of participants

18. Children are approximately aged two (can be as young as 16 months) at entry and are offered the programme for at least 46 weeks of visits over two years.

At enrolment PCHP children are expected to be around the age of twenty-four months but no younger than 16 months. Cohort B children who commenced PCHP in September/October 2009 ranged in age between 17 and 36 months (mean age 28 months). Cohort A children (in year two of the programme cycle in 2009-2010) ranged in age from 26 months to 51 months (mean age 37 months).

The average age of children in each Cohort was around two years on commencement. Nevertheless, a number of children were outside the age-range expected on enrolment. For example in Cohort A, one child was three years and three months, and another two years and nine months. Two others were a few months away from their third birthday. In Cohort B one child was aged three-and-a-half and another was aged two years and nine months.

Each Cohort was almost evenly divided between boys and girls. In the Docklands the majority of children attended a crèche, which diverges from the US programme. This perhaps reflects the complex nature of the Irish social and educational systems as well as the diversity of families that received the programme.

## Programme delivery

### *The Home Sessions*

23. Two home sessions per week in both Year 1 and Year 2 of the programme.

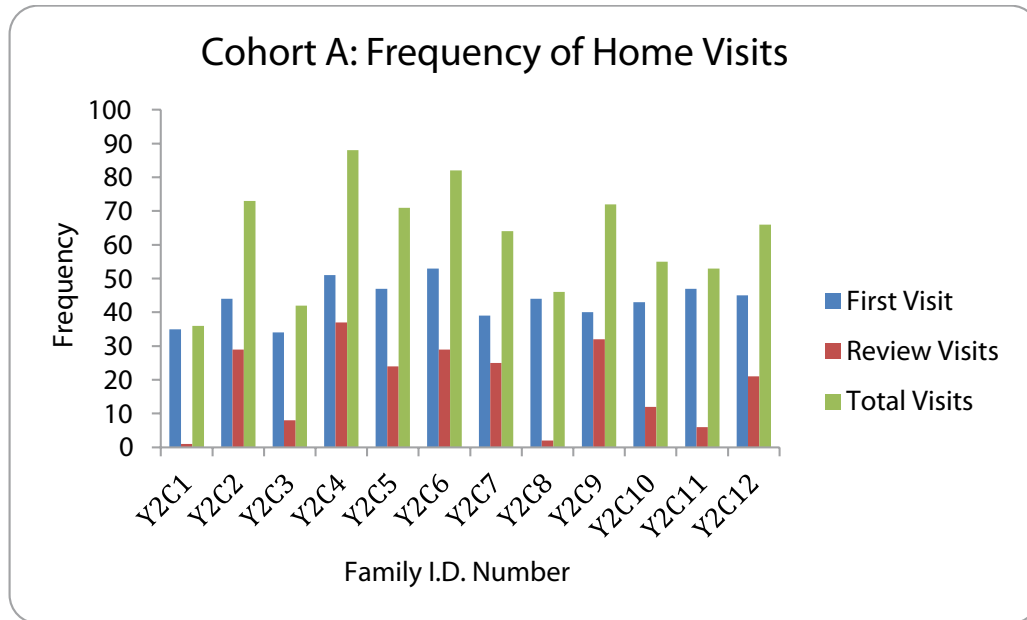
The programme replication standards contain four items related to the delivery of the home sessions in terms of their frequency, techniques, and the presence of parent/caregiver.

A Home Visitor is matched with each family and visits their home for 30 minutes twice a week on a schedule that is mutually convenient for the family and the Home Visitor. For instance, a Home Visitor might see one family in the mornings on Monday and Thursday while another family might prefer their visits in the afternoons on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The programme replication standards require a minimum of 23 30-minute visits twice a week for each parent-child dyad in each programme year. In effect this means that a child is expected to receive a minimum of 92 visits for the full two-year programme. Analysis of programme records for each Cohort of PCHP children indicates that children received below the minimum number of visits required.

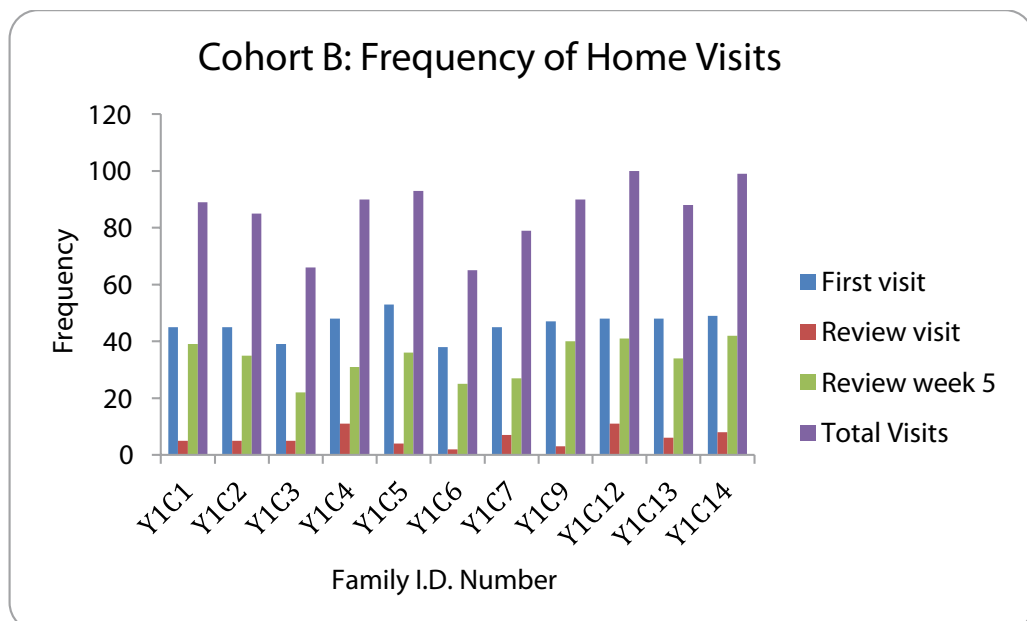
As Figure 6 shows Cohort A children received an average of 62 visits (between 36 - 88 visits) over the two-year period.

**Figure 6:** Cohort A: Frequency of Home Visits



For Cohort B, records indicate that an average of 86 visits (between 79 - 100 visits) were received over the two-year period (Figure 7). Although this is still below the minimum required number of visits, Cohort B received more visits compared to Cohort A, thus providing evidence that the delivery of the programme is improving each year.

**Figure 7:** Cohort B: Frequency of Home Visits



For several families in Cohort A there has been almost a complete absence of review visits. In some cases this seems to have been pre-arranged, to suit the family's desire to receive the programme just once a week. Additionally, in Cohort A, some families were enrolled as early as September 2008 and others as late as March 2009: some families will thus have received more visits, as they were involved with the programme for a longer period of time. In Cohort B, all families started in either September or October 2009. Furthermore, in Cohort B, there is a more even number of initial and review visits and adherence to the twice-weekly visits was less problematic.

Nonetheless, visits were missed in both Cohorts, which led to some families not having received the required 92 visits. From interviews with Home Visitors and from the Home Visitor record sheets, it emerges there are numerous reasons why this may have happened: child illness on the day of the scheduled visit; a national holiday; parent having been called into work at very short-notice, family having taken an extended holiday; or Home Visitor cancelling the visit. It is also important to note that visitation schedules were disrupted because of extreme weather conditions in January and December 2010, and in January 2011.

There are instances (in both Cohorts) when it is not clear why there are missed visits. The Home Visitor may go to the house at the agreed day and time and no-one will be home or else the parent will text or ring ahead of time to cancel without giving a reason. This is recorded in the Home Visitor notes for one family over five weeks (Table 2.2). In these instances, the Home Visitor attempts to change the agreed day and time and attempts to send reminders, but it seems a minority of families still find it difficult to be present for the twice-weekly visits. These situations cause difficulties on a number of levels. Firstly, the child does not receive the intended programme and the Home Visitors must figure out how to catch up at the next visit. In addition, the Home Visitor often must spend extra time trying to engage the child and build trust and rapport once again. These cancelled visits have practical implications for the Home Visitors, not least of which is the impact on their take-home pay.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 2.2:** Home Visit Records: A sequence of missed visits

<b>2/3/2010</b>	Called	no answer [at door]
<b>3/3/2010</b>	Cancelled	HV had doctor's visit
<b>9/3/2010</b>	Called	no answer [at door]
<b>9/3/2010</b>	Called	no answer [at door]
<b>10/3/2010</b>	Called	not in
<b>17/3/2010</b>	Missed visit	Paddy's Day
<b>18/3/2010</b>	Missed visit	Paddy's Day
<b>23/3/2010</b>	Called	no answer [at door]
<b>24/3/2010</b>	Called	no answer [at door]
<b>13/4/2010</b>	Called	no answer [at door]
<b>14/4/2010</b>	Called	not in; rang mother and she was out shopping

<sup>21</sup> These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

According to the Home Visitors, cancelled visits over an extended period have been more prevalent among non-Irish families who return to their home countries at frequent intervals and for extended periods. This occurs when the family takes an extended holiday or when the family must suddenly leave because of a bereavement or family crisis. In these cases, there has been some uncertainty among programme staff about whether or not these families should cease the programme, but by this stage it is quite late in the programme year to enrol new families.

#### 24. At least one parent or primary care giver at each home session

The analysis of the Home Visit record sheets indicate that in all cases a parent or primary care giver was present at each home session.

#### 25. Home session techniques – Home Visitor models interactions

At the first visit in the week, a Home Visitor brings a book or toy to the programme child. During this visit, the Home Visitor models behaviours aimed to enhance the child's development. The Home Visitor uses the book or toy to create a sense of enthusiasm for learning and to encourage verbal interaction.

For example, at the first visit, a Home Visitor might bring the book *Goodnight Moon* to the family. At this visit, the Home Visitor will sit with the parent and child and go through the book, reading the book and taking time on each page to point out different objects and colours and asking the child questions about what is happening on each page, encouraging the child to talk and point out interesting things in the book. This is illustrated in the Home Visit record sheets below.

I [Home Visitor] read first and [child] was saying how he liked the light on at night. [Child] spoke about different animals he saw and kept finding the mouse. Mother was brilliant spoke to [child] about how the rabbit settled down to sleep and asked child what he saw in the pictures on the walls, asked child the colours of the clock and how it was dangerous to sleep in the fire place. (Book: *Goodnight Moon*, Y1C7)

In their interviews the Home Visitors reported on the range of techniques they use to engage parent and child during a visit. In the early days of the first year Home Visitors can be challenged when a child is shy or less involved. Home Visitors must try out different techniques to engage the child and/or parent. Such techniques include: sitting on the floor; using the book or toy that the child prefers (their own) to the one that is scheduled for the visit; following the parent into the kitchen; singing/dancing; or encouraging the parent to read part of the book:

*I'd say "oh ma, will we show mammy this?" and try and draw her back in to the session oh look at this and, oh come on, if I had something to play with it's ah come on there and we'll see can we. (HV11, Time 1)*

*But, I find what works well would be if, say if the child wasn't interested and he was rambling off around and all, you might say like, have the book and say, "oh god I wonder what goes on the next page, what's going to happen" and make a game out of it. Or even, you think they're not listening and just keep going on and on and on and they might say, "oh, that was the blue one ... you said that earlier" and you can see, you can play little games with them and when you, you get to know the child that little bit better, it's easier. (HV3, Time 1)*

Parents have also noted these interaction techniques. They illustrated strategies used by the Home Visitor to engage a child when they appear uninterested:

*But like I remember one particular time when (Home Visitor) did come down, I don't think it was a book I think it could have been a game because she does love the books. And (Home Visitor) brought down the game and played and I'd say five minutes (child) was, Ah, I'm not having any of this and she kind of just left the game and started walking around. So (Home Visitor) said, do you want to do this? No, no, no. (Home Visitor) said well okay, so I think we'll sing a song. So (Home Visitor) starts singing Dora to her and the whole lot and of course that grabbed her attention and she was back over and she was sitting there and we'll say if they're not interested in what they have the girls just will do their own thing, sing a song and do whatever which I thought was great because it actually kept her attention, you know that way. (Y2P11, Striver)*

*Initially, because you don't know them from Adam, and because (child) wouldn't want to read the book or anything I was thinking, is this ok? And like that, she might have (Home Visitor) crawling around on her hands and knees on the floor and I would think, god I'm scarlet. But, but then just as time goes on, you build up a relationship with that person, so you're comfortable. (Y1P9, Striver)*

*So she's gone. But she sat and (Home Visitor) read to the dog and suddenly this carrying on and this - and (child) like... And it was just really clever because she could have tried for ages trying to engage her and she'd have only got worse, but the minute she just ignored her and continued reading the story to the dog, you could just see her, she was kind of, she came around and she wanted to hear. (Y1P4, Striver)*

## 26. Home Sessions ultimate aim: Parent leads, Home Visitor follows

The aim is for the Home Visitor to 'fade in to the background' so that the parent leads - reading and playing with the child. According to the Programme Co-ordinators, in the beginning the Home Visitor is doing 90% of the work to engage the child and parents and over the course of the programme the parent takes on more, so that by programme end they are doing 90% of the work. After Christmas in year two of the programme the Programme Co-ordinators remind the Home Visitors that the 'push is on' so that the parent takes over.

The analysis of the Home Visitor record sheets, interviews with the Home Visiting staff and parent interviews provide some more insight into how this lead up to the engagement of parents takes place. These also show how the different parent types engage:

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Interviewer | <i>And so when [the Home Visitor] was gone, did you use the books and toys?</i>  |
| Participant | <i>Oh God, yeah. Like, I'd sit there and I would - If I wasn't busy we'd sit and I'd say come on we'll go through this book and I'd like - we'd bring it up to bed. And he'd be going through the book and nearly reading the story back at you, you know.</i> |
| Interviewer | <i>Yeah, did it change the way you read or interacted with him at all?</i>   |

- Participant *Em. Well, I suppose it gave me more eh, education-wise, like. To really get into the story you know like you can just pick up a book and read the story blah blah blah blah blah. But you'd kind of be like doing the actions and say like you'd have to say like "No David" [putting emphasis on word No] you know like. And he used to be like fascinated with that.*
- Interviewer *Yeah, so you'd kind of get more involved*
- Participant *Get more - yeah. Because [before] I'd be just reading the story. Like with me own children we'd just be reading the story. And, [thinking] god is he asleep yet? [laughing] (Y1P1, Striver)*

<b>1st Initial Visit</b>	Brown Bear - Child loved the book. It was the first visit, father trying to tell child to sit.
<b>2nd Initial Visit</b>	Stacking Cups - Child's eyes lit up and played for 45 minutes, made tower and built and knocked down, matched colours with animals in previous book (Brown Bear). Mother just sat back.
<b>3rd Initial Visit</b>	Visitor tried to get her to read 'Where's Spot?'. Child loved playing with flaps, also played with previous toy (Stacking Cups) and sang songs. Mother just sat back
<b>Several Visits Later</b>	1. Animal Snap - Initial Visit: Child loved them, Home Visitor explained how to play and dealt out cards. Mother played as well. Home Visitor talking with child about sharing when child upset. Home Visitor notes say cards were great for getting parents involved & Review Visit: Cards ready and waiting, child showing Home Visitor and mother how to play. Child trying to win. Mother took part as well, also paired cards and matched colours. (HV notes; Y1C12 (Hesitater))



## Books, toys and curriculum

### 29. Books and toys are presented weekly in developmentally appropriate sequence

The Programme Co-ordinators select the books, educational toys or materials that are the curricular materials for the home visits. The programme criteria provide an element of choice in material selection so that it suits the language and cultural needs of the local community. In the Docklands PCHP most of the materials are the same as for the US PCHP, but some adjustment has been made. The Co-ordinator has done this on the basis of her own experience, the cultural appropriateness of the US materials and the advice of the home visiting staff.<sup>22</sup>

The programme guidelines stipulate that books and toys should be presented to families weekly in a developmentally appropriate sequence. According to the Programme Co-ordinator the materials are presented to children with attention to a developmental sequence. In the first year the child's attention span is an important consideration. In the second year, books are used that have 'slightly more complex stories where there is a little story line going through it' (Programme Co-ordinator).

Interviews with parents highlight that they were satisfied with the type and range of materials received. While both Home Visitor reports and parent reports have shown that some children may already have some of the books, several parents pointed out that they had been introduced to toys and books they would not have chosen themselves. This was particularly the case for the Pedagogue-type parent:

*One of the things that I like is that (child's name) gets exposure to activities and books that I probably wouldn't consider and probably something that would be too loud even if it was age appropriate and it is very loud and it is simplistic but he absolutely loves it and every child that comes into the house loves it, so it's getting the perspective of somebody else on what is probably age appropriate that we might not consider as age appropriate. (Y2P8, Pedagogue)*

*I think the products were really good, like we still play with the jigsaws and stuff that maybe I wouldn't have known to buy, crafty things, there was a few craft things now that I wouldn't have known about that have been really good. (Y1P7, Pedagogue)*

Each week, the same materials are typically given to each family. This helps to ensure each child is at the same stage in the programme and allows Home Visitors to discuss in supervision the book or toy they are using that week. In the Docklands, families did generally receive the same materials, though not in the same sequence. Some families (especially in Cohort A) had long breaks between visits for various reasons that included family holidays, illness etc and therefore the sequence of books and toys received varied considerably between families. In Cohort B there is more adherence to the sequencing and spacing of books and toys; but with some differences between families.

When Home Visitors try to engage children and parents they may use a book or toy that the child prefers. At times this is an extra book the Home Visitor has brought or one they think the child might enjoy. For example, if the child likes dinosaurs, the Home Visitor might choose a book with dinosaurs in it.

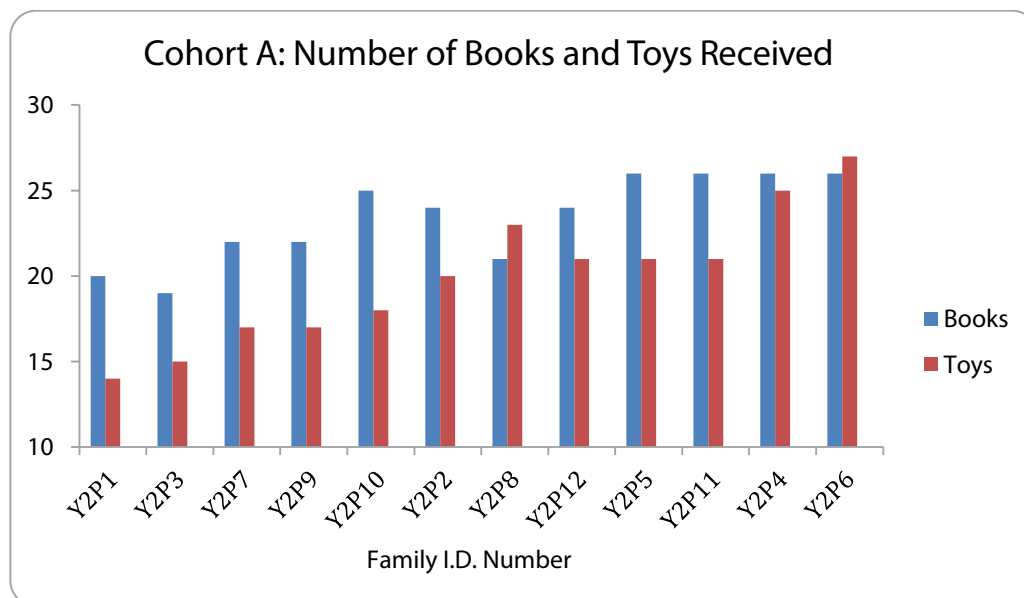
<sup>22</sup> A list of books and toys presented during years one and two of the programme is at Appendix 1.

At times, it is unclear why the sequence is changed and it would perhaps be useful to maintain a record of any divergence from the intended sequence.

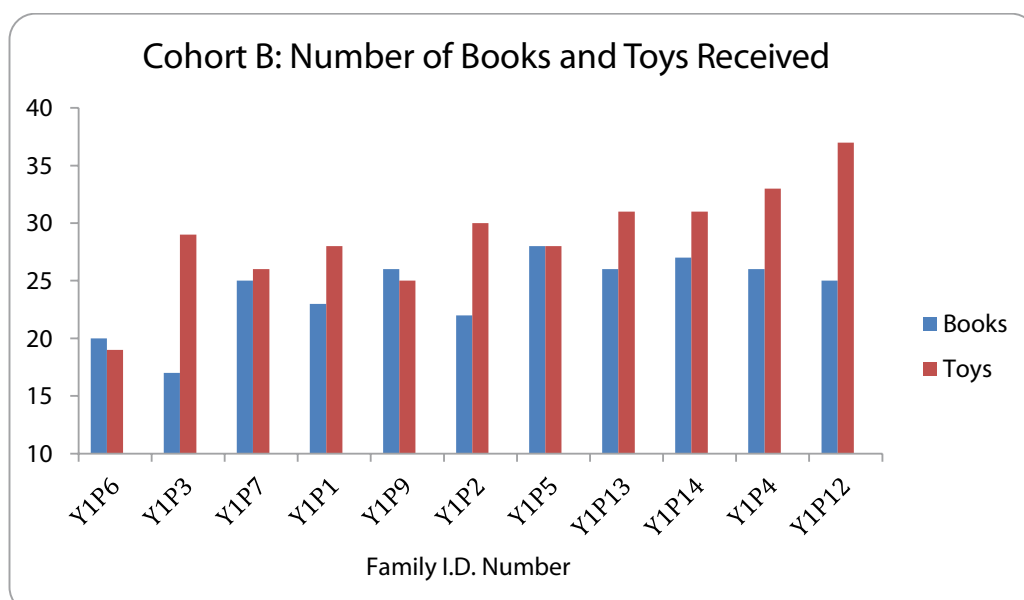
28. A minimum of 12 books and 11 toys are given to families each year over a minimum of twenty-three weeks (46 home sessions) per programme year.

PCHP guidelines specify that families should receive 24 books and 22 toys over the two years of the programme. Cohort A families received on average 23 books (19-26) and 20 toys (14-25) (Figure 8). This is slightly below the recommended number. It is likely families in Cohort A received fewer books and toys because of the previously mentioned issues around programme starting dates and the number of missed visits. Cohort B families received an average 24 books (17-28) and 29 toys (19-37) (Figure 9). This is within the recommended guidelines.

**Figure 8:** Cohort A: Number of Books and Toys Received



**Figure 9:** Cohort B: Number of Books and Toys Received



There are a number of reasons why there are differences in the amount of books and toys received. These include the number of missed visits by some families; the variation in programme starting dates; the need for Home Visitors to bring 'back-up materials' in case a child does not engage with the material scheduled for a particular visit; and the change that took place in 2010-2011 programme year when the amount of materials provided to families was reduced. In 2010-2011 the programme sequence was revised so that on the fifth week a thematic review of the previous four weeks' materials took place. The reason for this related to both cost savings and feedback from the parents via Home Visitors, and in the end of year reviews conducted by Programme Co-ordinators with parents. The Home Visitors suggested that more reflection from children and parents on the previous four weeks of materials would be beneficial for everyone. In addition, parents mentioned they disliked how comfortable the children were becoming in expecting a book or toy each time from the Home Visitor. At the end of programme year 2010/2011 the Home Visitors consider this to be a successful adjustment to programme delivery.

30. For each book or toy, the Home Visitor and family receive a guide sheet which the site may develop from the National Centre's model.

Item 30 of the PCHP replication standards requires that a guide sheet be left with parents outlining how the book or toy can be used to promote early literacy and verbal communication. It was unclear from Home Visitor notes or from interviews with parents/staff whether this took place. While Home Visitors and Programme Co-ordinators are clear about what is supposed to happen in each visit, some parents expressed confusion about their own role in the visits:

*Participant: Yeah because (child) wouldn't play with the toy sometimes, I didn't know, you know, (pause) in (name of crèche) what they do is you get your book at the end of the year and then, they'll say 'They were playing with straws and this was for fine-motor and they were playing with this and it was for gross-motor', and I just thought 'Oh that'd be really handy', like, if there was a little hand out to give to the parent to say –*

*Interviewer: Is that an improvement you'd recommend then?*

*Participant: Yeah definitely, that you'd kind of say 'Right, we...' because sometimes you'd get a puzzle or you'd get something and you're like 'What's the purpose?' like 'Why are we doing this?' or 'What's to be learned from this?' Whereas if there was even just a little note that came with it, that kind of went 'This is for developing this skill' or 'Getting...' (Y1P4, Striver)*

*See I think it might not have even been in the beginning that -, it wasn't very explicitly said, they might have said 'You just stay with us' or whatever, but I don't think it was very explicit about you know, 'We'll teach you some skills on what to do later, I don't think it was' (Y1P7, Pedagogue)*

*Interviewer: Yeah. And – just in terms of improvements on the programme, was there anything you would change about – about the visits or about the materials or – or anything at all?*

*Participant: No, I suppose ... I think I would put more focus on the parent – on what the parent's role in the play. I think that would be the only thing I would say that – like initially, that - like initially because you are a bit unsure about how involved are you meant to get, you know? Now, obviously she did probably say it at that first thing, but you know when you just don't know yet, but that would be the only thing that I would say. Because, as I said, listening to other people who their children were in the programme – some of them didn't get as involved. I suppose maybe that's ok, that they didn't want to – but if that's the whole idea of the programme – well then maybe they should put more emphasis on that. Not that you have to play, you know, but that maybe ...if people don't really realise that ... the more the parent gets involved, if that's the better benefit ... Cause I suppose that's where they're from, is trying to equip you with the ... skills to carry it on. (Y1P9, Striver)*

A guide sheet that explicitly outlines how a parent or caregiver can use the book or toy could aid the review visit, so that when a Home Visitor returns for the second visit of the week to re-visit the book or toy that had been given previously, they can ask the parent if the guide sheet had been useful and find out if the parent and child had been using the book or toy as intended. It also acts as a gentle reminder for the parent to use the materials to interact with their child rather than leaving them alone to play or look at a book.

## **Programme organisation**

The implementation evaluation examined certain organisational aspects of the PCHP to find out how the PCHP organisational systems support the programme and the extent to which these are aligned with key replication standards. The programme replication standards outline a number of areas that concern key organisational aspects of the PCHP. These are: Home Visitors' in-service training and supervision and the administration of the PCHP.

### *Training and supervision*

A key element of the PCHP is the ongoing support and supervision of the programme staff. In the Docklands PCHP group supervision takes place every Monday morning for two-and-a-half hours. The Programme Co-ordinator considers the supervision session to be 'core to keeping the whole group together'. The importance of group cohesion must be considered in the context that the Home Visitors operate as individuals when they conduct their home visiting sessions in the local community. They do not have an office that they can use as a base when they might be able to confer with other Home Visitors, though they do call to the ELI office to collect materials and may connect with other Home Visitors as they go about their visits. The Home Visitors are encouraged to use the ELI office and have access to the NCI library, meeting room and canteen facilities. The group supervision session is therefore important to providing a physical space where staff can meet.

Interviews and focus groups with the Home Visitors support the Programme Co-ordinator's perspective on the importance of the weekly supervision sessions. Home Visitors have not wavered in their views on the usefulness of the supervision sessions over the two-year period of the evaluation. These sessions provide them with an opportunity to share ideas and difficulties. All Home Visitors were keen to point out that they have learned and continue to learn new things from each other about how to engage children and parents:

*We share it out, we share the experiences out, we all help each other and if there's any problems at all we always solve them out. (HV10, Time 1)*

*And then when you go to supervision you get great feedback and with all the other Home Visitors. So it's ongoing. So I mean something I could be doing with a child and maybe the child was kind of, not kinda doing it right, someone else could say well why don't you try this or why don't you try that so you go back and try that and then that might work. So it's, everyone has an input. (HV2, Time 1)*

*Supervision does work for me. If I do have an issue and I bring it, yeah, I walk out of supervision with, I suppose a clarity, a clearer mind on what way I will handle it, what suggestions have been given, and what way, what suggestions I'm going to take on, and what way I'm going to handle it. Yeah, definitely, definitely, definitely. I don't think you would be as successful without supervision. (HV6, Time 3)*

*So for me that, because I would very much rely on supervision as being really important, when you're out there on your own all week, and then you have somewhere that you can go if you are having a problem, so for me that was the most important aspect of the training, was the team work. (HV8, Time 3)*

Although Home Visitors strongly endorse the value of the supervision sessions, over the course of this evaluation some changes have occurred that indicate alternative approaches may be warranted. These changes include the appointment of two experienced home visiting staff to the position of Programme Co-ordinator in a job-sharing arrangement; the up-skilling of the Home Visitors through their completion of three FETAC Level 5 training modules; and the general level of experience that has accumulated amongst the Home Visitors. There may be merit therefore in rotating the leadership of the supervision session.<sup>23</sup> This should also be viewed in the context that the PCHP, as part of the ELI, endorses community development practices and principles and indeed regards the PCHP as a community development programme that empowers the Home Visitors.

The US PCHP National Centre requires that replication sites provide some space and equipment for programme coordination, and this has occurred at the NCI. While it does not require sites to provide desks and space for the Home Visitors it does consider that this can add to the morale of the staff. Some Home Visitors in this evaluation have spoken about the occasionally uncomfortable conditions of the supervision sessions:

*The only problems that I would have is like we need a room, we need a proper room, the room is tiny downstairs, it's ridiculous (HV4, Time 3).*

*It's just that the atmosphere - I don't know. I mean, last week the room was so warm... There was another crowd that was ... Bluebell was with us, and now, it was really stifling, and I was kind of sitting at the corner and I couldn't even breathe ... There wasn't a breath of air, no air conditioning, nothing, you know? (HV2, Time 3)*

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<sup>23</sup> The ELI reports that it plans to do this during 2012.

## Administration of the PCHP

The Docklands PCHP has appointed two Programme Co-ordinators in a job-sharing arrangement to support the National Co-ordinator in the day-to-day administration of the programme. These Programme Co-ordinators have also maintained their home visiting role and can provide a very important link between the programme management and the home visiting team. While these are relatively new positions there is merit in undertaking an assessment of their training needs and opportunities for increased responsibilities and progression.

The replication standards outline a number of programme requirements in relation to the administration of the PCHP that include, family files, work flow sheets and a monitoring system for books and toys.

### 10. Home Visitor writes a home session record after each home session

After the first visit of the week the Home Visitor completes a record sheet about the visit documenting: book or toy that was given; date of visit; people present; how the child reacted to the book or toy; how parent(s) or others participated during the session; and other reactions, impressions, questions for supervision (See Box)

Book/Toy given	Toy: Doctor's Kit
Date of Visit	19/11/2009
People Present	Mother, child
How child reacted	Today child joined in, wanted to open the kit. When we started to play, child took out stethoscope and pretended to listen to teddy's heart. We pretended to give medicine.
How parent(s) participated	Mother joined in pretending to take bear's temperature, looking in ears and throat. Child liked the glass in the kit and seemed to enjoy writing on the pad.
Other reactions, impressions, questions for supervision	Blank

At the second visit of the week, the Home Visitor returns to the family, but does not bring a new book or toy. Instead, the Home Visitor is there to revisit the book or toy that was brought earlier in the week and to observe the interaction between the parent and child. After this visit, the Home Visitor fills in a record sheet about the return visit, documenting: date; people present at the visit; whether book/toy was available for review; whether the parent and child demonstrated use of book or toy; and other reactions, impressions, questions for supervision (See Box).

Date	13/11/2009
People present	Mother, Child
Book/Toy available for review?	Yes
Did parent/child demonstrate that the book or toy had been used	Mother had it opened, child joined in today, putting glasses on everyone. Mother took over visit, showing child how to play, asking child what to do with kit. Visit went well, child needs time to come around can say and do a lot depending on mood.
Other reactions, impressions/ questions for supervision:	Blank

These forms can be used to assess how many visits each family received, how many books/toys were received and to what extent families used them between the initial and review visits. The notes can also be used to help observe any patterns of difficulties with, for instance, a specific book or with a specific family.

While the home visit record sheets may be useful for reflecting on child progress or issues that arise during the visit, our analysis of these records indicates that there is room to enhance current practice in this area. In some cases the record sheets make it clear the parent and child had been using the book/toy:

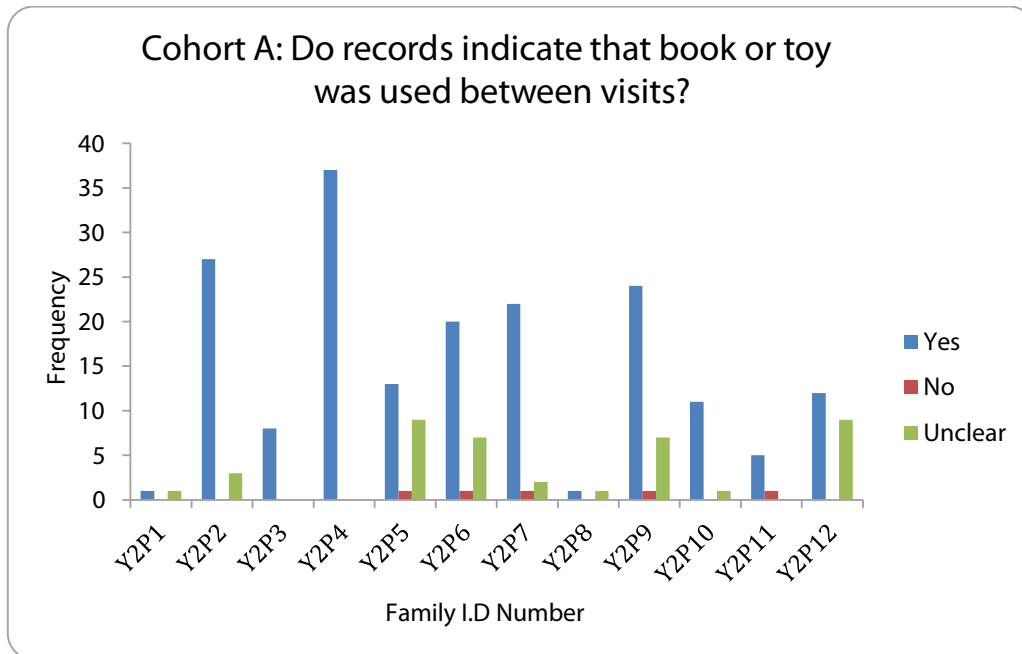
[Mother] had to go upstairs to get cards, they had been playing the night before. [Child] knew names of most of animals and loved the cards. [Mother] telling me [Home Visitor] that they were playing with cards, had lots of fun, all the family played together. [Child] is better at concentrating and mother said teacher noticed the same and also speech is improving. (Review Visit –Book: *Moms & Babies* - Y2C3)

Sometimes it is unclear from the notes whether the book/toy had been used between visits:

It was [child's] birthday so we did not get to do a lot, [mother] said [child] looks forward to visits and did not want to cancel, played with balloons and naming colours. (Review Visit –Book: *Ugly Duckling* - Y2C6)

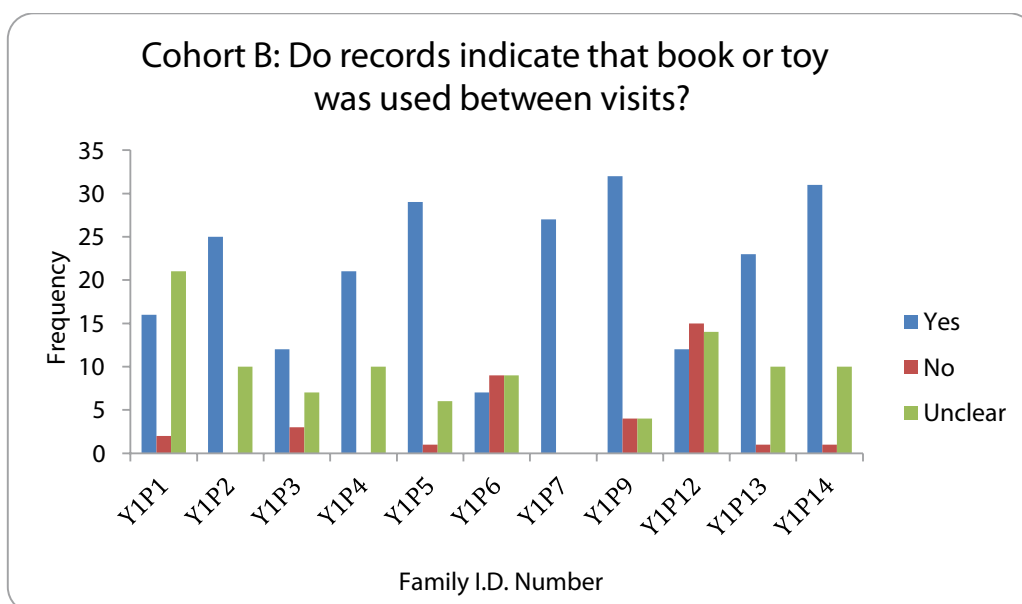
Our analysis of the home visit record sheets shows that for Cohort A, at review visit, the majority of records indicate that parent and child had been using the book or toy (181 Total Visits, Average 15) (Figure 10). For some visits (40 Total, Average 3) the records were unclear as to whether the book/toy had been used.

**Figure 10:** Cohort A: Do records indicate that book or toy was used between visits?



Again for Cohort B (Full programme 2009-2011), at review visit the majority of the time it was clear that parent and child had used the book or toy (234 Total Visits, Average 21 visits) (Figure 11); on an average of nine visits (101 Total) the records were unclear as to whether the book/toy had been used.

**Figure 11:** Cohort B: Do records indicate that book or toy was used between visits?





The elapse of time between the first visit and the review visit may also impact on what information has been recorded about the review visit. Some families have received the review visit the day after the first visit. Home Visitors have found that the child and parent may not have looked at the book or toy simply because there has not been enough time.

### 33. Files on families (electronic or paper) are well-organised, up-to-date, and confidential

The Docklands PCHP keeps a file for each family. This file holds the intake form; signed agreement; confirmation of the dates/times that suit the family; a list of the books and toys which is signed and dated each week by the parent; and the follow up notes completed after each visit by the Home Visitor.

Records about the families themselves were incomplete in many cases and do not hold information about parent level of education, income or other socio-demographic information.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, family records were often unclear about who else lives in the house, whether the child speaks a different language, whether the child has any health issues or special needs and how the child communicates – whether they speak or gesture, use words or sentences.

When attempting to match the parent form to the follow-up form completed by the Home Visitor, some discrepancies emerged. For some visits, it was clear that the visit was completed because the parent form was signed and dated specifying which book/toy had been received, but the follow up notes (completed by the Home Visitor) were missing; perhaps misfiled or misplaced. For other visits, the parent form would be signed but not dated or else the dates on the parent form would not match the dates on the follow up notes (completed by the Home Visitor). This makes it difficult to evaluate the nature of the review visit and, in some cases, difficult to know whether the review visit happened. Therefore, we could be under-estimating the number of visits as they were counted as having happened only where it was clear they had occurred.

In the interviews with the Home Visitors we asked about how they experienced the record keeping aspect of their job. All Home Visitors reported that they did not feel at all burdened by this. At their end of programme interviews in June 2011 we asked the Home Visitors if they ever returned to their family records. In all cases where this question was asked it was apparent that the Home Visitors made no further use of these records after they had been written and filed away. Nevertheless, on reflection the Home Visitors felt that returning to the records might inform their practice.

### 35. Effective system for storing and keeping track of toys and books

Books and toys are stored in a secure cage at the NCI. Before a visit, the Home Visitor must obtain the correct book or toy and bring it with them to the family. PCHP replication guidelines state that each family receive the same book or toy in the same week. As families start at different times and as visits are missed, families are often not on the same book/toy on the same week, so Home Visitors

24 It is noted that the ELI in consultation with the US PCHP decided not to ask for socio-demographic information while the programme was in its developmental phase. Nevertheless

such information is crucial for the monitoring and evaluation of programme effectiveness.

must check before leaving the office that they have the correct item. At the visit with the parent/child, the parent must sign and date the form to validate the item was received or the visit happened. While these forms appear useful for the Home

Visitor to keep track of where the family is in the progression of books/toys, it seems repetitious for the parent to sign and date each time an item is received in addition to the Home Visitor keeping a written follow-up record about the visit.

## Summary

This chapter has examined the operation and function of the Docklands PCHP, including programme reach and delivery; how the programme is organised; and how records are maintained. Participants come from a variety of socio-demographic backgrounds and are targeted through their geographical area rather than level of education or income. While many of the children received below the recommended number of visits, most received the recommended number of books and toys specified in the PCHP replication guidelines. There was some repetition and disparity in paperwork which may mean our estimation of the visits was slightly under-estimated; however, follow-up notes completed by the Home Visitors gave a clear impression of how families progressed in the two years they participated in the PCHP.

There is clear evidence each year that the Docklands PCHP is making improvements - to enrolment procedures; towards ensuring each family receives twice-weekly visits; and by introducing review visits to ensure each family received the recommended number of visits. While parents expressed some uncertainty about their own role in the visits, they were positive about the types of materials received and the way the programme is delivered by the Home Visitors.



C H A P T E R

3

# Child outcomes

**This chapter outlines child cognitive development and school readiness outcomes for a sample of children that have participated in the Dublin Docklands Parent Child Home Programme during its pilot phase (2009-2011).**

**The first section describes the concept of school readiness. It then outlines key considerations in the assessment of child development. Following this we describe the methodological approach, sample of children and the assessment measures employed. The developmental progress for each cohort of children is presented at baseline, after one year in the programme, and at programme end.**

**The chapter concludes with a consideration of the lessons learned about child assessment during the PCHP pilot phase.**

## *School readiness*

Research confirms that children's readiness for school is multi-faceted and encompasses the gamut of physical, social, emotional and cognitive skills that children need to thrive.<sup>25</sup> Recent research by the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the Institute of Medicine, highlights the importance of early emotional development in young children. Based on a careful review of neuroscience and developmental research, it provides evidence that a child's earliest experiences and relationships set the stage for how they manage feelings and impulses, and relate to others. It also highlights emerging evidence that emotional development and academic learning are far more closely intertwined in the early years than has been previously understood (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2002). In addition, early school performance is predictive of later school outcomes.

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<sup>25</sup> For further information see the US National School Readiness Indicators Initiative ([www.gettingready.org](http://www.gettingready.org))

## Assessment of child development

PCHP aims to enhance the school readiness of children at risk of poor educational outcomes. PCHP supports parents to nurture an early learning home environment that will benefit their children on the commencement of primary school.

In order to determine how participation in the PCHP impacts on a child's school readiness we need to establish their stage of development at baseline: to find out if those who receive the intervention are below, at or above developmental norms for their age. It is important to understand the developmental profile of the child participants so that assessment of programme impact is framed in the context of the profile of the group that received the programme. In order to do this the children were assessed on a developmental screening test at the start of the programme.

In addition to having an understanding of the children's developmental profile on programme commencement it is necessary to capture developmental progress over time. Human development is the result of an interaction of nature (biological factors) and nurture (experience factors), with culture affecting parenting practices. Although the patterns and sequences for growth and development are usually the same for all children, the rates at which individual children reach developmental stages will be different (Smith, Cowie & Blades, 2003). Understanding that there are individual differences in rates of development should cause us to be careful about using and relying on age and stage characteristics to describe or label children. There is a range of ages for any developmental task to take place. This dismisses the notion of the "average child". Some children will walk at ten months while others walk a few months older at eighteen months of age. Rates of development also are not uniform within an individual child. For example, a child's intellectual development may progress faster than his emotional or social development. As the PCHP is aimed at enhancing school readiness the study aimed to answer two research questions:

- Does child participation in PCHP improve school readiness?
- Does child participation in each year of PCHP improve child cognitive development?

### *Expectations for children's school readiness and cognitive development after completion of PCHP*

For the programme to have had the desired effect it was envisaged that children that were at risk of educational disadvantage and below developmental norms for their age would improve on school readiness and cognitive scores at a rate above that expected given their individual starting point. For example, a child of 3 years whose scores indicate an age-equivalent of 2 years 6 months at baseline would be expected over the next nine months to perform around the 3 years 3 months (2 years 6 months + 9 months) age level without any programme. If on the other hand, the child receives 9 months of the PCHP and performs well above the level expected (more than 3 years and 3 months) and the child hasn't had any other intervention or change in routine in that time period, it could be said that the programme may have helped.

### Characteristics of PCHP child sample

During its pilot phase the PCHP was offered to any family that expressed an interest and lived within the ELI catchment area. As a result children recruited into the PCHP baseline evaluation came from different family backgrounds in terms of social class, ethnicity and family structure. English was not the first language of six of the children (two in Cohort A and four in Cohort B).

Twenty-five children in two cohorts were administered child developmental assessments.<sup>26</sup>

Cohort A (n = 12) comprised children that had completed one full programme year. They were tested on their enrolment in the second programme year (Sept/Oct 2009) and at the end of their second year (May 2010).

Cohort B (n = 13) comprised new programme entrants. They commenced year one in Sept/Oct 2009. These children were followed until completion of their full two-year programme in May 2011. Cohort B children were assessed at programme commencement, in the middle and at the end of the full two-year programme.

When they commenced the programme the children's ages ranged from 17-51 months (n = 25).

**Table 3:1** Characteristics: Cohort A and Cohort B child sample (n = 25)

	Male	Female	English 2nd Language
Cohort A	6	6	2
Cohort B	6	7	4

### Description of assessment measures

The wide distribution of ages in the child sample meant that a range of developmentally appropriate assessment instruments was required. Three measures were used to assess general development, academic progress and school readiness. Some of the children were quite young when starting the programme and so a developmental screening test (**Denver II**) was used at the start of each child's programme to ascertain a developmental baseline. The cognitive (**British Ability Scales**) and school readiness (**Bracken Basic Concept Scale**) measures could not be administered until the children reached the recommended age of two years, six months and three years respectively.

<sup>26</sup> One family from Cohort A was not contactable for their final assessment. Two families withdrew from Cohort B at Time 3, between year one and two of their programme, and one family was out of the country at final assessment.

Table 3:2 below outlines the time points for the assessment of each Cohort's developmental and school readiness outcomes.

**Table 3:2** Developmental Tests Administered

	Denver II	BAS II	Bracken SRC
Cohort A	Start Year 2	Start & End Year 2	End Year 2
Cohort B	Start Year 1	Start & End Year 2	End Year 2

### Denver II

The Denver Developmental Screening Test (DDST) second edition (Frankenburg, Dodds & Archer, 1992) is a widely used assessment for examining the developmental progress of children. It is designed to be used with children between birth and six-years of age, and is administered by assessing a child's performance on various age-appropriate tasks.

### British Ability Scales (BAS II)

Three subtests from the BAS II were used to assess the children's development progression in the programme in of the following areas:

- Verbal comprehension,
- Naming vocabulary
- Numerical concepts.

#### *Verbal Comprehension*

The task of Verbal Comprehension included naming part of the body, categorising items and following increasingly complex instructions along with recognising shapes and colours.

#### *Naming Vocabulary*

This subtest assesses expressive language and naming objects. It specifically measures vocabulary skills.

#### *Early Number Concepts*

The final BAS II subtest measured knowledge of pre-numerical and numerical concepts and problem solving. Number ability requires a grasp of vocabulary and an understanding of instructions in the first instance in order to complete the task.

## **Bracken Basic Concept Scale (BBCS-3: R) School Readiness Composite (SRC)**

The BBCS-3: R is designed to assess educationally-relevant concepts for early formal education. The SRC can be administered to children from 3-years, to 6-years-11 months.

Appendix 3 provides more information on each of the measures.

### **Limitations of the study design**

The study was a pre-post test design. Pre-post testing refers to assessments (in this case in verbal comprehension, language and early number concepts) that are given to children to assess their progress at the beginning and at the end of a programme of instruction. The pre-post testing undertaken documents a group of children's progress over the course of an intervention programme but does not compare their progress with that of other children who receive no intervention programme.

Usually the best way to address the shortcomings of the pre-post design is to utilise a control group. A matched 'control group' of children not participating in the programme also complete a pre-test and a post-test, taken at the same time interval as that of the programme participants. This design is based on the assumption that if the intervention group performs better than the control group the intervention can be seen to have improved children's performance beyond the level they would have achieved without the intervention. The sample of PCHP children was heterogeneous in terms of age, ethnic, social background and household income. A matched 'control child' would have been needed for each child in the PCHP programme. While this design would have been preferable, the characteristics of the PCHP sample available for the study highlighted the impossibility of finding a matched control group. Such a design requires a homogenous sample.

During its pilot phase the PCHP recruited families in the catchment area who expressed an interest in the programme. At the time of this evaluation it was not confined to children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Chapter 2 provides detail on the rationale for programme recruitment that was employed at this time.

After Cohort A had been assessed (children who were in year two of the PCHP in October 2009), it became apparent that the sample was heterogeneous in terms of age and socio-economic background. It comprised children who aligned with our categories of Hesitater, Striver and Pedagogue parents, including children from families where English was not spoken as the main language in the home.

With these limitations in mind this study design can report the gain or lack of gain in cognitive abilities that individual children made during the course of the programme. The study also describes the children's developmental status at the start of the programme and reports on their school readiness at the end of their respective programmes.



## Presentation and interpretation of results

The children's scores in each Cohort are presented in percentile ranks. These represent the children's test performance relative to the test performance of children in the normative sample. For example, a percentile rank of 60% would mean that a child earned a score that was equal or greater than 60% of the children in the normative sample. See Table 3.3 below for categories relating to percentile ranges.

**Table 3.3** Categories of Percentile Scores

Percentile Scores	Category
98% and above	Very High
91% and above	High
Above 75%	Above Average
25%-75%	Average
Below 25%	Below Average
Below 9%	Low
Below 2%	Very Low

Results for each Cohort are presented below.

## Cohort A results

### *Developmental profile of Cohort A at baseline*

Cohort A children had completed one year of PCHP and commenced year 2 of their programme in October 2009.

The Denver II was administered at the start of the programme to establish a baseline of children's development. At the start of their programme year 2, Cohort A's results on the Personal-Social, Fine and Gross Motor domains indicated that the majority scored in the above average range at the 75th percentile (6 children). Of these six children four scored in the 90th percentile. One child's results were average (50th percentile) and one scored average at the 20th percentile.

**Cohort A's** baseline Language scores on the Denver II programme are reported in Table 3.4 below

**Table 3.4** Cohort A Denver II Percentile Scores at programme commencement (Y2)

Child	Category	Denver II %
1	S	50
2	S	75
3	H	75
4	S	90
5	H	75
6	P	90
7	P	75
8	P	90
9	S	90
10	S	50
11	S	50
12	S	25

Categories: S = Striver, H = Hesitater, P = Pedagogue

### *Cohort A's developmental progress*

The BAS were used to assess child developmental progress over the course of their second programme year. Children were tested at the beginning and end of the nine-month programme. If the PCHP intervention benefitted children they would be expected to make gains of more than nine months between assessments from their starting age.

Cohort A improved only slightly taking their increase in age into account. See Table 3.5 below.

**Table 3.5** Average Improvement in Percentiles on BAS II subtests, Cohort A

BAS Subtest	Cohort A
Verbal Comprehension	7%
Naming Vocabulary	2%
Early Number Concepts	2%

The average scores only report how the group as a whole performed. Actual gains in performance above that expected for the duration of the programme are noted in Table 3.6 with an asterisk. ‘No gain’ indicates the scores of children that remained constant over the course of the programme.

**Table 3.6** Cohort A's gain in test performance in months on BAS II subtests

Child	Category	Verbal Comp. Gain	Naming Vocab. Gain	Early Number Gain
1	S	No gain	No gain	No gain
2	S	No gain	No gain	No gain
3	H	No gain	No gain	No gain
4	S	No gain	19 months	No gain
5	H	No gain	5 months	No gain
6	P	7 months	6 months	No gain
7	P	No gain	13 months*	7 months
8	P	7 months	No gain	No gain
9	S	No gain	6 months	7 months
10	S	No gain	No gain	No gain
11	S	No gain	No gain	No gain
12	S	No gain	No gain	No gain

Categories: S = Striver, H = Hesitater, P = Pedagogue

\*Indicates children performing above that expected for their age.

Five children (S4; H5; P6; P7; P8) improved over the course of the programme year on the BAS II subtests though not as much as expected and another two performed above that expected for their age (more than 9 months). One child performed at the ceiling (99%) at the beginning and end assessment on the Naming Vocabulary and Verbal Comprehension subtests (child 8). Given the child's starting point the programme could have had an effect on boosting performance to an even higher level, but the child's very high performance has not been captured by the tests.

Just two Cohort A children made slight gains on the early Number Concept subtests (P7 and S9). This task was challenging for most of the children in terms of attention and a number scored poorly at programme end.

We also examined children's results in terms of age equivalents rather than chronological age to take account of the fact that pre-school children develop at varying rates and often not in line with their chronological age. Taking the children's starting age-equivalent score into account, two children from Cohort A (S4 and P7) showed some gain above that expected on the naming vocabulary subtest after nine months of the intervention programme.

**Table 3.7** Cohort A Child scores above that expected for age (BAS II).

	Age at Pretest	Naming Vocab. Score Pre Test	Age equiv. Score Pre Test	Naming Vocab. Score Post Test	Age equiv. Score Post Test	Gain above 9m expected
S4	02:07	6	<2y6m	99	4y10m	19m
P7	02:05	62	<2y6m	82	3y7m	4m

### Cohort A's School Readiness Performance

The Bracken School Readiness Concept is a more in-depth assessment of children's knowledge of colours, letters, numbers/counting, sizes/comparisons and shapes.

Four children scored below average (below the 25th percentile) on their school readiness assessments and all were designated as children from Hesitater and Striver families (H3; S4; S11; S12). It should be noted that a number of the children were at the lower age threshold on the school readiness scale.

One child scored at the 91st percentile on the school readiness measure despite English being a second language (S1). This reflects his observed confidence and engagement in learning during assessment. When considered with their baseline results on the Denver II assessment, three children exhibited an improvement at programme end. Two of these children were from Pedagogue families (P6; P7) and they performed above average at the start of the programme.

Overall nine children had weaker scores on the Bracken School Readiness concept at programme end (SRC). Of these five were children from Striver families, two Pedagogue and two came from Hesitater families. These results must also be considered in the context of the children's age at programme end. One child was just 2 years and 9 months, while a further five children were just over three-years of age, and were not at the age for moving on to primary school. Two children were just under four and one was almost five-years of age.

**Table 3.8** Cohort A School Readiness Percentile Scores programme end

Child	Category	Denver II baseline%	SRC % Programme end
1	S	50	91
2	S	75	25
3	H	75	16
4	S	90	5
5	H	75	37
6	P	90	95
7	P	75	84
8	P	90	75
9	S	90	84
10	S	50	No data
11	S	50	16
12	S	25	16

Categories: S = Striver, H = Hesitater, P = Pedagogue

### Results for Cohort B

Baseline results on the Denver II indicated that at programme commencement the majority of children in Cohort B scored in the average range (25%-75%) with three children ranked in the 75th percentile or above. Two children scored in the below average range. However one child had English as a second language and scores improved by the end of the programme.

**Table 3.9** Denver II Percentile Scores at Start Cohort B.

Child	Category	Denver II %
13	S	75
14	H	75
15	S	25
16	S	50
17	S	90
18	S	25
19	P	90
20	S	10
21	P	10
22	P	75
23	S	75

### *Cohort B's developmental progress*

As with Cohort A the BAS II were used to assess children's progress over the course of the programme.

A summary of the gains made for Cohort B are noted in Table 3.10.

**Table 3.10** Average Improvement in Percentiles on BAS II subtests by Cohort

BAS Subtest	Cohort B
Verbal Comprehension	13%
Naming Vocabulary	2%
Early Number Concepts	20%

The subtest performances of the individual children in Cohort B are reported in Table 3.11.

**Table 3.11** Cohort B's gain in test performance in months on BAS II subtests

Child	Category	Verbal Comp. Gain	Naming Vocab. Gain	Early Number Gain
13	S	7 months	No gain	4 months
14	H	No gain	No gain	No gain
15	S	No gain	No gain	No gain
16	S	No gain	22 months*	No gain
17	S	No gain	No gain	9 months
18	S	No data	No data	No data
19	P	No gain	No gain	7 months
20	S	7 months	No gain	No gain
21	P	No gain	No gain	No gain
22	P	No gain	No gain	13 months*
23	S	No gain	No gain	No gain

Categories: S = Striver, H = Hesitater, P = Pedagogue

Cohort B's performance on the comprehension and vocabulary subtests was mixed with some children with Pedagogue parents scoring below average. Four children's scores recorded no change. Two of the children (H14 and P22) were performing in the high range on some of the subtests at programme start.

On the Early Number Ability subtest, Cohort B performed better than Cohort A at programme end. Five children scored in the above average and high ranges (three from Striver families and two from Pedagogue families).

Two children exhibited gains above that expected after nine months of the intervention programme, but only on one of the three BAS II subtests. See Table 3.12 for Cohort B children performing above the level expected for their age.

In Cohort B four children showed some improvement (S13; S17; P19; S20) but only just in line with their chronological age. One child scored poorly at the start of the programme (S23) as English was not a first language. This child was also one of the youngest in the study, however she improved slightly but not above her expected age by the end of the programme. Another child was out of the country for an extended period at the end of the programme (S18) and so final data are not presented for this child.

**Table 3.12** Cohort B Child scores above that expected for their age (BAS II)

	Age at Pretest	Naming Vocab. Score Pre Test	Age equiv. Score Pre Test	Naming Vocab. Score Post Test	Age equiv. Score Post Test	Gain above 9m expected
S16	03:02	54	<2y6m	93	4y4m	13m
P22	03:01	24	<2y6m	97	3y7m	4m

### *School Readiness Cohort B*

Scores on the Denver Screening Test were compared with scores on the Bracken school readiness measure at programme end. Although these are different measures they provide an indication of how the children performed overall.

Three children improved their scores. Of the two who scored highly, one (P22) scored consistently highly on most measures and while young at programme start engaged well on the school readiness assessment. One child was not available at end of programme for assessment.

Two children scored in the high range (one from a Striver and one from a Pedagogue family), performing up to 13 months above their age at final assessment. However, one of these children (P22) was already performing above his chronological age at the start of the programme.

One other child scored poorly on the School Readiness Concept. This was due to a difficulty staying on task and the child spoke English as a second language (S23).



**Table 3.13** School Readiness Percentile Scores at Programme end Cohort B

Child	Category	Denver II%	SRC % Programme end
13	S	75	63
14	H	75	63
15	S	25	37
16	S	50	84*
17	S	90	75
18	S	25	No data
19	P	90	63
20	S	10	63
21	P	10	63
22	P	75	91*
23	S	75	2

## An Overview of the Children's Development

To get a sense of the children's progress over the course of the PCHP some insights may be gained from re-introducing Felicity, Terry, and Síofra that represent children of Hesitater, Striver and Pedagogue families.

### Felicity: child of Hesitater parent

Felicity performed below average on most of the assessments at each time point. While she improved slightly in areas of comprehension and number ability, her vocabulary is still poor and she is not confident engaging with her peers. Though now nearly four years of age her school readiness score is below the 20th percentile. Felicity will start school next year but is likely to struggle to keep up with her class peers.

### Terry: child of Striver parent

Overall Terry is performing well for his age on the Denver assessment at both time points. Terry was a little shy at Time 1 assessments as he was just two and a half years old and learning English. However at Time 2 Terry performed at the 91st percentile on his School Readiness Composite and was much more confident and outgoing.

### Síofra: child of Pedagogue parent

Síofra performed above average on all of her developmental assessments on programme commencement. Síofra was quite young starting the programme but performed above the 80th percentile at Time 2 on all her assessments and on the School Readiness Composite. Although not yet three years of age, she is performing at a level more than two years above her current age.

## Summary

This assessment of PCHP children's developmental progress and school readiness outcomes took place over the course of two years when the programme was still in a pilot phase. This has important implications for the conclusions that may be drawn about programme impact for these children as a result of their participation in PCHP.

### *Does child participation in the PCHP improve child cognitive development?'*

As shown scores were mixed on the BAS II with only four children out of the total sample showing gains more than anticipated for their age. For the programme to be effective it would be expected that the majority of children would gain more than nine months in age-equivalent scores on their cognitive assessment.

This result should be considered in the context that at the start of the programme a number of children were already performing above that expected for their age. These children had either Striver or Pedagogue parents. Hesitater children did not perform as well. This finding provides useful information about the selection of programme children that have the potential to make gains.

We also found that children from non-English speaking families performed less well on language tasks initially but showed some improvement over the course of the programme which would be expected.

### *Does child participation in PCHP improve school readiness?*

Five children scored higher on the final school readiness assessment (Bracken SRC) than the Denver II at programme end. However one of these children scored well above his chronological age on the cognitive tests at the start of year two of the programme and so this was to be expected. Overall children from Pedagogue and some Striver families showed the most improved scores. The programme did not seem to have an effect on the scores on Hesitater children. As shown in Tables 3.7 and 3.12, two Striver children had the most improved scores. However, these results must also be considered in the context that these children's parents are already engaged in supporting their children's learning.

### *Child Assessment during the PCHP pilot phase*

In relation to the two groups of children in this baseline evaluation it must be considered that the programme had been offered to any family that expressed an interest and lived within the geographic area targeted by the ELI. There was also a very wide variation of ages within each Cohort and many children were quite young for the assessment of school readiness. In addition, as no explicit selection criterion relating to, for example, socio-economic or educational disadvantage was employed during this pilot phase, it is difficult to make firm conclusions about the impact of the programme on this sample of children.

While some gains were observed for a minority of children above that expected for their age, a significant number of children were performing at average or above average on programme commencement. Nonetheless, some important lessons have been learned during the PCHP pilot phase that can enhance future programme implementation and evaluation:

- There is a need to ensure that each new cohort of PCHP children are of the same age
- If the programme is to impact on educationally disadvantaged children then children enrolled in it should meet the criteria for programme recruitment in terms of their cognitive development and socio-economic status
- It is important in future PCHP evaluation to use a matched control group design in which the same tests are administered pre and post intervention. This requires a homogenous sample of programme children that receives the same pre- and post-tests that are appropriate to their stage of development and relevant to the assessment of school readiness.

Further discussion of these issues takes place in Chapter 6.



C H A P T E R

4

CHAPTER 4

# Parents' Programme experience

**At the end of the programme parents in each cohort were interviewed about their involvement in the PCHP. Semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with 17 parents: nine from Cohort A and eight from Cohort B. The interviews sought to elicit parents' perspectives on why they got involved in the PCHP; what they saw as its benefits; and areas that they considered could be improved.**

## Motivation for involvement

Most parents found out about the PCHP through their local toddler group/crèche or from a friend. Some had been seeking an 'extra' activity for their child for the period between being cared for at home and being old enough to attend the local crèche. Two parents indicated they had heard about the PCHP through the Public Health Nurse, one a Hesitater parent and the other a Striver.

Both Pedagogue and Striver parents indicated that they had become involved because they were keen to enhance their child's abilities. Pedagogue parents emphasised that they were attracted to the teaching aspect of the programme:

*Yeah we got involved just because anything that might give her some kind of advantage in the future. You know we would follow through with it. I thought it would teach her vocabulary; maybe learn to concentrate a bit more. I just saw it as the first exposure to what a teacher would be. (Y2P7, Pedagogue)*

*We talk about science, nature and cooking and crafts and whatever so reading was something that we both do but I don't know how to teach somebody ... We were looking for guidance in how to go about teaching (Y2P8, Pedagogue)*

Striver parents were also keen to help their children, but here the emphasis was more on how the child could benefit through extra education:

*Well I think it was more that (child) would get more out of it herself. Well I know she's in a crèche at the moment and they do a lot of things in the crèche with them as well. But I don't know, I think for her, to broaden her as well, you know like. (Y2P11, Striver).*

*Just for (child) to learn, yeah, to learn stuff from books from someone else different to me. (Y2P5, Striver).*

*Yeah about the parenting and I rang up, I thought it would be good for (child), it'll help him in school. (Y2P9, Striver).*

## Benefits from programme participation

Parents were asked about what they saw as the benefits of the programme for themselves, their child and other members of their family.

### Parent benefits

Parents spoke very positively about what the programme had done for them personally. The main benefits were their relationships with the Home Visitor and learning a different approach to playing with their child.

#### *Parent - Home Visitor Relationship*

Parents spoke of warm relationships with the Home Visitors. While parents perceive that the focus has been on the child they have also built a relationship with the Home Visitor. For some, receiving an adult visitor in their child-centred daily routine is welcomed:

*Yeah she's as I said like – I actually feel, like she was a stranger when she came and now I feel like she's a friend. And it's gas, cause she is ... she is just like part of the family, you know that way. Even for a parent just to have, even though you're playing with the kids, just to have adult company, you know. It's nice as well. (Y1P9, Striver)*

For other parents, being able to speak about their child's development has enhanced their relationship with the Home Visitor. These parents recognise that the Home Visitors have a wealth of knowledge drawn from their own parenting experience, and from visiting other children:

*Benefits to me just talking to our visitor about children's development in general and you know she can confirm for me that other kids are reacting in the same way to things, to doing the same things. (Y2P8, Pedagogue)*

*You know, and like with the potty training (Home Visitor name) was able to give advice then and just little things, like obviously she had gone through it a number of times. (Y1P4, Striver)*

#### *A different approach to reading and play*

One of the main benefits for parents from their involvement in the PCHP has been in how it has changed their approach to reading and playing with their child. Most pedagogue parents, although they do point out that they always read to their child/ren and had lots of books in the home, now approach books and toys differently. The approach is less controlled, more enjoyable for the child and parent, and stimulates the child's creativity:

*I wouldn't say that I learnt anything that I wouldn't have already known, but it's just the extra reminder – ok, you should be doing this, so do it (Y2P7, Pedagogue)*

*Whereas before I would have kind of 'no we're reading the story, we have to keep going because there is another page. (Y2P8, Pedagogue)*

*Yeah before, from lots of, from lots of information ... in reality I don't know how to play. I didn't know how to play with her. Just know general things. But after two years of visits I learned I can play in different ways not only the main function, side functions for completely different ways. For example, it was like a puzzle to put the shape or sort by colour, but my child played and said they were food. So she cooked. She pretends to cook. Oh yeah if (Home Visitor)*

*didn't teach this to me, probably I would have said 'no, not that way. Put on the shape, find it, the colour', something like this. But I just let her – I let her play. 'Ok I prefer this pizza or jam sandwich' – I understand how she can be more creative. (Y1P14, Pedagogue)*

*I don't know if it has done anything that's different, it's more consolidated in some ways what my approach would have been. But it has also shown me and his dad more both the need and the benefit of getting him to sit down quietly with a book. (Y2P6, Pedagogue)*

*Yeah and I'd be quite animated when I'm reading anyway so from that point of view, probably not much. Yeah I think my reading is pretty good. But actually having said that now, with reading I did pick up a few tips that I noticed have definitely kept their focus, especially (child) when the two of them are together. Say if we are on a book and I'll go "Where is the balloon?" or something, whereas normally you'd read – giving them little tasks on each page kind of. So I've learnt that definitely. (Y1P7, Pedagogue)*

Striver parents also commented on how they have changed their approach to reading to their child. The main difference between Pedagogue and Striver parents seemed to be that for Strivers this was often a new skill, which most spoke about enthusiastically, whereas for Pedagogues it was a reminder or a prompt about what they knew they should be doing:

*Well basically before I was reading to him I'd be reading and my intonation would be up and down and, you know, 'Grrrr' and I noticed the way that (Home Visitor) reads to him she reads and she lets him, and she asks him lots of questions about things. I wasn't doing that before I was just reading a story from A to B and trying to do the characters and thinking "yeah this is magic" and then the kids were sitting there going 'yeah, yeah, yeah'. Yeah, basically that I find has been a major benefit for me. My approach with reading now is very different. (Y2P2, Striver)*

*I always explained colours to her and books and she could tell you any colour and stuff like that so it's kind of describing the picture yeah more so than just flying through it. (Y2P5, Striver)*

*It has really because, say before if I was playing a game with her, say if she was doing her blocks or whatever she might be doing. If she put something into the wrong spot I would say, oh no (child), that's wrong. Where the home visitors have learned me, just let her do it if that's the way she thinks it's done. And they would just say is that right (child) and she would say Yeah! And they say okay and she'd continue down and then she'd realise that this part was wrong . . . and I thought that was actually brilliant. Where I would have kind of said straight away I would have said 'no, no that goes in here'. So that's something that I thought was brilliant and that's something that I wouldn't have thought. I would have just kept on saying no, you put it in there, that one goes there. Where this way it's actually learning her if she's putting it in the wrong spot she's going to find out at the end of it well no, that isn't right. That part I really now thought was brilliant. (Y2P11, Striver)*

*I mean I read books before and really what they're doing is not reading books it's looking at them and the pictures and the words and that's how they teach them I suppose, you know. Whereas before I would've just been reading. (Y1P5, Striver)*

## Child benefits

### *Focused time with parent*

Although parents pointed to a number of benefits that the programme has brought to them, many of these benefits also filtered down to their child. For most parents, following the PCHP approach has shown them the importance of having focused time with their child. This is particularly the case in households where there are older or younger siblings. For these parents there is a realisation that the emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity:

*It just kind of, it showed - like sometimes when you sit down and you play or you've got a million things going on and you're like 'Oh, just let her play by herself' whereas even just half an hour, you know, you saw the benefit of just half an hour on the Mondays and Thursdays, so you're like 'Oh right, we'll ... if I just take half an hour', it doesn't mean I'm going to be on the floor for two hours or three hours, we can take half an hour, a half an hour's not all that long, we can play and we can do that and then say 'Put that away, or you can play by yourself, I have to go and make dinner'. So it just - it kind of showed me that it doesn't have to be hours and hours of play, or not even to dread it because she got used to (Home Visitor) coming in and (Home Visitor) going. It was like 'Okay, well we have this long, we'll play her game' and then I'm going to go and do something else. (Y1P4, Striver)*

*It benefited me because I enjoy reading with (child) and I like to sit down at the end of the day when he is going to bed and I enjoy doing it, and it gives us our time, that's mine and his time . . . it's just us, just the two of us we'll do it all. (Y2P12, Striver)*

*And there was, and it's that time, as I said to you about the convenience and me being in work and rushing all the time, and we just had to sit down for half an hour and it's nice to have that time, you know, you have to make it and you have to make an effort, you know. (Y1P5, Striver)*

### *Child - Home Visitor Relationship*

As well as their own positive relationships with Home Visitors, parents reported on the bond that developed during the two-year programme between their child and the Home Visitor. Even in the early days of the visits, when some children were reluctant to engage, they went on to establish warm relationships with their Home Visitor. For these children being involved in the programme helped them to overcome shyness and a greater acceptance of new people in their lives.

*At the start she reacted very badly, now she absolutely loves her, being made in a way to deal with new people. (Y2P8, Pedagogue).*

*She would have been shy at the beginning when (Home Visitor) was coming down at first she would have been shy and (Home Visitor) brought a book the first day but we'll say whatever book she had she'd read it for a bit now normally she loves books so she would sit there for the whole half an hour like the girls would say that themselves, that she'd sit there but I think at first it was kind of like, who's this, who is she, well my mammy seems to know her so we're all right. (Y2P11, Striver)*

*He just likes their time I suppose, and I know he's seeing different people now in crèche but before he was in crèche it'd be kind of me and him or my mam and him, and now he has someone else coming and he enjoys it. (Y2P12, Striver)*



In general parents were keen to point to the strength of the relationship between the child and Home Visitor:

*So he is fond of her, so that is lovely to see. (Y2P6, Pedagogue)*

*The bond that has developed between (child) and (Home Visitor) – that's just amazing ... This is his time with (Home Visitor) and he loves her visit. (Y2P2, Striver)*

For most the end of the programme would be marked by sadness that this special bond between child and their Home Visitor would be broken. Yet for some parents who were already or were intending to use local pre-schools or primary schools they did think that they would continue to see the Home Visitor in the local community.

### Benefits for other family members

The benefits of PCHP extend to other family members. These included siblings and fathers. Parents reported on how other older or younger children in the family also got to benefit from the PCHP experience. Some parents spoke about how their older child had never had such an interactive experience with books and showed little interest, but had become interested in what their younger sibling was doing or in the books or toys they received from the PCHP. Some older children participated in reading with their PCHP sibling and some PCHP children read to their very young sibling 'PCHP style'.

*And also a great fringe benefit (older sibling) was in absolutely in no way shape or form interested in words or reading, and he wasn't able to read at the beginning, but now he's getting better at school and reading, he's quite good actually, but he would always hurry home and 'What did (child) get today?' and he'd open it and we'd go through them together. (Y2P2, Striver)*

*Yeah definitely cause even the boys, like we would play with the stuff with the boys when they come home. They'd come in like, 'what did you get today?' And you know they would they'd play with the stuff as well. (Y1P9, Striver)*

*I've some lovely photos of her sitting down and 'Now, (name of baby)...' and she'll read a book to him and he's just like... And so she'd say to (name of baby), you know, the same way like 'Where's the truck?' and he's like trying to turn the page, she's like 'No' (Y1P4, Striver).*

*Yeah, like he would kind of come in and she would say, I've got a book today, the tiger with the pink hat and (child's father) would go, he's wearing the pink hat! And in the book it would kind of say, a tiger in a big pink hat. And (child's father) would be going 'Oh, I didn't know a tiger wore a pink hat' and she'd go, 'and look he has skates and look Daddy he has a bag on his tail', you know, all this kind of thing. So then he can see her noticing everything and the colours she'd say. Then she'd be going 'rarrrr', like the tiger. Then it's bringing him into it as well even though he's not here all the time at the programme. He knows then what she's kind of learning. He's saying he can see each time that she is getting more. Like she'll just pick up the book herself, there's the tiger and his skates and this kind of thing. I think she's coming on brilliant. (Y2P11, Striver)*

## Programme improvements

We asked parents if there was any aspect of the PCHP that could be improved. While all were highly positive about the programme, most had suggestions for improvements. These included how people receive information about the programme; the extent and type of books and toys; information about how to use the curriculum materials; and who should receive the programme

### *Information about and promotion of PCHP*

Most parents had heard about the PCHP in an indirect way, either through friends or a childcare centre/toddler group notice board. In talking about how beneficial the PCHP was to them personally, many parents spoke about how they promoted it to their friends and how surprised they were that so few people knew about it, even those living on the same street. The majority of parents interviewed felt that the PCHP could be better promoted in the community. Some parents were so enthusiastic about the benefits for the programme that they said they were always promoting it:

*Well I suppose like, there was another girl and her little fella would be a bit older than (child), so he's already 18 months, so by the time September comes he'll be almost two, and I said it to her - and she has a three year old and this little fella - and I talked to her about the programme, and she was like 'I never heard of that' and I said 'Oh you'd see the signs up in the crèche' and she goes 'No, never heard anything about that'. . . So I don't know if it's just not getting out, like I'd happily tell anyone I'd meet 'Do it, it's brilliant'. (Y1P4, Striver)*

*I think they need more publicity about it because a few people that I have spoken to since I started on it have never heard of it. (Y2P12, Striver)*

*I suppose it could be advertised a bit more you know. And ok they went down the school that day and that's how I got involved in it but yes leaflets or anything. But as you say they might not be able to take on everybody, that kind of thing as well. (Y2P11, Striver)*

*I had to get told from someone else where I wasn't aware of this going on. . . I don't think there has ever been. I know we get the Dublin Docklands pamphlet now and again and I know there was something in it about the playschool that the girls go to but I don't think I have ever seen anything about the parent home programme. (Y2P9, Striver)*

### *Books and toys*

While all parents were happy with the free books and toys, some made suggestions about the materials in terms of the amount received; the topic areas; and information about how to use the materials between visits and after the programme ends.

Two parents were concerned about the amount of materials received because it set up an expectation in the child about the role of the Home Visitor:

*I think the toys and books are too often and I think that just gives the impression to the child that every time (Home Visitor) comes she is bringing her something . . . In my opinion it is too much. It is leading the kids to expect things - new every week - and I don't buy new stuff for them every week. I very rarely go out and buy stuff for them because they get stuff from all corners - from grannies and grandads and they just got too much material stuff. (Y2P2, Striver)*

*I don't know sometimes I wonder if giving them a book or toy every week is good because when (Home Visitor) comes in (child) goes 'what have you got for me? So you know . . . I don't want him to be thinking that's why (Home Visitor) comes, to give me something. (Y2P6, Pedagogue)*

While most parents did not say their child received too many materials, Pedagogue parents reported that their child already had some of the books or materials that were brought to them.

Parents observed that they had been introduced to books and toys they would not have chosen themselves and were surprised when their child liked them. Some pedagogue parents felt the programme could be improved by expanding the range of themes introduced through the curriculum materials - to move beyond animals to other areas such as the household, going to the park etc.

*It's a lot of animal features, lots of animal sounds, lots of colours and shapes, which is good but it's a lot of it. . .it could branch out it into other areas.*  
(Y2P7, Pedagogue)

*Yeah there was a lot of animals, there was a lot of stuff I wouldn't pick myself but they did seem to like them. Some books they never went back to. There were some that were a bit silly – a little bit and I'd say there are a good few books out there now that I would have bought for the kids as well that they loved that they haven't picked up on.* (Y1P7, Pedagogue)

In Chapter 2 we observed that some parents were unclear about what they should do with the book or toy between visits. One pedagogue parent who wanted to know about the programme's specific learning objectives regretted that she didn't write down the programme schedule so she could use it again for her younger child. She felt that she was 'still kind of fuzzy at times about what we actually were supposed to have gotten out of it' (Y2P8, Pedagogue). Striver parents did not speak in terms of learning objectives but could see the benefit of having some 'tips' on how to use the book or toy:

*You know ... some tips on what you could do ... this is Brown Bear, this is focusing on colours.* (Y1P5, Striver)

Some parents also expressed a desire to have follow-on information after the programme ended about suitable books or toys for their child:

*If you go to the ELC [Early Learning Centre – shop for educational toys], they have guidelines. But actually I don't know if they are interesting or not. And the price is not cheap. And so if they [PCHP] have that kind of workshop, how to continue, the programme benefit at home after she finishes it. How to find a book or recommended books or toys. What kind of toys does she need? What kind of books? Yeah something like this would be good.* (Y1P14, Pedagogue)

### **Who should receive the PCHP?**

In Chapter 2 we observed that the PCHP did not adopt a targeted approach to enrolling families in the programme and its rationale for this decision. When we asked parents about areas for programme improvement Pedagogue parents - in particular, although not exclusively - were keen to point out that the programme could benefit those in greater need than themselves:

*So when I talk with the mums who join the programme usually they are well-educated. Actually they don't need the programme. They knew how to play with them, how to read. But they know the programme benefits and fortunately we live here so we have a chance to get the benefit. But actually the person who should join for their children didn't seem too interested or didn't [participate].*  
(Y1P14, Pedagogue)

*Well I wondered was it maybe more for, this idea of kids from deprived backgrounds, maybe more with younger mothers who weren't that into it. So I kind of didn't know whether I'd be entitled to it.* (Y2P6, Pedagogue)

*I have a feeling it should be for more disadvantaged children because a lot of the kids we know are in it would still get stimulation anyway. They'd still get books anyway. (Y2P7, Pedagogue)*

## Summary

Parent experiences of PCHP have been largely positive whether one is Striver, Hesitater or Pedagogue parent. Of all parent types interviewed, Hesitater parents were less forthcoming about how the programme had benefited them, or about aspects that could be improved. While they were generally very positive, on the whole they were less reflective, less likely to question and had fewer suggestions for how the programme could be improved. They were happy to say that their child liked the programme. To summarise parent experiences of the PCHP we return to Síofra, Terry and Felicity:

**Síofra's mother, a Pedagogue**, has enjoyed the programme but is not sure that she was really meant to be getting it and has some anxiety about this. She lives in an area where she regularly sees people that she feels could benefit more than her but still she found benefits for Síofra and herself. Síofra's mother wanted to know more about how to instruct her child and found that, although she had always been reading to Síofra, she got some tips on better approaches – things that she knew she should have been doing anyway. Síofra's mother would have liked more guidelines on what the learning objectives for each book or toy were and what she should have been doing between visits. Síofra and her mother had very good relationships with their Home Visitor and looked forward to the visit. Síofra's baby brother will get to benefit from the materials although her mother would like to receive continued guidelines on books and toys. Síofra will miss her Home Visitor and it appears is not likely to have any connection with the Home Visitor as she is going to attend a school outside of the Docklands area.

**Terry, whose mother is a Striver**, has enjoyed the programme. His mother has actively promoted it to her friends and neighbours and two are now in the programme. She thought it would be beneficial for Terry to have another person involved in preparing him for school and liked the idea of having someone to chat to. Terry's mother has picked up lots of other child-rearing tips from her Home Visitor, and her other children get to use the books and materials. Terry's mother has changed her approach to reading – she used to just read through the book, now she will spend a lot of time on one page asking Terry questions. She can't think of much that could be improved but would like to see more information in the community about the programme. Terry was a bit shy at first but now has a warm relationship with his Home Visitor and will miss her but he is likely to see her at one of the storytelling sessions in the local primary school. Terry's mother would like to maintain a link to the programme.

**Felicity, whose mother is a Hesitater**, believes her child has benefited from the programme because the Home Visitor was reading and teaching her vocabulary. Felicity's mother was very happy with the books and toys because her child was happy with the materials and happy with the Home Visitor. Felicity's mother welcomed the Home Visitor as it was an opportunity for her to have a break from Felicity. She tried to maintain regular reading time with her child and felt that the programme would help her when she starts school.



C H A P T E R

5

# The Home Visitors

The PCHP is delivered by a team of 13 Home Visitors, most of whom are women from the local area. As the Home Visitors are central to the programme, the evaluation aimed at an in-depth review of their role and experiences. We did this through interviews and focus groups. One-to-one interviews were conducted with 11 home visiting staff on three separate occasions. These explored the pathway to becoming a Home Visitor; the home visiting routine; and experiences of delivering the programme over a two-year period. We also found out about how they perceive their job and their capacity to carry out their role effectively, and how they see the future of the PCHP.

Two focus groups were conducted at the end of each programme year. These provided an opportunity for the Home Visitors to reflect on what had worked well and what could be improved in the year ahead. The last focus group at programme end allowed the group to reflect on key issues arising in the evaluation.

This chapter first describes the Home Visitors' pathways to the PCHP. We then examine the various ways that the programme has built the capacity of the Home Visitors to carry out their jobs through ongoing supervision and training. We outline the Home Visitors' perspectives on how the programme benefits them personally and professionally and how the PCHP impacts on children and families in the programme. Finally, we examine what Home Visitors see as barriers to being a Home Visitor and their ideas for improvements. Table 5:1 outlines the research methods and timetable that examined programme implementation and outcomes specifically related to the home visiting aspect of PCHP.

**Table 5:1** Home Visitor Evaluation

Topic area	Method	When	
Pathway to becoming a Home Visitor	Semi-structured interview	Start of year 1	Follow-up in year 1
Attitudes to and experiences of programme delivery		Start of year 2	
Barriers and facilitators to implementing PCHP	Focus group	End of year 1	End of Year 2
Programme attendance/ programme delivery	Secondary analysis of programme records	End of year 1	End of programme

### The pathway to becoming a Home Visitor

The Home Visitors are mothers and most reside in the Docklands. All have responsibilities for caring for pre-school and/or school-aged children. Many of the Home Visitors left school early, around the age of 15. Before becoming Home Visitors they were involved in a range of occupations from childcare assistance, office administration, manual factory work, retail assistance, cleaning and home duties. Most completed FÁS courses at foundation level in areas such as sewing, cooking, computer skills, childcare and pottery. Most completed these courses some years after leaving the second-level school system.

#### Motivation for involvement

Many of the Home Visitors were introduced to the PCHP by friends or through their local crèche or playschool. One mentioned how she felt comfortable working with young children as she had experience of reading to groups of children:

*Right how I found out about it was I used to bring ... to playschool I'd sit over there and by the time I'd finish the book there'd be about ten kids sitting around me and one of the girls in the crèche told me that the training was coming on for the Home Visitor programme . . . .so I said I've nothing to lose I'll come over and do the training and see how I get on, and I enjoyed the training and applied for the job. (HV3, Time 1).*

All the Home Visitors were motivated by a strong desire to work with children:

*Cos it's one to one with children...It's something I would have liked myself as a young mother as well for my own children, I just thought it was very good... Really interesting to me. (HV11, Time 1).*

*I think that I liked about the job was you were working with the families, and like that they are very young children, they start at eighteen months. (HV5, Time 1)*

The Home Visitors were also attracted to the flexibility of the working hours. This flexibility allows them to work around their own home life. They particularly liked being able to select the number of hours and the days that suited them:

*I suppose the main thing that attracted me was the flexible hours. I could do it around my own life. (HV6, Time 1)*

*My child is my priority absolutely number one by a mile and I have to work around her now and I have to work around her life and her world so this fits it quite well with that because it's very flexible. They're very good to let you decide your hours and your times and how much or how little of it you want to do. (HV8, Time 1)*

### **Setting out as a Home Visitor**

A key difference between the Docklands PCHP and the US programme is in the employment of women from the local area who do not hold professional qualifications. This has been useful for securing local buy-in: the Home Visitors' local knowledge and networks have helped to promote the programme. But it has also been necessary to build the capacity of the Home Visitors so that they could effectively carry out their jobs. Most spoke of experiencing nervousness when they started. They questioned themselves: would they be able to do it effectively? How would they get along with the families? The Programme Co-ordinator accompanies the Home Visitors on their first home visit. Thereafter, the Home Visitors must proceed alone. Interviews with new recruit Home Visitors in their first year of the programme (2009-2010) revealed their level of anxiety upon commencement:

*You do an introduction visit with and then you go back and do a visit on your own for the first. I don't know which is more nerve wracking, you know. (HV5, Time 1)*

*Yeah, I would say so even with the ... with just from receiving the initial home visiting training, you definitely have enough to walk into the house but it's just the apprehension of walking into the house ... basically, the first visit is daunting, we're not going to say it's not, but you will get over it and when you're going in then again you will feel a little bit easier and by a couple of weeks. It takes time. It takes time in any job. (HV4, Time 1)*

Undertaking the programme modelling techniques in front of parents on their first visit also added to their anxiety:

*Relieved that I can actually do it cause I was very apprehensive ... because I had never done it before; I'd never been put in a situation where, you know, I've got to model these items, you know, a book or a toy. How can I possibly model it? Is it better than a parent would? (HV6, Time 2)*

*Yeah, so I mean I remember when I went on my first and I was like, God am I doing it right? Questioning meself. (HV1, Time 2)*

When these Home Visitors were re-interviewed at the end of year one it was clear that there had been a need for them to experience a whole programme year to build confidence in what they were trying to achieve. From their accounts it is apparent that the new Home Visitors were settling well into their role:

*Then I was like ninety nine per cent confident to go on me own the next time. (HV1, Time 2)*

*It's going really well. I absolutely love it. Everything's gone great, I have to say. (HV7, Time 2)*



The Home Visitors' capacity to undertake their jobs is enhanced by the experience of following a child and their parent through a full-programme. Home Visitors speak of the 'big differences' that occur for them, the child and parent on the transition from year one to year two:

*Yes, it is. Very different in Year 2. When you walk in, they know exactly when you walk in this is what you're doing whatever you're taking in with you. I'm just kind of a routine now. (HV2, Time 2)*

*The other day, she sat in between her mum and meself and we had Ten in the Bed and the elephant fell out of the bed but was stuck under the bed and she wanted us all, we had to push. She was in charge. And she turned every page. (HV3, Time 2)*

Nevertheless, not all Home Visitors share this experience despite being in the programme for more than one full cycle. Some have experienced their families dropping out after year one. Some Home Visitors have had to take on families in year two of the programme, not having had them in year one owing to changes in Home Visitor or family circumstances.

### *Supervision and training*

Chapter 2 highlighted the importance to Home Visitors of the weekly group supervision sessions. The apprehension and nervousness experienced prior to their first visit can be alleviated at the supervision sessions by drawing on the experience of staff that had been in the programme since the beginning. Supervision time is highly valued by all as it provides a forum to discuss any problems with particular visits, share different techniques to engage uninterested children, or share ideas on how to use new toys and books. The Home Visitors all find the feedback they receive from others very beneficial.

For one Home Visitor the initial programme training provided an idealised version of the home visiting experience. The weekly supervision sessions extend this training by dealing with the real events that occur:

*And then, like, you've got supervision every week so you're still being trained ... The everyday, yeah, the training did cover the everyday, you know, you go in an ideal world and you sit there with the book and the child's so interested that it's great, you know? And then you've got the other side of the coin where something goes wrong, and that's where the Monday comes in. I find it very important (Supervision on Monday). (HV6, Time 1)*

Some of the more experienced Home Visitors noted how new members benefited from their background knowledge, something they would have liked when the programme first started:

*Exactly yeah, like where we got up and spoke this year each of us about our experience, where when I done that in the first year we'd nobody. So it was like, like I understood it but it was like, what is it all about, do you know what I mean Yeah, where now the girls have a better insight of it all. (HV3, Time 1)*

*Where I do think the girls coming in now have the 'brucey bonus' that they're able to talk to us the 'brucey bonus', you know like? (laughter). That they're able to talk to us you know and, em, they have a little more background on what's going to happen. (HV4, Time 1)*

While the newer Home Visitors benefit from the supervision sessions, this is also the case for the staff that have been in the programme for three or four years. They also gain more experience each year through their participation in the training programme for new Home Visitors.

## Being a Home Visitor

At their first interview, when asked about how they perceived their role, the Home Visitors spoke positively about having a job they loved. They generally found it hard to 'pigeon-hole' the job in terms of its status, but most saw themselves as professionals working in the community. Being attached to the National College of Ireland bolstered this. Home Visitors also consider that the job requires a genuine interest in children, a sense of confidence in oneself and an interest in people generally. It is therefore not a job that just anyone can do. At their end of programme interviews and focus groups the Home Visitors' have maintained a strong sense of satisfaction about their job. In particular they enjoy the work, the children and families and the comradeship.

### *Personal benefits*

The Home Visitors were asked about the benefits of being a Home Visitor for themselves and their families. Most spoke about how it has boosted their self-confidence and given them a sense of achieving something worthwhile. Home Visitors spoke enthusiastically about the benefits of seeing the child and the family develop over time: the new Home Visitors reported that they were looking forward to this aspect of their job. Over time a bond develops between the child, parent and Home Visitor. Some Home Visitors have seen children leave the programme and move on to school and speak proudly of how well they are doing.

The Home Visitors indicated they were enjoying their job and they found it a very rewarding experience. In particular they pointed out that they had an enormous sense of job satisfaction because they had a sense of purpose. One Home Visitor described *'It makes me feel like somebody'* (HV1, Time 1). Other Home Visitors expressed similar feelings of contentment about the role:

*I feel great I ... I feel like that I'm actually, have a purpose now... (HV11, Time 1)*

*Me personally I find that it's a wonderful job. I think it's well, it's a worthwhile job, you know, you feel you're making a difference and I don't think an awful lot of people get that in their job. (HV4, Time 1)*

The Home Visitors also mentioned having a sense of pride in their job. They enjoyed being employed and enjoyed telling others about their job. This seems to give them not only a sense of purpose but also a sense identity:

*I love it, I think it's great ... There's no minuses and lots of plusses for me. Very proud ... Yeah, it's a nice thing to tell people that you're doing you know?... So for me that's the, the nice bit of it I ... there is an element of pride in it. (HV 8, Time 1)*

This sense of purpose was expressed in terms of being able to make a difference to children's development. Home Visitors reported feeling happy at seeing children develop and make progress. One mentioned how she liked the idea of *'being able to give something back'* (HV2, Time 1). Another reported enjoying the aspect of her job where she could help and support parents out with their enquiries about schools and local services:

*I was delighted that I could help her (the parent) and it's nice to be nice. (HV11, Time 1)*

The Home Visitors also spoke about how the job had built their confidence and self-esteem. They talked about feeling better as a person and that it had given them the confidence to take on other challenges:

*It's improved me...I feel better in myself I've a lot more confidence now and I have no problem I'm meeting new families.(HV11, Time 1)*

*I feel I could do anything now ... I swear to God. If you said to me three years ago that I'll be working, I'll be doing what I'm doing, I, I would say no. Because I, I'd no confidence, I wouldn't have even been able to sit here and talk to you ... I swear to God and it's just, made me in myself feel so much better... me husband has said to me loads of times he notices how much happier I am as a person ... And I feel proud as myself (HV3, Time 1)*

*It's good for my self-esteem anyway (laughter), you know ... Cos that's what happens, we don't all know this, I've learned so much even from this myself like from my own children there's always things that you can pick up to help your child and to help yourself. (HV4, Time 1)*

Others have also pointed out how getting the job itself had boosted their confidence. One Home Visitor mentioned how she was delighted to get the job as this meant that someone had belief in her abilities. She went on to describe how getting the job was a life-changing experience for her. For her the benefits have been wide reaching both personally and for her family:

*I was actually thrilled, but, to get it because I didn't think I'd be able to do it I never ever thought ... I have the faith in me now knowing that I can do the job because I've just been given the job ... So I just couldn't wait for it then to start that was a major big boost and that was one thing that I'd absolutely say I'd never change doing, was coming, to find out what the programme was about and how to become a Home Visitor and learn all about it, and it was probably one of the things that actually changed my life personally. (HV10, Time 11)*

### **Benefits to other family members**

The Home Visitors reflected on how many positive elements of their job have trickled down to other family members. Their own families were interested in what they were doing; children at home were proud that their mother was working in a college and were curious about the children that their mother visited. Some children benefited from their mother's new approach to reading and this was being extended to nieces, nephews and grandchildren:

*I would, I would actually I'd read and I'd play more now than I would have say with me own children ... I mean I sit with my granddaughter I did sit with me own children but I wouldn't have sat the way I do now. (HV2, Time 1)*

*And I'm finding that I am reading to my family to my nephews and nieces. (HV1, Time 1)*

Some Home Visitors noted that through the PCHP materials and techniques they have found benefits in how they now approach parenting, and this ultimately benefits their own child's development:

*Like I said now, my youngest lad, I would have read to him but not as much as I do nowadays. I find that he can actually read more. And he is actually, holds his concentration better now. (HV5, Time 1)*

*And also it's helping me with my daughter; you know I'm learning things, how to teach her ... she's getting the advantage of seeing all these new books you know so my daughter's definitely benefiting ... She's getting the materials through me as well and so that's helping her. (HV8, Time 1)*

*I, I just think confidence-wise and, and the way like I'm real, like my niece and nephews or other people's kids, I actually talk to them different like, you know what I mean, and I look at them like different as well like, and I'm, I'm learning when I'm talking to them like, I'm like telling them colours and kind of learning as I'm speaking to them like. (HV3, Time 1)*

Several Home Visitors commented on how enthusiastic their own children were about the programme. They expressed a keen interest in their mother's work, particularly the programme materials:

*He reads every book I bring home ... every book, he has to have a look through it and see what's going on. (HV5, Time 3)*

*Even the reading now, if I bring books back home for the kids, ... it's like 'What do you have for them today? Can I read them and make sure they're okay?' which is great. (HV6, Time 3)*

The Home Visitors have observed how their own children imitate their mother's reading behaviour and some want to be Home Visitors when they grow up:

*She wants to do my job when she's older... she loves, she loves to see what I got and stuff like that and she'll go through my bag for the books and stuff. (HV11, Time 1)*

*But she actually said to me last week - she was playing in a nurse's outfit - and I said to her 'Are you going to be a nurse when you grow up' and she said 'no I'm going to read books for children'. (HV8, Time 3)*

*He loves it, he thinks it's fantastic ... He wants to like you know, come and help me with the kids ... And he wants to mind the kids and tell them how he does it, but how do they want to do it, em he loves knowing what I've done in work on the days that I do, you know do be with the kids and he wants to know everything that I've done with them and did you have fun and did they have fun and, he'll ask you all the questions, it benefits him as well because what I've learned. (HV10, Time 1)*

Some Home Visitors mentioned that members of their extended family were showing an interest in their work and were keen to find out about it. This validation adds another layer of support to the Home Visitors; it generates heightened respect for them in their own families and enhances their own confidence:

*Well I think they, there's some of them are still like "what do you do" (laughter) but no I think like the, like my sister, but my sisters and all are, like they'd be really like em 'what are you doing this week like you know' and they'd be real interested. (HV4, Time 1)*

*The nieces and nephews when I [laughter], when they see what I do be doing as well they always ... everyone saying Jesus that was great. (HV11, Time 1)*

*I just feel that I know more, I'm really more knowledgeable on that end of things, and like just like I notice even in my family, they're starting to come to me and ask me questions like about, my brother had a baby last year, and he's one now, and he's like 'what books do you get?' (laughter) and I'm like you know I - I'm the book person now. (HV4, Time 3)*

Many of the Home Visitors' children display a sense of pride in their mother's work as they often refer to their mother as 'being a teacher', 'teaching the kids' or 'working in the college':

*He thinks it's great, he'd just say 'are you a teacher ma?', like but I just say look at the books and, I know he's fifteen but like ... I was saying it to him, 'read that, you might know something there like' see he just thinks I'm gas because, I've a bag of toys one week, a bag of books the next week, he just thinks it's great. (HV1, Time 3)*

*It does actually, it has a great influence on the kids. Yeah, I mean he tells everybody that I go to college ... So, they're all pretty proud, like as I said she's like you know to everybody in the class 'See that shirt the girl up there is wearing, my mammy works there', you know, and it's just, it's great. And they know college as a regular thing, you know. (HV6, Time 3)*

### **Professional benefits**

While the capacity of the Home Visitors has been enhanced by on the job support and supervision, during the course of this evaluation the home visiting staff have engaged in accredited training programmes that have increased their personal and professional development. During the course of this evaluation they have undertaken the following FETAC Level 5 training modules:

- Family and Community Studies – Spring 2010
- Health & Safety – Autumn 2010
- Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace – Spring 2011

At the end of programme year one (April-May 2010) the interviews with the Home Visitors aimed to assess how their initial expectations had played out and what changes had occurred during the first year of the programme. For most, things were going to plan, but others experienced some disruption (to be discussed later). The most dominant aspect was their involvement in the Family and Community Studies course that was being conducted at the NCI.

When asked about how this course was going there were mixed responses from the Home Visitors. About two thirds indicated that they were stressed by it. They talked about having busy home lives, how the timing of the course did not suit them and they seemed overwhelmed by the amount of work involved. In this regard they did not appear to be enjoying the course:

*Interviewer: Are you happy to be doing it?*

*Participant: Do you know what, not really (happy) ... Being honest. It's just that time wise ... I've got the kids and I am the only one at home bringing up the kids ... So trying to fit the course in, it's just not happening. (HV6, Time 2)*

*Don't talk to me about it ... Very stressful. No, I'll get on with it and try and do it but ... But I can't wait for it to end either ... That's the thing. I don't have the time to do homework and do all this. (HV11, Time 2)*

In contrast about one third of the Home Visitors spoke positively about the course. They seemed to be enjoying it and things were going well for them. They appeared to be well able to handle the course workload:

*Yeah, it's absolutely fantastic ... I mean I've got everything up to scratch that I need to have done for this so ... I'm doing it, yeah, and it's going to be brilliant to do when it's all handed in and it's all done. (HV10, Time 2)*

The main concern of many of the Home Visitors was the amount of work that was involved during their course. Several talked about the pressure they felt in completing assignments. Some expressed a lack confidence in knowing how to organise, manage and present their assignments:

*Even spelling words it's "I haven't spelled that word in a long time" I don't know... And I know, like, it will help us, like it helped me, like. It's just doing it. (HV1, Time 2)*

*Oh, that melts me head ... It's mostly trying to get the things all together. To me get the things but it's putting, you know, in a, in a proper way, you know. I've sleepless nights over it. (HV2, Time 2)*

A number of the Home Visitors were unsure about their own capabilities as many repeated how they had left school early and taking this course on was a big challenge for them:

*It's really ... Yeah, it's like you're going to school. I mean it's twenty years since I went to school ... Doing homework and all. So, it's a kind of a huge big step. I mean it's not just a huge big step for me. I need help. (HV2, Time 2)*

For those who were enjoying the course and coping with the workload they appeared to be growing in confidence about their own abilities:

*That's going well. I've a good bit of that done. I've done me learning journal which I think is brilliant. The way you can write down how you feel and what you've learned and that. I find that really good, that part of it. Ah, I'm not freaked out ... I feel great in meself, I can do it. (HV3, Time 2)*

*No I can deal with it. I've got everything that needs to be up to date, is up to date in my coursework ... I am looking forward to handing it in to see how I can put it across to them and hopefully pass the lot. (HV10, Time 2)*

While some Home Visitors talked about the pressure they were under others seemed to understand the benefits of obtaining an accredited qualification:

*Well, no, in fairness it is actually a good decision as Home Visitors as much as we get all the in house training we are not getting accredited qualifications ... where if anyone did decide to go elsewhere, yes, it's great to have the experience but we've no qualifications or anything so that's why it was decided that we'll do ... They're (NCI) paying for it and everything you know. You get more; you get paid for it. It's proper, em, FETAC Level 5. (HV4, Time 2)*

*That's what I'm saying, it would be nice to actually get the qualification for it. It will actually be nice. That's what I was saying, the qualification that would be great to have. (HV5, Time 2)*

While many of the Home Visitors spoke of the difficulties they experienced with the coursework, they acknowledged that they received support from the NCI and from family members at home:

*I left school at the age of fourteen ... Yeah, that's great support now, I have to say...Great support. (HV11, Time 2)*

*Just great, great support actually. We didn't know what way it was going to stand, the support for us all and [name] has been helping us out and it's been fantastic because she has been able to break it down and help us do it. And there actually is members of staff in the college that's actually help us as well. So, that's brilliant and I'm getting support then at home as well. (HV10, Time 2)*

At the time of their second interview most of the Home Visitors were experiencing anxiety about the Family and Community Studies course, yet they went on to take more accredited training programmes in programme year two: Health and Safety and Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace. At their third interview, towards the end of programme year two, they reflected on their first course – Family and Community Studies.

All of the Home Visitors reported that they felt a great sense of achievement at completing these courses even though initially many of them were feeling overwhelmed by the workload and feared a lack of ability. Many pointed out that they lacked confidence as they had left school early and at times had struggled with the work. Their accounts are filled with pride at what they have managed to overcome and achieve.

*I enjoyed it for myself and my own personal achievement. (HV3, Time 3)*

*It gave me the confidence to go and do anymore courses that I wanted to do, which is fantastic. As I said I never thought I'd ever do another course again after I left school. So it has given me the confidence to go ahead and do that, it has given me the, you know, the want to go and learn more, regardless of whether it was too hard, or not hard enough ... the course is never not hard enough! But it's gone and done that, it's helped my confidence in a lot of ways to do with the job, doing other courses, with my own life then outside the job, so it's after having a major impact on me, but a good one. (HV10, Time 3)*

The Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace course required participants to write and maintain a learning journal throughout their course. Several of the Home Visitors mentioned the positive benefits of self-reflection. They learnt a lot about themselves, they felt better able to cope with situations and were able to identify both their strengths and weaknesses:

*Insight ... I don't know what you'd say – on it. That I was able to handle it more because I was able to talk and write it, rather than it kind of always in the back of my head ... Reflect on it, yeah ... I found that yeah, by doing that ... it kind of like, you were able to kind of communicate then. I mean, at the time of the course, when you're doing it, you don't feel that you're doing anything, but then when you've finished the course and you see someone or you hear someone, just something clicks in the brain and it comes out of what you're after learning in the course, which you probably wouldn't have done it otherwise. (HV2, Time 3)*

*I did because it was a lot about yourself, like, we had to give our assignment in today and how we feel as a student, and as a Home Visitor, what our strengths were and what our weaknesses were, so, I enjoyed writing about that. And, giving time for yourself to sit down and write about yourself, you can off-load. (HV3, Time 3)*

In all their accounts the Home Visitors reported that they gained valuable knowledge and skills. In turn this increased skill level has a positive impact on their work life and builds their capacity to carry out their jobs more effectively. Some Home Visitors referred to being more knowledgeable about the services in their own community. Furthermore, some felt their training had highlighted different approaches to use with families and they feel better equipped to deal with parents' questions:

*It actually makes sense, this course has actually made a lot of sense, because I mean it's made us as Home Visitors - I mean it makes you look at yourself and question how you're actually going into the houses and changing your*

*approaches. It does - and then even like, when we do public-speaking for the ELI at events and stuff like that, yeah it actually makes you more aware ... Personally as well. (HV5, Time 3)*

*Well, it's opened our minds, I mean if I go to a family and they ask me a question on something, we know now a lot of services that we're doing through the courses ... Like if a family wants to know about like counselling sessions, I can feel like I can recommend them to somewhere. (HV8, Time 3)*

In addition to enhancing the on-the-job skills of the Home Visitor the attainment of these FETAC qualifications has opened up other career avenues. When asked what they would do if the PCHP was no longer an option for them they all felt confident that they would be able to seek other types of work whether that is with a school, a crèche, working in the community, working as a health and safety officer, pursuing a career in youth work or pursuing further education:

*The same work, probably not doing the same thing, because obviously that'd be gone, but I'd say crèche, or helping out in a school. (HV10, Time 3)*

*I'd be a Health and Safety Officer. (HV9, Time 3)*

*I'd do community work ... I'd like to work with the older - with the youths, youth organisations, you know? ... No, I wouldn't have been as confident ... Yeah I'd go out and I'd look specifically for community work. (HV5, Time 3)*

## Home Visitor Perspectives on who can benefit most from PCHP

At their third and final interview the Home Visitors were asked for their views on who can benefit most from PCHP and who should receive it. In the following we outline Home Visitors' perspectives on these issues.

### Who benefits?

The Home Visitors consider that *all families* benefit from the PCHP approach. They feel that while many children will have access to learning materials, parents may not necessarily make optimal use of these in the promotion of their child's language.

The issue is not clear-cut among the Home Visitors about who benefits the *most* and who *should receive* the PCHP. They suggested a range of groups that should receive the programme, for example, families with more than one child or immigrant families. Some reported that it was for families who could not afford to buy books and toys, others mentioned how single mothers would benefit from the programme and some mentioned how it should be for people living in disadvantaged areas. In short there was no consensus on who would benefit the most from the programme and who should receive it.

It would appear there is some discomfort among the Home Visitors about identifying any particular group:

*And it's very hard to say, 'well I think it should be this type of family or this situation that should be in it' because I think a lot of people benefit. (HV8, Time 3)*

*I wouldn't pinpoint any particular style of family, do you know. (HV9, Time 3)*



This issue was probed further with the Home Visitors. Two reported that it should be for families that have more than one child as they felt this one-to-one time was invaluable to both parents and children:

*I don't know uh I don't really know now (pause) I think the ones that have more than one child, because it gives them their time with the child ... I think the, the ones that have the bigger families. (HV1, Time 3)*

Several Home Visitors expressed a view that a variety of families benefit from the programme from those who are not in a position to buy books and toys for their children to those who are married and are in employment or immigrant families. In this regard they perceive the programme as being for everyone. One Home Visitor referred to the programme title, noting that it is a parent child programme that made no mention of specific parent or child types and therefore it should be open to all families:

*I think then, you have families then who can't afford to buy books and things like that, you know what I mean, so ... the people who can't afford to kind of hmm, but see, but then you have, a different kind of like the ones who are married and have like husbands and good jobs like, they benefit from it as well like ... it's for everyone as well. (HV1, Time 3)*

*I think it should be offered to who wants it. (HV5, Time 3)*

*Any child, any child at all could benefit from this. They don't have to be the ones with everything, they don't have to be the kids with less. Any kind of child could go with this programme, and would totally benefit from it. (HV10, T3)*

As reported in Chapter 2 some Home Visitors noted how immigrant families were benefiting from the programme. In this regard they view the programme as suiting families who need to develop their English language skills.

Other Home Visitors noted how lone parents would benefit from the programme. One talked about the positive impact the programme was having on one of her families that is also a lone parent family. Another Home Visitor reported how a young mother benefits as she sees the Home Visitor as her role model:

*Yeah, well I mean I have one. But his mother's only twenty-one, and the benefits she's even getting out of it, you can actually see it. I mean, at first ... She's a lone-parent. And you can actually see her kind of coming, I mean I'm only there since September ... A great impact on them. (HV2, Time 3)*

*We have got a few younger, younger girls coming in now, I just know one that [name] visits and it's like [name] is nearly her second mam, you know and the things that she'll say to [name] or she'll ask has to do it obviously in a subtle way, and whatever else, but that girl looks up to [name] you could see ... so it would be good because it's a good start for them and a good start for the child. (HV7, Time 3)*

### *How to reach families: Stigma and targeting*

While there were mixed responses about who would benefit most from the programme, the majority of Home Visitors voiced strong opinions on the issue of targeting particular groups of people as they did not like the idea of labelling people. They felt that the PCHP could become known as the programme for *lone parents* or *single mothers* or *disadvantaged families*. They are not in favour of this approach as it could result in young mothers being reluctant or embarrassed to sign up to the programme:

*I know but like, there's leaflets around everywhere and it's voluntary, so I mean some of them girls mightn't, might feel embarrassed or might say 'Oh I'm not going because of this'. (HV2, Time 3)*

*But I wonder the impact that it would have if you're just pinpointing and saying 'right we're just gonna go for these people', or we're just gonna go, do you know what I mean? (HV4, Time 3)*

*So I think it's terrible if they start putting them into categories or, yes we do have it but it's not as if we'd come up and say 'this person really needs it because they don't have a job and this is wrong in that family home'. (HV10, Time 3)*

There is also discomfort among some Home Visitors about setting selection criteria for families. There is a view that such an approach could turn families off signing up to the programme:

*Well then if you put it out that it's only for disadvantaged families, would we actually get so many families signing up, I mean some people could take that, like being labelled ... people feeling pigeon-holed, you know what I mean? (HV5, Time 3)*

*So it, it is very hard to answer, it's very hard to categorise I think, whether it should be to, given to everybody I don't know, I don't know, there's a lot of families that I do think it would be wasted on ... There's a lot of families who need it more probably, but how, trying to - to find the line, is very difficult. (HV8, Time 3)*

One Home Visitor noted the importance of taking a careful approach, particularly with young single mothers:

*I mean, and you have to be really very careful because, I mean they're all only young girls and young, you know what I mean? You have to be very ... you can't force them, but you can do it in a nice way, then they're not feeling threatened by they have to join it, or they don't feel threatened that they're stupid or the child is this or – do you know what I mean? You can do it in a nice – I mean, you can't kind of, intimidate. (HV2, Time 3)*

This Home Visitor went on to say that rather than targeting, those who are already in the programme could act as its ambassadors. As local ambassadors families would not feel threatened by an outsider approaching them. She stressed the importance of promoting the programme through local community members.

Other Home Visitors were similarly not in favour of targeting specific groups of people and maintained that the reason the programme has been so successful is because it does not do this. Nevertheless, there is a realisation by some Home Visitors that they would prefer that the PCHP remain voluntary, but at the same time should ensure that the families who need it most are offered the programme:

*I do believe the reason why it has worked is because we didn't target. (HV4, Time 3)*

*It should be voluntary like the way it is now, but the children that need to get it should get it. (HV11, Time 3)*

The voluntary aspect of the PCHP, while seen as desirable by the Home Visitors, does present some difficulties when it comes to attracting professional immigrant groups. This is a contentious and sensitive issue. While still firmly of the view that PCHP benefits all and should be non-targeting, some Home Visitors considered that the programme should prioritise families that have a greater need. Several of the Home Visitors have spoken about their experience of delivering the programme to professional families. Professional immigrant families are a particular concern for the Home Visitors because over the years they have observed a pattern whereby most return to their home countries for extended periods during the programme year while families with greater need miss out or remain on a waiting list. Some Home Visitors have noted that even though there has been an improvement in the number of disadvantaged families receiving the programme in recent times the issue of immigrant families opting in and out of the programme to go on long holidays continues to be a cause of concern:

*Now, I have to say this year we've seen a big number in more disadvantaged families joining, but I just, and you've probably heard this from all the other Home Visitors – a lot of the immigrant families are just swanning off and coming back and thinking they can get it, I mean something's going to have to be done for September. (HV3, Time 3)*

While the Home Visitors consider that all families benefit, a few are critical of having Irish professionals in the programme. When probed a few Home Visitors suggested families in greatest need should be offered the programme and not those who can afford to pay for example crèche or Montessori fees:

*Yeah, I think there's more of a foreign intake in the programme than there is an Irish intake in the programme. Now I'm not saying anything about that, I'm just talking about that they're middle class, whether they're foreign or Irish, and they're all – not wealthy – well off, and their kids are getting what they have to get from crèche, preschool and Montessori, and I'd just love to see it go in a different direction. (HV6, Time 3)*

*Yeah, I think yeah - well if you had to choose, like say you only had two places left ... I would go with the disadvantaged, I would yeah. I'd go with the person who needed it more. (HV7, Time 3)*

*I think it should be for disadvantaged children. (HV11, Time 3)*

## **Challenges in the role of Home Visitor**

At each interview we explored the challenges the Home Visitors experienced in their jobs. Consistently Home Visitors reported that they thoroughly enjoyed the nature of the work. Their accounts of their training and on the job experience showed how they have grown personally and professionally during the period of this evaluation.

### Cancelled visits

Some Home Visitors expressed annoyance or disappointment when a family cancels a visit. As mothers with young children themselves they know how a child can get sick and plans can change at the last minute; they are very understanding in this regard. Although some parents manage to send them a text in advance to cancel the visit others do not:

*That is one of the biggest factors of, that's one of the let me downs of the job, love the job apart from if you're knocking and they don't text you or don't ring you and you're knocking. (HV11, Time 1)*

*The only, one of the negatives I would, I would have to say I've found so far is people cancelling. And not telling you. (HV8, Time 1)*

*What really annoys me, that I find difficult, is parents that don't let you know that they're (inaudible) ... It would be so simple just to text an hour beforehand, to let you know sorry, I won't be there today it's not that hard to do you know. (HV3, Time 1)*

Home Visitors may agree to work 10-and-a-half hours each week during school term-time. At the start of the programme year they have an expectation of a certain number of families and the income that goes with it. With the exception of those who work in a Co-ordinator role many Home Visitors experience wage fluctuations when families cancel a visit or go on extended leave. They do not have a guaranteed set wage. Home Visitors expressed strong views on their inability to plan ahead and in turn the financial stress they were under:

*But if I get a text message or a call... Before that I don't get paid for that ... You won't have anyone yeah you don't, wouldn't have any money like. (HV1, Time 1)*

*Then you've no money ... It is difficult and it would be the one thing... Buy a pair of shoes at the end of the month ... Or there has, there was, in the first year, weeks that I came out with twenty euro for the week ... Yeah I would consider, that would be one of the major hindrances of the job. Em that can be a nightmare because obviously you're not getting paid, you know? Yeah (laughter) that doesn't happen all the time, you do get mothers and em, or fathers as I said that do text you, but certain things come up like a child could have been just sick the night before. (HV4, Time 1)*

### Pay and conditions of employment

The issue of cancelled visits has become more pronounced as we reach the end of programme year two. This is a complex issue that is associated with: immigrant families that leave for extended periods; reporting rules for cancellations; and perceptions about the absence of sick-leave and holiday pay for Home Visitors. These issues are for some Home Visitors further complicated by the fact that they receive social welfare benefits:

*Yeah, you're not guaranteed a set wage, as the same thing all the time. (HV2, Time 3)*

*That is a big with me, not being - because I am a lone parent, I'm the only one that bring money into the house, and it kind of doesn't sit very well with me because we can't make any plans because I don't know, you know, if the kids need to go on a trip next week, have I got all my families there to get that wage, to pay for this trip for them? I just don't know. (HV6, Time 3)*

Many of the Home Visitors articulated views on their need for a set basic wage and how this could be managed. One Home Visitor expressed this in terms of the need for 'groundwork to be done' on the issue. The suggestion here is the need for dialogue to occur between the Home Visitors and management regarding the terms of their contract. They argue that they signed a contract and are ready for work but despite this they are at the loss if families cancel or are away on holidays:

*Like there still needs to be groundwork done to say that like 'okay well I know I'm guaranteed a certain amount of money every week'. (HV4, Time 3)*

*Okay, you've taken on six families, no matter what it's €8 the half hour for those six families twice a week, and then when you get to see the families, it goes up to €13, do you understand? ... Say if I had two families cancel on me, I'm still guaranteed €8 you know, per family per week, because they cancelled on me, but if I went to them, I would earn my €13. Do you understand? I'm still guaranteed a base if they cancel on me ... You see there has to be a basic wage. (HV6, Time 3)*

*I mean, if you sign your contract with that family, and then they don't then - I think you should still be paid for one hour out of them two hours each week, because if you've agreed at the start of the year to take that family on, and you've said 'Well I won't take this family, or this family, but yet I'll take this family', then why should you be at loss if they decide to toddle off somewhere for a few months? (HV5, Time 3)*

This lack of a set basic income is making some Home Visitors question the sustainability of their position. This is expressed in terms of depending on social welfare where at least they are guaranteed a set amount or having to find another source of income:

*Yeah, it's huge. I mean, to the point where at Christmas I kind of was thinking 'Will I go back?', because if I don't I'm going to get my dole, which is €70 a week, I'm going to get fuel allowance is €20, that's €90, I'm only earning €120 or something so, 'is it worth my while to go back for €30, in the snow trudging around in the cold when, for €30?'. (HV8, Time 3)*

*It's hard now. No, but I am dedicated to the job, I just think I'll have to find another job ... Like, I love it and all, but at the end of the day how am I going to feed my kids? At the minute I'm thinking of car-booting it for the Easter weeks, what can I do? They're the options I have. (HV11, Time 3)*

According to all of the Home Visitors, families that go on long-term holidays and the issue of families cancelling or being absent for a visit has adverse effects on their take home pay. One Home Visitor talks about how at the start of the year she had fourteen-and-a-half-hours but this was decreased to eight plus her two-and-a-half-hour supervision. This reduction was primarily because one of her families went on a six weeks holiday:

*No they're going home for six weeks, ... So it's fourteen and a half hours I started off with, and then just before Christmas I went down to, it would be eight and two and a half supervision, so that's ten and a half hours - that's not including anybody who has rang me up to say they're sick, and the visits have to be cancelled. (HV6, Time 3)*

Cancellations and families taking time off from the programme similarly inconvenience other Home Visitors:

*It's a major, well it is a challenge yeah, you could put it down as a challenge because in one way it's, I'm missing out on two hours, right so that means my wages are down. (HV11, Time 3)*

*They don't get paid if somebody says to you the week before, 'I'm going on holidays for a week'...so as long as they get the text that morning, they get paid, but if somebody says to you, 'I'm going on holidays for four months' ... you would like it's reasonable to say two, two weeks holiday but you, that's it, you don't get anything. (HV4, Time 3)*

This is not the experience of all Home Visitors. In contrast a few reported that they were fortunate this year as they have not had too many cancellations or families going on long holidays:

*But I haven't had it much this year so it's good for me in that way like and I, I have to say I am, I'm lucky because I haven't had what, what the other girls have, people going away. (HV1, Time 3)*

For Home Visitors that have been with the PCHP for a few programme cycles the issue of cancellations and families taking breaks during the programme is not a new situation, rather it is an ongoing problem to be addressed. For these Home Visitors they feel that as they entered into a contract to work with a family they would also like to see families honouring their side of the contract. Again this issue is more pronounced when the Home Visitors speak about professional immigrant families who return to their home countries for extended periods:

*The rest of them go for three or four months and it's already been said, the same stuff's been said to the girls every year, like well 'ah well it's not gonna happen next year'. (HV4, Time 3)*

*Now that's what I'm saying, if we have to honour our contract on our part, then why can't they honour theirs on their part, you know? Right, there are factors like if a child is sick, you can with no explanation or nothing, if you're after signing up the contract for the nine months of the year, I think you should be actually paid for that. (HV5, Time 3)*

*Yeah, but I just want it every week. You know, if I take on a contract and I start with six families ... I have taken on my side of the contract, and I have stuck with those families ... No, but I've often had cancellations on me now, and I'm ready and able for work. (HV6, Time 3)*

Families on long-term holidays would appear to be preventing other families from enrolling in the program. Some Home Visitors feel strongly these families are not committed to the programme and should not be allowed back into it:

*I don't think they should be allowed back into the programme ... But, not even that, I mean if they've missed – what? – say three months, if they've missed that, and there's another child on the waiting list, then why should they - ? I mean, they've been given the option in the first place, so if we're committed and they're saying their committed, but then no if they just toddle off and don't come back then, no. Not if they're blocking another child on the list. (HV5, Time 3)*

Many Home Visitors are frustrated when their wages are reduced due to families cancelling a visit. This situation has become more acute in recent times as it is being bound up in issues of trust. Home Visitors are asked to produce evidence of the time that they received the messages from the parent cancelling the visit. If the message is received while the Home Visitor is en route to a scheduled visit then they are paid for the visit. If it is received before they leave for the visit they are not paid. This has an impact on whether they get paid for the visit or not.

The issue of trust was also being compounded at time three by some Home Visitors feeling that the programme was becoming hierarchical as there were different employment and pay conditions amongst staff. One Home Visitor argued that those working with administrative responsibilities have a set wage whereas Home Visitors' income is casual and liable to change. One Home Visitor made the point that all workers should be treated equally:

*And they're all the girls that are on the streets, whereas the girls that are in the office have the wage coming in every week, you know, and they're the ones allocating all the families and all the jobs and - I mean I'm not putting down their job, they're getting paid for it - but we should be treated the same. It's supposed to be a team. You've got the people at the top, and you've got the people at the bottom doing the hardest job, the job that the whole initiative is working around, and the ones that just are not treated properly. (HV6, Time 3)*

### How Home Visitors see the future of PCHP

The Home Visitors were asked about how they saw the future of the PCHP. All the Home Visitors would like to see PCHP grow and expand beyond the Docklands area but at interview three they have become concerned about the future funding of the programme and the extent to which such expansion is possible.

Some have noted how people from other areas express an interest in the PCHP and would like to see something similar in their own area. In this regard they would like to see it go beyond the Docklands and the inner city areas:

*I would just like it to be, broader like because it's only in the Docklands like, I'd just, like in different areas as well. (HV1, Time 3)*

*Yeah, I can see it kind of growing. I can see it going on ... I can see it because I often talk to the people outside the area that are kind of interested in it, that kind of interested in it that saying 'God there's nothing out in this area, that'd be great for the kids out here'. I mean, and it's not only, if you're kind of talking about people in disadvantaged areas, I mean it's not only in the inner city - It goes beyond, do you know what I mean? So, you could nearly expand it to beyond. (HV2, Time 3)*

*When I tell my friends and all and relations about the programme, they go 'My God, if that was in the area. Oh so-and-so could do with it, so-and-so could do with it', you know. (HV5, Time 3)*

Other Home Visitors express a desire for the programme to continue as they feel it is having an impact on families as they are getting positive feedback from parents, schools and teachers. Yet they remain uncertain about the future due to funding issues:

*Oh God, it's a hard one isn't it really, because well Jesus a couple of weeks ago we didn't know whether we were going to be here or not! I think now after the meeting - you know we had a big meeting with the Community and all, like some of the community members a couple of weeks ago? ... we were told that PCHP would be the last to go, but you never know, you know? But, now the president has made a big commitment to get out advices, opinions and all about PCHP, but I mean that's only verbal, no guarantee. I hope it gets bigger and stronger and expands, to be honest, but I don't know really. (HV3, Time 3)*

At their end of programme focus groups the Home Visitors had the opportunity to reflect on the key issues emanating from the research. Discussion ensued about the prominent issue of employment conditions and pay. It was clear among the Home Visitors that the current arrangement regarding their employment was not sustainable for them, or for the programme. They considered that a changed approach was required that was more equitable in which they would have a guaranteed percentage of their wage for the number of families that they visit. They felt that since the expenses for PCHP had been allocated as the visiting year begins, Home Visitors should be given a base salary for the whole year divided into either 10 monthly (or 40 weekly) payments consistent with the number of families the Home Visitor serves. Following this Home Visitors would be paid the number of hours above the base that they have worked. In addition, where supervision sessions fall on a Bank Holiday Monday it is currently the case that Home Visitors do not get paid. They consider that in the future a better and more equitable arrangement would be for them to receive pay on these occasions.

## Summary

Over the course of this evaluation the Home Visitors indicated that they have experienced and continue to experience a high degree of satisfaction in their jobs. Becoming a Home Visitor has impacted on both the professional and personal lives of the women involved. It is evident that they feel more confident, have better self-esteem and are more knowledgeable about early childhood home learning. Furthermore, their competencies and confidence have been boosted through the attainment of accredited qualifications and these have the potential to provide them with other career prospects. Although many experienced high levels of anxiety about undertaking further education, they overcame this and went on to increase their qualifications. This was a profound achievement particularly for those who had never been to secondary school or had left school at the age of 15, decades earlier.

The personal benefits derived from being a Home Visitor also extend to their own families. The Home Visitors' children benefit from their mother's improved parenting techniques, increased reading and changed approach to reading with them. Their children show more of an interest in reading than their older siblings. Some Home Visitors noted that their children have better concentration skills and aspirations to go to third level college.

Despite the high degree of satisfaction that they have with their jobs particular organisational barriers persist and to some extent diminish the level of satisfaction that they have with their role. These concern the extent of cancelled visits and the impact that this has on their pay and other benefits. While these are complex issues and are connected to issues such as personal social welfare entitlements, the PCHP policies around family recruitment and programme readmission, and the enrolment of particular immigrant families that leave for extended holidays, over time these issues have become more pronounced and have made the Home Visitors acutely aware of the casual and uncertain nature of their jobs.

The Home Visitors provided mixed responses to who benefits most from the PCHP. While they are clear that all families benefit, there is no consensus on who would benefit the most from the programme. Some see that those whose first language is not English can benefit but these groups are not necessarily economically disadvantaged. In general Home Visitors are not in favour of targeting specific groups but they do see that the voluntary nature of the programme has attracted people from professional backgrounds.





C H A P T E R

6

# Discussion and Recommendations

**The evaluation examined implementation and outcomes for the PCHP over a full two-year programme in three key areas: the programme; children and parents; and Home Visitors:**

- The *implementation evaluation* examined the organisational aspects of programme delivery, reach and level of stakeholder satisfaction.
- The *outcome evaluation* examined how participation in the PCHP impacts on children's school readiness; and on the personal and professional lives of the Home Visitors.

**We collected data between September 2009 and June 2011 from a variety of sources using multiple methods. Certain data were collected at repeated intervals to assess progress over time, such as child development assessments and Home Visitors' implementation of the programme.**

**This chapter discusses the key findings from the evaluation. It draws together key results and provides interpretative commentary that refers where appropriate to relevant published research. Recommendations are also made that could support the ELI in the future development, delivery and evaluation of the PCHP.**

## Programme Implementation

### Programme reach

During the period of this baseline evaluation the Docklands PCHP has focused its recruitment on families with toddlers that live within a specific catchment area that comprises the Dublin Docklands on the north and south side of the Liffey. It has done this through a variety of ways that include public health nurses, word of mouth, road shows and notices in local schools and crèches.

The majority of parents who participated in this evaluation were identified as Strivers (n=14), parents who may be socially, educationally or economically disadvantaged, but who want the best for their children and try to help them achieve highly. A much smaller number were identified as Hesitators (n=4), also socio-economically disadvantaged and who do not often encourage their children to interact, problem solve or participate in creative play.

While we have been able to apply the parent typology that has been identified consistently in the large volume of international PCHP research, it is important to note that although these parents align with the characteristics of Strivers and Hesitaters, neither group exhibits a high degree of socio-economic disadvantage. For example, many of those categorised as Strivers were in employment and purchasing their own homes.

In this evaluation we have identified a new parent type: a number of parents were identified as Pedagogues (n=7), parents who are not socio-economically disadvantaged, hold third level educational qualifications and who already read with and encourage and expect their children to achieve very highly.

On programme commencement the majority of parents provided supportive home literacy environments for their children in terms of the age at which their child was first read to and the frequency of child-parent reading. The majority of children attended some form of childcare outside of their homes. In addition, all parents indicated that they were very positive in their role as a parent.

In the US and indeed in most international PCHP replication sites, children who enter the programme undergo an IQ test and parents must provide information about their income and education levels. In the Docklands, to date, this has not been part of programme practice.<sup>27</sup> The Docklands PCHP does not target families as such and programme organisers take the view that they serve a geographic area rather than a particular target group. This has implications for programme impact.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the PCHP in general has been shown to be effective in enhancing children's school readiness and later school achievement when delivered to children at risk of educational disadvantage and below cognitive developmental norms for their age. The programme originators consider it wasteful to offer PCHP to children and families not at risk of educational disadvantage; on the one hand it denies those in greater need of access to the programme and on the other it will make little or no difference to the child's educational outcomes. Levenstein and Levenstein, in considering the future of the PCHP, lament the prospect of it becoming 'a gift from the poor' to the advantaged. They ask:

will the Parent Child Home Program continue to thrive in its service to the disadvantaged, or will it evolve into a method for merely further enriching the hidden curriculum of the middle-class family?  
(Levenstein & Levenstein, 2002: 181).

This is a problematic issue in the Docklands PCHP. The evaluation shows that from the perspectives of parents and Home Visitors, all families that participate can benefit from involvement in the PCHP. A significant number of programme staff would not support the targeting of the programme. While all stakeholders praise the PCHP, there appears also to be differing ideas about what the programme is trying to do and for whom. This is evident among parents, Home Visitors, the US PCHP, and those who fund the Docklands programme.

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<sup>27</sup> It is noted that following the CRC's Interim Report in April 2010 that the ELI Review Board decided that PCHP should adopt a targeted approach to programme recruitment so that those in greatest need could avail of it.

Notwithstanding the issue of programme reach and impact it is important to acknowledge that - in its developmental stage - there has been merit in having a spatially-limited but universal access PCHP. As noted in Chapter 2 the ELI has made clear its rationale for adopting a non-targeted approach during its set up phase. This has certainly allowed the programme to achieve local buy-in and has also benefited the Home Visitors as they became trained up in their jobs. Although we are clear that they have experienced ups and downs in the home visiting routine it is likely that the Home Visitors had a greater chance of succeeding by not starting out with very 'hard to reach' families – the Hesitaters that the programme is designed for.

The issue of programme impact is complex but, after four years of programme delivery and the evidence from this evaluation, a key question needs to be considered, what is the best approach for the PCHP - targeted, universal or a combination of both?

There has been considerable debate about whether social interventions are best targeted at those who can benefit the most from them or whether, like the pensioner travel pass, or child allowance, everyone should be eligible. Critics of the universal approach (in the context of early years education and care) point out that children of advantaged parents already have the resources at their disposal to equip their children for school and so there is little societal benefit from providing them with free or reduced cost services (Heckman & Masterov, 2007).

Additionally, universal access may limit the potential of the PCHP to achieve its aim of addressing educational disadvantage. While a universal access approach is non-stigmatising, there are limited resources available to run the programme on such a scale, as it is reliant on a diminishing source of private funding. It needs to be acknowledged that those who seek out such programmes, the Strivers and the Pedagogues, are more likely to prevail in securing access to programmes. Furthermore, a universal access approach would need to be rationalised in the context the PCHP's original theoretical model and the extent to which the Docklands programme should be represented as a programme for disadvantaged groups.

A targeted approach will actively seek out those who fit the programme criteria in terms of their income, educational profile and home literacy environment. There is a greater possibility of attracting the harder to reach, Hesitater families. The difficulties with this approach have been noted by many of the Home Visitors and are echoed in research that has examined other family support and home visiting programmes. These include stigmatising the programme and the individuals that receive it and a greater chance of programme drop-out. Targeted programmes are also vulnerable because they serve groups that are marginalised and who do not have a political voice. This matters a great deal when resources are constrained and when programmes require funding renewal (Skopol, 1991). Targeted approaches can also miss out on those who are disadvantaged but do not live in a poor community (Clavero, 2001; Barnett, Brown & Shore, 2004). This evaluation has found that the ELI has considered these issues in its set up and establishment phase.

PCHP, like many other Irish social programmes, has been area-based. According to Fahey et al., (2011) this presents difficulties in relation to targeting. In a review of service provision in seven Irish social housing estates they concluded that:

A key weakness of spatially targeted programmes is their targeting methods. The spatial units to be included in their operational areas are often defined only loosely, if at all, and that tendency over time is to extend the spatial scope of the programmes thus reducing the intended benefits of targeting, since there is then no effective means of ensuring that programmes reach the neediest groups. The latter weakness – failing to reach the neediest – is difficult to overcome because of the wide geographical dispersion of social disadvantage. Programmes that utilise spatial targeting, therefore, should be required to show that they have good methods for selecting areas, that they have effective means of identifying and reaching the neediest within those areas, and that they have the means of knowing whether and to what degree they have achieved successful outcomes in this regard. (Fahey et al., 2011: 97-8)

While there are those who prefer universal access programmes and others who advocate for targeted approaches the research evidence points to the benefits of *combining* universal and targeted approaches (Greenstein, 1991; Barnett, Brown & Shore, 2004).

The debate about universal versus targeted programmes must also be considered in the context of what has been learned in this evaluation and the fact that the PCHP is based in an area with a mixed socio-demographic profile. This evaluation shows there are difficulties in transposing the whole PCHP package, including its evidence base for effectiveness, into an entirely different socio-economic and cultural context.

Moreover, there is substantial evidence from research that has shown that many programmes based around a home visiting model depart, over time, from their original model. This makes it difficult to draw generalisations about how such models should be applied among different target population groups (Duggan et al., 2000). This observation does not in any way suggest that the PCHP is not worthwhile in this setting, but we consider that though the model may be welcome and acceptable there would be benefit in adjusting the delivery mechanism to suit a very different cultural context and in so doing make it clear that this has been done. Notwithstanding that programme resources are limited there may be merit in delivering the PCHP as a universal access programme but using a different model of provision according to family needs and resources. In this connection it might be worth considering the Lifestart model (Lifestart, 2008).

## *Recommendations*

There is a need to implement a more precise method for the recruitment of the families to the programme. There should be a focus on those that can benefit most from the programme, taking into account the dilemmas of targeting and universal access provision and the socio-demographic context in which the PCHP is offered. There are a number of alternatives that can support a combined approach:

As we have noted, the Pedagogue families also derive benefits for their children and could avail of Level 1 PCHP: There are a number of options here: 1) they could pay for it; 2) they could receive a monthly visit and/or 3) they could enrol in a monthly/bi-weekly interactive reading session.

Level 2 PCHP should comprise 50 per cent of those who can be identified as Strivers. Recruitment of these can take place through local toddler groups and crèches and word of mouth. Here the programme would be delivered using the original model.

Level 3 PCHP should comprise 50 per cent of those who can be identified as Hesitators. This will require contacts with key informants in schools, local PCHP ambassadors and crèche leaders.

To support evidence based practice and evaluation of programme impact information should be collected, in a non-stigmatising way, from every family about their home literacy environment, parental education and income level, in order to better assess level of need for the programme.

More attention needs to be paid to the ages of children participating in the programme. Too wide an age range in each cohort presents difficulties in evaluating child outcomes on school readiness at programme end.

## **Programme delivery**

Efforts were made in the Docklands PCHP to ensure children received the minimum number of visits, books and toys; however, this did not always occur. It was clear that staff communicated openly with families to agree on a suitable day and time for the visits but that some missed days were unavoidable. Some of the changes Home Visitors made to ensure families received the minimum number of visits included ensuring families began at the same stage in the year (September or early October) and introducing a fifth weekly review visit.

Of the first Cohort of children (Cohort A), none received the recommended 92 visits, but this improved with the second cohort (Cohort B). It is clear that staff made every attempt to limit the number of visits that were missed, but some families do find it difficult to remember or adhere to the programme.

Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the nature of the home visits, the programme materials and in particular how the Home Visitors used the materials to enthuse the child, encourage verbal interaction and support the child's development and readiness for school. It was clear that Home Visitors engaged very well with the children and with the parents they served.

Some parents were unclear about what their role was, both within and between visits. While Home Visitors were clear about their role in encouraging the parent and the child, not all parents were as clear and sometimes viewed the Home Visitor as a more formal teacher coming in to teach their children how to read.

The materials used in visits were selected by the PCHP Co-ordinators to be developmentally appropriate as well as interesting to children and parents living in the Docklands. While some materials were the same as those used in the US PCHP, the Co-ordinator made some adjustments based on cultural appropriateness. Many parents expressed their satisfaction with the materials, and indeed pointed out how they were often provided with books or toys that they themselves would not necessarily have chosen that their children enjoyed using.

Several key organisational aspects of the PCHP were examined, including the Home Visitors' in-service training and supervision as well as management and administration. On the whole Home Visitors were positive about the organisation of the programme, in particular regarding their training and weekly supervision. They pointed out how the group supervision helped them to learn and develop and reflect on their skills and practice, but they also stressed how important it was to further develop in the role.

Records of families and visits showed clearly the progression of the child and the family throughout the two years. Many files were incomplete which made it difficult to know the full extent of the benefits of the PCHP. This may partly have been due to human error as paper files can easily get misplaced or misfiled. Yet the Home Visitors did not feel at all encumbered by the record keeping aspect of their jobs. This contrasts with research that examined the Lifestart Family Visiting Service in Sligo where staff felt burdened by the extent of paperwork involved in their jobs and the need to complete accountability sheets (Share, 2003).

## *Recommendations*

### *Programme delivery*

While it is clear that delivery of the PCHP in the Docklands has been improved upon each year, many families who participated in this evaluation did not receive the minimum required number of visits. There may be merit in a system whereby families are sent a text message that reminds them about the impending visit in order to give plenty of time for cancellation and if possible for rescheduling the visit. Furthermore, some families have negotiated one visit per week and others receive their initial and review visit without any days in between. The latter situation appears to be not enough time for parent and child to review the material together and consideration should be given to having a minimum number of days between the weekly visits.

### *Programme resources*

Providing parents with a guide sheet that explicitly outlines how to use the specific book or toy could aid the review visit. When a Home Visitor returns to re-visit the previously-given book or toy, they could ask the parent whether the guide sheet had been useful and so ascertain whether the parent and child had been using the book or toy as intended. It also acts as a gentle reminder for the parent to use the materials provided to interact with their child rather than leaving them alone to play or look at a book. Furthermore, some parents mentioned they would value an explanation about why the book or toy was developmentally appropriate, for instance whether a toy was targeting fine motor skills or helping to develop problem-solving skills.

Efforts should be made to give each family the materials in the same sequence. This would ensure that each child is delivered the same programme and would also allow for the materials to be discussed by Home Visitors in their group supervision. At the same time, we recognise one of the strengths in the Docklands PCHP is the scope for variation and flexibility which has helped Home Visitors build trust and rapport with children and parents.

### *Supervision and training*

While supervision was highly regarded and valued, the leadership of such sessions could be rotated in order to encourage and allow Home Visitors to develop new skills. This has a number of benefits: it allows the Home Visitors to put into practice the skills they have developed in their Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace course; and it affirms that the programme takes a community development approach that centres on the empowerment of women and develops their autonomy.

Providing Home Visitors with their own workspace where they can organise and complete paperwork, speak to each other and undertake coursework when it arises can further enhance their workplace autonomy. Additionally, a computerised system for storing notes would help with organisation of files and help to identify potential difficulties with, for example, a certain toy or family. We recommend that the review sheets used by Home Visitors after each session be re-assessed to more accurately gauge whether the book or toy had been used between visits.



## Parents' experience of PCHP

The three parent types identified in this evaluation have all found benefits from their involvement in the PCHP. These range from the receipt of books and toys; the relationship that they and their child have experienced with the Home Visitor; having more quality and focused time with their child, and in finding a new approach to reading and play with their child and other children. In relation to this last aspect:

- Pedagogues and Striver parents were able to talk about how they changed their approach to reading, but the Strivers demonstrated that for them this was something new and they spoke very enthusiastically in this regard
- Pedagogues were less reflective about the programme and saw it as more of a prompt to improve their existing practice
- Hesitaters were also less reflective about the programme.

Parents welcomed being introduced to books and toys that they would not have considered themselves. Pedagogue parents reported that they already had a lot of books and toys for their child but they saw their child derive benefits from books and toys that they would not have chosen themselves.

Although parents have indicated that they were very positive about the PCHP, some parents, particularly Pedagogues, were not sure if they were the intended target group for the programme. Other home visiting research (Share, 2003) that has adopted a universal approach with an element of targeting has similarly shown that recipients were not always clear on why they were being offered a home visiting service. Some believed that they were offered a programme because they were lone parents and were not aware that other socio-economic groups also received the programme.

## *Recommendations*

There is a need for greater clarity for programme parents on what the PCHP is about and its intended benefits for its audience. If the programme continues to provide a service to professional groups then they should be clear that they are entitled and not taking the place of a family with greater needs.

While both programme records and Home Visitor interviews have shown that Hesitater parents can be involved and can improve their level of engagement there needs to be more intensive efforts to recruit such parents. There may also be a need for a different sort of engagement with such groups so that they can get a deeper understanding of what the programme is for. The use of the programme guide sheets, encouragement to attend small group events and opportunities for other forms of parent education may be beneficial in this regard.

## Programme Outcomes

### Children

PCHP aims to enhance the school readiness of children at risk of poor educational outcomes. School readiness is a somewhat contested term; in the past it has been viewed in terms of a child's numeracy and literacy skills on commencement of primary school. It is now considered in a more holistic way and goes beyond these skills to include: a child's self-care and social development; approach to learning; language development; and early literacy (Kagan, Moore & Bradenkamp, 1995).

In the evaluation of child outcomes our assessments have aimed to capture a number of indicators of school readiness across the developmental domains, including school readiness. Two research questions regarding the child outcomes were:

- Does child participation in each year of the PCHP improve child cognitive development?
- Does child participation in PCHP improve school readiness?

To assess these it is important to examine the different domains of child development. As children develop, they become able to carry out more complex activities and assessment of these physical capabilities is important in terms of assessing the child's healthy development and to identify potential impairments. Several factors impact on children's motor development including physical post-natal growth, physical disability, maternal education (Najman et al., 1992), socioeconomic status (Nicholson et al., 2010), and parenting practices (Victoria, Victoria & Barros, 1990). Results on the Denver II indicated that all children were developing age-appropriately on the fine and gross motor domains at the first and last assessment. These children, as indicated by their parents' reports on the Parental Stress Scale, were cared for by parents with a very positive disposition towards their parenting role.

In relation to language, it is well established that children from a socio-economically disadvantaged background are less ready for primary school than their middle class peers. While the reasons for this are complex, much of the literature points to how middle class and working class children are raised differently by their parents. Lareau (2000) highlights that middle class children's cultural competencies are fostered by their parents through the provision of multiple opportunities in which they can use language for reasoning and for learning. Furthermore, research on home literacy environments illustrates significant differences between middle class children and children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in terms of the type and number of books in the home; parents' attitudes to reading; extent of child-parent reading; and extent of library use (Bennett, Weigel & Martin, 2002). As indicated by parents' reports of their home literacy environments, all children lived in households where parents promoted reading to their children at an early age. Therefore in this aspect each Cohort may be considered to have had a head start on programme commencement. This accords with the parent socio-demographic findings that showed the majority to have obtained Leaving Certificate or higher qualifications.

Children from families where English is a second language improved their vocabulary. It is unclear if this was due to one-to-one interaction with the Home Visitor (or indeed any adult) twice a week or the programme delivery and materials. Results on the BAS II for both Cohorts were inconclusive as some children disimproved on their second assessment, some improved and others maintained their high score from their previous assessment.

As the PCHP is aimed at enhancing school readiness it would be expected that the child participants would make developmental gains of more than nine months (the average time between testing points) in their assessment scores if the programme was having a positive impact. While this did not happen in the majority of cases it must be acknowledged that there were wide variations within each Cohort in terms of age and stage of development and socio-economic background.

As reported in Chapter 3, some children who performed well at programme end were already performing above that expected for their age at the start of their developmental and cognitive assessments when they joined the PCHP. These outcomes are likely to be attributed to other factors (familial or environmental) other than their participation in the PCHP. These findings resonate with other PCHP research that shows that the programme has a greater impact on children that are at risk, and below cognitive developmental norms for their age at programme commencement (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008). However, as recruitment of PCHP children was undertaken during its pilot phase and prior to the establishment and implementation of eligibility criteria (Chapter 2 outlines the Docklands PCHP rationale for this approach) it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about the efficacy of the programme for children that participated in the current study.

As outlined in Chapter 2, not all children received the minimum number of visits. English was a second language for some families. These factors along with the broad age range of the children, some were as young as three at programme end and not moving to primary school, their varied socio-demographic backgrounds, and some programme implementation issues, do not allow for clear conclusions to be drawn about the impact of PCHP on this particular cohort of children.

## *Recommendations*

The PCHP child outcome evaluation was undertaken during its pilot phase. The baseline evaluation findings during the pilot phase point to some important issues regarding programme implementation and evaluation. The evaluation has noted a need for clarity about and adherence to PCHP recruitment criteria and a controlled programme delivery. The following recommendations are made to support PCHP implementation and evaluation during its next phase.

### *Eligibility*

Entry criteria should be established and implemented so that families whose children are deemed at risk for low academic achievement are recruited into the programme. Such criteria could include: mother's education level; family income level; limited access to playschool, books, or educational resources; English as a second language; Lone parent with little parenting support; speech and language delay.

### *Programme Planning*

A longer lead-time is needed before programme commencement. Advertising for the programme should take place in spring/early summer and formal assessment for eligibility to the programme undertaken in the summer months in preparation for programme commencement in September. Persons qualified in child assessment should carry out the assessment of literacy levels and IQ. The children's age at entry to the programme and consistency of programme delivery should be decided and adhered to.

### *Future Programme Evaluation*

#### *English as a second language*

A number of children were from families in which English was spoken as a second language. While it is expected that children would benefit from the programme's one-to-one visits from native English speakers on a weekly basis, a decision would need to be made on whether to include non-English speakers in any future evaluation. Children cannot be expected to perform as well on any screening tool that is administered in English rather than their native language. In addition, assessment tests are not published in a wide range of languages and administration through an interpreter is not usually recommended as it may influence the data.

#### *Assessment of children for programme evaluation*

PCHP guidelines suggest that children start as young as 18 months. However, this makes it difficult to measure school readiness at the start of the programme. On the other hand, ensuring that children are close to each other in age and old enough to assess school readiness outcomes (minimum age: 2 years on programme commencement) risks missing the early learning window and the early modelling of interactive reading and play for parents. A decision on the appropriate age group to target is recommended.

There is a need to ensure that children that are recruited into the programme are of the same age and meet criteria for eligibility. This will support the assessment of programme outcomes using a matched control group design.

## The Home Visitors

The evaluation examined in-depth the role of the PCHP Home Visitor. Home visiting research rarely investigates the experience of the Home Visitors themselves, their development over time or their relationship to the organisation they serve. In this regard this evaluation bridges that gap and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the PCHP than found in other PCHP research. With the Home Visitors, over the course of the two-year programme, we explored their pathway into and through the programme, how it benefited them personally and professionally and their perspectives on its organisational aspects.

### *Becoming a Home Visitor*

PCHP in the Docklands is innovative in its approach to the recruitment of home visiting staff. Unlike US programmes it has drawn its staff from the community: mainly local women with a strong local attachment. They have received their education, reside in and have extended families in the local community. The Home Visitors do not come from professional occupational backgrounds, indeed, many left school early and worked for many years in manual jobs. In addition to their strong connection to the area they are all mothers of young children and were strongly motivated to become a Home Visitor by their desire to work with children. Although some of the Home Visitors have worked in childcare settings, none came to this position with formal qualifications in childcare.

The importance of understanding Home Visitor characteristics, what motivates them to join and remain in the programme is reflected in research that has examined volunteering (Martinez et al., 2004, Mayer et al., 2007). Studies of volunteers reveal that people with greater personality resources and good health are more likely to undertake community service (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Snyder and Omoto (2008) report that volunteers who demonstrate high dispositional empathy toward others are likely to want to help them in some way. Motivations to volunteer seem to have both other-interested and self-interested considerations playing an equally important role for deciding to volunteer (Mayer et al., 2007). From the interviews with the PCHP Home Visitors there is much to suggest that these motivators and characteristics are similar for them. We have seen how, as mothers, they are strongly motivated by their desire to work with children, but also to make a difference to others and for themselves and their own families.

Wasik and Bryant (2001) maintain that paraprofessionals require good interpersonal communication skills and that the work is best carried out by mature individuals with life experiences that can enhance their capacity to help others. They also emphasise that to be effective, Home Visitors need to be 'non-judgemental, objective, and reflective' (Wasik & Bryant, 2001: 82). From their accounts of their pathway into and through the PCHP, it is clear that the Docklands Home Visitors bring their life experiences to the job and this has also been noted and welcomed by parents.

### *Being a Home Visitor*

We have followed 11 Home Visitors through a full-two year PCHP programme and spoken to them about their experiences of carrying out their role. Consistently the Home Visitors reported a high degree of satisfaction with the nature of their work. They exhibit a genuine love of their job.

While the Home Visitors come to their jobs with characteristics and motivations that are critical for success, they consider their initial and on-going training essential to effectively carry out their jobs. In particular, they place a high value on the weekly supervision session in which they support each other and problem solve difficulties they may experience. Over the course of this evaluation they have not wavered in their view of the importance of the supervision sessions.

### *Capacity building and empowerment of local women*

The capacity of the Home Visitors to carry out their jobs has been further enhanced by their participation in three FETAC Level 5 training modules. There is little research evidence describing the trajectory of skill development of individual paraprofessional Home Visitors except to note that historically, 'over time, the Home Visitor's role has evolved from problem solver, expert and decision maker to negotiator, collaborator and facilitator' (Wasik, 1993:143). In addition, ongoing professional development and supervision helps the individual to develop a cohesive sense of professional identity by helping them to integrate their new knowledge with an already well-established sense of self (Wasik & Bryant, 2001).

The first FETAC course, Family and Community Studies, was undertaken in paid work time; nevertheless it was stressful for most of the Home Visitors. Looking back they are proud of their achievements. For those Home Visitors who had left school early - and for most this was many years ago - the significance of undertaking and completing this programme should not be underestimated.

Home Visitors' accounts show they have exceeded their own expectations, feel more confident in themselves and in doing their jobs. They reveal they engage in much self-reflection on who they are, what they are doing and the impact that they have on others. They also went on to take two other FETAC training modules, in their own unpaid time. While less stressful, involvement in these courses indicated a strong motivation towards personal and professional enhancement.

The Home Visitors' reports of these training programmes and their usefulness suggest they have become reflective practitioners. The strategy of promoting the continuing professional development of the Home Visitors undoubtedly strengthens the operation of the PCHP and reflects the community development ethos of the Early Learning Initiative of which the PCHP is a core element.

Supporting the Home Visitors through accredited training programmes also strengthens the Home Visitors' future career prospects. This reflects the research that shows that a home visiting programme can be viewed as an investment in the community as jobs are created and the Home Visitors become role models for others (Wasik, 1993). This illustrates how the PCHP can also be viewed as a programme that empowers local women. It helps them to change their lives through increased educational opportunities and the prospects of a career path.

### *Extension of PCHP benefits to wider family*

All Home Visitors reported on the personal benefits they derive from their role. They enjoy the relationships that they have with children and their parents and, in particular, enjoy seeing a child develop over the course of the programme. They also value the camaraderie that exists among the group of Home Visitors. Yet the benefits of the PCHP approach extend beyond the Home Visitors. As we have seen their own children benefit in numerous ways that include reading the books and playing with the toys, showing an interest in and feeling proud of what their mother is doing and having their mother engage with them more often and more creatively with books and toys. Many of the Home Visitors were able to reflect on their changed approach to their young children by giving examples of how they had engaged with their older children in the past. Their descriptions reflect those of many of the Striver parents who also found that, because of their involvement in the PCHP, they now had a very different way with their younger children.

Overall, be it for other relatives, spouses, partners, or their other children, the Home Visitors are an important conduit for the PCHP approach. Therefore its benefits, although not always tangible, are wide reaching.

### *Organisational barriers*

While the Home Visitor element of the PCHP evaluation presents an overall positive picture of how it impacts on them professionally and personally there are a number of organisational barriers to their work and to the future of the programme. Some of these concern the difficulties that they face when families cancel visits or take lengthy breaks and are then readmitted to the programme. Though they do not feel comfortable about a targeted programme, many of the difficulties that they have experienced with particular professional immigrant groups could be alleviated through changes to recruitment practices, programme delivery and to policies about programme absenteeism.

Connected to the issue of programme absenteeism are pay and employment conditions. The Home Visitors experience fluctuations in their pay as a result of cancellations and family drop-out. They find it difficult to plan their own finances because of the lack of certainty about pay. Furthermore, the casual basis of their job, and for some the uncertainty about what they will get paid, impacts on social welfare benefits and makes them question the viability of their job. Over time this issue has become more pronounced.

The approach to the Home Visitors in terms of their employment conditions appears to be at odds with how they have been supported to achieve higher level qualifications, encouraged to be professionals, critical thinkers and reflective practitioners. The current model of employment of the Home Visitors is a flexible one. Many of the Home Visitors have welcomed the flexibility of the job whereby they can work around their own family circumstances. Nevertheless, the lack of stability in their pay and for some a perception of differences between their employment conditions and those of staff employed in other areas of the PCHP/ ELI, has raised issues about the casual nature of their employment contract. Furthermore, this situation is an acute one as to date the strengths of the programme have been in the group cohesion, the high level of staff retention and Home Visitors' support and enthusiasm for the programme.

Professional identity has important implications for individual motivation and for the sense of organisational ownership. Pierce and Gardner (2004) describe how self-esteem at work can be determined by an individual's organisational context, a concept they refer to as organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE). Higher levels of self-expression and personal control at work lead to a greater likelihood that individuals will attribute positive events to themselves, so raising their OBSE. It has emerged that consistent training and clear work expectations, such as those used by PCHP to prepare Home Visitors for their work, can provide a structure for developing employees who have high levels of OBSE.

Research that has examined effects on individuals who volunteer in a similar but non-paid capacity points to the importance of such OBSE. Mayer et al., (2007) were able to demonstrate that volunteers with high levels of OBSE tend to work longer hours and stay with their organisation longer. While this might help to explain the high rate of retention of home visiting employees over the life of the PCHP it needs also to be considered that organisational based self-esteem is subject to change and may have relevance for what has happened for the PCHP Home Visitors in terms of how their professional identity has been promoted but is at odds with their employment conditions.

### *Recommendations*

Undoubtedly the PCHP has generated considerable benefits for the Home Visitors and these have extended to their families. The professional development of the Home Visitors is reflective of a community development approach that supports the empowerment of local people to take control over (and in which they have the capacity to change) their lives. Nevertheless there are organisational barriers related to pay and employment conditions. To this end, we recommend that the conditions of employment for the Home Visitors be reviewed. We also recommend that each Home Visitor is guaranteed a base wage for the number of families to which they are contracted.





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## APPENDIX 1: PCHP CURRICULAR MATERIALS

### First Year Official List of Books / Toys

1. Initial Visit / Bag
2. Brown Bear, Brown Bear
3. Stacking Cups
4. I Went Walking
5. REVIEW
6. Where's Spot
7. Farm Animals Tin
8. Oh Dear
9. Play Doh
10. REVIEW
11. I Like It When
12. Maracus
13. Nursery Rhyme Book
14. Mega Blocks
15. REVIEW
16. One Wet Welly
17. Tea Set
18. Itsy Bitsy Spider
19. Crayons & Paper
20. REVIEW

21. I Spy Little Wheels / Animals
22. Vehicles
23. No David
24. Shape Sorter Cube
25. REVIEW
26. Where's My Mummy?
27. Touch & Feel Cards
28. Five Little Monkeys
29. Wooden Blocks
30. REVIEW
31. Dinosaur Roar
32. Bean Bags
33. Good Night Gorilla
34. Bubbles

REVIEW

Extra: Oops Sorry

Extra: What Mommies/Daddies

Extra: Mouse Mess

Extra: Hide and Seek

Extra: Jump Frog Jump

### Second Year Official List of Books / Toys

1. Dear Zoo
2. Stickle Bricks
3. 10 Scary Monsters
4. My Day Puzzle
5. REVIEW
6. Freddy Visits the Doctor
7. Medical Kit
8. Head to Toe
9. Doll
10. REVIEW
11. Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother Too?
12. Moms and Babies
13. The Very Hungry Caterpillar
14. Lace and Trace
15. REVIEW
16. Ten in a Bed
17. Animal Snap
18. Duck on a Truck/on a Bike
19. Wooden Train / Puzzle Block
20. REVIEW

21. Goodnight Moon
22. Lauri Fit a Space
23. The Door Bell Rang
24. Perception Puzzle
25. REVIEW
26. The Big Red Bus
27. Opposite Puzzle
28. Rosie's Walk
29. Wood Shape Board
30. REVIEW
31. Memory Game
32. Who Ever Heard of a Tiger?
33. Crayons & Paper
34. Mr. Grumpy's Outing

REVIEW

Extra: Bear in a Square

Extra: The Ugly Duckling

Extra: We're Going on a Bear Hunt

Extra: Caps for Sale

Extra: Circus Caps for Sale

Extra: Apple, Pear, Banana

## APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE OF PCHP PARTICIPANTS

All PCHP programme participants in year 1 and year 2 were invited by the PCHP Co-ordinator to participate in the evaluation and, if agreeable, they were asked for their permission to have their names passed to the research team. In the following we detail the number of programme participants and the final sample of evaluation participants.

As of 15 October 2009 18 children were

enrolled in year 1 of the PCHP. Eleven of the parents of these children agreed to being contacted about the research. A further five families were recruited to the programme during October bringing the total enrolled in year 1 to 23. Two children in one family withdrew from the programme. The final sample of year 1 children was 14 and comprised two thirds (66%) of all year 1 PCHP participants.<sup>28</sup> (Table 1).

Table 1: Year 1 PCHP Sample	Number
Children enrolled in Year 1 15 October 2009	18
Children enrolled November 2009	5
Total in Year 1	23
Refuse to participate in research	6
Withdraw from programme	2
Insufficient English language (as advised by PCHP Co-ordinator)	1
Agree to participate in the research	14

In October 2009 17 children had returned to year 2 of the PCHP programme. Of these 13 parents agreed to being contacted about the

research. The final sample comprised three-quarters of the year 2 PCHP participants (76%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Year 2 PCHP Sample	Number
Number expected to return to in Year 2 October 2009	21
Did not return /withdrawn from programme	4
Total in Year 2	17
Refusal to participate in research	3
Withdrew from programme	1
Agree to participate in the research	13

<sup>28</sup> note that new families were recruited to the programme during November and December 2009 after the research had commenced.

## APPENDIX 3: METHODOLOGY AND INSTRUMENTS - CHILD OUTCOMES

A total of 25 children were administered child development, cognitive and school readiness assessments. Twelve (Cohort A) were assessed at the beginning and end of their second year of the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) and thirteen were assessed at the start and end of the full two year programme (Cohort B). Children recruited into the PCHP evaluation study came from a heterogeneous family background in terms of social class and family structure. English was not the first language of six of the children (two in Cohort A and four in Cohort B).

Children in Cohort A were administered the Denver II and BAS-II at Time 1. At the end of their second year of the PCHP the children completed both these assessments and the Bracken School Readiness Composite. Children in Cohort B received the Denver II and BAS II at four assessment points between October 2009 and June 2011 and the Bracken School Readiness Composite at their final assessment in June 2011.

One family from Cohort A was not contactable for their final assessment (Time 2). Two families withdrew from Cohort B at Time 3, between year one and year two of their programme.

### Denver II

The Denver Developmental Screening Test (DDST) II is a widely used assessment for examining the developmental progress of children from birth until the early school age. It was originally designed at the University of Colorado Medical Center, Denver, USA.

The Denver II is designed to be used with children between the ages of birth and six years, and is administered by assessing a child's performance on various age-appropriate tasks. The Denver II is not an IQ test and is not designed to diagnose learning disabilities, language disorders or emotional disturbance. The test is designed to compare a given child's performance of a variety of tasks to the performance of other children of the same age.

Each child's age is calculated and an age line is drawn which indicates the items to be administered. The assessment starts three items below those that the child should be able to complete for his or her age. The children are assessed on items on each subscale until they fail three consecutive items. This is standard procedure in developmental testing. Depending on the test, children can be administered up to six items, until they fail on a subscale. This enables the tester to gain an accurate indication of the children's ability. During the testing parents are reassured that all the children will fail at some level as this is the nature of the test and not a reflection on the child's ability or their parenting.

The test consists of up to 125 items, divided into four domains:

- Social/personal: aspects of socialisation inside and outside the home, e.g. smiling
- Fine motor function: hand/eye co-ordination, and manipulation of small objects, e.g. grasping and drawing
- Language: production of sounds, ability to recognise, understand, and use of language, e.g. ability to combine words
- Gross motor functions: motor control, sitting, walking, jumping, and other movements

Self-care is assessed on the Denver II by parent self-report although it is not a component of the PCHP. An indication that the child is becoming independent in dressing and feeding bodes well for the smooth transition into pre-school and school and indicates a readiness for learning.

The second subscale assesses fine motor tasks such as stacking bricks and copying lines. The language subscale assesses both receptive and expressive language where the child must point to certain objects or name colours or actions. The gross motor items cover areas such as balance, jumping and throwing; all essential skills for co-ordination and negotiating pre-school and school.

Scores on the Denver II are recorded as follows:

**‘P’ for Pass** – the child successfully performs the item, or the caregiver reports (when appropriate) that the child can complete the item.

**‘F’ for Fail** – the child does not successfully perform the item, or the caregiver reports (when appropriate) that the child cannot complete the item.

**‘N.O.’ for No Opportunity** – the child has not had the chance to perform the item, due to restrictions from the caregiver or other reasons. This score may only be used on report items.

**‘R’ for Refusal** – the child refuses to attempt the item.

When interpreting the scores children are expected to pass items for their chronological age. If they refuse or cannot complete an item at which 75%-90% of children their age can perform the task, this is treated as a ‘caution’.

A ‘delay’ results when a child fails or refuses an item that falls completely to the left of their age line.

## British Ability Scales (BAS II)

The British Ability Scales: Second Edition (Elliott, Smith & McCullough, 1996) is a measure of cognitive functioning over a wide age range, using ability scales. The BAS II has been used widely in large cohort studies internationally (Nation, Marshall & Altman, 2003)<sup>29</sup>.

The BAS II is a battery of individually administered tests of cognitive abilities. It is divided into two batteries (Early Years and School Age). It is suitable for use with children aged from 2 years, 6 months (2:6).

The three subtests administered to the study children were Verbal Comprehension, Naming Vocabulary and Early Number Concepts. The age range for these subtests is from 2:6 years to 7:11 years. As with all developmental testing, the children fail on items at the upper end of their age range. On each subtest when five

successive items are answered incorrectly the subtest is completed for that child.

Verbal Comprehension assesses receptive language and understanding of basic language concepts. The child points to pictures or manipulates objects in response to oral instructions from the administrator. There are 40 items in this subtest and as with the other subtests, testing ceases when the child has failed five consecutive items.

Naming Vocabulary is used to assess the children’s expressive language skills. The children are asked to name a series of pictures of everyday items, 36 in total. The number of items shown to each child is dependent on their performance.

The Early Number Concepts subtest assesses the children’s knowledge of numerical concepts and problem solving skills using pre-numerical and numerical concepts. There are 30 items on this subtest and the child is required to answer questions about number, size or other numerical concepts using square shapes or pictures presented in the test book.

In addition to ability scores, percentile scores and age equivalents can be provided.

## Bracken Basic Concept Scale (BBCS-3: R) School Readiness Composite

The BBCS-3: R is a receptive measure of children’s comprehension of foundational and functionally relevant education concepts in ten important concept categories. The first five subtests of the School Readiness Composite (SRC) are designed to assess educationally relevant concepts for early formal education. The SRC can be administered to children from 3 years, 0 months to 6 years, 11 months. Administration time for the SRC is 10-15 minutes.

All the children were administered the SRC at their last assessment. It was not possible to administer the SRC at an earlier assessment point as the children had not all reached three years of age.

<sup>29</sup> See also [http://www.glassessment.co.uk/health\\_and\\_psychology/resources/british\\_ability\\_scales/case\\_studies.asp?css=1#cs2](http://www.glassessment.co.uk/health_and_psychology/resources/british_ability_scales/case_studies.asp?css=1#cs2).



The children were administered five subtests:

Colours	Recognition and naming of primary colours and those identified as basic colour terms for all languages.
Letters	Recognition and naming of upper- and lower-case letters.
Numbers/Counting	Recognition and naming of single- and double-digit numerals and assigning number value to a set of objects (counting).
Sizes/Comparisons	Knowledge of concepts that describe one dimension (e.g., tall being a descriptor of vertical length or long being a descriptor of horizontal length), two dimensions (short may be a descriptor of either vertical or horizontal length,) or three dimensions (concepts such as big and small, where more than two salient dimensions must be considered). This subtest also measures a child's ability to match, differentiate, or compare objects based on one or more of their salient characteristics.
Shapes	Recognition of one-, two- and three-dimensional shapes

The BBCS-3: R provides both a scaled subtest score and an overall composite score for the SRC. Percentile ranks, concept age equivalents, and descriptive classifications can also be provided for all subtests.



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