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<td>Köppe, Stephan; Oak, Eileen</td>
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What Parents Want
A Needs Assessment in Dublin South City

Executive Summary
Stephan Köppe
Eileen Oak
University College Dublin,
School of Social Policy, Social Work
and Social Justice

With Ciara Reynolds

Advisers: Valerie O’Brien and Nessa Winston

Funded by
This report presents the research findings on family-related services in Dublin with a specific focus on Dublin South City (DSC). The focus of the research was on

1. Awareness of services
2. Perceived need for services, and
3. Service usage.

For this report parents were interviewed in focus groups in Dublin South City and a city-wide online survey was conducted. Here are the main findings.

1. **Awareness of services**

Most parents are aware of universal services, but less aware of specialised and highly targeted services. By and large, parents show a lack of awareness of Tusla services in their local area. Further, even when they are aware of the existence of these services, they do not always know that they are provided and funded by Tusla. While family and friends are key informants in terms of providing awareness of particular family services, the internet and social media are also important in this regard. Professional social service staff (e.g. community workers, nurses) are also highly relevant for raising awareness among disadvantaged families.

### Awareness of Services*

<table>
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<th>Service</th>
<th>% Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-School</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Club</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Centre</td>
<td>52%</td>
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*excluding housing and general health services
2. Need for services

Parents reported that a number of crucial family services were not accessible or available to them, namely childcare services including affordable creches, schools and afterschool clubs. Also high on the agenda are local playgrounds, sports clubs, youth clubs and community centres. The parents in the focus groups, predominantly with a disadvantaged background, mentioned also a high need for services specifically geared to supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged parents. These services include contact centres, staff for supervised contact, domestic violence support services, early intervention, and respite as well as support groups for parents, and particularly lone parents.
Need for services: key findings

- There is an urgent need for universal services like schools, housing, health and childcare (as defined by Hardiker 1991).
- Disability Services (both learning and physical disability) services are a key priority for parents from all social backgrounds. This includes accessing early intervention services.
- The key problems with special needs services are access, referral and extremely long waiting times.
- There is an urgent need for services for all age groups such as youth and sports clubs for over 3-year olds, not just for early childhood services.
- Local communities need more youth clubs and youth workers, located permanently in the area.

Tusla provides a broad range services and caters for a diverse client base. The research revealed that additional resources are required in the following areas:

- More special needs assistance in creches and schools
- More resources for early intervention, including more speech therapists.

3. Service Usage

We measured the levels of service usage by asking parents if they ever used the service they were aware of (limited to 3 services in total). The levels of service usage are high for the majority of level 1 services, with the highest of these being public libraries at 89%. When looking at the figures for Dublin 8 we see a higher rate of usage for the majority of the services compared to figures for all respondents. The main exception is the lower usage of play centres in Dublin 8. A possible explanation is that fewer play centres are located in this area compared to the wider Dublin area.
Parents expressed positive views on Tusla staff engagement and comprehensive family support service.

Parents appreciate the strong advocacy role of Tusla staff on behalf of their clients.

Parents need more localised services, specifically those living in areas of deprivation. Local childcare facilities have a high priority, but also domestic violence services. Existing local services such as Family Resource Centres should be promoted better and be more accessible (e.g. opening hours, public transport).

Children with special needs should be prioritised.

There is a lack of childcare services at certain key times such as on weekends and during term breaks.

Parents demand better communication between professionals in multi-agency agencies and stronger parental involvement in this communication.

Tusla services require better promotion.

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### Services Used

Excluding housing, general health, schools

- **Public Library** 89%
- **Play Centre** 86%
- **Pre-School** 81%
- **Sports Club** 80%
- **Childcare** 69%

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### Services Used

More than once a week

- **Afterschool** 52%
- **Pre-School** 50%
- **Sports Club** 34%
- **Organised Activities** 26%
- **Childcare** 59%
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Key Information Sources

Family & Friends 72%
Internet 38%
Social Media 31%
School 29%

Spending
More than €1000 per month

Childcare 22%
Afterschool 6%
Pre-school 3%
Recommendations

For the development and investment in family services we suggest the following recommendations (in brackets key departments):

- More investment in universal services, particularly childcare services (DYCA, DPER).
- Strengthen the role of the Child and Family Support Network Coordinator (Tusla, DYCA).
- Stronger multi-agency and inter-agency cooperation on issues such as health, housing and education, especially with regards to the needs of children with special needs (DYCA, Health/HSE, Housing, DoE).
- More logistical planning needed for Prevention and Early Intervention services for children with multiple service needs.
- More investment in local services and reducing waiting times for services in high demand (DYCA, Councils, HSE).
- Investment in services for all ages, especially for those children aged ages 1 -9 (e.g. youth club, sports activities, preschool activities) (DYCA, Councils).
- Contact centres with professionally trained staff to supervise contact arrangements (DYCA, Department of Justice).
- Using professional staff as multipliers to raise awareness of services (DCYA).
- For targeted services: greater investment in disability services, such as speech therapy and early intervention with the aim to reduce waiting times (HSE, Department of Education).
- Repeat evaluation and parental needs assessment in regular intervals. Expand local survey to nationwide assessment (DCYA).

Key achievements

The key achievements of this report are:

- First comprehensive assessment of parental needs in the Dublin area.
- Gathering of qualitative and quantitative evidence on parental needs.
- In-depth assessment of needs among hard-to-reach parents and area related indicators for Dublin South City.
- Design, testing and delivery of a cost-efficient survey tool for future needs assessment.
- Delivery of robust and valid responses of service needs across the main socio-demographic characteristics.
Acknowledgments
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Authors
Dr Stephan Köppe, Assistant Professor of Social Policy
Dr Eileen Oak, Assistant Professor of Social Work

Contributor
Ciara Reynolds, Public Policy PhD Student


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