

Facilitating and supporting interagency collaboration in a community-based Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme in Ireland, the role of the lead agency

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Aims of the presentation

Explore how the EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE facilitates and supports interagency collaboration between local organisation for children and families, as lead agency in an Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme in Grangegorman, in the North West Inner City of Dublin.

Presentation Layout

- Context
- Interagency collaboration & ELI's approach
- Initial Steps and Review Process
- New initiatives
- Learnings & Next Steps



CONTEXT



The Early Learning Initiative

The Early Learning Initiative is part of the National College of Ireland. It works in partnership with local communities to provides programmes to children and families aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in both Dublin's Inner City and across Ireland.

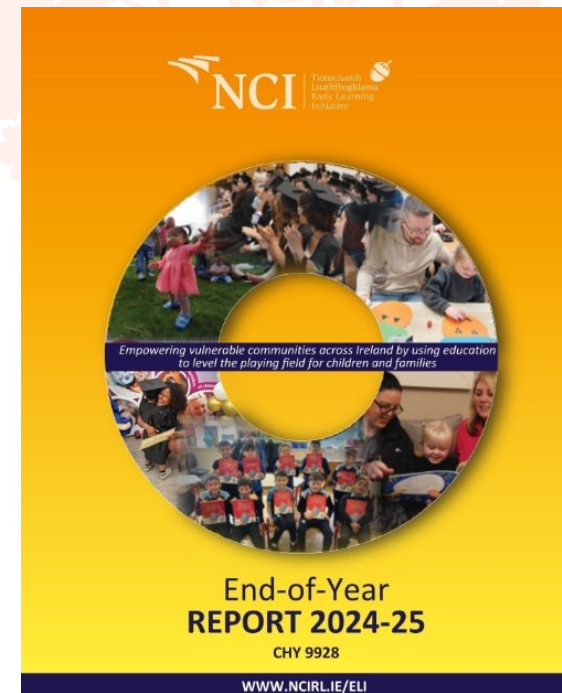
The Early Learning Initiative

Message and Mission

Change a life, Empower a community.

“A charity that empowers vulnerable communities across Ireland by using education to level the playing field for children and families.”

Reach and Impact



 **23,659**
Participants Engaged



15,817 
Home Visits Completed

10,706 
Parents Engaged

92% Indicators of Satisfaction
(n=2,015) participants were satisfied
with their engagement



89% Indicators of Learning
(n=1,883) participants learned new
knowledge or skills



34 Philanthropic and
Corporate Partners
Supporting ELI



222 Volunteers
Engaged



321 Interagency
Meetings



The Area Based Childhood Programme



- National prevention and early intervention initiative in Ireland designed to tackle child poverty and improve long-term outcomes.
- Managed nationally by Tusla and funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), the programme targets areas of entrenched disadvantage.
- Delivers evidence-informed supports tailored for children from pre-birth up to six years old, as well as their parents, families, and early educators.
- The initiative operates through 12 distinct local consortia comprised of statutory, voluntary, and community organisations. Each site delivers local interventions under a unified national data and framework strategy.

The Area Based Childhood Programme in Grangeegorman

One of 12 sites nationally delivering supports to children and families

Target Reach: Delivers prevention and early intervention

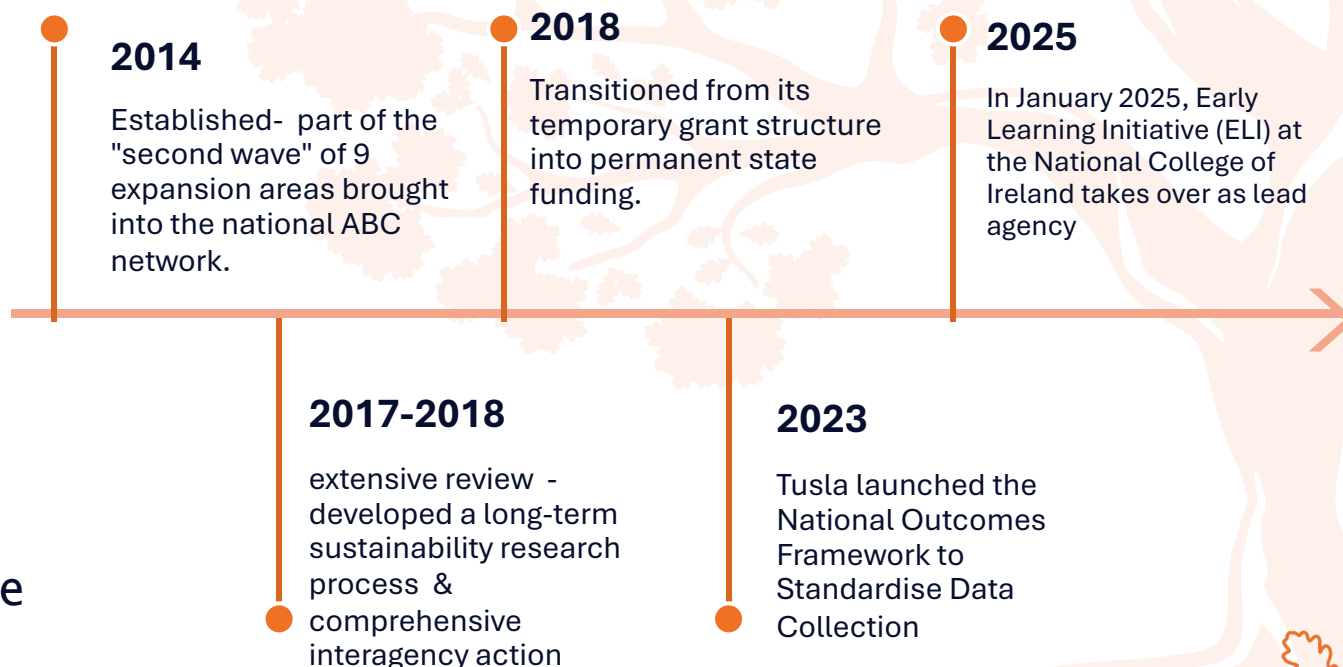
Core Mission: Partners with families and communities to break the cycle of poverty.

Evolving Demographics (2025/2026): Additional needs and temporary housing/homelessness.

Cultural Diversity: Serving an increasingly ethnically diverse local population.

Annual Impact (2025/2026): Reached 554 children, 320 parents, and 134 professionals.

Interagency Collaboration: Facilitated 131 collaborative interagency meetings to streamline local support.



2014

Established- part of the "second wave" of 9 expansion areas brought into the national ABC network.

2018

Transitioned from its temporary grant structure into permanent state funding.

2025

In January 2025, Early Learning Initiative (ELI) at the National College of Ireland takes over as lead agency

2017-2018

extensive review - developed a long-term sustainability research process & comprehensive interagency action

2023

Tusla launched the National Outcomes Framework to Standardise Data Collection

ABC Grangegorman

Governance Structure and Roles and Responsibilities

Structure	Role and Responsibility
Lead Agency (ELI)	Key governance and oversight structure with responsibility for the overall direction of Grangegorman ABC
Steering Group	Representatives of Consortium Member Organisations, Stakeholders and senior representatives of the Lead Agency. Works in partnership with Lead Agency to ensure programme delivery is achieved in line with funding agreements and programme policies/guidelines.
Consortium Member Organisations	Representatives of local community organisations that provide leadership direction and input on programme delivery and share resources
Partner Orgs	Local organisations who deliver programmes and valuable expertise and input regarding programme delivery, needs and implementation
Participants	Parents and children who participate in programmes. Main Target of programmes provide feedback through evaluations

Honoring the Journey Before Us

- Prior to the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) assuming the role of Lead Agency for Grangegorman ABC, an exceptional foundation had already been established by local organisations whose unwavering commitment to service provision for children and families has shaped the programme over many years.
- ELI is grateful to the community, partners, and governing body for the warm welcome received in 2025. Grangegorman ABC demonstrated a strong willingness to engage with and support the transition process, showing great patience, flexibility, and commitment throughout.
- Local knowledge and expertise have been central to the initial stages of ELI's role as Lead Agency. Combined with our shared commitment to interagency collaboration, these strengths will help drive future milestones and maximise the programme's impact.



INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION



Interagency Collaboration in Community Settings

“More than one agency working together in a planned, coordinated and formal way, towards shared and agreed goals” (Barnardos, 2014)

Can be Broken down in Levels:

1) COOPERATION

2) COLLABORATION

3) COORDINATION:

4) INTEGRATION:

(Frost, 2005, p13)

- “Interagency approaches are heavily contextualised, meaning they take their form, focus and mechanisms from the policy-making and service-delivery frameworks they are situated in, but also from the substantive problems they aim to resolve.”(Devaney et al 2021)
- Need for a framework applicable to complex, multi-professional settings involving a range of agencies/professional collaboration to develop/maintain supports overtime (Warmington et al. 2004) and recommendations for service provision for children/families experiencing multiple adversities (Davidson et al. 2012)



Need for an Approach & Framework adapted to the Organisational Context & Needs and Demographics of the Population

Impact of interagency approach on the provision of services for children and families

Why does this approach matter?

- **Effective Early Intervention and Prevention for Children:** National policies support Early Intervention and Prevention, however implementation remains uneven-(Haran et al. 2025)
- **Cooperation ensures a comprehensive response** to concerns about children and young people (Devaney et al 2021)
- **Avoid gaps** in service response and **provides mutual support** for professionals in complex cases (Devaney et al 2021)
- Effective coordination **improved referral pathways, joint planning and avoid duplication** (Haran et al 2025)
- Collective **advocacy for families and children** (elevated voice and coordinated communication)
- More **resilient systems of care** (Haran et al 2025)
- **Meeting the needs of Families with Complex and Multiple Needs:** Importance of a coordinated and integrated practice (Barnardos, 2012)
- **Strengthen community ties**

Comparative Model: The Finglas West Interagency Model

- Developed in an ABC with comparable population/structure to ABC Grangegorman
- Community-driven initiative which aims to respond to longstanding need in the area and represents a concerted effort to embed early intervention and prevention services in a highly structured, interagency framework.

Impact

Improved efficiency, service alignment, and stronger inter-organisational relationships.

Effective coordination= Service providers noted improved referral pathways, joint planning, and reduced duplication

Improved integrated services for children and families

contributed to sense of safety and belonging in the area

Some Guiding principles

Adjusted depending on the family/ community needs

Clear layered governance framework

Dedicated resources (people, time, funding)

Cross-sector partnership

Community participation

Data Sharing and evidence informed practice

Continuum of Collaboration model

ELI's approach to Interagency Collaboration in Grangeegorman

- Co-creation Interagency Model
- Community Action Research Methodology

Initial Stages of Role

- **Learning Context:** Honoring the Journey Before us
- **Curiosity and Listening:** What is happening? What are the challenges? Needs? Barriers?
- **Seeking input and collaborating with those with valuable local knowledge:** key stakeholders, governance bodies and partner organisations
- **Relationship Building**
- **Balancing Reporting Requirements & Collaboration**
- **Bringing the Value of ELI:** Bringing the learning, expertise, dedicate support and knowledge of ELI “the lense of children and families support and wellbeing”
- **Clear Communication and Deadlines**

Initial Research approach

Process	Explanation
Listening and Relationship Building	Centering the expertise and knowledge of those implementing the programme
Translating the Role & The WHY	Communicating all their work and the impact of the programme
Clarity of expectations and reporting requirements	Clear deadlines & Guidelines to ease this process which can be time consuming and stressful for programme staff
Increased and Streamlining of reporting of data	Intake forms, Evaluation Measures. Aligning of process with ELI, National Outcomes Framework
Reviewing Measures and Data	Resources invested in reviewing measures and monitoring and evaluation process. Assessing are they measuring impact. If not, how can we this better
Realistic approach, grounded in context	Awareness of Time and Capacity Challenges (explaining, patience, repetition & capacity building)

Review and Initial Steps



Spring/Summer 2025 Review: Building Relationships and Gathering Feedback



January to August 2025

- **Programmatic Review:** Conducted a review of Existing Programmes and Identified gaps in service provision
- **Interviews and Check ins with Stakeholders:** What was working well? What wasn't? How were the needs of children and families being met and where were the gaps?
- **EOY evaluations:** Feedback sought from organisations that engaged with the ABC (Early Years, Primary Schools and Service Managers)

Feedback Spring/Summer 2025

January to August 2025: 14 one on one meetings with consortium members, 3 steering group, 2 consortium, 3 to 4 in person meetings with each partner orgs and email/phone follow up, EOY Evaluation responses from 13 services

Needs/Opportunities Identified



Capacity
Challenges-
Early Years

Children with
Additional
Needs

Parent
Engagement

Meeting
Children's
Learning
Needs

Community
Space

Systemic
Issues
Facing
Families

Service
provision for
0-2 age group

Positive
Engagement
with ELI staff

Training and
Professional
Development

Initiatives related to Interagency Collaboration



Initiatives 2025/2026

Below is a list of some initiatives taken based on the needs analysis, feedback sought from stakeholders and the programmatic review

Feedback	Explanation	Response
What was working well	Strong community organisations Generally positive feedback regarding engagement of services with ABC staff and programmes	Continue and Build on these networks and Relationships
Gaps in service provision	Children with additional needs, 0-2 age group	Identification of new programmes to fill gaps
Communication and Information Sharing	Several mentioned in EOY more handouts and information needed at regular intervals to share with parents. Through one on one meetings need/want to Strengthen collaboration and reduce siloed working across the consortium	Checks ins and meetings, increase in interagency collaboration with ABC staff and services as well as the Newsletter, WhatsApp group, Sharepoint etc
Engagement with early years services	Both from EOY evaluations and check ins in person with staff, service managers noted challenges re capacity to release staff for trainings and engage in interventions	Adapt to their capacity

New Programmes: Responding to Identified Needs Through Consultation and Collaboration

- Research through consultation with local services, the Consortium, and the Steering Group.
- Identified gaps in service provision informed decisions on programme priorities and pilot initiatives.
- Strong interagency collaboration supported programme design, referral pathways, and implementation.

Identified need	Proposed Programme	Implementation
Supports for children aged 0-2 years	Community Families	Introduced in January 2026 – currently ongoing
Supports for children with additional needs	Parenting 365	Pilot programmed delivered from 21 st Feb and 28 th of March
Cramped/unsuitable/transitional accommodation	Home from Home	Introduced in January 2026 – currently ongoing
Language development	Early Talk Boost	Delivery is currently ongoing with two EY services on a pilot babies
Groups for Children and Families	PEEP/Building Baby from Head to Toe, Baby Massage, Yoga	Delivery is currently ongoing

Case Study: The Stepping up Transition Programme

Programme Overview

- Part of Grangegorman ABC since 2016
- Transition programme designed to support children moving from preschool to primary school.
- Involves consortium Early Years Services and Primary Schools across the area working together to implement
- Provides an important opportunity for interagency collaboration

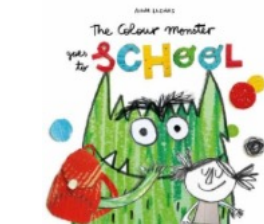
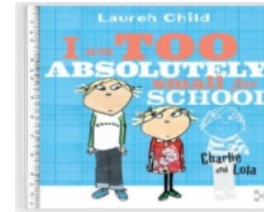
Programme Reach 2025/2026

- Programme resources and materials have been delivered to 235 children across 7 participating preschools 7 primary schools.

Stepping Up – Review and Programme Implementaion



Stepping Up



'The Kids absolutely love the transition resources. Their books are probably their fav and puppets. It's a big hit at our place'

Tinv Toes



New Initiatives: Communication

Using communication to facilitate interagency collaboration

- SharePoint: [ABC Grangegorman - RESEARCH & DESIGN](#)
- Newsletter: [ABC Grangegorman Newsletter](#)
- Instagram: [Instagram](#)
- ABC Grangegorman website: [an Area-Based Childhood Programme based in Dublin 7](#)
- Whatsapp Group for Early Years Services
- In person meetings
- Calls as follow ups to emails
- Working groups

Cementing Research and Monitoring and Evaluation processes

Process	Explanation
Regularly Sharing Data and Feedback with the Governing Structure	Reflect work being done and programme impact
Aligning processes	ELI equivalent programmes + National ABC Outcomes Framework
Co creation	Seeking feedback and guidance from programme coordinators and consortium
Community Action Research Cycle	Regular Check ins and Communication Dedicated Times in Research Cycle (Start, Middle and of Year Meetings).
Realistic approach, grounded in context	Awareness of limits in resources & time, Varying Priorities, “ Asking for more” Process
Reviewing Measures and Data	Prioritising Reporting Requirement + Measuring Programme Impact
Using Feedback to Inform Practice	From Consortium and Partner Organisation as well as wider network: EOY evals, Early Years seminar, Community Conference

NEXT STEPS



Learnings

- **Initial Stages of role as lead agency:** Patience
- **Need for dedicated time and resources**
- **Relationship Building is Key:** Building/Rebuilding Trust across organisations
- **Importance of Realistic, Context Specific Approach:**
Awareness of limitations and constraints & emerging needs
- **Systemic Challenges & Needs of children and families:**
inadequate housing, waiting lists/resources for child additional needs, community space

Summer 2026 Review & Next Steps

Summer 2026 Review

- Check ins with local stakeholders & End of Year evaluations
- Review of Programmes & Data Monitoring and Evaluation Processes
- Communication Strategy

Next Steps:

- **Relationship Building and Identifying New Organisations:** Continuing to support and facilitate current networks and work as well as imbed/build on them and foster new ones
- **Increasing Visibility and Awareness**
- **Signposting and Referral Pathways**
- **Imbedding Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Measuring Impact**
- Team Meetings-ELI lead and partner organisation **“Building sense of Cohesion”**
- Working Groups

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Thank you!!

Thank you for your attention!
If you'd like learn more about the work of the Early Learning
Initiative



ELI Website



ELI Research