



Public policies supporting positive parenthood: new policy perspectives

The proceedings of the ChildONEurope Seminar on positive parenthood

(Florence, Istituto degli Innocenti, 23 May 2013)

ChildONEurope Series 8

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The proceedings
of the ChildONEurope Seminar
on out-of-home children

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on positive parenthood

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ISBN 978-88-6374-040-0

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Introduction

The European interinstitutional network ChildONEurope organizes seminars in order to endorse and support the discussion over sensitive issues in the framework of child social policy. ChildONEurope has been proactive in the social policy sectors since its inception, in particular because the issues to be addressed by the ChildONEurope annual seminar are indicated by its General Assembly, the decision making body of the network which is composed of both national Ministries competent on social policy addressed to children and adolescents and national observatories monitoring the condition of the youngest generation. Therefore, the thematic focus of each ChildONEurope annual seminar is related to the needs of children and adolescents as intercepted at national level by policy makers and monitoring institutions.

This eighth volume of the ChildONEurope Series contains the collection of papers related to the European Seminar on 'Public policies supporting positive parenthood: new policy perspectives' held at the ChildONEurope headquarters in Florence, on 23 May 2013. During the ChildONEurope General Assembly of October 2012 the partners of the network decided to dedicate the tenth ChildONEurope Seminar to the issue of positive parenthood. This choice was meant to continue the discussion started during the previous ChildONEurope Seminar on out-of-home children (October 2012). The support to positive parenthood is perceived by NGOs as well as governments as one of the main efforts in the prevention of family breakdown.

Thus, this tenth seminar had the intention of sharing good practices and positive experiences on what works in parenting support and the discussion was focused on the effectiveness of parenting support programmes in the light of evidence-based research and practice in recent decades. The overall purpose was to identify what is known about 'what works' and to agree on key points for policy makers regarding practice, research and overarching national policies.

For these reasons the experts who contributed to the debate - as a general characteristic of the ChildONEurope seminars - were representatives of three main sectors, namely: policy makers, academic scholars and practitioners operating in the field.

The plenary debate started with the contribution of Maria Herzog, Member UN Committee on the Rights of the Child who provided a critical overview on the approach of the UN CRC Committee. The European dimension of the debate on parenting support policies in Europe was addressed in the contribution of Mary Daly, Professor at the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford. She underlined how countries are explicitly prioritising the provision of support to parents above and beyond measures for child welfare and childcare. Whereas in the past parenting was taken for granted except in 'problem cases', today the related policies constitute a very significant development not least because they indicate a change in perspective about how child well-being and the role of parents is understood. A practical example of this change of attitudes toward policies dedicated to positive parenthood was provided by Paola Milani, Professor at the Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Padua, Italy, who presented the evolution of parenting support policies in Italy and the project PIPPI - *Programma d'intervento per la prevenzione dell'istituzionalizzazione* (Intervention Program to Prevent Institutionalization).

The second session of the seminar was dedicated to a comparative approach to new European policies trends. To this session contributed experts such as Mona Sandbæk, Head

of Department of Social Work, Child Welfare and Social Policy at Oslo, Norway and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, who participated also as representative of the Services to Support Positive Parenting of the Council of Europe and Agata D'Addato, Senior Policy Coordinator at Eurochild, who presented a comparative European study of policies and practices on parenting support.

The proceedings contained in this publication include as well two of the contributions of the discussion panels. In particular: *For a thoughtful family support in public policies planning* introduced by Benoît Parmentier, General Director of the Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE), French Community of Belgium; *Service user perspectives: Messages from research*, introduced by Harriet A. Churchill, Lecturer in Social Work, Department of Social Studies, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

Part 1

Public policies supporting positive parenthood: new policy perspective. The approach of the UN CRC Committee

Maria Herczog

Parenting issues, positive parenthood and related policies are essential elements of the dialogues with State parties and are often mentioned in the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. There are several areas where preparation for parenthood, support to develop, strengthen parenting skills is dealt with, however not always directly referred as positive parenting. Positive parenting is most often mentioned in relation to child rearing practices, alternatives to violent, humiliating discipline, corporal punishment.

According to the CRC Preamble "...the child for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding".¹ An important condition to fulfil this requirement is positive parenting.

The State party should also promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment and establish child-friendly complaints mechanisms.²

... The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen and expand awareness-raising and education campaigns, in order to promote positive and alternative forms of discipline and respect for children's rights, with the involvement of children.³

In articles 5, 18 and 20 there are specific provisions concerning the roles and responsibilities of parents however in many articles there are references to it. "Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern" (Art. 18).⁴

The General Comments are also drawing the attention to the complexity of parenting and parenting support:

Parents are the most important source of early diagnosis and primary care for small children, and the most important protective factor against high-risk behaviours in adolescents, such as substance use and unsafe sex. Parents also play a central role in promoting healthy child development, protecting children from harm due to accidents, injuries and violence and mitigating the negative effects of risk behaviours. Children's socialization processes, which are crucial for understanding and adjusting to the world in which they grow up, are strongly influenced by their parents, extended family and other caregivers. States should adopt evidence-based

¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

² Concluding observations on the second to fourth periodic reports of Israel, 2013, pp. 10, 38.

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC-C-ISR-CO-2-4.pdf>

³ Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Malta, 2013, pp. 7, 37, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/crcs62.htm>

⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

*interventions to support good parenting, including parenting skills education, support groups and family counselling, in particular for families experiencing children's health and other social challenges.*⁵

As parenting has become more and more demanding, relying on instincts or the former generation's experiences is far from being enough. There is a tendency to expect all parents knowing all developmental needs of their children despite of the lack of proper information provided to them and the fast changing knowledge base and requirement towards parents. There is a lacking clarity in many countries on the share of responsibilities between the parents, community and the state. The art. 5 of the CRC refers to the parental responsibilities, rights and duties of the parents but also when applicable the extended family and the community however the distribution and methods of these shared responsibilities differ widely in the different countries, communities. The different forms of institutional care, like day-care, school, boarding schools, residential homes are supplementing parental care and are influencing the development of children but still the impact of the family is more essential. The Committee often urges the state parties to provide all necessary measures to provide services that are helping families and parents but not taking away from them their responsibilities and opportunities to be the primary care giver and reference for their children. This is a delicate balance especially in extremely difficult situations, when for instance the parents are separated from their children, due to crisis situations for different reasons, suffering from mental illness, addiction, are disabled.

Despite of the very diverse economic, political and cultural circumstances, local, regional patterns of child rearing the basic, most important elements of positive parenting have to be acknowledged in all societies and ensure their implementation.

The scientific evidence, brain research shows that emotional stimulation, sensitive response to children's needs from the first day of life is in compliance with the rights based approach, with the best interest of the child.⁶ This approach requires attitude and practice changes in many countries, including new policies, training of professionals, set up of services and awareness raising, support, help and encouragement provided to parents and other carers.

States parties are required to render appropriate assistance to parents, legal guardians and extended families in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities (Arts. 18.2 and 18.3), including assisting parents in providing living conditions necessary for the child's development (Art. 27.2) and ensuring that children receive necessary protection and care (Art. 3.2).

In many cultures and families children are still not seen and heard as right holders, and not as "mini adults with mini rights".⁷ The reasons are different, partly due to the fact that many adults, parents do not feel, that they could exercise their own rights or are not aware of children's rights, or are afraid of empowering children and not referring to their obligations first and foremost. Many institutions, including schools and other services for families and children are also lacking the needed knowledge on child rights' and especially its dissemination, implementation.

⁵ General comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24), <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm>

⁶ The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do, http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/science_of_early_childhood_development/

⁷ Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 2007: http://www.coe.int/AboutCoe/media/interface/publications/europe_a_decouvrir_en.pdf

Providing adequate assistance to parents should take account of the new roles and skills required of parents, as well as the ways that demands and pressures shift during child rearing, reconciliation of work, private and family life, solidarity between generations.

Assistance to parents should include provision of parenting education, parent counseling and other quality services for mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents and others who from time to time may be responsible for promoting the child's best interests. It is however easier to suggest parent education and counseling than performing it, as there is limited evidence on what works and what is the most effective and efficient way of doing it. The Committee is trying to learn more about the good practices, best examples but also taking into consideration the enormous differences between the opportunities and acceptance of those in the different cultures. Assistance also includes offering support to parents and other family members in ways that encourage positive and sensitive relationships with children and enhance understanding of children's rights and best interests, development of their evolving capacities.

Appropriate help to parents can best be achieved as part of comprehensive policies provided for all but also including the special and vulnerable groups of children and their families, where parents need more and/or targeted, specialized support. There are many and more and more diverse forms of families, including one parent, mosaic, same sex parents, adoptive and foster families, parents with disabilities, migrant, refugee, minority families etc., where parents are in need to be provided with specialized support. In many of these families parents and children are facing special and often multiple difficulties, and new challenges.

Children are spending earlier and longer time in different forms of out of family care, like day care, educational facilities, school, after and out of school programs that also require co-operation with parents and challenges the traditional role of parents, needs additional focus by providing enough information, involvement of parents.

The UN CRC Committee is paying special attention to these needs and encourages the state parties to aim at comprehensive policies that are taking into consideration many aspects that have not necessarily seen as part of parenting, parent support.

Recommendations to state parties to promote and implement policies include:

- The physical, emotional bonding, secure attachment is one of the most essential basis for the good relationship between parents and their children. It is best served by the provision of a child and parent friendly environment and support during the first days of life. Pre-natal care of the expecting mothers, preparation for parenthood and high quality services during the most sensitive periods following birth are essential. Baby (parent) friendly hospitals, joyful birth, rooming-in, breastfeeding, prevention of post natal depression are the most important elements, the Committee is recommending to consider.⁸
- The conditions and length of maternal, parental leave and the early childhood education and care are also contributing to the positive parenting options. Parents who can make a fair choice to decide how long are they staying at home, what kind of ECEC services prefer, whether these are high quality, affordable, accessible and how flexible are their working conditions are getting better opportunities to become "good enough parents".⁹

⁸ General comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24) pp. 13, 52., <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm>

⁹ B. Bettelheim, *A Good Enough Parent: A Book on Child-Rearing*, Random House, New York 1987.

Hotlines for children, parents and professionals can help preventing and contributing to the referral to needed information and services in many family conflicts, crisis and risk situations. Hotlines without appropriate services are not enough but their availability is not only helpful in acute crisis but also provides information on the needed provisions and gives a realistic picture on the most striking problems.

Handling divorce, separation, custody issues, visitation rights, death or disappearance of a family member, parent also require skills and parents can face these challenges much better in case they are equipped with the necessary knowledge on conflict resolution, non-violent communication. They have to be ready to listen to their children and taking their views into consideration. The Committee recommends the state parties to facilitate the opportunities to parents learning about these possibilities as part of the parenting support programs.

Given the gravity of the impact on the child of separation from his or her parents, such separation should only occur as a last resort measure, as when the child is in danger of experiencing imminent harm or when otherwise necessary; separation should not take place if less intrusive measures could protect the child. Before resorting to separation, the State should provide support to the parents in assuming their parental responsibilities, and restore or enhance the family's capacity to take care of the child, unless separation is necessary to protect the child. Economic reasons cannot be a justification for separating a child from his or her parents.¹⁰

In General Comment 13 the Committee made a clear standpoint on the need for a holistic and comprehensive approach and practice including positive parenting:

...States must ensure that positive, non-violent relationships and education are consistently promoted to parents, carers, teachers and all others who work with children and families. The Committee emphasizes that the Convention requires the elimination not only of corporal punishment but of all other cruel or degrading punishment of children. It is not for the Convention to prescribe in detail how parents should relate to or guide their children. But the Convention does provide a framework of principles to guide relationships both within the family, and between teachers, carers and others and children.

Children's developmental needs must be respected. Children learn from what adults do, not only from what adults say. When the adults to whom a child most closely relates use violence and humiliation in their relationship with the child, they are demonstrating disrespect for human rights and teaching a potent and dangerous lesson that these are legitimate ways to seek to resolve conflict or change behaviour.

The Committee notes that there are now many examples of materials and programmes promoting positive, non-violent forms of parenting and education, addressed to parents, other carers and teachers and developed by Governments, United Nations agencies, NGOs and others. These can be appropriately adapted for use in different States and situations. The media can play a very valuable role in awareness raising and public education. Challenging traditional dependence on corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of discipline requires sustained action. The promotion of non-violent forms of parenting and education should be built into all the points of contact between the State and parents and children, in health, welfare and educational services, including early childhood

¹⁰ The right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1): http://www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC_C_GC_14_ENG.pdf

*institutions, day-care centres and schools. It should also be integrated into the initial and in-service training of teachers and all those working with children in care and justice systems.*¹¹

¹¹ General comment No. 8 (2006), The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, pp. 11, 46:
[http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CRC.C.GC.8.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.GC.8.En?OpenDocument)

Parenting Support Policies in Europe

Main Developments and Trends*

Mary Daly

Parenting support is a policy which is expanding rapidly, especially in Europe but elsewhere also. What this means in practice is that countries are explicitly prioritising the provision of support to parents above and beyond measures for child welfare and childcare. Whereas in the past parenting was taken for granted except in 'problem cases', the notion of parenting as a set of skills and practices in which people need information and education is becoming more widespread in public debate and policy. Parenting support policies constitute a very significant development not least because they indicate a change in perspective about how child well-being and the role of parents are understood. These policies are a product of a climate of greater concern on the part of the public authorities about how parents behave in their family lives as well as a greater willingness on the part of the public authorities to intervene in relations which were formerly considered 'private' to parents and families.

This paper is organised as follows. The first section introduces the subject by outlining what is involved in parenting support. The second part gives a brief overview of the main factors behind the push to parenting support. The third section describes the nature of provision in a number of countries (including England, France and Germany). The final section presents a brief overview of some of the evidence about parenting support.

1. Definition and examples

There is no accepted definition of parenting support. Given its relative newness and the fact that it relates closely to other aspects of provision, one has to be specific about what is meant by parenting support. I suggest the following definition:

Parenting support refers to a range of information, support, education, training, counselling and other measures or services that focus on influencing how parents understand and carry out their parenting role.

A common goal is to achieve better outcomes for children and young people as well as for parents and families as a whole. The programmes or measures involved tend to have the following aims:

- to develop parental strengths and competences and help parents to deal with ordinary as well as difficult situations in family life;
- to teach parents techniques to control their own and their children's behavior and to foster their children's talents and resources;
- to inculcate good habits in the family, especially around education and learning and health;
- to reduce risk factors associated with poor outcomes for children;

* This paper is based on research carried out under the auspices of the ESRC/ORF-funded project *Governing New Social Risks - The Case of Recent Child Policies in European Welfare States* (Research Grant - RES-360-25-0062).

- to increase so-called 'protective factors' (such as parental self-awareness and self-control).

While there is great diversity in practice, parenting support tends to take three main forms:

- General information made available to parents (through brochures, manuals/books, advice services, the internet and so forth);
- One-to-one advisory or coaching sessions, especially in relation to health and/or behaviour management;
- Courses consisting of training/education programmes for parents (which can be one-to-one or group based).

The latter programmes are quite standardised. They tend to be created usually by professionals (academic and/or practitioner). Some of these courses originate in universities or associated research centres but the most standardised ones tend to end up as commercial enterprises which are purchased by end users (typically governments, local authorities, community and voluntary providers or NGOs). The classic example - and most widely used programme - is Triple P. This has five levels:

- Level 1: a universal parenting information strategy;
- Level 2: brief (one or two session) primary health care intervention for mild behavioural difficulties or a three session large group seminar series on positive parenting;
- Level 3: a session of interventions for mild to moderate difficulties including parent skills training; or a one-off brief 2 hour discussion group (multiple topics available);
- Level 4: an intensive 8-10 session programme which is individual, group or self directed (with telephone support) for more severe problems;
- Level 5: intensive behavioural family intervention where parenting problems occur in the context of other family difficulties (e.g., conflict, depression).

We do not as yet know how many parents have been engaged through parenting support measures - either in England (where they are at their most developed) or elsewhere as no national or other authority has counted this yet.

Sometimes the providers are highly-trained professions but on other occasions - especially for the lower levels of the standardised programmes - they may be people who have as little as one week's training (this is considered sufficient because many of these programmes are run from manuals).

In the countries where it is most developed (especially England, Germany, the Netherlands and the US), parenting support tends to be quite diversified. Looking within and across countries the following are the main sources or types of variation

- Universal or targeted;
- Oriented to prevention or intervention;
- Degree of intensity/intervention;
- Who initiates it - parents, NGOs, government or other public authority;
- Whether the focus is on the parent only, the parent and child, the mother and/or father, the extended family;

- Providers and modes of governance;
- Source of funding and amount of funding;
- Conditions of access to the programme/provision (e.g., compulsory or voluntary);
- Whether the provision is home grown or 'imported' from elsewhere;
- The age of the children targeted.

In terms of explaining why there is such variation in the type of parenting support offered within and across countries, this is greatly influenced by factors in the national context such as: the model and history of social policy, the prevailing philosophy and approach to child welfare and family well-being, the traditions of service organisation, the amount of funding available, where the demand comes from (parents, NGOs, government or other public authority), and the degree of importance attributed to interventionist as against preventive policies.

2. The policy debate and origins of interest in parenting support

A number of different factors have come together to propel parenting support to attention.

1. The health and well-being of children has been a driving concern. Interest in parenting has been driven also by research on child development, child health and child well-being (especially from medical and other sciences and especially on early brain development) which highlights the role of parenting in optimum child development and subsequent adult functioning (O'Connor and Scott, 2007; Hosking *et al.*, 2010).

2. Parenting support is also rooted in a concern about problem or dysfunctional families and poor family practices. While such families have always existed, the attention given to them seems to be increasing and the costs of dealing with such families appear also to be rising. Of relevance especially are concerns about social disorder and anti-social behaviour and, indeed, about risk as a feature of contemporary life (Oates, 2010). This area dovetails with concerns raised from a social inclusion perspective on the transmission of dysfunctionality across generations and the fact that families experiencing or at risk of social exclusion face multiple layers or levels of difficulty which they then might pass on to their children.

3. Another factor that might also be said to be influencing the debate is the increasing participation of mothers in employment. While this has been widely sought as a policy goal in Europe (at least before the recession), there is a feeling that it might have impacted negatively on the quality of family life and child-rearing. As well as creating constraints around the time availability of parents for children and family, this has served to raise questions about whether parenting in a context of two-earner families is sufficiently supported and emphasised. In some quarters, parenting support has elements of a backlash against changes occurring in family life especially in relation to mothers; in others it has a more positive orientation to allay parents' worries about their competence and improve the quality of child rearing.

4. The international organisations (especially the UN and the Council of Europe) are also driving factors. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has transformed the discourses about the respective roles of the child, parents, the family and the state. As well as mandating the rights of children, the CRC underlines the parents' primary

responsibility in their children's upbringing and places strict limits on both State intervention and any separation of children from their parents. While the EU has been relatively silent on the issue,¹ the Council of Europe has been adopting recommendations on family matters since the 1970s with an explicit focus on parenting and the quality of family life since the 1980s.² While it did not invent the notion of positive parenting, the Council of Europe Recommendation (2006)19 provided a definition of 'positive parenting' identifying it as the parental behaviour ensuring the fulfilment of the best interests of the child "that is nurturing, empowering, non-violent and provides recognition and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child".

This Recommendation underlines the importance to children of growing up in a positive family environment and the State's responsibility to create the right conditions for positive parenting (Daly, 2007).

3. Some examples of different countries' approaches

England in my opinion is the country with the most sophisticated and extensive range of supports for parenting. This dates mainly from the last 10 to 15 years - it was mainly the New Labour governments of Tony Blair that instituted a strong move to parenting support in England. It started with the *Sure Start* programme, first introduced in 1998, and subsequently developed through Children's Centres and other providers (including schools and early education centres). At the end of New Labour's tenure of office in 2010 practically any parent who needed support could turn up and ask for it. Provision ranged across the continuum including:

- A national network of Children's Centres (which provide a range of services including some oriented towards parents and the way they parent);
- A national roll-out of education programmes for parents (some of which take place under the auspices of the Children's Centres but many of which are run by a variety of NGOs and some statutory service providers such as schools);
- Parenting Commissioners in each Local Authority and evidence-based guidance for Local Authorities and their staff with regard to commissioning programmes and services around parenting;
- A national programme focusing on the education/support of young mothers (the Family Nurse Partnership which is a health-led home visitation programme);
- Parent support advisors in schools;
- Telephone helpline and web-based information services around parenting;
- A focus on the training of the parenting workforce through the setting up of a national academy for parenting practitioners and a Council for the Development of the Childcare Workforce and a Parenting and Family Institute;
- A series of intensive intervention projects around parenting (Family Intervention

¹ However, under the auspices of the EU, the French government hosted a Peer Review on parenting support in Paris on October 6/7, 2011. Some nine other countries attended, all expressing a strong interest in 'parenting support'. See: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2011/building-a-coordinated-strategy-for-parenting-support>. There are also other EU-wide initiatives - see ChildOneEurope, 2007 and Boddy *et al.*, 2009.

² For example, Recommendation (84) 4 on parental responsibilities; Recommendation (85) 4 on violence in the family; Recommendation (87) 6 on foster families; Recommendation 94 (14) on coherent and integrated family policies; Recommendation (97) 4 on securing and promoting the health of single parent families; Recommendation (98) 8 on children's participation in family and social life.

Projects (for families involved in anti-social behaviour) and Parenting Early Intervention Programmes (for families of children at risk or likely to become so).

When the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government replaced New Labour in 2010, it undertook to reorganise public support for parenting. Some of the provisions and organisations set up under New Labour for parenting support were disbanded or merged with others and funding was generally cut back. In regard to parenting classes, a £100 voucher scheme was instituted to enable parents to purchase parenting classes. Such vouchers are available to all parents and carers of children under 5 years but on a two-year pilot basis in only three areas.³ The stated intention is to roll out the scheme to all of England and Wales in the next years and to extend it to cover parenting of children of all ages. The vouchers can be used to ‘purchase’ free attendance at a range of parenting classes and services run by a range of ‘independent’ providers. A second prong of current UK government policy is the strong support for intensive and interventionist measures with so-called ‘troubled families’ - to all intents and purposes an intensification of the Family Intervention Projects initiated by New Labour. Such families, whose lives are represented as ‘chaotic’, have been estimated to number some 120,000 (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012; HM Government 2012).⁴ Some £448 million are to be spent on a cross-departmental programme to ‘turn around their lives’ (in three years). As part of this every Local Authority has been asked to identify their ‘most troubled families’ and appoint a co-ordinator to oversee local action (‘Troubled Families Trouble Shooters’). The government will offer up to 40% of the cost of dealing with these families to local authorities - but on a payment-by-results basis available only when they achieve ‘success’ with families. Intensive work with families is favoured, whereby each family will be assigned a ‘single key worker’ who will work intensively with the family. Another significant parenting-related measure on the part of the current government is the decision to double the capacity of the Family Nurse Partnership, which is an intensive structured home visiting programme for new mothers aged under 20 years.

In France parenting support is very different. Organised parenting programmes do not exist and unlike England much of what exists has come from the ground up (mainly from parents themselves). One of the most significant initiatives is a national infrastructure of networks of parents. These are the ‘REAAPs’ (Parental Consultation, Care and Social Support Networks). They are not highly interventionist, working on a more ‘softly-softly’ basis, oriented to peer support by parents for parents, and drawing upon principles of voluntarism and parent-centredness. The goal is to offer support and assistance to enable all parents to assume their parental role, especially in an educational context. The parents meet in different places (social centers, schools, crèches, municipal rooms) and engage in different activities (discussion groups, lectures or debates, parent-child interactions), with or without the support of professionals. In 2009 at least half a million French parents took part in REAAP activities.⁵

³ Piloted in Camden, Middlesbrough and High Peak (Derbyshire), the scheme is projected to be availed of by some 50,000 parents at a cost of £5 million. See www.canparent.org.

⁴ See Levitas, 2012 for a critique of both the categorization of ‘troubled’ families and the methodology whereby the figure of 120,000 was derived.

⁵ See *Bilan REAAP 2009* available at <http://www.solidarite.gouv.fr/espaces,770/famille,774/informations-pratiques,981/partenaires-institutionnels-et,859/reseaux-d-ecoute-d-appui-et-d,6826.html>. See also Hamel *et al.*, 2012.

Germany has a range of services available for parents - these include information booklets and various helplines and web services as well as a network of counselling centres and parenting training type measures. However there are three big differences between Germany and England. First, German parenting support (old and new) is strictly driven by legislation, in contrast to being 'programme driven'. Germany has traditionally (through the Civil Code and Social Code VIII (SGB VII) "Child and Youth Support Legislation") provided a range of services to parents - services that since the 1990 SGB VIII reform have been explicitly linked to children's right to decent upbringing or 'education'. The state's obligation to control parenting and to offer a multi-tiered system of support services to parents (as laid down in SGB VIII) has been, since the late 1970s, a corollary of children's right to decent upbringing. Therefore, and this is the second difference between England and Germany, parenting support in Germany is closely linked with established institutions, like the complex system of Erziehungshilfen, Elternberatung or Familienbildung. The last two (often requiring a small fee for service) are open to all parents seeking advice or parental education (Bermaoui *et al.*, 2012). New forms of parenting support have evolved within the frame of SGB VIII, as part of the Erziehungshilfen. Recent family court law reforms deepened the notion of 'prevention' and stipulated sanctions for parents who refuse preventive Erziehungshilfe (if decided by a court or youth office). The 2012 reform of the child protection laws aimed at a better coordination of established parental support measures (also rules and procedures for controlling parents). This reform also introduced the Familienhebamme as a new free of charge parenting support measure, resembling the British Family Nurse Partnership. It targets parents of children under three who are defined as being particularly in need of advice and monitoring in their homes. Thirdly, the competence of parents in child-rearing appears to be less often a central focus as compared with England, although it has attained more public and scientific interest recently.

Taking an overview of provision in these countries, I would emphasise the following.

1. There is much diversity in what is in place in different countries and how the matter of supporting parents is conceived. Of the countries considered here, England has by far the most developed architecture of support for parents and it is different also in terms of the extent to which parenting support is built around standardised parent training programmes. In other countries, 'support' has a more voluntarist and educational cast. There is, therefore, no unified form of 'parenting support' in Europe and one should be careful to define what one means when one uses the term.

2. Parenting support in most countries is not a stand-alone entity. Indeed in some cases it is difficult to identify parenting support as a field of policy - it shades into child welfare, family support or family education. In most cases parenting support is an evolution of other policy areas or concerns.

3. It seems possible to identify different policy models or approaches. England (especially under New Labour) forms one clear model with parenting support institutionalised through a broad-ranging series of provisions that seek to make available a wide range of types of parenting support but prioritises standardised parent education packages that target especially behavioural and attitudinal change among parents experiencing difficulties. France forms the opposite pole to England. Parenting support is seldom about re-educating parents and most often aims to offer them practical and social support in their child-rearing and educational roles along with information and advice on how to engage with the

education system and other services in a way that benefits their children. There are no parenting programmes (standardised or other) in France and as compared with English provision French parenting support has less compulsion and a more preventive orientation. However it is important to emphasise that in all countries including France the parenting-related developments have more than one orientation and spring from more than one discourse or origin. Another difference between France and England is that if the latter is very top-down (in the sense of being led by central government) there is a much stronger bottom-up element in the French case, especially in the extent to which provision in France has strong roots in activism on the part of parents and NGOs. Germany seems to fall between these two poles. While it uses parenting programmes, it has a strong tradition of voluntaristic and parent-centred advice and guidance with emphasis on family as an institution and on parents' needing education for the vital role of child-rearing and child socialisation.

4. From the evidence of different countries, it is possible to put together, albeit loosely, a trajectory of the development of parenting support services. A first marker of development is the extent to which provisions move beyond advice and what one might call 'passive' support. This kind of expansion is manifested by an increase in the volume of provision and in the resources devoted to it and in the diversity of what is provided with a move to more directional approaches. A second key marker of change is the expansion of services for older children and their parents. Most countries have long made available parenting information and instruction (through counselling, social work services or health services for example) to mothers of young children. In fact, early childhood support appears to be the longest established form of parental support in most countries. However, parenting support is now moving up the age range (especially noticeable in England), often driven by an integrated approach and a recourse to parenting as a medium of bringing about change in families and in children. A third marker on the trajectory of development is moving towards diversified provision. Most countries have some history of parenting support of one type or another but as countries move forward they appear to be recognising that parenting support should take different forms and appeal to different kinds of families.

4. The Impact and Challenges of Parenting Support

A lot of claims are made for parenting support. The most reliable evidence (Moran *et al.*, 2004; Utting, 2009; Hosking *et al.*, 2010; Barlow *et al.*, 2011) suggests that when it works well parenting support can:

- Make parenting a less stressful and more enjoyable role;
- Reduce the risks of emotional and physical harm to children;
- Improve children's well-being and development.

The evidence base is strongest for established approaches to working with parents. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) - working with the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour - shows good outcomes for children and families, particularly those with anxiety-based difficulties (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, cited in Oates, 2010). Parent skills training, which combines observation of the child and family by the therapist, therapeutic and educational clinic sessions and problem-solving and goal-setting work, provides well-evaluated support for families with children with behavioural problems (as discussed by Webster-Stratton and Spitzer, 1996, for example; cited in Oates, 2010).

However, there are risks involved also. For example, parents may be overloaded with information or knowledge that can confuse and disempower them. Also, as a general phenomenon, the move to parenting support may actually make parents more anxious and less secure. There is also the risk that parenting programmes provide platforms for people and organisations who are not specifically trained in child development and evidence-based child and family therapeutic approaches. Finally, parenting support measures might be associated with the stigmatisation of those on low incomes, depending on the way they are run and targeted.

By way of conclusion, the complexity and diversity of parenting support programmes and policies needs to be emphasised. It is important also to take a critical perspective and to ask what it is that governments (or other promoters) seek to achieve through parenting support. Viewed as a whole, parenting support is a particular form of social policy and family policy which has to be set in the context of a number of broader trends around the role and responsibilities (and in some ways the perceived failings) in relation to parents, the up-bringing of children and the family's place in society.

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Parenting support in Italy: P.I.P.P.I. - Programma di intervento per la prevenzione dell'istituzionalizzazione (Program to Prevent Institutionalization)

Paola Milani, Marco Ius, Sara Serbati, Diego Di Masi, Ombretta Zanon

1. Parenting support in Italy

In Italy, at least from the 18th century to the present, many educational and child development experiences have been conducted with the clear awareness that raising a child and promote his/her development is an action that also requires attention to parents and specifically to their parental style and competences.

In many contexts focussing traditionally at the education and development of children, such as child care services, schools, as well as health and social care agencies, a “co-education” approach has been step by step developed and assumed to promote parents’ inclusion and participation.

Moreover, recent research about implicit transmission and social reproduction (Desmet, Pourtois, 1993; Lahaye, Pourtois, Desmet, 2007), shows the impact of “familial education” not only on the future children’ learning at school, but also on their whole wellbeing.

Welfare and Social Policy is induced to promote and provide, without hesitation, action aimed at building Positive Parenting, such as the Recommendation REC (2006) 19, where Parenting Support is considered as a “social investment” fostering “the creation of the conditions for positive parenting, by ensuring that all those rearing children have access to an appropriate level and diversity of resources (material, psychological, social and cultural) and that broad social attitudes and patterns of prevailing life are receptive to the needs of families with children and also those of parents», REC (2006)19, 3.

Today, Parenting Support is gradually gaining ground across Italy within the framework of family support policies. However, services providing it are not homogeneously cross-nationally regulated and there is no an agreed definition of what are the services in charge of this provision: many different agencies - both institutional and non-institutional - provide different kinds of Parenting Support intervention (including Regions, Provinces, Municipalities, local healthcare and welfare authorities and third sector organizations - among which religious associations and institutions, childcare centres and schools at all levels). The different projects and opportunity of Parenting Support are targeted at parents of children of different ages and in different conditions, and new and old intervention projects, programs and working solutions have been planned and run to meet the new needs of families. Therefore, it is quite difficult to make a clear distinction between specific Parent Support services and services that are broadly targeted at children and families issues.

In general, it is probably more accurate referring to interventions that are based on different instruments, methodologies, theoretical models and evaluation framework, that pursue a variety of goals and are targeted at different groups of parents, and that despite their own identity share common purposes: the development of parenting skills, the reduction of social exclusion among children, the promotion of the parental potential of

each parent, and a more fruitful interaction between parents and children to promote children's growth.

An important development is underway in Italy, with the aim to support parents in their parental competences and tasks, shifting the focus of intervention from the therapeutic-clinical sphere to the socio-educational-promotional one. This applies both to "normal" families, participating in intervention driven by the desire to improve and empower your parental potential and awareness, and to "vulnerable" families, involved in specific intervention because they need specific help. Only recently, since the early Nineties, social practitioners have become better aware that Parenting Support can play an important role also for families already receiving social and psychological support, within a multidisciplinary and integrated approach (Ciampa, Milani, 2011). As a matter of fact, Child Care and Protection system and Parenting Support usually are considered as different areas with their own different legislative references, with stories with different roots, with different goals and cultural models and background.

The challenge that today is shared in most Western systems of welfare and that is inherent in the program P.I.P.P.I., that will be presented in the next section, is to make these two areas working in tandem, while maintaining a degree of independence. What has to be underlined is that point is not the no-acknowledgment of the centrality of child's individual rights or the bending and hiding of his/her rights to the needs of a familist vision, nor the willing to preserve family bonds at all costs. On the contrary, it is to affirm that in order to really practiced child's rights, at least in situation of child neglect, you have to focus non only on the care and protection of the child, but on his/her whole relational world. And this allows you to place in a positive dialectic, rather than in opposition to, the right of children to be protected and the right of parents to be supported, their vocation to be the first protectors of the child, and consequently to center the question of the pertinence and value of the assessment of each family situation reported: appropriate and pertinent assessment is, indeed, the only real tool able to protecting us from the dangers of ideologies (Serbati, Milani, 2013; Milani, 2013, in press).

Research clearly shows that families (especially the poorest ones) having access to services that integrate parents support and children support, are more likely to improve and to make up for the ability to adequately care their children and meet their developmental needs (Brousseau, 2012; Davies, Ward, 2012; Quinton, 2005).

For this reason, Sellenet (2007) proposes to prefer a multidimensional view of protection, that is centered on the whole spectrum of relationships in which every child is born and grows and that includes the family of origin in the child care plan, instead of a monodimensional view, that is centered only on the child, abstractly understood.

Including the family of origin within the intervention plan is a crucial issue that should be addressed starting from the attitude towards parents in order to really engage them, and fully enable and empower their involvement in decision making, in the choices regarding their children' daily lives, and parent-school relationship and partnership, etc. It is crucial starting this process revisiting the institutional mandate child protection-based, that often hampers the work with parents in favor of a work only on children.

Therefore, it is key to assume a holistic and ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner 2005) not to separate context and person and contexts among themselves, and to work on the connections and belongings, which are a deep need of every human subject. In example, in situation of vulnerable families where children may be placed out-of-home, not only the practical process of the placement has to be taken in account, but also the understanding

underlying that process and the way the process is developed: sometimes it may be necessary to place children out-of-home for a period of time, but this action cannot be taken basing on an approach that considers the needs of children and those of their parents in an hostile and antagonistic way.

Within this logic and the REC (2006) 19 mentioned above, P.I.P.P.I. was developed as research-training-intervention program consisting of an intensive care program for vulnerable families, that was implemented in 2011-2012. The name P.I.P.P.I. stands for Program of Intervention for Prevention of Institutionalization and it is inspired by Pippi Longstocking, a creatively amazing resilient girl known all over the world (Milani et al. 2011).

2. P.I.P.P.I. (Program to prevent institutionalization)

P.I.P.P.I. is the result of a collaboration between the Ministry of Welfare, the Laboratory of Research and Intervention in Family Education (LabRIEF, University of Padova), and Child Care and Protection services, schools and local health authorities of 10 Italian cities (Bari, Bologna, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Reggio Calabria, Turin, Venice) that joined the program for the first 2 years of implementation thanks to a specific fund by the Law 285/1997.

P.I.P.P.I. is also an attempt to build a new link between different institutions (Municipalities, Ministry and universities) that share the same mission of promoting the “common good”, between professions and disciplines of the field of social work - psychology, social work, humanities and social sciences - that only together can face the challenge of reducing the number of child placement: “Common good means cultivating a long-term vision, it means investing in the future, it means taking care of the community of citizens, it means placing the long-term interests of the collectivity before the immediate profit of the few, it means pay priority attention to young people, their development and education, and their needs”(Settis, 2012).

In according to the Italian Welfare National Policies on Child Care and Protection, the experimentation is designed as an action-research and its main goal is to prevent children from being placed out of their families. In particular, the different interventions provided in the implementation aimed at improving parenting skills, at promoting full involvement in children’s school life and at strengthening social networks (environmental and family-related factors). These actions are consistent with the national policies for the fight against poverty based on Parenting Support, which is provided in partnership with the social and health care services, schools, the third sector and families.

The underpinning idea is to work with vulnerable families and professionals involved in the care system on the specific issues of parenting, but at the same time also on the whole framework of parenting, targeting the internal relational factors, as well as the relational factors that are external to the family (such as income, employment and housing conditions, etc.) and that impact the situation, leading to parental neglect (Lacharité *et al.*, 2005).

Through an eco-systemic approach, the purpose of P.I.P.P.I. is to experiment and assess a specific multidimensional program to meet the needs of vulnerable families, by balancing risk and protective factors, and supporting parenting through multi-professional and resilient based intervention. Particularly the goal is to implement and evaluate an intensive approach, structured and flexible at the same time, for family care process, able to decrease children’s risk of placement out-of-home and/or facilitate family reunification by:

- articulating interventions between the different areas of activity involved around the needs of children
- promoting the full participation of parents and children in the whole care process, building analysis, assessment and plans together to meet their needs, starting from the point that “the best predictor of success is the engagement of families” (Berry, 2007).

The outcomes of the implementation of the program are divided into final and intermediate outcomes (referring to families) and proximal (referring to practitioners and therefore aiming at building communities of practice and ensuring replicability of the intervention) as follows:

Final Outcome (Referring to families):

- to ensure the safety of children, to foster their optimal development, to help to improve their future by avoiding the placement out-of-home;
- to improve the psychosocial functioning and cognitive development of children within the different contexts of life.
- Intermediate Outcome (Referring to families):
- to enable parents to positive parenting;
- to empower parents in learning how to adequately respond to development needs of their children,
- the psychological availability of parental figures and responsible and sensitive behaviour to the needs of children improve.

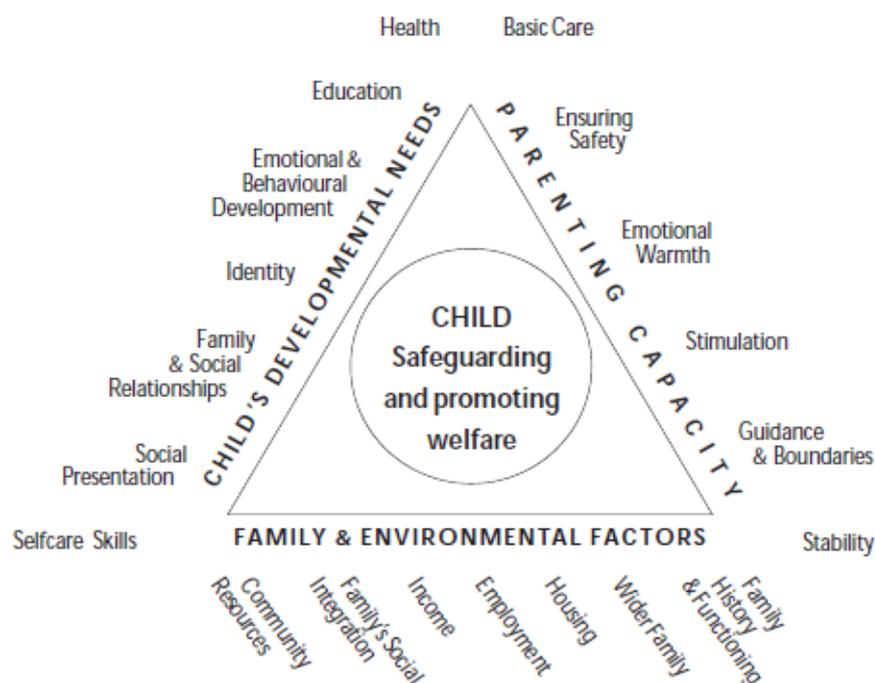
Proximal Outcome (Referring to practitioners):

- to foster parent participation and collaboration through the care process, especially in decisions that impact the family;
- parents have the support necessary for the exercise of their responsibilities towards their children (in a sufficiently intense, coherent and continuous way);
- to promote the cooperation between all the professionals involved in the care process and all significant adults caring for the children in order to allow effective integration of interventions that will ensure the well-being and optimal development of children.

The main tool used to assess, plan and monitor the effectiveness of the measures taken to support families is called *RPMonline - Rilevazione, Progettazione, Monitoraggio* (assessment, planning and monitoring) - *strumento per il Progetto Quadro* (tool for the Care Plan) and it represents the methodological-operational application of this eco-systemic approach.¹ It is also intended to give a visual representation of the triangular multidimensional model called *Il Mondo del Bambino* (The Child’s World), which was built starting from the English Assessment Framework (Figure 1) (Department of Health, 2000) and from the experience of the Scottish Government (2008).

¹ R.P.M. online is a web-tool developed by LabRIEF and C.S.I.A. (University of Padua). It is meant to foster all the process of the care plan (assessing risk and protective factors, planning and evaluating intervention) and aims at empowering the participation of all the actors involved in the intervention (firstly children and parents, and then practitioners, teachers, etc.) giving them voice, collecting their point of view and using their resources.

Fig. 1 The Assessment Framework



Il Mondo del Bambino is intended to help professionals to assume a holistic understanding of the needs and potential of every child and of every family and, consequently, to fill in the RPM form with relevant information for the purposes of the action plan. The project focuses on three fundamental dimensions (three sides of the triangle): the child's developmental needs, the parenting skills necessary to meet child's needs, and the family-related and environmental factors which may impact the response to these needs.

PI.PPI. promotes the provision of comprehensive care for families, with the involvement of professionals, but also of parents and children themselves in the assessment and planning stages. In particular, the participation of families is promoted through several instruments that are intended to give voice to all the people involved, in order to elaborate a framework project by considering concrete issues and by defining actions, responsibilities and deadlines to achieve a common objective.

The program was designed according to the formula $SI=f(E,C,P)$ that underline how Successful Intervention has to be considered as an intervention leading to socially significant outcomes that are made of three main factors: Evidence (What/Effective Intervention), Context (Where/Enabling Contexts) and Process (How-Who/Effective Implementation Methods) (Kitson, Harvey, McCormack, 1998; Fixsen, Blase, 2013).

The implementation of PI.PPI. requires an implementation team working on 3 different levels (scientific, institutional and operative level) and able to involve and put together stakeholders, service managers, service leaders, practitioners and researchers. PI.PPI. implementation team is made of the Multidisciplinary Teams and Local Stakeholder Teams of the difference cities and the University-Ministry Scientific Team.

The Multidisciplinary Team (M.T.):

- is made by the case manager, the psychologist, the social worker, the home care worker, the family's paediatrician or G.P. and community members, professionals or

- not - (family helpers), the children's teachers and the family members, including the children themselves;
- has an operational function, i.e. to guarantee quality, continuity and pertinence in child and family care processes, in the implementation of the process and in the use of the existing instruments;
- is in charge of the operational aspects and of coordinating the programme for its entire length of implementation;
- must be considered as a "variable geometry" group (core of professionals + a number of person and professionals who may join the group when needed and according on the situation and its needs).

The Local Stakeholder Team (L.S.T.)

- is made up of all the institutional and non-institutional stakeholders that in a given community collaborate in providing support to vulnerable children and families: the leader of the service running the project, one or two representatives of the Municipality, the professionals of the local health authority who are in charge of the cases of children in need, a representative of the Foster Care Centre, a representative of the administrative-political institutions, a representative of the third sector and a representative of the Education Office of the County-Province;
- plays a political-strategic role which guarantees the continuity of funding, the presence of all the professionals and the possibility to have an actual impact on the community;
- discusses, prepares and is in charge of organizing, monitoring and supporting the specific planning, monitoring and evaluation activities of every single project and of the whole programme in general;
- works to create social consensus on the project.

The Scientific Team (S.T.):

- is made up of researchers of the University of Padua and of senior officials of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
- organizes and supports the use of the necessary planning, assessment and action tools;
- trains, assists and tutors the various Multidisciplinary Teams in the evaluation of processes and outcomes;
- collects and analyses the experimentation results, discusses them, and presents them to all the professionals and the scientific community (Milani *et al.*, 2013).

During the first 2 years of implementation, P.I.P.P.I. involved directly more than 200 practitioners, belonging to the 10 involved cities, working with 89 families in care (122 children, 0-11 years old); 9% of them live in poverty, 41% are unemployed or hold precarious jobs, 21% experience problems linked to isolation and exclusion. In the Experimental Group there were 35 families. About 100 more practitioners were indirectly involved because even if they didn't attend trainings and tutorials, they were invited by colleagues to take part in specific actions and times and therefore approached gradually P.I.P.P.I. method.

The first months focused on sharing with practitioners the framework and goal of the program and on training them about actions and tools, linking P.I.P.P.I. program with their usual practice.

Since Italian services are dominated by a culture that does not support professionals in documenting the care process and there is no common way of assessing, planning and evaluating intervention, the main goal of the training was to share with practitioner P.I.P.P.I. the method of work with families that is based on the 4th generation evaluation (Guba, Lincoln, 1999), and that consists in "Participatory and Trans-Formative Evaluation" (Serbati, Milani, 2013): practitioners and families all together are main protagonists in all the steps of the care process, according to their resources and difficulties, and where every meeting is a context that gives the possibility to achieve a new learning to use together to go further and improve together.

Afterwards the program was implemented with families setting three times of data collection (t0-t1-t2: October 2011, April and November 2012), in which different questionnaires were used to measure parents' satisfaction, child behaviour (SDQ), families' social support (MsPSS), and family functioning (Assessment Framework). This tools and other qualitative "Giving voice" tools were used to foster family participation. For each child the team of professionals used R.P.M.online. All the tools were chosen because they allow practitioners to self-evaluate their intervention with family and because they can be use also to involved families into the evaluation process.

During all the time of the implementation tutors of the S.T. of the University met every 2 months the Multidisciplinary Teams of practitioners in each city, in order to provide them help and advise on the use of the tools, and discuss and reflect together about the process of implementation with families. The approach of tutors in meeting with practitioners was based on the concept of isomorphism that is promoting a tutor-practitioner relationship meant as a participatory and transformative learning context that is the same practitioners are asked to build with families. Through evaluation process and reflective practice practitioners can increase the awareness about problems to solve and actions to take and researchers can compare theories and practice. Through participation in evaluation process families increase the awareness about problems to solve and actions to take.

The results of the first implementation (questionnaires, R.P.M.online and focus group with practitioners) give Evidence to the improvement of family situation and mostly practitioners show an high level of innovation in their practice. Practitioners are really enthusiastic about the method and how it allow to evaluate and prove their work. 9 cities asked to go to the next step towards a full implementation.

The Ministry of Welfare agreed to fund other 2 years of implementation (2013-2014) in order to consolidate and scale up P.I.P.P.I. within other services, practitioners and families in care of the cities, planning to go step by step toward a national wide full implementation (2014-2020).

In each city about 3 practitioners who took part in the first implementation, were selected and involved as coaches, to offer together with the tutors of S.T. internal and peer support to M.T.s and to provide training while engaged in practice activities, coaching, assessment and feedback, emotional support and optimism in changing and empowering practice (Spouse, 2001). The long-term goal of P.I.P.P.I. is to train a group of practitioner who will be able in the future to take care of the whole implementation process in their own city, as the role of the S.T. tutors decreases.

P.I.P.P.I.'s training method is based on the concepts of *situativity*, *contingency* and *reflexivity*

of professional formation (Schön, 1983). Practitioners gain and then transfer knowledgeable skills, participating in a community of thinking and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where evaluation tools of P.I.P.P.I. are used for a dual purpose:

- to verify what happens, in order to determine the accordance with the program (Evidence);
- to allow and promote new learning contexts, for professionals and also for families, in order to experiment new practice (Context and Process) (Serbati, Milani, 2013).

On one hand results of 1st implementation and the first steps of the 2nd one are promising, on the other hand Social Services are facing many challenges due to social-economic issues. Therefore a further task of the 2nd implementation is to identify and define with the 3 levels of the Implementation Team the future steps for scaling up the program in a way that:

- is sustainable within the Social Services work and empowers the full potential of social professionals and M.T.;
- leads to Effective Intervention in Parenting Support;
- promotes and reaches socially significant outcomes for children and family wellbeing;
- keeps the optimism in social work and empowers all the resources available in the community.

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Part 2

Public policies supporting positive parenthood: new policy perspectives

Positive parenting - a duty not only of parents

Mona Sandbæk

1. Introduction

Thanks to the organisers for inviting me. I am pleased to talk about the Council of Europe's work in this field. My contribution consists of three parts:

- The Council of Europe's work on positive parenting which aims at contributing to a wider understanding of what family and parenting support is.
- Combating child poverty with reference to Council of Europe's work to fight social exclusion, to Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013 - Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage, and a Norwegian example from poverty research, and finally
- Council of Europe's further work in the field of children's rights and family policy.

2. Council of Europe's Recommendation 2006 (19) on policy to support positive parenting

The first part of my presentation is anchored in the Council of Europe's Recommendation 2006 (19) on policy to support positive parenting, based on the report edited by Mary Daly: *Parenting in Contemporary Europe. A positive approach*. I will highlight three parts of the Recommendation; the content of positive parenting, non-violent upbringing and social policy measures to support parents.

Parenting in the light of the UN Convention

The background for the concept "positive parenting" can be summed up in the core question: What does the UN Convention on children's rights mean for *parents*? Surprisingly little attention has been directed towards enabling parents to implement the Convention. Adult society has focused mainly on what the Convention means for children, and of course they are the key persons. But the intention of the Convention is not to promote a view of children as individuals standing alone in the world, separated from their families. On the contrary, children's rights should be taken care of in a caring family environment. Parents are vital in children's lives and they need support in exploring what it means to be a parent under the Convention. If we continue to educate only children on the Convention this may create conflicts and misunderstandings between parents and children, because the children will be informed and many parents will not be aware of what the UNCRC means. The positive parenting approach aims to avoid such unnecessary conflicts between parents and children. The work demonstrates in a very concrete way what the UNCRC may mean for parents; how to create good relationships, structures and routines, attitudes and values that will enhance children's rights and promote positive communication between parents and children.

Four key words are used to sum up the content: Nurture, Structure, Recognition and Empowerment.

NURTURE is defined as giving the child warmth, acceptance, involvement and support. STRUCTURE implies giving the child guidance, standards, limits and reasons, RECOGNITION is about acknowledging the child's experiences and views, and EMPOWERMENT represents enhancing the evolving capacities of the child and its increasing sense of autonomy. The methods of parenting according to the UN convention and new knowledge may be labelled as Authoritative parenting. Parents should be warm and involved, they should be consistent in establishing and enforcing guidelines, limits and developmentally appropriate expectations and they should allow and promote children's autonomous behaviour and decision making. This brings me to the second part;

Guidelines for a non-violent upbringing

Children's right to a non-violent upbringing is a major concern of the Council of Europe and a fundamental condition in the positive parenting concept. The Council of Europe does not address the issue of non-violent upbringing in order to make parents feel guilty or ashamed. However, scientific knowledge on how violence may harm children and the fact that children's rights to a non-violent upbringing are now embodied in law, demands new practices.

For many parents this can be a difficult change, and they may strive to find alternative ways of bringing up their children. The report and recommendation therefore provide examples on how guidelines and boundaries can be exercised in a firm, but non-violent way. Steffan Janson has been quite courageous in giving concrete advice in his chapter in the report. I cannot go into details now, but I want to mention that the Recommendation 2006 (19) in addition to the general policy messages contains keys for parents and guidelines for professionals. This was done in order to make it easier for member states to communicate directly with parents and professionals.

Policies to support parental practices in accordance with the UNCRC

The Recommendation on positive parenting is not only about putting demands upon parents but also about what kind of expectations the parents can put upon the states parties in terms of policies and services. This is a particular important aspect of this work. Too often the society put demands upon parents without addressing how society can assist them in putting the demands into practice. In Recommendation 2006 (19) the Council of Europe recommends that parents should have a right to material support through public transfers and taxation; there is a further need for public measures to reconcile work and family life, and ensure access to child facilities.

In these times of financial hardships in many European countries it may not be easy to talk about universal services. However, the importance of universal services should be emphasised, because of their qualities of being non-stigmatising and supporting people's capacities to take care of themselves. I will return to this in a minute.

These measures are in accordance with EUs Recommendation on Child Poverty, which advocates ensuring that children grow up in families with adequate resources to meet their essential needs, to provide families with decent employments and flexible working arrangements and provide quality childcare facilities for working parents.

In addition to policy measures, the recommendation argues that services should be delivered on a continuum from informal to semi-formal and formal services. States parties

must guarantee people's rights, but civil society also has an important part to play. When parents are asked what they value in services, these are their clear messages: They want services that are non-judgemental and non-stigmatising and they want their own experiences and competences to be respected.

3. Combating child poverty

The Council of Europe has a rights-based approach to combating child poverty, emphasising people's rights to income, employment, housing, education and health.

Council of Europe's work underlines also how particular attention must be given to ensure families at risk of social exclusion their access to social rights. It may be necessary to reach out to families in their homes and providing long- term support. The most vulnerable families may need encouragement and information to approach and use services. This may require patience and respect, in order to help them understand how services work, as well as motivating them to approach the services (Council of Europe, 2007: *Parenting in Contemporary Europe. A positive approach*).

Commission Recommendation of 20.02.2013. Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage

EU's Recommendation also emphasises a human rights approach to combating child poverty and the importance of prevention and integrated strategies. Integrated strategies must combine general measures and targeted services to parents with services that are essential to children's outcome in education and health and children's own participation.

A Norwegian example. Children's living conditions: the importance of family finances

The measures embedded in EU and the Council of Europe's work are in accordance with my own experiences as a researcher on child poverty. Over ten years - 2001-2011 - I headed the project "Children's living conditions - the importance of family finances" on child poverty, a co-operation between NOVA and the Norwegian Women's Public Health Association & Statistics Norway. More than 1300 children and an equal number of parents, the majority living in low income families, were interviewed three times; 2003, 2006 and 2009. We also draw on statistical information from public registers.

In international contexts I am often asked if there is something to learn from studying poverty in a rich welfare state like Norway. My answer is that it is important to follow the hard-to reach also in developed welfare states. Interestingly, the same groups of children fall behind in Norway as in other parts of Europe. There is an over-representation of poor children among non-western immigrants, families outside the work force and single mothers. The differences between the groups of children are in the disadvantage of low-income children. However, it is important to note that the level of living in poor families in Norway and in Scandinavia is higher compared to most other countries in Europe.

The new wave of poverty research starting at the beginning of the 21 century brought along two new trends: A focus on *child-poverty*; on how children fare when the families are poor. Further, *children and parents themselves have been invited as informants* in poverty research. Based on reviews of international and Norwegian poverty research I find reason to conclude that their stories have changed the views upon poor families. Poverty research used to consist of statistical information, demonstrating the over-representation of all kinds

of problems in poor families. More recent research also find that there are more problems in poor families, but interviews with poor children and parent themselves also provide nuances and information about their strategies.

Children have double strategies; they try to avoid exclusion in numerous ways and they try to help their parents (Redmond, 2008, Sandbaek, 2004, 2008, 2010 and Van der Hoek, 2005).

Most parents give priority to their children. Our results show, like British, French and German studies, that most poor parents make huge efforts to give priority to their children's economic need. Parents go without items and skip necessities for the house in order to give their children a life as similar as possible to other children. This is of course only possible if their poverty is not too severe. If poverty is really deep, there are no resources to prioritise from (Middleton *et al.*, 1997, Chasse *et al.*, 2003, Grødem, 2008, Thorød, 2006, 2008).

Even though parents and children have their own strategies, poverty has severe costs for children as well as parents and public measures are vital.

The recommendations from the project "Children's living conditions - the importance of family finances" may be summed up in three major actions:

- Universal services come across as an important topic. This is one way society can recognise the efforts made by a majority of poor parents to support themselves and their children. Universal services are not stigmatising and enable parents to manage by themselves, which is in accordance with what they really want to do. In addition to universal services, there is a need for target measures.
- We further recommend paying attention to how measures for adults work for children and to have a child's perspective on adult services.
- We also underline the importance of addressing children directly, in particular through access to free schooling of good quality and access to leisure activities. Parents and children emphasise how much they want to be like most children and do what other children do!

The overall principles from the Council of Europe, EU and recent research on working with children and families in poverty may be summed up in the following points:

- Apply a rights-based approach,
- Respect parents' and children's potentials and experiences,
- Recognise different kinds of families and parenting,
- Address key players
- Promote cooperation among professionals as well as between professionals and parents/children.

4. Council of Europe's further work in this field

Council of Europe's Strategy for the Rights of the child (2012-2015) gives direction for the coming years. Four strategic objectives are underlined:

- Promoting child-friendly services and systems, see Rec 2011 (12) on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families & Guidelines on child-friendly justice.
- Eliminating all forms of violence against children.

- Guaranteeing the rights of children in vulnerable situations, see above.
- Promoting child participation, see Council of Europe Rec 2012 82) on the participation of children and young people.

The child is the key person, but embedded in recent recommendations and guidelines are also direction for family policies. The Recommendation on social services should be “friendly to families and children”, defined as services which take into account the child’s age, level of maturity and understanding, an assessment of each child’s unique circumstances and which give due consideration to their views, *in particular with respect to family ties*.

The strategy addresses challenges in the following four fields: Prevention, Protection, Provision and Participation. Under the key word Provision the strategy talk about *service provision to children and their families* - and how services do not necessarily match their needs. Economic, social and technological developments have resulted in new challenges that children, their families and the professionals working with them are not sufficiently equipped or trained to handle. This calls for integrated local, regional and national strategies.

I would also like to mention the present work to develop a toolkit for professionals working with and for children in alternative care in cooperation with SOS Children’s Villages International.

Council of Europe is also working on a follow-up to the “Think Parents” conference on policies to support positive parenting in Hague, 10-12 October 2012.

Implementation

Seen from the Council of Europe’s perspective a particular important goal is to bridge the gap between existing standards and guidelines and what actually happens in the field. Implementation of existing standards must be a focus in the coming years.

Investing in family and parenting support: inspiring practices across Europe

Agata D'Addato

1. Introduction

Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to improve the quality of life of children and young people. We are the only EU network specifically focused on child rights and child welfare that brings together membership from different sectors (NGOs, professionals, local/regional authorities, academics, research institutes, etc.).

Eurochild advocates for the promotion of children's rights and well-being across Europe. It sees family and parenting support as central to the pursuit of this objective. Eurochild's thematic working group on family and parenting support provides a forum for members to exchange experience and know-how, thereby contributing to improved policy and practice across Europe.

Eurochild believes that investment in all families, complemented by targeted support for the most vulnerable families at risk of exclusion, is a fundamental building block of cohesive societies. In practice this means protecting education and early childhood services from spending cuts and ensuring welfare reforms do not undermine an adequate safety net for vulnerable families. It means strengthening early intervention and prevention services and providing integrated services that enable children to flourish. Interventions such as parent support, education, training, strengthening family and community networks and peer support can help build parents' self-esteem and skills. They can improve parents' long-term employability and enhance outcomes for children.

2. Policy context and direction of the EU

We can be very happy that we can position today's discussion into a clear policy context and direction of the EU. Through its recent *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage Recommendation*¹ - launched on 20 February 2013 as part of the European Commission Social Investment Package - the EU has taken on board a balanced approach, ie. labour market integration to be balanced with care responsibilities; a focus on early childhood education and care (ECEC) to work with parents as "main educators of their children"; developing parenting skills in a non-stigmatising way; strengthening links between schools and parents. This provides leverage for policy reform and investment at Member State level, particularly through the structural funds. The amount and priorities for available **EU resources** in the coming seven years (2014-2020) are under discussion, with a growing scope given to social inclusion and achieving the Europe 2020 poverty target. The potential of the EU Structural Funds, in particular, to support children and families has repeatedly been recognised.

¹ European Commission Recommendation *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, C(2013) 778 final. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=9762&langId=en>

Alongside the framework of the “Investing in Children” Recommendation, the European Commission set up an online **European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC)**. The intention is to collect and disseminate innovative practices that have demonstrable impact on better outcomes for children in areas where there is a need for policy and practice reform. The platform will serve as a forum for mutual learning and exchange at EU level.² Whilst welcoming this development, which we believe has a valuable role to play, Eurochild is concerned about the strong focus within the EU on ‘evidence-base’ as an underpinning principle for investment and transferability of good practice, which is particularly relevant in the field of family and parenting support.

A EU-wide coalition of stakeholders is calling for 2014 to be designated European Year for Reconciling Work and Family Life.³ Eurochild is involved in this coalition, bringing the child rights/ child well-being perspective and promoting the vision of quality life for all. For Eurochild, policies and measures that aim to reconcile work and family life should be at the heart of Europe’s recovery from the crisis. One in every five children in the EU is at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Parents’ access to the labour market is an important part of the solution, but jobs alone are not enough. Are the jobs sufficiently paid to give families adequate income? Are working parents still physically and emotionally available to their children? Are there quality services that allow parents to work, safe in the knowledge that their children are nurtured by caring professionals? We strongly believe that a European Year can bring attention to these issues and ensure that Europe’s recovery is inclusive and puts the best interest of children at its heart.

Also, in 2014 the **United Nations** is celebrating the **20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family**.⁴ This will offer an opportunity to refocus on the role of families; take stock of recent trends in family policy development; share good practices in family policy making; review challenges faced by families worldwide and recommend solutions.

3. Inspiring practices of family and parenting support services across Europe: similarities and differences

The strength of Eurochild’s advocacy work lies in its access to high quality information from members about what is happening on the ground, what the issues are and what is producing results. This also underpins its mission to promote mutual learning.

On 10th October 2012, Eurochild published its Compendium of Inspiring Practices on Early Intervention and Prevention in Family and Parenting Support at the ‘Think Parents!’ Conference hosted by the Netherlands Youth Institute in The Hague.⁵ The Compendium, which builds on 5 years of mutual learning and exchange in the frame of the Eurochild Thematic Working Group on Family and Parenting Support, documents 12 detailed case studies of early intervention and prevention services that show what works in Europe to

² To find out more information please see: <http://europa.eu/epic/>

³ To find out more information please see:

http://eyf2014.wordpress.com/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_campaign=c6f5e75e14-Press_Release+25%2F09%2F2012&utm_medium=email

⁴ To find out more information please see: <http://www.family2014.org/home.php>

⁵ Eurochild (2012), *Compendium of Inspiring Practices on Early Intervention and Prevention in Family and Parenting Support*, Brussels. Available at:

http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/Communications/09_Policy%20Papers/policy%20positions/EurochildCompendiumFPS.pdf

improve outcomes for children and that demonstrate the huge potential of developing new, inventive and cost-effective ways of strengthening and empowering children and families.

Case studies featured in the Compendium were selected firstly, because they reflected a response to an identified need, social challenge, economic and/ or political imperative that was innovative in the context of prevailing national, regional or local circumstances. Secondly, because of their potential to motivate others to use the learning or to be replicated more widely within their country or elsewhere in Europe. *Its intention was not to collect comparable case studies.* However, some common features can be identified. All case studies:

- aim to work with parents, families and communities to promote a **positive environment** in which children and young people can grow and develop;
- demonstrate the need to intervene with **appropriate, timely measures** when children and their families are in a **vulnerable situation**;
- are underpinned by **key principles** such as a non-judgemental and non-stigmatising orientation, participatory and strengths-based approach, accessible services for all and early intervention services for the most vulnerable;
- demonstrate **inter-service collaboration**, as a way of engaging with families, building their resilience and empowering them.

Within this overall context, the case studies had different *emphases*:

- *Spain/ Northern Ireland/ France* are predominantly aimed at strengthening families and communities and promoting social cohesion;
- *Belgium/ The Netherlands/ Germany/ Sweden/ Italy/ Poland* are, first and foremost, concerned with supporting parents in their parenting task;
- *Romania/ Bulgaria/ Wales* are focused on preventing children at risk from being separated from their families.

Obviously these are not discrete categories and there are overlapping features, e.g. France and Northern Ireland provide individual support to parents in the parenting task and reduce the risk of family fragmentation. Spain (indirectly) and Germany are both promoting families' work-life balance. Bulgaria's objective of keeping families together is dependent on strengthening communities. Sweden's structural approach to parenting support is also about community organisation and development, etc.

A further observation concerns the use of parenting programmes (evidence-based programmes). Sweden and Wales for example, in very different contexts, use a range of programmes and identify these as one of the essential elements of their initiatives. Interestingly, Sweden also proofs theirs from a 'child rights' perspective. In contrast, the focus in The Netherlands is predominantly on one programme (Triple P) and this consistency is identified as a key success factor.

4. Success factors and challenges

Some success factors can be identified from the inspiring practices, which can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Think parents
- (2) Think communities
- (3) Think partnerships.

Services must be delivered in an accessible and empowering way.

The practical aspects of accessibility are obviously important - the location, building design, social and cultural mix, opening hours, service affordability - but the image of the service created through promotional materials, the reputation (word of mouth) are also crucial.

Creating the right environment for constructive engagement with parents is where it becomes more challenging as it depends on the skills and competences of the people involved, their ability to engender confidence in parents, to build relationships based on mutual respect and trust, to deal appropriately with tensions, to convey through actions the value base of the service. The important point is that 'relationship-based' work does not come naturally any more than being a parent does and requires an investment in joint training and orientation.

Services must be locality sensitive as well as responsive to individual families' needs.

Ensuring that services provide assistance that is both useful to families on an individual basis and, at the same time, attuned to the needs of communities and neighbourhoods is a significant theme in the case studies documented. Allied to this is the need to ensure services are made available to parents in different ways making use of the resources available (see, for example, the case study from Flanders where the locality approach to service provision in the *Parenting Shops* is described - and The Netherlands *SPIL Centres* which have different profiles according to the neighbourhood and particular group of children and parents served).

The reality of family and parenting support work is that individual support for parents does not usually take place in a vacuum. Strengthening family and community networks and peer support can help build parents' self-esteem and skills and enhance children's overall well-being and development. For some projects, achievement of objectives would be impossible without a close collaboration with local community based, and recognised, organisations for access to, and smooth communication with, target groups (see, for example, the Spanish and Bulgarian case studies). Building informal networks, promoting social inclusion and community partnerships are also central to the model of delivering services through 'Hubs' (the Northern Ireland case study) and service planning and development is undertaken through locality planning systems.

Some case studies signal that, with so many people engaged, it can be challenging to maintain project goals and ensure the ethos and underpinning principles of the project are understood and faithfully applied. This will be referenced in the next section on inter-service working.

Strong inter-service collaboration is the 'bedrock' of parent support services and the key to appropriate, timely early intervention.

Inter-service working is a feature in all case studies, the consensus view being that better coordination of services means a better service response and more efficient use of resources. The creation and activation of a support network around the family is considered key to ensuring the sustainability of interventions.

As one would expect, inter-service working also brings its challenges, which include meeting the needs and interests of all the different organisations involved; the time required for coordination and strategic planning; the need to avoid unnecessary competition; the processing and sharing of information; agreeing common goals; ensuring quality standards. In addition, inter-service working was not the tradition everywhere and required reinforcement through awareness raising activities and promotional work (see, for example, *Good Parent - Good Start*, the case study from Poland).

Cross-agency training and staff development is identified as a pivotal factor in addressing these challenges, as well as good communication and coordination between all the different levels of administration.

5. Policy recommendations

1. All parents have some behaviour patterns that impact negatively on their children. Parents who are struggling to make ends meet, or who are coping with their own painful childhood experiences, may be less emotionally available to provide the necessary support for their children. A small minority may resort to substance abuse, placing their children at risk of abuse or neglect. The best way to support the children in these families is not to punish the parents but to **ensure the family has all the necessary material support as well as appropriate social interventions that enable parents to fully embrace their responsibilities towards their children.**

2. Keeping a child in the family is cheaper in the long-run. It also makes sense because it relies on the families' own resources and looks to empower and give more autonomy to those who ultimately have the responsibility for bringing up their children. Some governments are recognising the need to **invest in services that can make a difference in the long-run - early years education and care, family support and empowerment, mediation services**, etc. Unfortunately, too many governments are driven by short-term political goals. However, there needs to be recognition that development of such 'enabling' services that empower and support children and their families is also an important source of employment and economic regeneration.

3. **Family and parenting support is crucial** to fighting child poverty and promoting child well-being. **However, to maximise effectiveness it needs to be complemented by effective intervention to tackle the root causes of poverty and social exclusion, and address structural barriers and inequalities.** Parenting interventions should sit alongside wider family support and be part of a comprehensive package that enhances children's rights and well-being.

4. Family and parenting support includes a wide range of actions and services that help parents develop the skills they need to carry out their parenting role and that support children within families. It can range from low threshold advice and support to all parents to very targeted, specialised services for the most vulnerable. However, **all services aimed at family and parenting support must be non-stigmatising and empowering in their approach, have a participatory and strengths-based orientation, be accessible to all but built around a model of progressive universalism. They must be underpinned by a rights-based approach.**

5. There is a strong demand for evidence-based policy and practice at EU level. At a time when resources are limited, we acknowledge that **services and interventions need to demonstrate their effectiveness in addressing social challenges. However, in the strive**

for effectiveness, the tendency to adopt programmed or ‘manualised’ interventions proven in specific contexts has the potential to devalue the important role of practice wisdom and expertise in meeting the needs of families. Achieving a balance between these two positions is important. Eurochild advocates a wider evidential perspective, particularly in the field of family and parenting support.

Part 3

For a thoughtful family support in public policies planning

Benoît Parmentier

There are multiple parental support practices and underlying theoretical references. The many forms of initiatives pursue a great variety of aims. The polysemy of the term 'parental support' generates confusion and difficulties for dialogue between sectors, institutions and even between people. There are tensions and the different positions are sometimes contradictory and faltering. Nonetheless in the children's interest, a consensus must emerge so as to allow better coordination between all the professionals working in support of parents.

We think it is important to equip professionals with a reference document, placing ethical markers and educational benchmarks. There should be not only a shared vocabulary but also professional practices that respect children and their parents.

In this respect, proposing a reference tool today will give the bearings for a reflection by professionals, institutions and the policies concerned, each at their own level.

Another ambition of this reference tool is to propose benchmarks which can be shared by field professionals, institutions and very different approaches.

To support the dialogue between people and between networks, it is useful to establish a shared vocabulary... and to develop it together.

It is intended particularly for **professionals** (nursery nurses, reception staff, social workers, educators, nurses, teachers, psychologists, activity leaders, doctors...) in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, who are in direct or indirect contact with children and (future) parents: whether they work in the social youth service, at the Office for Birth and Childhood, in teaching, in associations, in SOS Children teams, in Mental Health Centres, in Family Planning, at Psycho-medico-social Centres, in hospitals and in the field of children's rights.

1. Parenthood

The word 'parenthood' appeared in the 1970s, in response to several deep transformations within families.

- **The child's place within the family.** The family starts with the child (a notion developed in particular by François De Singly, Pierre Grelley...).
- We can observe, with Irène Théry (1998), that the contemporary family has experienced both a weakening of conjugal ties (couples are separating more) and, at the same time, a tightening of the ties of filiation (children's ties with their parents are preserved beyond conjugal separations).
- **Diversity of family forms.** Claude Martin (2003) stresses that the term «parenthood» refers to a multitude of stakeholders and situations. Owing to single parenthood, separations, and family recomposition, the biological parents no longer necessarily take on all the parental functions (biological, educational and social),

which are sometimes shared out among different adults close to the child (parents, parents-in-law...).

- **Redefinition of the boundaries between private and public.** Responsibility for socialisation, education and childcare go beyond the family space and is borne by other adults (in the host environment, at school...). Child education is not the sole responsibility of the parents. Parents delegate a part of their role to third party professionals.
- **Development of female and male roles** and the importance of individualised relations between the child and his parents. The concept of «parenthood» is neutral; it embraces the father and the mother as well as everyone with a parental role. (In this regard, the experience exchanging days have also widely stressed the importance of questioning the roles of fathers).
- **The parenting dynamic.** Becoming a parent is a process. This idea breaks with the maternal or paternal instinct idea: you are not born as a parent, you become one. This dynamic can be different for each new child.

2. Parental support in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Parental support concerns all levels of power.

- The Wallonia-Brussels Federation has competence as regards childhood, youth, education and promoting health.
- The Wallonia Region and the COCOF have competence as regards health, mental health, handicap and social cohesion (family planning centre, family assistance service...).
- The Federal state has competence in the areas of civil law or as regards employment legislation, parental leave, health care...

All of these subjects have to do with family life. Every action in these areas of competence may play a part in parental support.

The issues in connection with parenthood thus come within a legal context containing numerous laws and regulations

The international Convention on the rights of the child

Numerous articles in the Convention pay particular attention to the **fundamental role played by the parents in establishing the rights of the child** and to the State's obligations towards parents.

Office for Birth and Childhood

The ONE has parental support as its cross-disciplinary mission

Specialised youth service

Parental support is a strong line of the decree of 4th March 1991: priority is given to service in the living environment; placement must be an exception.

Aid for victims of child abuse

The philosophy behind this decree, a philosophy which guides the action of the SOS Children teams since their creation, rests on the principle that it is not compulsory to report

to the judiciary, a principle that is replaced by an obligation to personally come to the person's assistance or refer the situation to specialised personnel.

Main principles

Four main principles have been retained to define a possible global parental support policy in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation:

- The child is at the heart of parental support;
- Parents have abilities;
- Parental support is addressed to all parents;
- It is necessary to take living situations into account.

These principles and values must be developed and put into practice by professionals, according to their mandates and their functions...

Ethical and practical questions crosscut the whole field of parental support. Some of them will be indicated here, in a non-exhaustive fashion, in order to support a thought process.

1. Take the time to analyse.
2. Adopt a positive attitude towards the parents.
3. Recognise the other stakeholders.
4. Encourage reflectivity about your action.
5. A tool to reflect parental support.
6. Collectively recognise professionals in the risks they must take.

Intelligibility tool of parental support actions

The “intelligibility tool of parental support actions” presented here is **a tool which allows a downtime in relation to a family situation, to consider possible action at a given moment.**

It can enlighten the professional helping him to position himself alone and/or in consultation with other stakeholders, promoting dialogue among them.

The “parental support actions intelligibility tool” is not:

- an action guide;
- a response model;
- a diagnostic tool (of the child's or the parent's situation...);
- family typologies;
- a static, fixed object.

Mitigate					
Restore					
Reinforce					
Enhance					
Promote					
	Regular situation	Situation of temporary fragility	Situation of specific vulnerability	Situation of multiple vulnerabilities	Situation of danger

Intelligibility tool of the parental support actions

This tool is constructed according to a continuum logic. By 'continuum' we understand a set of elements such that one can continuously go from one to the other.

A continuum of family situations

The concept of a continuum of family situations refers to the idea that a family situation is not fixed: each family experiences changes which have an impact on the child and on parenthood (illness, separation, loss of accommodation, return to work, birth of another child).

Axes

The **horizontal axis** presents types of family contexts according to a continuum which goes from the regular family situation to one of danger for the child.

The **vertical axis** proposes different actions in support of parents, also presented as a continuum, from actions promoting parental abilities to mitigating actions with the aim of protecting the child.

These two axes fall within a time dimension recording every situation that has developed.

It develops at different speeds: the professional's time is not the same as the parent's, or as that of the child, nor of another professional.

How the tool works

- **Supplementary approach.** Parental support actions may be cumulative: what is proposed to parents in ordinary situations is also proposed in situations of vulnerability or danger. In situations of danger, there is sometimes an action of mitigation, added to actions of promotion, enhancement, reinforcement and restoration of parental abilities.
- **Bottom-up approach.** A gradation can also be observed in the parental support actions going from the professionals' and the institutions' simple recognition of the parents' abilities to a response in relation to situations of danger. The professional must adjust his action to the resources of families and their environment.
- **Evolving approach.** Support actions evolve in accordance with the variable family situations.

Parenting support and education. Service user perspectives

Harriet Churchill

1. Introduction

Parenting support and education initiatives have become significant dimensions of public policies for parents and families among European Union and OECD member states (Moran *et al.*, 2004; RAND, 2013). By supporting family responsibilities for children and young people, improving family relationships and promoting positive parenting approaches - policy makers and service providers aim to promote children's rights, development and well-being (Council of Europe, 2006). Recent developments reflect increasing interest among policy makers to reduce educational and health inequalities and promote social inclusion via child-centred social investment and early intervention (Churchill, 2011; Daly, 2012). These public policy agendas are informed by the growing body of research about cost-effective approaches, social programmes and services as well as research about approaches to - and elements of - parenting and parent-child/family relations, and their beneficial or detrimental implications for children and their development, welfare and well-being in the more immediate and longer term (Moran *et al.*, 2004). In addition, policy agendas respond to increasing public demand for authoritative parenting, child care and child-rearing advice in the context of the information age and inter-generational changes in social attitudes and circumstances in relation to the families and childhood (Daly, 2007; RAND, 2013).

This ChildONEurope Proceedings reviews developments in 'positive parenting' policies and parenting support services across several European countries. Towards this end, this article focuses on service user perspectives and experiences. Drawing on a selection of studies, national initiatives and types of services, the article examines parents' views about, and experiences of, accessing and engaging parenting support and education services. Initially the article provides a brief overview of different types of parenting support and education. It then examines studies of service user perspectives across several welfare states and in relation to selected examples of universal and targeted services, programmes and approaches - community orientated child and family centres, parenting support accessed via schools and parenting education programmes. The article closes with reflections on the broad policy implications.

2. Parenting support and education: definitions, aims and approaches

'Parenting support' and 'parenting education' are wide-ranging terms. Across European Union (EU) member states they incorporate several approaches and types of provision targeted at parents, families and - in some cases - all citizens as prospective parents to be. 'Parenting support' is often the generic term used to refer to all of these (Barlow *et al.*, 2007; Boddy *et al.*, 2009; Daly, 2007; Moran *et al.*, 2004). Daly (2011), for example, defines parenting support as initiatives which provide 'information, support, education, training, counselling and other measures or services that focus on influencing how parents understand and carry out their parenting role'. In this volume, Daly (see article in this

volume) seeks to distinguish between parenting support services and other elements of family policy (such as work-family reconciliation measures, income support and social welfare measures) and other family/child services (such as childcare services, mainstream child health services and generic family support services), by emphasising three core features of recent developments in parenting support services across advanced welfare states:

- (a) parents' are the first-line target and the focus is on their parenting role;
- (b) the support provided is a service in kind, and therefore parental leave and services in cash are excluded; and
- (c) the focus is on parents' resources and competencies.

Barlow *et al.* (2007) further seek to capture the specific aims of parenting support services as opposed to family support services. These researchers state the former includes 'semi-formal and formal services which aim to increase parenting skills, improve parent/child relationships, the insight of parents, their attitudes and behaviours, and their confidence in parenting', while the latter provide more general social support to parents and families, and seek to 'reduce the stresses associated with parenting as well as programmes to develop confidence and self-esteem in parents themselves - adult learning programmes for example' (*ibid.*: 2).

These definitions in broad terms emphasise the focus on parental knowledge, skills and values in relation to everyday child care and child rearing practices across parenting support services and the emphasis on parent-child interactions and the quality of family relationships and attachments. The term 'parenting support', however, has an Anglo-phone bias. Across EU member states other key concepts have stronger currency, although they also denote distinct types of national and disciplinary service traditions. For example, Boddy *et al.* (2009) highlight the significance of 'family education' in the German context, an approach that aims to 'promote parenting skills and the provision of a socialisation environment that promotes the development of children'. Other terms include family life training, parent skills training, social support or parent/family counselling.

Beyond these broad definitions, parenting support and education includes an eclectic mix of provision. Formal services vary in terms of their aims (i.e. the type of support provided, or the degree to which they aim to be supportive vs instructive and educational), disciplinary and theoretical influences, key features, scope as universal or targeted services, scope as a mainstream form of support or time-limited social programme, source of funding and type of service provider (i.e. in terms of being a form of voluntary, public or private sector provision or outsourced form of public service). The Council of Europe (2006) Recommendation on Positive Parenting called for governments and authorities to 'engender support for parenting at the following three levels':

- informal: creating and strengthening existing social bonds and encouraging new links between parents and their family, neighbours and friends;
- semi-formal: empowering parents' and children's associations and NGOs and activating a range of self-help and other community-based groups and services;
- formal: facilitating access to public services.

The REAAP (Réseaux d'Ecoute, d'Appui, et d'Accompagnement des Parents) networks in France, roughly translated as 'Parental Consultation, Care and Social Support Networks', provides an example of semi-formal parenting support (Boddy *et al.*, 2009; RAND, 2013).

These networks, which all local authorities have a duty to establish, are organised with assistance from local health, social work and family support professionals and are funded as part of a national parenting support and education campaign (Boddy *et al.*, 2009). They constitute discussion groups and professionally facilitated support and community groups for parents, carers and young people, focusing on a range of matters and local needs (Boddy *et al.*, 2009; Moran *et al.*, 2004; RAND, 2013). Community Mothers schemes in the UK and US recruit volunteers, often mothers themselves, to support other mothers in the community. UK initiatives particularly utilise this type of semi-formal service so that mothers with experience of breastfeeding infants can help and support new mothers to breastfeed their infants. Home Start initiatives, mainly operating in the UK but also in other EU countries, provides home visits by trained and supervised volunteers, often parents themselves and/or members of local communities, to provide practical and emotional support to families in need, and signpost families to community resources and other services (Moran *et al.*, 2004). These initiatives recognise the important role peer support and supportive social networks play in providing the mainstay of family support, informally educating and socialising children and young people, facilitating social inclusion, promoting and maintaining mental health, reducing personal stress, enhancing capacities to cope with difficulties and times of crisis, building social and cultural capital, and strengthening family roles and resources (Moran *et al.*, 2004). Emphasising experiential knowledge and the capacity for parents and families to learn much from one another, these schemes also seek to reduce the power imbalances within professional-service user relations, and reduce the anxieties many parents and families can experience when turning to formal services for help and support with what are often considered private and sensitive family matters, for which they fear might generate an alarmist response, stigmatise their children and/or engender a negative judgement as a failing and inadequate parent (Churchill, 2011).

Parenting support services, however, commonly intend to be instructive and promote social values, attitudes, practices and relationships which promote children's best interests. Notions of children's best interests vary across social contexts and evolve overtime. The Council of Europe (2006) Recommendation for Positive Parenting is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and defines positive parenting as:

parental behaviour based on the best interests of the child that is nurturing, empowering, non-violent and provides recognition and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child.

It views parenting support and education services 'as a means of ensuring respect for and implementation of children's rights'. It calls on policy makers and service providers to promote societal education in children's rights, contributing to cultural change towards positive parenting and the realisation of children's rights in combination with a broad range of public policies to address poverty, unemployment, poor housing, social discrimination and inequalities of opportunities. The Council of Europe (2006) calls for parenting support services to make parents more 'aware of the nature of their role and children's rights', promote gender equality and fathers involvement in children's lives, and address the additional and specific needs of children and families at risk of social marginalisation and disadvantages such as young parents, poor families, socially isolated families and families affected by more severe health problems and disabilities.

While incorporating the provision of support for parents and often seeking to promote positive parenting approaches and address broader social disadvantages - 'parenting education' has more explicit educational aims and includes more structured programmes

and initiatives, variously informed by theories of child development, parent-child attachments, authoritative parenting and social learning. Parenting education can be focused on specific parenting issues - such as parenting approaches to dealing with challenging behaviour from young children or teenagers - or specific dimensions of parenting knowledge, skills and values. The latter can include a focus on child-rearing skills training or an emphasis on promoting warm and authoritative parent-child relationships and enhancing communication and problem solving skills among parents (Moran *et al.*, 2004). They can further include a focus on encouraging reflection on and change in parental attitudes, beliefs, self-understandings and social constructs (Moran *et al.*, 2004). Towards these ends parenting support and education services can encompass therapeutic approaches such as in the case of parent and family counselling.

3. Parenting support and open access neighbourhood children's and family centres

Children's and family centres provide a range of support services, activities and groups for families. Service user perspectives illustrate the ways in which these centres can 'facilitate the creation of social networks of mutual assistance' for parents, families and young people; provide access to 'a local network of support and services' and promote positive parenting as envisaged by the Council of Europe (2006). This will be illustrated with reference to provision in Sweden and the Netherlands.

Family centres in Sweden serve families with pre-school children and often house maternal healthcare, child health, open pre-school, parenting support and education, social pedagogy and social welfare services. In the Swedish context there is a stronger tradition of universal services, delivered free of charge, stipulated in legislation and designed/administered by regions and municipalities. 'Open pre-schools' are important features of family centres. Abrahamsson *et al.* (2009: 2-3) state that 'all municipalities are obligated to provide pre-school services for children' especially from the ages of 1-5 years old' and 'the open pre-school is a staffed informal meeting place for young children and their parents where parents and children can meet spontaneously on a regular basis for play, pedagogic activities and social interchange'.

Although further studies of Swedish family centres are needed, service user perspectives highlight the valued role they play in promoting access to informal, semi-formal and formal parenting support. Abrahamsson *et al.* (2009) evaluation of 16 family centres in the Vstra Gotaland region involved 470 parents, over 600 children and 185 professionals, service providers and policy officials. Their report concluded that, from parents' perspectives, family centres provided valued forms of social and professional support and guidance as well as opportunities for social learning, personal development, parent-child bonding, stimulating children's development and enhancing social networks. The majority of parents reported "they feel confident that extra support is at hand when and if needed, and that they have access to all the competence available at the entire family centre" (*ibid.*: 4). Abrahamsson *et al.* (2009: 4) stated that parents visit the centres "to meet other people, exchange experiences and find help and support". The social support role of these centres was particularly important to first time mothers, mothers with infants, fathers on paternity leave, parents new to a local area, socially isolated parents and immigrant parents new to Sweden or the local area (*ibid.*).

De Vries (2010) found that mothers with infants highly valued meeting other mothers at family centres:

I need other mothers. I've learned to know other parents in this place. We are still in contact. With some of them I have deep contacts, we meet at our homes. Parents can have these discussions about changing diapers and about not sleeping well at night. I can't have these discussions with my friends. Without this place I wouldn't have met other parents. When you come to this place you can make friends. It's absolutely great.

This study reported how mothers valued the 'inviting friendly atmosphere' at family centres. Professionals often welcomed parents into the centres, informed them of the range of activities and services on offer, and encouraged them to participate and spend time there. De Vries (2010) argued this more informal, friendly professional approach and the opportunities to participation in social/pedagogic parent and child activities, meant parents built relationships with other parents and professionals, which then helped parents to feel comfortable enough to discuss family and parenting problems and turn to parents and professionals for help and advice:

I felt really welcome. They told me about the whole place and they showed me around, that was really nice. It felt good in here, I felt really welcome. This is so nice, also the other women who work here. The social workers, they work here as well, so you can talk to them if you maybe have problems in your home or in your relationship or whatever or with the children. You can also sit down and talk to them and have some coffee. That was really nice, because I had some problems in that time with my daughter's father. (De Vries, 2010: 14)

However, funding cutbacks in recent years has led to reductions in provision. Abrahamsson *et al.* (2009) found there were not enough family centres to meet parental demand in some areas. Some served larger and/or more densely populated areas, were attended by higher numbers of families and hosted larger teams of professionals. These centres were found to risk 'losing intimacy and trust' as parents received a less personal style of service and activities involved larger numbers of families (*ibid.*: 6). Some municipalities were criticised for an under-representation of involvement among fathers and some ethnic minority groups.

Youth and Family Centres in the Netherlands are a more recent development. From 2007-2011, the former Youth and Family Ministry sought to establish a Youth and Family Centre in every municipality as part of the 'Every Opportunity for Every Child' initiative (Youth and Family Ministry, 2007). In order to improve child well-being, promote positive parenting and children's rights, and enhance the scope for communities, professionals and services to identify and better support children at risk of poor outcomes and behavioural problems at an earlier stage - the 'Every Opportunity for Every Child' initiative sought to provide 'all parents, young people and children, including those without specific problems' with 'access to an approachable, recognisable point of contact close to home where they can get advice and help on a wide range of parenting issues' (*ibid.*: 20). In contrast to many other EU countries, the Dutch Youth and Family Centres serve young people up to age of 23 and families of younger and older children. The types and range of services and activities are designed on a local basis and in response to local needs, but within a statutory framework of core functions which should include: information and advice for parents and families and young people; minor pedagogic advice; identification of problems at an early stage; and inter-professional and multi-agency coordination of care and services for families.

The Netherlands Youth Institute (2012) cited several examples of innovative practice. They refer to a centre in The Hague area which ran well attended advice sessions and activities for parents and children, and organised youth groups, youth outreach, mother groups, father groups and groups for parents and children with disabilities. Parents and young people reported high levels of satisfaction with the centre and its services, particularly in terms of better knowledge of and access to professionals and formal services, and valued opportunities to meet other parents and young people. These centres linked individuals and families to a “web of information, care, early identification of problems and referrals” (Netherlands Youth Institute, 2012: 8).

In a study that compared service user and professional experiences of Family Centres in Sweden and Youth and Family Centres in Netherlands, De Vries (2010) found that the social support role was less developed in the Dutch centres. The Swedish centres were found to place stronger emphasis on providing opportunities for parents to meet one another and parents and children to participate in social and pedagogic activities. Parents were also more involved in organising activities and volunteering in the centres. The community had a stronger sense of ownership and involvement. However, parents attending the Dutch centres reported primarily accessing baby and child health clinics, spending little time in the centre meeting other parents, socialising or engaging in parent-child activities. This was a small scale study, though, and these differences need to be understood in context. In Sweden, for example, there is a strong service tradition in social support and family/child/health services for families with young children are widely encouraged to promote social support and community involvement for parents, especially mothers. Further, professionals such as social pedagogues undergo much training in working in partnership with families and communities to promote children’s development in the broadest terms. De Vries (2010) found that the Dutch parents less readily turned to professionals for help and advice with parenting and family problems, and therefore, when they did, problems were of a more serious nature. Parents were less involved in shaping the services and support provided. De Vries (2010) called for Youth and Family Centres to offer more opportunities for parents to build social networks and be more involved in the centres. This was important for reducing social isolation, increasing social support for parents, encouraging wider participation and improving early intervention.

4. Parenting support accessed via schools

The Council of Europe (2006) Recommendation on Positive Parenting encouraged ‘an integrated approach to the provision of assistance with schooling and support for parenting’. A growing body of research illustrates the ways in which parental involvement, family support and the home environment promotes children’s engagement and achievements at school as does higher levels of parental engagement with schools and, additional support and services, where needed, for students with additional needs (Cummings *et al.*, 2007). Therefore several initiatives have sought to extend the role of schools in meeting the broader social support needs of children and young people, and providing better access to family, parenting and specialist child support services - such as the former Extended Schools programme and Parent Support Advisers initiative in England and Wales; Scotland’s National Parenting Strategy and the role of Community Schools; The Triple P public health approach to parenting education and positive parenting campaigns; and the PRE Educational Success Programme in France.

Extended Schools and Parent Support Advisers (PSAs) were introduced by the former UK Labour Government. Extended Schools were developed from 2002, while PSAs were piloted across schools in 2006-9 and rolled out nationally across schools from 2009-2011. These initiatives are no longer as central to national education and parenting support services, but many local authorities have retained some provision. Apps *et al.* (2007:5) described Extended Schools as:

Community hubs for a range of health, education, employment and leisure services aimed at children, families and communities. Extended schools services include pupil study support and leisure, adult education, family learning, parenting programmes and family support, access to information and communications technology (ICT), sports and art facilities, access to specialised health and social services and 'wraparound' childcare from 8 am to 6 pm.

Extended Schools aimed to reduce health and educational inequalities among children and young people, and improve school attendance, behavioural and achievement, by providing pupils, families and communities access to a range of services, resources and opportunities (Cummings *et al.*, 2007). In addition, Parent Support Advisers (PSAs) constituted a new home-school/parenting support worker in the English context. Working in one or across several schools, PSAs designed and delivered parental engagement and parenting support services and activities (Lindsay *et al.*, 2009).

In social survey and qualitative studies, parents reported high levels of satisfaction with Extended Schools' services and PSA support (Cummings *et al.*, 2007; Lindsay *et al.*, 2009; Percy-Smith, 2010). Lindsay *et al.* (2009), commissioned by the UK Government to evaluate the pilot phase of PSA provision, reported PSAs were more commonly located in primary school settings and, as intended, mainly worked with parents and families of pupils with behavioural, emotional, social and educational difficulties. Many PSAs developed a broad role undertaking one to one work with parents, young people and families; organising open access drop-in, parent/support groups and advice sessions; delivering parenting education and positive parenting programmes; providing signposting and referrals to specialist family services, social care and health services; and acting as a lead professional coordinating multi-agency involvement in families. Their study collected survey data from 105 parents who had received PSA support. 94% of parents regarded the PSA support as having 'worked well' or 'worked ok', while 6% rated the support as 'worked not so well' (Lindsay *et al.*, 2009). PSAs were appreciated as an 'easily accessible source of support', an 'authoritative yet approachable professional' who was 'someone to listen and talk to' and who provided 'practical and emotional support, information and advice, support for parents so they could better support their child's learning and behaviour at school and better access to targeted services' (Percy-Smith, 2010). The supportive and responsive PSA approach furnished relationships of trust which enabled parents to turn to the PSA for further support. This increased the capacities and confidence of parents, helping some to face severe family problems - such as domestic violence, marital problems or challenging youth behaviour - and change their family lives and parenting practices for the better (*ibid.*). Supportive relationships with PSAs could further repair fraught home-family relations and compensated for prior negative experiences of engaging with support services in the UK context (*ibid.*). This often enabled PSAs to work effectively as key workers for young people and families in high levels of need but who did not meet the high thresholds for child welfare services in the UK context. The quote below provides a poignant example of some of these features of PSA-parent relationships and PSA support:

The PSA has supported my sons and me through and difficult time. Without her help and understanding (which few other people involved showed) I don't know how we would have coped. She empathised with the children and with me and gave us all useful strategies and coping mechanisms. The children felt able to confide in her, as did I, when we felt there were very few people we could trust. Our situation has improved greatly ... and I know that should the need arise I can contact her and she will respond quickly and helpfully. (Mother interviewed as part of local PSA evaluation study, Percy-Smith, 2010)

PSAs often provided support to parents and young people in ways which reduced family problems for young people at risk of educational underachievement, and supported vulnerable young people to experience a smoother transition from primary to secondary school levels (Lindsay *et al.*, 2009; Percy-Smith, 2010). Factors critical to higher levels of parental engagement and positive service user experiences are commonly cited as: 'highly supportive' relationships between PSAs, pupils and families based on family support and children's rights principles; sufficient training in family support, child-centred and anti-oppressive practice so that PSAs could provide non-stigmatising, tailored and empowering support; sufficient funding and flexibility to utilise local budgets in flexible responsive ways; appropriate supervision, resources and support for the PSA role within the school context; effective inter-agency links between services in the local area - especially between education, health and social care; and sufficient local provision of specialist support services (Cummings *et al.*, 2007). However, Lindsay *et al.* (2009) found that service users were overwhelmingly mothers and parenting support based in local schools was less accessible for parents working full-time, parents of secondary school age children and parents with more fraught relationships with schools.

5. Parenting education programmes

As mentioned above, parenting education seeks to raise awareness of parental roles and responsibilities, positive parenting values and practices, and improve the quality of care and parenting children and young receive. Parenting education programmes are structured programmes, variously informed by theories of child attachments, child development, social learning, family therapy and authoritative/positive parenting, which can be delivered in a number of sessions working with individual parents and families, or with groups of participants. These are delivered by a wide range of family support, health, social care, childcare and educational professionals with some programme training. Above some distinctions were made between 'behavioural, relational and cognitive' programme foci and elements (Moran *et al.*, 2004). 'Behavioural' approaches are largely informed by social learning, authoritative parenting and child development theories. Social learning theory argues that to a large degree social behaviour is learnt and children's behaviour is therefore shaped by their social interactions and contexts. As children are primarily raised by families in European countries and parents are assigned primary responsibility for their care and upbringing, parenting education programmes seek to increase parental knowledge of children's developmental stages and needs, and teach them strategies for encouraging positive and developmentally enriching behaviour. Greater knowledge of the immediate and long-term harm of authoritarian parenting styles, lax and neglectful parenting and physical abuse/corporal punishment methods - and the positive impacts of authoritative - warm, responsive and negotiated parenting that sets clear and reasonable behavioural standards

enforced via non-violent methods of discipline - has led to the promotion of positive and authoritative parenting principles. Standardised group programmes can include 10-12 weeks of group sessions facilitated by trained professionals covering issues such as theories of child development, the relationship between thoughts and feelings, dealing with strong feelings as a parent, and key principles and strategies to positive parenting approaches to providing caring parenting, setting clear rules/standards and boundaries, providing consistent discipline, communicating with care/warmth and authority, and using rewards / praise and positive reinforcement of behaviour. The UK Family Links programme, US Webster-Stratton Incredible Years programmes and Australian Triple P parenting programmes incorporate these key features. Critical elements of parenting education programmes also include their use a range of 'learning methods' including group-work, group discussion, video-scenarios, role-playing and 'try at home' activities and exercises.

'Relational' approaches focus more on enhancing parent-child and family relationships and communication skills, in recognition of the central importance of relationship qualities to effective parenting and supportive social relationships. Parenting programmes can also draw on mental health and therapeutic traditions such as in the case of group therapy, family therapy or person-centred counselling. There can be an emphasis within a programme on examining parents' own childhood experiences. Moran *et al.* (2004: 64) notion of 'cognitive interventions' seems to incorporate these traditions where programmes provide structured and facilitated contexts within which parents can reflect on their 'beliefs about child behaviour and development, their perceptions of their own competence, their sense of coping, and their general confidence and enjoyment in parenting'. In practice, programmes often combine these aims and approaches.

Moran *et al.* (2004) review of programme evaluation research (limited to studies published in English) highlighted positive service user experiences and, according to parental accounts of change and programme impacts, much evidence of positive impacts on parenting and family relationships. When programmes were well focused on addressing a particular parenting issue or child-related problem, which strongly reflected participants needs and difficulties, and were delivered in ways which were appropriate and accessible to participants, they facilitated changes in parental confidence, skills, knowledge and values that improved their motivation and capacities to respond better to children's needs and problems, and better address problems in parenting and family relationships (Moran *et al.*, 2004). At times the social values promoted by these programmes and the personal/life skills (i.e. in communication, respectful relationships, problem solving, sharing experiences and reflection) had profound effects on participants viewpoints and lives beyond their parenting role (Moran *et al.*, 2004). Participants in group programmes particularly valued sharing experiences with others experiencing similar issues and building social networks of peer support. A systematic review of qualitative studies of participants' views and experiences of taking part in two parenting programmes - the UK Family Links programmes and the US designed Webster-Stratton programme - went further in developing a theoretical proposition of 'what works from the parents' point of view' (Kane *et al.*, 2007). The researchers emphasise their theory was developed in the context of the characteristics of the participants (the programme was for parents of young children with behavioural difficulties and solely attended by mothers) and the aims and key features of these specific behavioural/relational programmes. However, Kane *et al.* (2007) stressed the combined role of the social support and parenting education aspects of the programmes, and the behavioural/relational and cognitive dimensions to the social learning. They stated that:

The acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding, together with feelings of acceptance and support from other parents in the parenting group, enabled parents to regain control and feel more able to cope. This led to a reduction in feelings of guilt and social isolation, increased empathy with the children and confidence in dealing with their behaviour. (Kane et al., 2007: 14)

This research evidence, however, primarily reflects the views and experiences of participants who completed parenting programmes - who are more likely to be positive about them and tend to overwhelmingly be mothers and women. Less is known about the longer-term impacts of parenting programmes. There is insufficient research about participants who don't complete parenting programmes (and many programmes suffer from high drop-out rates) and less known about fathers' views and perspectives. Moreover, a major omission is the lack of research about young people's perspectives. However, when young people have been involved in parenting interventions, studies have found they are less positive about the changes in parental knowledge, skills and values than parents are (Moran et al., 2004). Moran et al. (2004) also raised a number of critical issues including:

- the cultural stigma associated with parenting programmes due to fears of being labelled an adequate parent and their historical use as a remedial intervention for severe child and family problems (compulsory attendance for some parents in several EU countries, which may be an effective way of engaging some parents, reinforce these issues to the general public);
- the accessibility of parenting programmes in terms of participation fee, time-demands, location and disability access, availability of childcare provision, literacy levels and language barriers, acceptability to fathers and appeal to minority groups;
- the importance of well trained and highly skilled practitioners, particularly in family support, the parenting programme, anti-oppressive practice and communication/relationship/group-work skills;
- the need for tailored, more comprehensive packages of support for higher need families including pre-programme and post-programme support and multi-agency services for the family;
- the need for parenting programmes to be part of broad parenting support frameworks, as developed by the Triple P public health approach and the community empowerment aims of the US/UK Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities programme.

6. Conclusion

This selective review raises critical issues for policy agencies and service providers. These include the need to conceptualise 'service users' in broad terms, to seek fathers as well as mothers views about their support needs and perceptions and experiences of services, and to consult widely on the support needs and views of parents in different situations and family circumstances, extended family members, grandparents, foster carers, and children and young people too. There are many benefits to broad engagement with service users' through-out the entire process of planning, developing, commissioning, delivering and evaluating parenting support and education services. The views of parents and communities are especially critical to processes of local needs assessments and the identification of unmet needs and gaps in services. Services need to be accessible and acceptable to parents and

families as well as of a high quality in line with emerging good practice guidance. While proclamations of positive parenting and parenting support principles are more common place among politicians and public policy networks - service user perspectives often highlight the uncoordinated, fragmented, inconsistent and limited nature of semi-formal and formal support. Service user perspectives provide experiential evidence of the practical, moral, socio-economic and cultural/linguistic barriers that can impede access to support and services, and therefore limit the social benefits they can generate. In addition, to enhance the scope of services and support to provide effective early intervention and meet the needs of all parents, young people and families - services need to offer sufficient and wide ranging open access support and advice to all families, that offer, where needed, access to more specialist and targeted support and services for families in higher need, which are sufficiently available to meet demand. An additional common theme is fathers continue to report parenting support and education services are less accessible to them and insufficiently supportive of their role. This can be due to services being seen as primarily targeted at mothers and a number of barriers to accessing services such a lack of time due to employment commitments and restricted service opening hours. Additional public policies are needed to address these issues - such as child-care provision and family friendly employment policies, as well as changes across services. Further, there remains a lack of research about teenagers and young people's views about family and parenting interventions. Yet many initiatives include young people as well as parents, and overall children and young people are viewed as a primary beneficiary of formal support services for parents and families. Moreover, negative service user experiences have damaging effects, 'undermining already fragile families and teaching parents to avoid so-called 'helping' agencies (Moran *et al.*, 2004: 21).

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Programme of the Seminar



Programme

Public policies supporting positive parenthood: new policy perspectives

Florence, Istituto degli Innocenti • 23 May 2013

- 9:00 Registration
- 9:30 Welcome address
Alessandra Maggi, President Istituto degli Innocenti
Marie-Paule Martin Blachais, Chairperson ChildONEurope Assembly
Roberta Ruggiero, Coordinator ChildONEurope Secretariat
- 10:00 First session - Plenary session
Chairperson: Raffaele Tangorra, General Director for the inclusion and the social policies, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Italy
The different dimensions of positive parenting support
Maria Herczog, Member UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
Parenting support: a new policy domain
Mary Daly, Professor of Sociology and Social Policy, Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford, United Kingdom
Family welfare policies in the Italian experience: the PIPPI project
Paola Milani, Professor, Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Padua, Italy
- 11:30 Coffee break
- 11:45 Second session - A comparative perspective
Chairperson: Luciana Saccone, General Director Department Family Policies, Italy
Positive parenting: a duty not only of parents
Mona Sandbak, Services to support positive parenting, Council of Europe
Parenting support in Europe: a comparative study of policies and practices
Agata D'Addato, Senior Policy Coordinator, Eurochild
Methods and good practices of positive parenting support: the Italian Department on Family Policies
Luciana Saccone, General Director Department Family Policies, Italy
- 12:45 Debate
- 13:15 Lunch
- 14:15 Third session - Discussion Panel
Chairperson: Marie-Paule Martin Blachais, Chairperson ChildONEurope Assembly
1. *For a thoughtful family support in public policies planning*
Expert: Benoît Parmentier, Directeur General, Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE), French Community of Belgium
Discussant: Claude Janizzi, Vice-Chairperson ChildONEurope Assembly
2. *Parent minded policies as forms of early intervention/prevention of child abuse*
Expert: Jenny Gray, Social Work Consultant and President, International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
Discussant: Roberta Ruggiero, Coordinator ChildONEurope Secretariat
3. *Service user perspectives: Messages from research*
Expert: Harriet A. Churchill, Lecturer in Social Work, Department of Social Studies, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Discussant: Raffaella Pregliasco, Researcher, Istituto degli Innocenti, Italy
- 16:30-17:00 Concluding remarks

Authors

Harriet Churchill is a Lecturer in Social Work in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK. She joined the Department in 2008, teaches on social policy and social work programmes, and undertakes research into welfare state support and interventions targeted at children, young people and families. Her current research includes a study of multi-agency family support services, and the implications of the Coalition's reforms to family support provision and children's services reform in the UK. Previously she has carried out research about lone mothers' experiences of negotiating motherhood, paid work and welfare reform; parental empowerment in Sure Start Children's Centres and parenting programmes for parents of adolescents. Harriet's recent publications include a book called *Parental rights and responsibilities: Analysing policy and service user perspectives* (published in 2011 by The Policy Press) and a book chapter called *Troubled and troublesome teens: Mothers' and professionals' understandings of parenting teenagers and teenage troubles* (in *Family Troubles: Family change and family experiences* published in 2013 by The Policy Press). Prior to her academic career, Harriet spent some years working in social care and youth services.

Agata D'Addato is Senior Policy Coordinator at Eurochild, a network which brings together over 100 member organisations from across Europe promoting the rights and welfare of children. Eurochild aims at monitoring and influencing EU policy to ensure the rights of children and, in particular, the most vulnerable children are taken into account.

Agata is responsible for developing Eurochild's work on child poverty and well-being and for managing Eurochild's work on family and parenting support. She also coordinates Eurochild's work on mutual learning and practice exchange.

Prior to this position, Agata, who holds a PhD in Demography from the University of Bari, worked as a researcher both at universities and in well-renowned research institutes across Europe in the fields of demographic change, family policies, immigration and integration. She

has written several articles and coordinated many projects on these issues.

Mary Daly is Professor of Sociology and Social Policy, and a Senior Research Fellow of Green Templeton College. She received her PhD in social and political sciences from the European University Institute and taught at Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany and Queen's University Belfast before joining the Department in 2012. Her research interests and expertise are primarily focused on the analysis of social policy in advanced OECD countries. Most of her work is comparative, in a European and international context, and interdisciplinary. Substantively, she is interested in the following social policy areas: family policy, gender, care, poverty and welfare, EU social policy. She is currently working on two ESRC-funded projects: *Governing 'New Social Risks': The Case of Recent Child Policies in European Welfare States (2011-2014)* and *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK, the 2012 Survey (2010-2014)*.

Professor Daly has a wide range of experience in research and consultancy on the future of social policy in an international context for the EU, the UN, the ILO and the Council of Europe as well as a number of national governments. She was Chair of the Council of Europe High-Level Taskforce on the Future of Social Cohesion in Europe (2007-2009). She is a member of the Royal Irish Academy and a government nominated member of the National Economic and Social Council in Ireland. She is a member of the REF 2014 panel for sociology. She serves on the editorial boards of *European Societies and Social Politics*.

Maria Herczog is currently an associate professor at the Eszterházy Károly Teacher's College, visiting lecturer at the ELTE Budapest University Doctoral School, president of Eurochild since 2010, founder and chair of the Family Child Youth Association since 1993. Her current research was finished on infant and child abandonment in Europe, an EU Daphne project led by Nottingham University, and a research on child abuse in the family, good

practices in intervention, EU Daphne project led by the Netherlands Youth Institute in 5 countries. Currently she is working on a new EU Daphne project on foster care program for offending children. Her article on the need of quality ECEC programs have been published in the New Zealand journal „Children”, recently and another article on ECEC and Child Rights in Europe is under publication in the European Journal of Education in 2012 just like two book chapters on Family Group Conference. She has been working as an expert on the Hungarian chapter of the Eurofound led research on parenting programs in Europe. She was elected to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2007 and re-elected in 2010.

Paola Milani, Ph. D., is associate professor of Family Education at Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology (FISPPA) of Padua University and Invited Professor of *Education Familiare* at Fribourg University, CH.

Member of scientific committee of *MinoriGiustizia* review, *Cittadini in Crescita*, *Studium Educationis*, of AIFREF C.A. (Association Internationale de Formation et Recherche en Education Familiare). Director of LabRIEF (Lab of Research and Intervention in Family Education, www.educazione.unipd.it/labrief), that promote projects of research, training and intervention around parenting support, relationships between families, social services and schools, evaluation of intervention with vulnerable families according to resiliency and empowerment approach. She is author of 170 national and international papers.

Benoît Parmentier, training social psychologist, is since 2008 General Administrator of the Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (Birth and Childhood Bureau, ONE), the Public Administration charged of policies for childhood for the French Community of Belgium. Since 2000, he represents the Minister of Childhood of the French Community of Belgium's Government to the Permanent Group of L'Europe de l'Enfance. He is the former President of the Assembly of the European Network of National Childhood Observatories, ChildONEurope, that he has chaired from 2007 to June 2010. From 1999 to 2008 he has filled the role of Coordinator of the Observatoire de l'Enfance, de la Jeunesse et de l'Aide à la Jeunesse (Childhood, Adolescence and Juvenile Assistance) of the French Community of Belgium.

Mona Sandbæk is Head of Department of Social Work, Child Welfare and Social Policy at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. She holds a PhD in Social Work from the University of Trondheim. She has for several decades been a senior researcher at NOVA; Norwegian Social Research in the field of family and social policy with a particular emphasis on children's rights, child welfare and child protection, children's rights and child poverty. In 2004-2006 she was seconded to the Council of Europe, DG III, by the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality and has later been involved in different Council of Europe activities.