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# It Takes a Village to Raise a Child: An exploration of the experience of parenting in the Fairhill Community

Kasia O' Leary

**CARL Research Project**

in collaboration with

Fairhill/Fairfield Community Association



|                                                |                                              |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
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## **What is Community-Academic Research Links?**

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a community engagement initiative provided by University College Cork to support the research needs of community and voluntary groups/ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These groups can be grassroots groups, single-issue temporary groups, but also structured community and voluntary organisations. Research for the CSO is carried out free of financial cost by student researchers.

CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers ([Living Knowledge Network](#)).

## **What is a CSO?**

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

## **Why is this report on the UCC website?**

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public through the publication of the final research report on the CARL (UCC) website. CARL is committed to open access, and the free and public dissemination of research results.

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**How do I reference this report?**

Author (year) *Dissertation/Project Title*, [online], Community-Academic Research Links/University College Cork, Ireland, Available from: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/rr/> [Accessed: date].

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The UCC CARL website has further information on the background and operation of Community-Academic Research Links at University College Cork, Ireland, <http://carl.ucc.ie>. You can follow CARL on Twitter at [@UCC\\_CARL](#). All of our research reports are accessible free [online here](#).

CARL is part of an international network of Science Shops called the Living Knowledge Network – [website](#) and on Twitter [@ScienceShops](#). CARL is also a contributor to [Campus Engage](#), which is the Irish Universities Association engagement initiative to promote community-based research, community-based learning and volunteering amongst Higher Education students and staff.

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Declaration of Originality

I certify that this dissertation 'It Takes a Village to Raise a Child: An exploration of the experience of parenting in the Fairhill Community' is my own work and I have academically referenced any work that was not my own, in line with UCC plagiarism policy, by reviewing submission through TurnItin.

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### Abstract

This Community Academic Research Links Project (CARL) was undertaken to understand the parenting experience in the Fairhill community, a community termed as disadvantaged located on the North side of Cork city. The Fairhill Community Association asked the researcher to map the voices of the cohort parents in the Fairhill Community and what would support them in their parental role with community participation being a key underpinning in this research. Seven participants (parents and grandparents) took part in semi-structured telephone interviews with the researcher, which were then transcribed and thematically analysed. A place for parents to meet and form parental support groups as well a safe place for their children to congregate emerged from the research findings. The importance of acknowledging parental stress and supporting this in the community is another major theme of this research. A community and youth centre would support in these emerging themes.

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Glossary of terms

**ASD-** Autism Spectrum Disorder.

**CAMHS-** Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

**Community Partner-** Mary Sheehy of Cork City Partnership who represents the Fairhill Community, whom the researcher worked in partnership with.

**Dyspraxia-** Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), commonly known as Dyspraxia. It is a complex neurological condition affecting fine and/or gross motor skills, motor planning and coordination in children and adults.

**Fairhill-** Community area on the North side of Cork city.

**Parents-** Any person who has/had a parenting role. This cohort includes parents and grandparents.

**RAPID-** Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development programme run by Cork City Council.

**Fairhill Summer Scheme-** 2-week programme for children aged 4-14 run in July from the Fairhill Community House.

**Meitheal-** Developed by Tusla, a multi-agency intervention for families with additional needs who do not meet threshold for referral to Social Work Department.

**Springboard Project-** Family support centre based in Farranree, Cork.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Background

#### 1.1 Research title

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child: An exploration of the experience of parenting in the Fairhill Community.

#### 1.2 Introduction

This chapter will outline how my interest arose in undertaking a CARL project and the reasons behind why I chose the cohort of parents and the area of Fairhill to focus my research on. I will outline the aims and objectives of this research project with the accompanying research questions. I will provide a brief description of each chapter and of Fairhill, the area where my qualitative research will be taking place.

#### 1.3 Background

Fairhill is a community situated on the northside of Cork city. It is an area which the Cork City Council is focused on regenerating. Regenerate means to make something develop and grow strong again. The purpose of this research was to investigate whether these city council initiatives are supporting the parents of the Fairhill community currently, and if there were parental supports in the past to compare with. This research builds on a previous CARL dissertation completed in Fairhill in 2019. It was in relation to the youth in Fairhill and the need for a community centre (Groarke, 2019). I found myself drawn to this type of research because I love listening and trying to understand people's experiences and what impacts these. I found it a privilege to help the voices of the parents of Fairhill be heard and contribute in a positive way to their community.

#### 1.4 Rationale

I chose a CARL project, because I was interested in completing a research project that was helpful to those in the locality. It is important to understand the experience of parenting in a disadvantaged area, and the challenges or benefits presented. Parents are part of a support network for their children and are a huge influence on their development. I wanted to understand what exactly supports and benefits parents, and if these can be found in their community. I was particularly interested in the cohort of parents because I worked in respite summer camps for children with additional needs, where I engaged a lot with the parents, when they were dropping and collecting their children. I realised, that often parents spoke of not feeling supported enough, and were very thankful for respite. I was amazed at the resilience of these parents, and this was where the spark for this research project began.

#### 1.5 Social work perspective

I have also completed both my MSW placements in the area of young people where I engaged a lot with parents/guardians. I co facilitated a parent support group in my first placement in CAMHS. I have worked in the area of Fairhill in the past, therefore I got to know the area personally and felt there was a strong community spirit present. Therefore, this was also a reason I was interested in completing a research project here. Applying a social work perspective, the parent is part of the support system of the child, this is highlighted in child

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protection social work. Community social workers practice in developing a community to support the needs of the community, this research project incorporates this by aiming to listen to and establish the needs of parents in the Fairhill community.

### 1.6 Information about Fairhill

According to previous census figures, Fairhill is categorised as a disadvantaged area (Cork Healthy Cities, 2018, p. 250). Fairhill is classified as one of the 4 RAPID areas in Cork City, which account for almost 25% of the total population (Cork City Council, 2020, p. 48). RAPID stands for Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development and is a programme created for disadvantaged communities (Cork City Council, 2022).

### 1.7 Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the issues and needs of parents in Fairhill and how the community can address them. Parents are the main support for children and young people and so it is vital that their experience is understood and acted on in order to meet children and young people's developmental needs in the community. For parents to complete this difficult task of parenting, there is a need to understand what enables a parent to complete this task. The aim in this research is to explore this and find out if this is being provided in the Fairhill community. Community participation is key and respect to each parent's voice will be given.

### 1.8 Research objectives

- Obtain a sample of the voices, views, and opinions of parents in Fairhill.
- Investigate the parental needs and what can support these in the Fairhill community.
- Conduct primary research in the form of semi structured telephone interviews.
- Conduct secondary research in the form of policies, statistics, and research articles relevant to parenting, disadvantaged areas and Fairhill.
- Examine the role of social work from a community perspective and how they can provide support for parents.
- Identify, highlight, and advise on any gaps in the implementation of services for parents in Fairhill.

### 1.9 Research Questions

- What is the parenting experience in Fairhill like?
- What are the parenting needs/strengths in Fairhill?
- Has the COVID 19 pandemic had an impact on the experience of parenting in Fairhill?
- Do parents/guardians think there are enough activities for children in Fairhill?
- Would a youth and community facility support parenting?

### 1.10 Chapter outline

Chapter 1- Current chapter, Introduction and Background of the research.

Chapter 2 – Methodology. The researcher discusses the theories applied in understanding the research findings.

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Chapter 3 – Literature Review. The researcher outlines the relevant findings from the literature read.

Chapter 4 – Research findings and thematic analysis. The researcher outlines the findings from the interviews conducted and themes formed.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations. The researcher lists the conclusions and recommendations after the analysis of the findings.

Bibliography and Appendices – Bibliography of all sources used, following an Appendices of a social interaction scale, information and consent form and the questionnaire used for semi structured interviews.

#### 1.11 Conclusion

Information about the community was provided and the reasons why the researcher chose this CARL project. The aim of the research was explained with the research objectives and research questions the researcher wished to answer.

## Chapter 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the methodology used, the epistemological foundation and the theoretical framework. It will be explained why the chosen research method of telephone interviews was used and the inclusion criteria for participants in 2.3 and 2.4 of this chapter. Seven themes were identified through thematic analysis of the research findings from a total of seven participants, this process will be outlined in 2.6. There were ethical challenges with ethics approval needed twice, this is elaborated in 2.7 and 2.8. Limitations of the research and the researcher's reflexivity is outlined at the end of this chapter.

### 2.2 Epistemology and theoretical perspective

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy dealing with the theory of knowledge, it focuses on the knowledge-gathering process. The epistemology for this research is social constructivism, *"constructivism looks at how human practices and culture help to create and define social reality"* (Carey, 2012, p. 34). Social constructivism helped refine the research questions as they are aimed towards understanding the experience of the parenting role in Fairhill (parents and grandparents).

*Research questions:*

- What is the parenting experience in Fairhill like?
- What are the parenting needs/strengths in Fairhill?
- Has the pandemic had an impact on the experience of parenting in Fairhill?
- Do parents/guardians think there are adequate activities for children in Fairhill?
- Would a youth and community facility support parenting?

Qualitative research in this project involved in-dept investigation of knowledge through participant interaction using the interview technique (Grix, 2010). The theoretical perspective applied when conducting these interviews was interpretivism.

The researchers chosen method of interviews for primary research was in line with the theoretical approach of interpretivism because it is sensitive to the social context in which research data is collected in (Grix, 2010), this social context being Fairhill, a disadvantaged area. It does this by listening to each participants life experience and their view of it and interprets it,

*"Interpretivism argues that truth and knowledge are subjective, as well as culturally and historically situated, based on people's experiences and their understanding of them. Researchers can never be completely separate from their own values and beliefs, so these will inevitably inform the way in which they collect, interpret, and analyse data"* (Ryan, 2018 , p. 17).

The social work perspectives to support this theoretical approach of interpretivism were systems, socio-cultural and child development theory.

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- Systems theory provides the overall view of a person's support network. For this research, the researcher focused on the ecological aspect of systems theory by focusing on parental supports within the Fairhill community. Systems theory supports in eliminating the concept of individual blame (Walker, 2012), that can occur when the overall structures in a person's life are not considered, "*the whole is greater than the sum of the constituent parts*" (Percy-Smith, 2007, p. 5). This is a holistic approach and allows for the consideration of the parent in his/her environment putting it in a more structural perspective (Teater & Baldwin, 2017, p.96). In this regard, the researcher looked at resilience present in the parent's support network and what forms did it take, with a special focus on their community, "*resilience is defined as the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten its function, viability, or development*" (Masten, 2018, p.16).
- Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), is a social constructivist approach, considering the social and environmental influence on child development. The researcher conducted the interviews in a specific location, the Fairhill community. Cognitive functions develop through interactions with the community, with knowledge acquired through social interactions, through the tool of language, to learn what is culturally important. The researcher applied this when researching what parental supports were in Fairhill to enable positive child development and behaviours and what aspects of the Fairhill community positively or negatively influences child development. 'Scaffolding' is a technique used by more knowledgeable others to put interventions in place to support a child's cognitive development and take them away once they have reached the zone of proximal development (D. Wood, 1976). Zone of proximal development is the distance between the actual development level, and the level of potential development (Vygotsky, 1978). The researcher researched how 'scaffolding' is provided in the Fairhill area and how participatory parents are in this.
- In terms of child development, the researcher also looked at the parenting approach at the infant stage and adolescence stage of development, and how different stages of child development influence parenting styles and in turn the effects of this for the child. The researcher also referenced the effect of intergenerational effects on parenting, and in turn child development.

### 2.3 Research Methods

The researcher chose half hour individual semi structured interviews for the research method. Interviewing allows for a topic which is decided by the interviewer, to be discussed by the participant, it allows for the participant to talk about their experience and views of the given topic, by applying their own culture and understanding of the experience (Clarke, 2013).

In order to allow the parent to feel free to speak about any parenting concerns they felt were important, the researcher was flexible in their questioning and did not strictly adhere to the questionnaire guide. The resources required were an information sheet and consent form

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with ground rules outlined, audio recorder, UCC google drive, encrypted laptop, a professional telephone and a quiet, empty room to conduct telephone interviews to ensure ground rules of confidentiality applied. These ground rules were provided to each participant with the consent form to be signed if in agreement to partake.

A set of 10 questions was asked in a nonspecific order, which provides the advantage of flexibility and *“the pursuit of unexpected lines of enquiry during the interview”* (Grix, 2010, p. 128). The researcher had a list of pre-determined concepts to discuss during the semi-structured interview which were parental supports, sense of community in Fairhill, what age their children were and the children’s school experience and hobbies. The researcher also tried to capture the participants own biographical account in Fairhill during the interview, incorporating an ‘oral history’ (Blaikie, 2000, p. 234).

### 2.4 Participants

A total of 7 participants, both male and female, consented to participating in the research, out of the 10 participants whom the researcher invited. This was within a wide age range which included parents to grandparents. The eligibility criteria for participants were that they must have parenting experience and are/were resident in Fairhill at the time of parenting. The participants were recruited through the community development officer for the Fairhill community as part of the Community Academic Research Links (CARL) project through the use of information flyers, which the researcher created. The participants were recruited from the following: Local soccer club, walking group, the Tusla Springboard project, Fairhill Men’s Art Group, Fairhill School, Fairhill pre-school and the Fairhill Parent and Toddler group. During the recruitment process, it was clearly outlined that it was the participants choice to take part, with no coercion or consequences would occur if they did not. This was ensured with an informed consent form. Each participant was provided with information about the research and how it will be used in line with GDPR guidelines. There was constant communication between the community partner and the researcher during this recruitment process, to ensure each participant has been provided with sufficient information in order to participate.

### 2.5 Procedure

An interview guide was given as a questionnaire, as well as an information sheet and consent form to each participant before commencing the interview. The researcher conducted these over the phone due to pandemic precautions. Through using open-ended questioning, the researcher hoped to encourage answers with significant detail about their parenting experience. The interviews were audio recorded on an audio recorder and then transcribed for thematic analysis (Clarke, 2013).

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Warm up Question:

- a. What words or phrases come to mind when you think of parenting in Fairhill?
  - b. What is your reaction to what you have heard?
1. What helps/would help your experience of parenting in Fairhill?
  2. How has experience of parenting changed since the COVID 19 pandemic (social distancing, social isolation)
  3. Are there any specific needs for parents in the following areas?
    - a. Health and wellbeing
    - b. Social activities
    - c. Local environment (GAA pitch, playground, meeting area, seated area)
  4. What can the community do to support parenting in Fairhill.
  5. Are there enough activities for children in Fairhill? Please comment. E.g., youth club, GAA
  6. Do you know where to get diet and exercise information for children?
  7. Are you interested in courses on children's health and wellbeing?

## 2.6 Data analysis

The researcher used reflexive thematic analysis when analysing the research findings from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis involves reflecting on patterns of shared meaning from the transcripts of the interviews. The most predominant of these patterns became themes. In ensuring it was reflexive practice, the researcher ensured that they were aware of their role as a researcher and any bias inherent in their interpretation of these themes through continuous reflection (Ayre, 2022). This was done by keeping a reflective research journal.

## 2.7 Ethical issues

The Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) in University College Cork (UCC) provided ethical approval twice (see appendix a), due to a change in research methods which is outlined in 2.8. The following ethical issues were identified for both submissions:

- **Confidentiality:** The researcher ensured they complied with the provisions of the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 and applied GDPR guidelines when processing data collected from the telephone interviews. This involved taking responsibility for the audio transcription of each interview. Data recordings were deleted from the recording device once transcribed with anonymised titles for each participant. The researcher used the dictate tool in Microsoft word and their UCC credentials when they uploaded audio transcripts to google drive. This will be stored in accordance with UCC data storage policy of 10 years.
- The researcher also discussed ground rules before conducting the telephone interview. Confidentiality is included in these ground rules, as was ensuring access to a quiet room free from distractions/other people when the interview was conducted privately over the phone.
- **Child protection concerns:** In the event of a parent disclosing child protection concerns, the researcher would comply with current safety practices and legal requirements of which they are mandated to report child protection concerns in accordance with the Children First Act 2015. This was outlined in the consent form.
- **Informed consent:** During the recruitment process it was clearly outlined that it is the participants choice to take part with no coercion or consequences if they do not. This was ensured with an informed consent form. Each participant was provided with information about the research and how it will be used in line with GDPR guidelines. The researcher worked collaboratively with the community partners to ensure that they were in control and responsible during the recruitment procedure. The researcher ensured that the participants had received sufficient information about the research and had the capacity to make the decision to participate, by giving ample time for the participant to understand the research and facilitate a time period for questions they may have had on the research, in a language they understood with their best interests protected. The researcher ensured that there was open communication between them and the participant throughout the research.
- **Ensuring the welfare of each participant.** The researcher was alert for any signs of trauma or discomfort on the part of the participant and acted accordingly. The researcher put in place procedures and practices needed to prioritise the safety and welfare of each participant and was aware of participants moral and cultural values in regard to this research and ensured that these were respected and that the participants were aware that they did not need to participate if it went against these values.

## 2.8 Limitations

The pandemic has been a barrier in conducting this research because of the social distancing measures. Face to face contact was not an option during the interviews. Originally, the qualitative research method was focus groups. This had to be changed due to concern of the rising numbers in COVID 19. The participants did not feel safe in a group face to face. It was decided with the community partnership and UCC ethics committee to instead conduct semi-structured telephone interviews, resulting in 2 ethic submissions which proved time consuming for the researcher. There was originally meant to be 2 focus groups, 10 participants in each. These were to be audio recorded and transcribed. This would have allowed for an interview with several people, providing for rich data collection (Carey, 2012). The researcher aimed to observe and document how participants responded to other participants' views and their behaviour as a member of this group, thus, this would've formed their own view on the topic through this group discussion. Telephone interviews did not offer the same quality engagement due to the phone connection being poor at times and as a result having to ask the participant to repeat themselves, inhibiting a flow in conversation. The audio recorder was not able to pick up clearly the voice of the participant, which then involved rewinding and listening repeatedly when transcribing, which was time consuming. Also due to the lack of visible communication cues, the researcher found themselves sometimes talking over the participant, which also inhibited a flow in the conversation. However, this method had the benefit of working well with parenting time constraints.

## 2.9 Conclusion

The research methodology used was social constructivism, interpretivism, ecological systems, Vygotsky's sociocultural and child development theory. Telephone interviews provided for qualitative research findings. The interview questionnaire and research questions were included in this chapter. The ethical issues pertinent in this research were outlined as well as the limitations encountered in the research approaches. The next chapter will outline the literature the researcher reviewed for this research topic.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

#### 3.1 Introduction

The literature researched was relevant to parenting and its influence on child development and also the experience of parents and the challenges presented. This supported in shaping the research project and gave ideas of how to approach understanding the parenting experience in Fairhill. Bronfenbrenner's systems theory was applied in order to understand all the supports present in the child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These supports are outlined in this chapter and the current policy in relation to parental supports is discussed, as well as in relation to disadvantaged areas. The type of family units present in Fairhill are outlined and how Fairhill is described as a disadvantaged community. Parenting styles, intergenerational influences and peer relations are discussed in relation to the parenting role. The stress of parenting is discussed, highlighting the importance of parental supports.

#### 3.2 Child development

By applying a developmental lens, the influence of parents can change in each developmental stage. Between the ages of 0-5 years old, cognitive development is most influenced due to 80% of the brain being formed before 3 years old (Roshanfekar et al., 2017). Applying Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950), the fifth stage captures the essence of the adolescence, in which the child is searching for their own identity. It is noted that this period causes increased parental stress (Anderson, 2008), with a decline in time spent with family (Larson et al., 1996).

#### 3.3 Definition of Parenting and Parenting styles

Parenting can be classified into authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting (Baumrind, 1967). In later research, there was an extra style presented called neglectful (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). According to Baumrind (2005), these styles of parenting can be categorised in 2 ways: through responsiveness and demandingness. Responsiveness means the attunement of the parent to the child's needs; demandingness means the way parents try to control the child behaviour in terms of social norms and supervising this. Another dimension to consider in parenting styles is 'autonomy granting' (Domenech Rodríguez et al., 2009, pg. 197). The difference between authoritarian and authoritative is the amount of responsiveness given to the child. Authoritarian gives very little whereas authoritative gives high. Responsiveness is important and can be seen when a parent gives praise. Permissive is high in responsiveness but low in demandingness. Demandingness is high in authoritarian and authoritative but low in permissive and neglectful, with neglectful being indifferent (Baumrind, 2005). Autonomy is given to the child from all however, it is at its lowest in authoritarian (Domenech Rodríguez et al., 2009). Parents shape their children's experience as they create opportunities for their children, through their parenting practice (Bornstein et al., 2018).

### Parental stress

Social disadvantage is associated with elevated parenting stress and lower rates of uptake, higher rates of dropout and poorer outcomes in conventional parenting programmes (Michelson D, 2014). It is important to acknowledge parenting in a disadvantaged area because the negative outcomes of living in a disadvantaged area for child development can be mediated by positive parenting (Hutchings et al., 2017). If at one years old, the child is experiencing high parental stress, they will most likely experience insensitivity from their mother at 3 years old, resulting in externalising behaviours (behaviours directed towards external environment) such as aggression at 6 years (Gerstein & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2015). It is also noted that these problem behaviours can present when a child is 3 years old due to parental stress (Tharner et al., 2012). This highlights the importance of parental supports and strategies for wellbeing and coping with stress due to this dysfunctional parenting (Kochanova et al., 2021).

### 3.4 Parenting on child development

The style of parenting can lead to a child developing into an adolescent that is easily influenced by either a positive or negative choice of peer group. Authoritarian or permissive parenting can lead to a negative peer group, whereas the opposite is true for authoritative. This can lead to anti-social behaviour and risky behaviour because of peers (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). This also results in adolescents internalising problems if they perceive the parent as hostile or distant (Griffith et al., 2019).

### 3.5 Influences on Parenting

#### Sport

Sport provides a support in parenting. Sport is a popular after school activity which allows children to learn beneficial managerial skills and goal attainment. It also teaches teamwork skills, positive peer relations and less peer problems. As well as raising a child's self-esteem due to winning competitions, this can have the opposite effect of stress and low self-esteem when a competition is lost. However, it can provide for valuable coping skills. Sports clubs are more accessible to all socio-economic statuses due to low membership rates (Felfe et al., 2016).

#### School

School is a major influence in children's lives. Parents must navigate the school system for their children, *"parents adjust their parenting style in response to incentives provided by the school system"* (Zilibotti, 2019, p. 275). This can be seen when parents are encouraged to read to their children in order to teach them to be literate. However, some cultures do not agree with formal teaching methods at a young age. Extra-curricular activities are also influenced by school, these are aimed at personal development or in the US and UK as part of a resume, to support in them in gaining admission into top universities (Zilibotti, 2019). The knowledge economy is a source of pressure for parents, *"since the 1980s, rising economic inequality and higher returns to education have increased the importance for children to work hard and succeed in school"* (Zilibotti, 2019, p. 307).

### Intergenerational parenting styles

Intergenerational parenting styles effect parenting behaviours and cause a continuity of such behaviours (Unternaehrer et al., 2019). This is especially true of harsher parenting styles as the resulting externalising/aggressive behaviour later effects their own parent-child relationships (Neppl et al., 2009). Also, the effect of intergenerational poverty present in a disadvantaged areas effects child development negatively (Curtin & Buckley, 2019).

### 3.6 Fairhill

Fairhill is part of the Cork City North- Central electoral area (Cork City Profile, 2018, p. 35). It is a RAPID area, which is a government programme that uses an inter-agency approach with residents in a community to create a shared plan for the regeneration of the local area (RAPID, 2018).

There is a focus on the following aspects for RAPID areas which are relevant to this research. The development of new community facilities, early intervention, training and employment initiatives for young people, community safety forums, Health Action Zone and age friendly projects and environmental projects (Council, 2021). There are higher proportions of Cohabiting Couples with Children in RAPID areas (Cork City Profile, 2018, p. 170). The below figures are taken from the last completed census in 2016 for Cork city.

- 27.5% of families with 2 children lived in Fairhill and were in among the highest proportion of families of 2 children in 2016 (Cork City Profile, 2018, p. 173).
- 13.4% of Fair hill are recorded to having an empty nest family, again in among the highest proportion (Cork City Profile, 2018, p. 177) This type of family are a couple ages between 45 and 64 who do not have children living with them (Cork City Profile, 2018, p. 175).
- 14.4% of Fairhill scored high in Adolescent families which are families with the eldest being between the ages of 15 and 19 (Cork City Profile, 2018, p. 175).
- 40.6% of Fairhill scored high in adult families (Family and Living Arrangements, 2018, p. 178), which is a family with the eldest child being 20 or older (Cork City Profile, 2018, p. 175).
- 36.8% of Fair hill scored high in 'lone parent' families (Cork City Profile, 2018, p. 182).

### 3.7 Parenting in a disadvantaged area

#### Peer support

In a study conducted for parents of children with additional needs, a peer support scheme was set up, with one popular theme emerging from the research of parents needing the support of another parent who had a similar experience (Bray et al., 2017).

#### Public Spaces

Social interaction for parents is precipitated by children (see appendix b)(Wood et al., 2013, p.359). Through these social interactions of parents with children, in public spaces such as playgrounds and green spaces, *“the intertwined relationship between the built environment and the social realm”* can be seen (Wood et al., 2013, p.360). The importance of public spaces in the built environment of the community is important. However, for these to be effective, regular maintenance to ensure safety in the public spaces is vital to guarantee its function as a place of positive social interaction and not of *“incivilities”* which are defined as *“breaches of community standards”*, activities such as littering and anti-social behaviour (Bedimo-Rung et al., 2005, p.164).

#### Parenting programmes

In research conducted within a year timeframe of a toddler parenting programme intervention in a disadvantaged area, the results showed *“significant improvements in home environment, child development and parental depression”* (Hutchings et al., 2017, p.109). This is believed to be due to the short-term intervention improvements after 6 months, in parental mental well-being and parental praise, making it beneficial for both the parent and the child. This was measured by observing parent child interactions, using a home environment measuring tool, parent stress index tool and completing a Personal Data and Health Questionnaire (PDHQ) with the parents by the researcher. This was a socio-economic disadvantage index which included the following risk factors *“employment status, marital status, number of children, primary carer education, housing and area of residence (high/low crime)”* (Hutchings et al., 2017, p.107).

### 3.8Diet

Research studies show the influence parents have in their children's lives, especially dietary (Åsa Norman, 2018). Parental diet is the most dominant factor in the eating habits of a child (Scaglioni et al., 2018). This is because of modelling eating behaviours for their children and setting rules and structure around what foods to eat and when to eat them (Tartaglia et al., 2021). However, barriers such as finance and lack of time can have a negative impact on a parent's ability to influence their child's nutrition positively. The intergenerational effect is also present with some parents engaging in feeding practices passed on by their parents. Parents are more willing to approach family members with diet questions rather than health professionals (Tartaglia et al., 2021). This is something to be aware of for social work practice also. In the first 2000 days from conception to the five-year period, it is especially important to have a good nutritious diet, as it is a key factor for optimal health, growth, socio-emotional, language, cognitive, and motor development (Skouteris et al., 2021).

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Linking diet with parenting styles, the authoritarian approach does not allow for autonomy for the child to develop their own eating habits. This is seen in food restriction or coercion, a child centred responsive feeding practice is advised over this (Daniels, 2019). To combat and support positive eating habits for children, a parent nutrition-education programme is advised. This would support the planning, management and preparation of healthy food skills and autonomous and competent parenting practices through confidence gained in understanding labels (Eneli et al., 2015), and gaining cooking skills (Reicks et al., 2014). This in turn would then cause less consumption of unhealthy processed foods (Martins et al., 2020). Familial relationships would be supported when cooking and eating together in these learnt parenting practices (Orr et al., 2020). Parental peer support is also an influence on these feeding practices through providing learning opportunities of healthy feeding (Tartaglia et al., 2021, p.15).

### 3.9 Peers

Research has shown that time spent in the company of parents declines throughout the development of the child, beginning in adolescence (Lam et al., 2012). This is supported by the individuation hypothesis of youth wanting to gain independence from parent relationships and becoming focused on peer relationships (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). Peer influence and parental influence amplify and mitigate each other towards child development (Kristina Sayler, 2022). This highlights the importance of peer relationships for adolescence and the parenting role in supporting these.

### 3.10 Policy

In the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 5 outlines that the State must respect the parents' rights and duties to provide direction to the child, within the child's capabilities. Article 18 outlines that the State must provide appropriate assistance for parents in the upbringing and development of their child, and to provide childcare for working parents (United Nations, 1989). Below is a strategy and a policy relevant to supporting the parenting role.

- **First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028**

#### ABC Program

Parenting supports are delivered through the ABC programme, which is outlined in the Government strategy First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families. Examples given of group-based parenting services are *“Triple P, Incredible Years, Parents Plus, Hanen parenting programmes, Circle of Security, family literacy and numeracy programmes, baby massage courses, and antenatal course”* (Government of Ireland, 2019, p. 46). Also, under this Government strategy, one to one parent support was provided using home visiting approaches, the given examples were *“Preparing for Life, Parent-Child Home Programme, Community Mothers, Lifestart, Marte Meo and Infant Mental Health home visiting”* (Government of Ireland, 2019, p. 46). The researcher investigated if these were present in the Fairhill community.

- **Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014-2020**

This policy ended in 2020. One of the transformational goals in the policy framework was to support parents with the overall aim of strengthening the support system of the child, resulting in 5 better outcomes (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. vi). In the policy, planning and coordination of parenting supports at local level through Children's Services Committees were aimed for. This was to be provided by Tusla, Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), Department of Justice (DJE), Health Service Executive (HSE) and Local Government (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. 28). In the policy, the Government recognises *"the importance for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities of having timely and affordable access to quality, inclusive services and supports"* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. 33). Brighter Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF) notes that the Government also recognises the importance of supporting parents to provide a safe and secure, stable and caring home environments for their children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. 77). The researcher planned to research if there parenting supports in Fairhill due to this policy implementation.

In evaluating the implementation of this policy, the researcher studied the report 'An Indicator Set for Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' which contains data that has been collected since 2017 from various sources, such as the census, on each outcome set out in the policy (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022). The outcomes relevant to this research are described below.

**Outcome 2: Achieving full potential in learning and development**

Access to speech and language therapy services for age range 0-17, have waiting times of more than 52 weeks. In 2019, 728 children were waiting for assessment and 889 waiting for treatment (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022, p. 27)

**Outcome 3: Safe and Protected from harm.**

A key indicator in its implementation is access to parent and family support services, the results in the final report were as follows: children receiving family support services in 2021 were 17516 which is a decrease from 2016 at 24217. There was no data available for families accessing family support services in 2021 due to TUSLA ceasing reporting this in 2017 and only reporting on children receiving family support services, in 2016 there were 16806 families receiving family support services (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022, p. 33).

Tusla as noted above is one of the Government bodies responsible for coordinating family supports in local areas. Parenting supports provided by Tusla are:

- ABC Programme.
- National Child Care Scheme.
- Child and Family Support Networks.
- Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS).

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- Meitheal.
- Springboard.

Websites provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth under the subject of support and advice for parental health and wellbeing were Mychild.ie, Barnardos, HSE.ie for effects of alcohol consumption on parenting and Drugs.ie for drug consumption effects on parenting. A helpline contact number operating Monday to Friday called parent line is also provided (Department of Children, 2021).

#### 3.11 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the parental influence on child development and the challenge of parenting in a disadvantaged area in terms of parental stress. It outlines the factors that influence child development and parenting combined. These being school, intergenerational, disadvantaged area, peers and diet. The benefits of parenting programmes were also discussed. Policy was researched in terms of parent supports and it will be investigated if this policy is being implemented in Fairhill through the qualitative research of semi structured interviews.

## Chapter 4

### Findings and Analysis

#### 4.1 introduction

This chapter will discuss the themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes were:

1. Local GAA club being a predominant support in parenting.
2. Lack of community supports available for children with additional needs.
3. Lack of awareness for community parental supports available.
4. Lack of peer and parental wellbeing support.
5. Impact of COVID.
6. Community and Youth Centre needed.
7. Feelings of neglect within the Fairhill community.

#### 4.2 Participants

The participants interviewed included a grandfather, grandmother, one father and 4 mothers. The parents and grandparents are numbered (parent/grandparent 1, 2,3 etc.) to ensure anonymity. The grandparents interviewed provided an understanding of how the community of Fairhill has changed and in turn of how the experience of parenting in Fairhill has changed. A male perspective was gained from the interview with the grandfather and father interviewed. I was aware that there were more female perspectives than men, but I found it difficult to recruit fathers. This is an identified gap in the research.

#### 4.3 Theme 1- Local GAA club, predominant support in parenting.

Many of the parents found sport to be a good support in their parenting. Na Piarsaigh Hurling and Football club was a major support for 4 of the 7 parents interviewed.

**Parent 1:** *“What the coaches put in down there is huge, but it would, dya know what now, it takes a village, my dad would go to all Nuala’s\*(niece) matches, we were always supported here”.*

**Grandparent 1:** *“Well, my eldest daughter would’ve been involved in, Na Piarsaighs, it would’ve been our local GAA club. My son was in Na Piarsaigh as well, he’d have played hurling”.*

**Parent 2:** *“He does the hurling and football in Na Piarsaighs all the time”.*

**Parent 3:** *“I’m just kind of lucky that my son is into football”.*

#### Discussion 1

This theme answers both the research questions of parenting strengths and activities for children in Fairhill. The local GAA club has proved indispensable throughout generations of parents living in Fairhill. It provides for a feeling of community through the time dedicated by coaches and support from parents in attending their children’s matches. In looking at the literature review, sport clubs are an affordable option due to lower rates in membership

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than other extra-curricular activities (Felfe et al., 2016). Therefore this may be part of the reason that Na Píarsaigh Hurling & Football club is a predominant support in parenting in Fairhill.

### **4.4 Theme 2- Lack of community supports available for children with additional needs.**

A theme that emerged was the lack of support for children with additional needs in the Fairhill area and the stress caused by this, for parents. Waiting lists for services puts pressure on parents when they are trying to support their children. One parent described the waiting lists as extensive:

**Parent 1:** *“Yeah massive (waiting lists). I know we have St. Mary campus (primary care unit) which is quite close to us but obviously the waiting lists in general are just huge, and we’ve had very little support with that so far. Even in the informal settings, just to kind of deal with it and day-to-day stuff, rather than necessarily kind of you know like big supports like OT and speech and language and stuff. Just anything. Supports coming to terms with it and you know dealing with day-to-day issues. We’ve kind of had to source our own supports almost you know other than that getting official help, you know like social groups or anything like that”.*

This parent also felt there was a lack of support in the area, their child was recently diagnosed with dyspraxia

#### **Parent 1:**

*“There’s only one other thing that could come into the area and that’s, Mary\*(daughter) has dyspraxia. She’s just been diagnosed with it. So, it’s not really special classes, special activities but kind of more, like specialized swimming lessons maybe or cycling groups”.*

*“This is all new to me with Mary\*, there might be more available, I haven’t really reached out, I did get Mary\* to swimming lesson behind me here the swimming pool but they just weren’t suitable for her, they weren’t appropriate for her”*

Covid has added to an already pressurized system.

#### **Parent 1:**

*“So I’m in services for Mary\* for 3 years for speech and language , but it’s only been 8 weeks a year that you got anything from it, then lock down came, so one block was really done over zoom, so I kind of fall in between the new diagnosis, I’m in the system plus I’ve also had covid the past few years, so it’s not running as normal”.*

### **Discussion 2**

There is a need for the Fairhill community to offer more supports for children with additional needs. In the policy ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’, the Government recognises the importance of access to supports for children with additional needs (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). This can be implemented through becoming aware of the types of supports children in the Fairhill community need. To

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increase this awareness, groups need to be set up. Children with additional needs require services to acknowledge that parents need specialized services available. There is a lack of space for parent's voices to be heard in this regard. This leads on to the next theme.

### 4.5 Theme 3- Awareness of parenting supports available in Fairhill.

During the interviews, it became apparent that there were mixed levels of awareness of parenting supports, with some parents knowing more than others, and as a result, being more actively involved in parental supports. Parent 1 spoke of several supports they used, such as Lets Grow Together and Niche. This parent was also involved in a Parents Forum of the Lets Grow Together Service and spoke of an active promotion campaign.

**Parent 1:** *"There's new information, and there is new flyers and all this media going out, they're a lot more aimed at, letting us know what's there, so there'll be leaflet drops and media post coming up".*

An awareness of supports in the Fairhill community was mixed.

**Parent 1:** *"All services are there but I don't know what the issue is with people not knowing about them. How interested people are in looking for those services".*

Whereas another parent described it as

**Parent 4:** *"I'm not aware of anything around here, there might be, but I'm just not aware of it, it doesn't seem to be advertised very well though".*

A parent whose child has a diagnosis of ASD described not being aware of any peer groups for his child.

**Parent 4:** *"I'm not aware of any peer groups from the north side at all, he goes all the way up to the South side to Rainbow Club (Autism Centre)".*

The majority of parents interviewed, created opportunities for their children by getting personally involved in extracurricular activities.

**Parent 3:** *"I know for a fact, I've grown up in this area myself and I've seen other people go down the wrong track, for me, I just had it in my head, I knew I had to do for my kids, so getting involved in their activities".*

One parent interviewed was actively looking for supports for their child.

**Parent 1:** *"I'll be honest with you, I'm a bit of a dumb priest gets to know parish, I would go back to the girls in Knocknaheeney (Lets Grow Together) and ask them do they know, or I'd go to Mary (Community Development officer) and ask her do you know of anything in the community".*

Let's Grow Together was mentioned as a very supportive service for this parent:

**Parent 1:** *Young Knocknaheeney, they're now called Lets Grow Together, they run courses and they liaison with families in the community, so they ask parents to join the forum, they*

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*come to us when they're starting something new or seek ideas from us, now they do flyer and the flyers are out but they do the consultation with us, the parents, how we'd like to see them, would we like paper, would we like electronic, would we like somethings that's visual, do you know, those kind of things".*

This parent felt awareness for this service was growing:

**Parent 1:** *"They do, there's quite a few of the parents that do know. I have a friend there whose child is going through early intervention at the moment, so she knows about it, she's been in that group, there's a lot. I've met a lot of people who have actually made friends from it. Yeah, so a lot of people do know about it. So, it's getting bigger and it's getting more prominent in the community".*

A reason for the lack of awareness in this service may be that it could be relatively new.

**Parent 1:** *"They're relatively new to be honest with you and they're growing as they go, if that makes sense. Key members have grown and the speech and language side of it has 3 officers".*

### Discussion 3

There is an apparent lack of awareness in parenting supports available in Fairhill. This is a problem that needs to be resolved if all parents are to be supported in Fairhill. The facilities mentioned were not in the Fairhill community but in nearby community Knocknaheeney. This is not a new theme as there has been previous lobbying for the awareness of the ABC programme in 2006 by the Niche Health Project (Cork) CLG (Standards in Public Office Commission, 2016). The ABC programme is listed as a one to one parenting support in the First 5 : A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families because of its deliverance of "infant mental health home visiting", as described (Government of Ireland, 2019, p. 22). NICHE Project CLG is community health development project and is core funded by the HSE and is part of the Healthy Ireland Framework 2019-2025 (Department of Health, 2019). Let's Grow Together is a government funded programme. It is funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. It is part of the TUSLA Child and Family Agency Area Based Childhood Programme (Let's Grow Together! Infant & Childhood Partnerships CLG, 2022). It is based on Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI). This can support in stopping negative intergenerational effects on childhood development such as poverty and disadvantage. The main aims are to protect families, reduce risk factors for children and to strengthen the community they are part of (Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG, 2021). Let's Grow Together applies child development theory in its practice by using the Infant Mental Health (IMH) framework. The IMH framework promotes the child and caregiver relationship for the infant/toddler, as this is viewed as essential for the social and emotional development of the child (Mckelvey et al., 2015).

As seen in this theme, parents shape their children's experience as they create opportunities for their children, through their parenting practice (Bornstein et al., 2018).

### 4.6 Theme 4- Peer support and parental self-care

The stress of being a parent was captured very well by a parent interviewed:

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**Parent 2:** *“How parents deal with their everyday stresses and how they can stay balanced, and parents do, they get annoyed, they shout, it kind of just goes around in a circle, because you’re carrying it the rest of the day yourself, because you’re annoyed with yourself, your thinking you’re no good, you’re no good as a parent, you’re doubting everything that you are, it’s that kind of thing, dealing with your everyday emotions and everyday situations, and then it will filter down onto everybody else”.*

Informal peer groups are present in Fairhill and are a source of parental support, these are both in person and online. Family was also described as a source of parental support:

**Parent 4:**

*“We do know a couple of other parents with autism because he is in ASD class and that’s how we got our little social group really”.*

*“I know my wife does regularly stress and I think she leans heavily on one or two parents for support when she’s feeling stressed, especially about the children. I really feel like she doesn’t have anywhere else to go externally you know”.*

**Parent 2:**

*“I get loads of support as well from my family do you know what I mean like? When you’ve got kids involved in things anyway, there’s supports there as well. There would be like group chats then, because like, you have to know if they’re going to be going and stuff, or if they have any questions then you would put it in the WhatsApp. There’s always a WhatsApp group for the sports stuff yeah”.*

**Parent 1:** *“The courses, and the activities in the community, the baby activities and the toddler activities for Mary\*, was about me as well, to be able to be social and to be involved in something”.*

**Parent 1:** *“I’m stressed but I also have my outlets, but I know myself it’s very easy for me to stay at home, so to have the facilities and the support in the community, if you want to get involved, it’s there for you, there’s huge resources there”.*

The sense of community in Fairhill offers support for parents, with even several generations still living in Fairhill.

**Interviewer:** *“Did you raise your own kids in Fairhill?”*

**Grandparent 1:**

*“I did, and I came from Fairhill myself”.*

*“We always had a lovely community, all of us really, the children grew up together, they played together, they fought together, mothers and fathers, they’re all mixed, we’re all friends here still”.*

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**Grandparent 2:** *"Oh, I did, sure I knew them, they're all still here, the kids are moved on, but all the parents are still here"*

**Parent 5:** *"I love living in Fairhill, I lived here since I was 7. I know the people that were there when I moved in".*

**Parent 4:** *"Yeah, its very community up here as well, people are very together, look out for each other well. Obviously by my accent, I'm not a native North-sider, but like, we bought a house up here 7-8 years ago, and the neighbors were fantastic to us, they lent us electricity, they came around and they helped. Lovely people up here I can't speak highly enough of".*

One parent interviewed was aware of the importance of self-care and the effect of stress on both the parent and the child.

**Parent 2:**

*"The younger people are taking on what their parents have, and a lot of parents don't know how to take care of themselves, they're always focusing on taking care of everybody else. Unfortunately, when you don't take care of yourself, you just can't give the best of yourself. So, if you teach the parents, it's going to spread out onto their children. That's where the ripple effects come from".*

**Interviewer:** *"Do you have a self-care routine yourself or would you be like very conscious of it?"*

**Parent 2:** *"Extremely conscious of it, there needs to be a lot more services in the area for parents. I know from our community house, there is a lot of groups run but a lot of them are run during the day when some parents are at work".*

### Discussion 4

Parents found support in family living nearby and close friend groups. Support was also found in the community spirit of the close-knit community of Fairhill. Parents were very aware of their self-care. Parental stress was felt in interviews, *"I know my wife does regularly stress and I think she leans heavily on one or two parents for support when she's feeling stressed, especially about the children. I really feel like she doesn't have anywhere else to go externally you know"* (Parent 4). Externalizing behaviours such as aggression can begin at 6 years old if parental stress is present when the child is aged three (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). Parental stress is a major influence in children's behaviours, this highlights the importance of parental peer support groups. Informal parental peer groups are formed through activities their children are a part of. These parent peer groups are formed both in person and through online messaging service WhatsApp. More awareness is recommended to be given to the time constraints of parenting overall and the different schedules parents can have due to employment regarding implementing parental supports, *"a lot of groups run but a lot of them are run during the day when some parents are at work"* (Parent 3).

#### 4.7 Theme 5- Impact of COVID

The social distancing measures of the pandemic was a stressor for parents due to the lack of social engagement for their children.

**Parent 4:** *“He (son) was missing his friends when he was off school, we did our best to, kind of, to meet up in parks and stuff outside where we could, where we were safe enough”.*

**Parent 1:** *“But Covid did make a difference between preschool and junior infants, playdates and groups weren’t on. There was a social lack for Mary\* because she would have started lockdown at age 3, she’s now nearly 6, so she would have missed out on all birthday parties, playdates, do you know those kind of things”.*

The pandemic also brought challenges in communicating with their child’s school, this caused stress for the parent, as they felt they did not know how their child was progressing in school.

**Parent 4:**

*“I mean in terms of the school; we’ve only had one face to face meeting with the school in the year and a half we’ve been there.*

*“Parents and the teachers at the gates had little informal chats, but it's not the same as getting proper time to discuss how your child is getting on, especially with autism”.*

The pandemic has caused extensive waiting lists for activities such as swimming lessons.

**Parent 2:** *“Because Harry was in it before (swimming pool lessons) and it was fabulous before all the COVID and stuff and I think it went downhill, a bit downhill after the COVID, getting in and stuff”.*

The need for community activities was highlighted, especially after the pandemic. A grandparent spoke of a nearby community centre outside of Fairhill holding a community gathering for the over 70s and wishing there was something similar in the Fairhill community.

**Grandparent 1:** *“I was just actually looking at Facebook yesterday now, there was the older generation again, they had a lovely day above in the community centre, and a band, and they were able to dance and have cups of tea, cakes and things, so for the younger grandparents and stuff maybe they could have a younger get together, now that covid is gone”.*

#### Discussion 5

The impact of COVID was seen in children missing social interaction with their peers, and parents anxious about this, causing parental stress. Parents also mentioned extensive waiting lists for services and the lack of communication with school in their child’s progress. This theme answers the research question of has the pandemic had an impact on the experience of parenting in Fairhill.

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### 4.8 Theme 6 – Youth and Community Centre needed

Anti-social behavior of young people in the Fairhill community was mentioned by participants.

**Grandparent 2:** *“The Fairfield was fabulous then, like it was, now it’s still very good, but you have a lot of anti-social activity going on, especially on the other side, they’re lighting fires on the tarmac and so on, motorbikes flying around the place”.*

**Parent 3:**

*“They’re (the youth) just hanging around in the fields, we kind of have a football pitch in the area where they kind of hang out, and you have anti-social behaviour where we are, because the kids don’t have anywhere to go”.*

*“A centre is really needed up here to be able to do something. To me, everything boils down to there is no space for things to happen in our area”.*

*“A place where they (children) can go where us as parents know where they are, peace of mind”.*

*“There is a community house in the area. A community centre is really, really needed to run activities my kids at their age there really is nothing”.*

This parent spoke of an annual summer scheme being organised from the community house and being supportive in her parenting role.

**Parent 3:** *“Yeah its fantastic (summer scheme), a lot of parents whose children attend the summer scheme would be leaders there as well”.*

It was discovered through the interviews, that there was a youth club in the nearby community of Farranree in the past.

**Grandparent 1:** *She (daughter) also got involved in a youth club in Farranree.*

**Interviewer:** *Oh yeah, is there a youth club in Farranree?*

**Grandparent 1:** *“There was, I don’t know if there is still there, there was there while she was, and my youngest, and there’s 10 years between them”*

Another parent was also part of a youth club near the area.

**Parent 2:** *I did, I did, I went to the Youth Club for years yeah when I was younger, yeah I don’t know how long ago now, years ago now. But then you need volunteers then to run the youth club as well.*

A parent who was a part of the Blackpool youth club growing up in Fairhill, is now a leader in the same youth club, of which her daughter is a part of.

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**Parent 5:** *“About 30 years, so I would’ve started there (youth club) when I was 13, I’m 43 now and I’m a general leader”.*

**Interviewer:** *“Did it really help you growing up then? Do you think it was a great source of support being involved in that youth club from that age 13? It was a big self-confidence piece?”*

**Parent 5:** *“Huge. And after that it was a support”.*

Parents felt there was a lack of services for their child, as well for parents.

**Parent 4:**

*“I work full time and my wife is the one at home, she would go to the park now with Billy\*, and his little kind of social group, two maybe three times a week, but you know there's there's nothing for that age, regardless of diagnosis”.*

*“Yeah, I mean like I'm not aware of a massive amount of clubs really for adults up here, but like I'm not really sure where I would go to find them out. There doesn't seem to be a central hub to make you more aware. Other than, honestly, Facebook is something that kind of everyone goes to these days. Like in terms of physical place like you know that you could go and find out about all these things, I don't think there's no specific place”.*

*“Something informal we can meet up and have a bit of a play and the moms or dads or whoever can have coffee or chat”.*

*“Someone who can lead and point you in different directions, if there's extra supports needed then they don't have to be an expert, but someone can go you know, there's that group over there and there's that group there, and they can really help you know, I think that would probably be a huge benefit yeah”.*

**Parent 3:** *“a place where kids would have somewhere to go, that’s what’s needed in the area because there is an awful lot of youth in the area”.*

**Grandparent 2:** *That’s what we could do with up here (youth club), something like that, to get the kids, to get them involved in things”.*

### **Discussion 6**

Parents spoke of a specific place needed to gain information and to form parental peer support groups for themselves as well as social groups for their children. Youth clubs have been beneficial parental supports in the past, as parents interviewed had access to these in different communities besides Fairhill. Anti-social behaviour was also mentioned by parents interviewed and reasons given were a lack of designated space for youth to congregate in the Fairhill community, *“a place where kids would have somewhere to go, that’s what’s needed in the area”* (Parent 3). Peer relations are important in the adolescence stage and more time is spent with peers than with parents (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986), a safe space where parents know where their children are with their peers in Fairhill is recommended, *“a place where*

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*they can go where us as parents know where they are, peace of mind"* (Parent 3). It is evident that from speaking with participants that a youth and community facility would be beneficial to support parenting in Fairhill.

### 4.9. Theme 7- Feelings of neglect in the Fairhill community.

Parents interviewed spoke of how visible they felt it was that the south side of Cork is allocated significantly more funding, when they can see it is needed in their community. Parent 1 described her mother speaking of this, so it seems this is a long-term theme.

**Parent 3:** *"The one thing that I would always say, that my mother would always say, and god rest her soul now, she would turn around and say, south side got all the colleges and the hospitals and the northside got a rubbish dump".*

**Parent 4:** *"I feel that the north side does tend to get a little bit neglected sometimes in supports in a wide range of things, not necessarily just in the parenting area".*

*"Yeah, I think a lot of people would share that opinion that the northside doesn't seem to get the focus of the south side".*

#### 4.9.1 Theme 7- Litter

A grandparent spoke about litter and abandoned cars in the Fairhill community and how this produces an unsafe environment for parenting.

##### **Grandparent 1:**

*"Well, they (abandoned cars) belong to someone but they're not going to move them. But it is an eyesore and a danger, you would be more afraid of getting a disease than picking up covid".*

*"They (local authority) don't listen, they don't act on anything, so I actually don't know who's going to act on it".*

*"Just around the corner from me now, there's a park but it's just vandalised the whole time, so you wouldn't take small children over there".*

*"There would be broken bottles, rubbish, broken glass, and bottles. I haven't been over there now actually since October".*

*"Oh yeah it's a danger like, you can't go out your gate, you can't let your grandchildren run out, where its parked is a danger as well for cars coming in because they wouldn't see it, other than that, everything down here is fine like that is a big thing now to be honest and its falling on deaf ears".*

### Discussion 7

This grandmother felt her voice was not being heard *"falling on deaf ears"* (Grandparent 1), in terms of much needed funding not being allocated to their community and hazardous litter. These feelings are not restricted to this research. There was a protest recently outside Cork city hall due to this issue, *"The northside of Cork City is suffering because of a distinct*

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*geographical funding imbalance, Sinn Féin claimed as it protested outside City Hall” (English, 2022). Abandoned cars and litter are posing hazards in the Fairhill community, these hazards need to be removed, in terms of this research, they are also posing a challenge for parenting in Fairhill.*

### 4.10 Conclusion

Seven themes emerged from the semi-structured telephone interviews. These themes were GAA being a predominant support in the parenting role, Lack of community support available for children with additional needs, Mixed levels of awareness in local parenting supports, Peer support and parental self-care, Impact of COVID on parenting, A Youth center being needed in Fairhill and Feelings of neglect in the Fairhill community. I was provided with an understanding of the parenting experience of those in Fairhill. The overall feelings about their community and what they would like to change about Fairhill to support in their parenting was also discovered through the qualitative research.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion and recommendations

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, conclusions and recommendations will be outlined resulting from the research findings. The parents' views are included in this chapter due to their voice being integral to this research.

#### 5.2 Conclusions

The researcher was able to answer the initial research questions. These are provided below:

**Q. What is the parenting experience in Fairhill like?**

A. The parenting experience in Fairhill is a positive one. Parents interviewed were resourceful and looked outside of Fairhill for supports. There is a reliance on the GAA clubs for children and youth activities. This was also noted in previous research on youth activities, conducted in the area (Groarke, 2019).

**Q. What are the parenting needs/strengths in Fairhill?**

A. The parenting needs in Fairhill are a meeting place to form peer support. There is no designated place for parents to meet and discuss their needs or for peer support which is needed due to the stress of parenting.

**Q. Has the pandemic had an impact on the experience of parenting in Fairhill?**

A. The pandemic has had an impact on the experience of parenting in Fairhill. It has been difficult for informal parent peer support. It has caused an extra stress for parents due to the worry their child is not having social interactions with their peers also.

**Q. Do parents/guardians think there are enough activities for children in Fairhill?**

A. The majority of parents participated in the local GAA club for activities for their children. There is a significant waiting list for swimming lessons in the local pool. This was a recurrent theme throughout interviews. Parents were instrumental in providing activities for their children. These parents actively looked for activities for their children. Anti-social behaviour among young people was a theme in the interviews, with reasons being that there is no place for young people to go.

**Q. Would a youth and community facility support parenting?**

A. A youth and community facility would support in parenting as it would provide a space for parents to form formal peer support. In the past there was a youth club near the area and the parents who had been a part of this found it supportive in parenting. This would also support in creating a safer community environment due to providing a space for young people, therefore lessening anti-social behaviour in the Fairfield which was mentioned in interviews.

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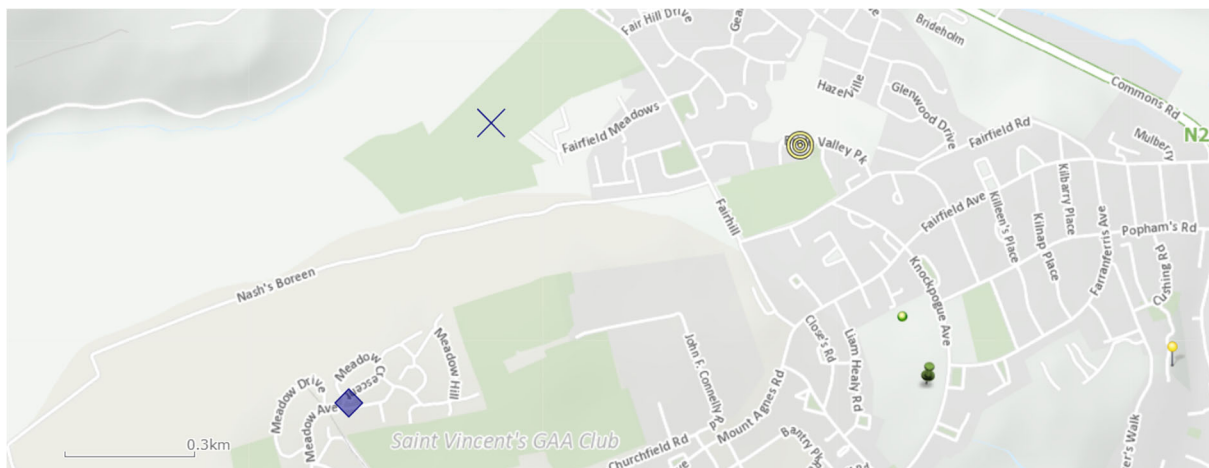
### 5.3 Recommendations

#### 5.4 Recommendation 1 - Increase the awareness of parental supports available.

Parent supports mentioned in interviews are illustrated below in the map. There is a second map providing a larger scale of the Fairhill area (figure b). Support services in the Fairhill area are the Community House and Na Piarasigh Hurling & Football Club. Lets Grow Together and Niche Health Project CLG are both in Knocknaheeney. Springboard, Scoil Aiseari (primary school) and the Family Resource Centre are in Farranree. Therefore, there is no designated space for parents to meet together where parents can form peer support and social groups in Fairhill. There is also no place for their children to meet together, where parents feel it is safe to do independently without their supervision, to gain peer relationships and develop social skills. There is a need for a place where parents can access information about parental supports which would promote an increase in awareness of parental supports available in the Fairhill Community.

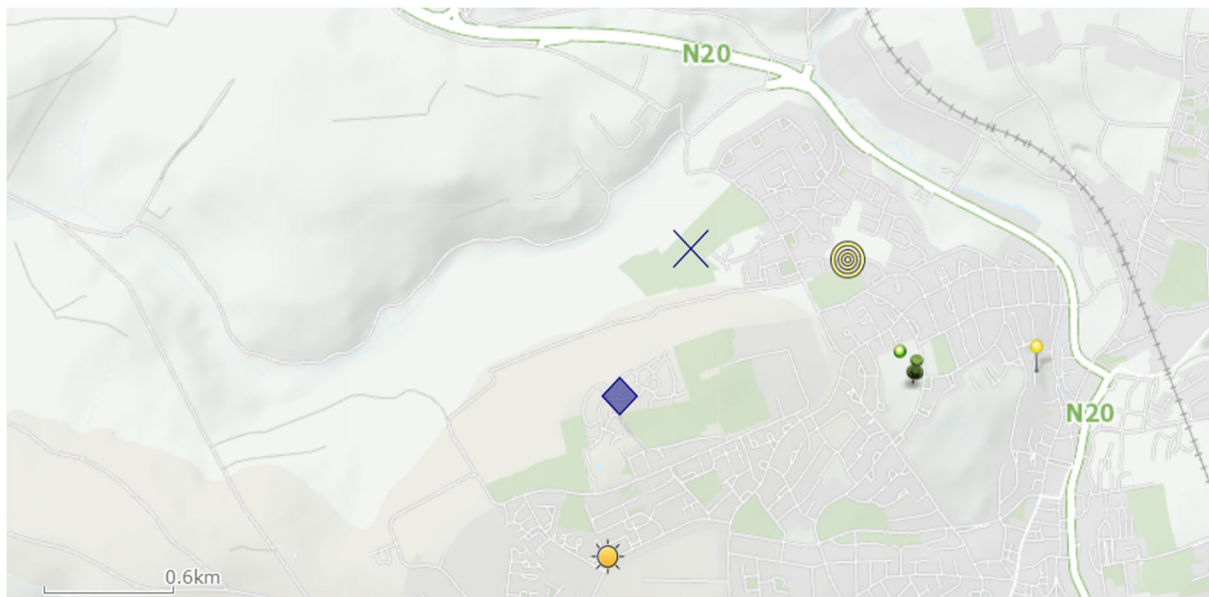
Figure (a) Map of support services listed by parents near the Fairhill Community

(Cork City Council, 2022)



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Figure (b) Map including Niche Health Project CLG (Larger scale) (Cork City Council, 2022)



Legend Key for figures (a) and (b)

|                                                                                     |                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
|  | Scoil Aiseari Chriost                  |
|  | Family Resource Centre                 |
|  | Springboard Project                    |
|  | Lets Grow Together                     |
|  | Na Piarsaigh Hurling and Football Club |
|  | Community House                        |
|  | Niche Health Project CLG               |

### **5.5 Recommendation 2- Youth and Community centre required for parental support.**

In order to provide for the above recommended designated meeting place for parents, a youth and community centre is required. This is a place where they could access information about parental supports and which would promote an increase in awareness of parental supports available in the Fairhill Community. This allows all parents to be included in the community and not isolated. Social isolation is a stressor when parenting. As seen in interviews, parents found support in family living nearby and neighbours. Parents who did not have this were more reliant on friend groups and were reported as being under stress. A youth and community centre would provide social inclusion for all parents in the Fairhill

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community. It would also allow socialisation for their children, which parents felt was very important to them.

### 5.6 Recommendation 3-Community supports for children with additional needs.

Children with additional needs living in Fairhill used services outside of the Fairhill community. One parent travels to Mahon on the southside of Cork city, to avail of the Rainbow Club service for his child who has a diagnosis of ASD. Another parent whose child has a diagnosis of dyspraxia was instrumental in sourcing informal supports for their child because there were no specific services in the Fairhill community. This parent found information in the Fairhill Community House and Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme in Knocknaheeney. Both parents spoke of extensive waiting lists for services. There is evidently a gap in the provision of services to children. It is recommended that services be readily available for all children. There is also a gap identified in relation to children with additional needs, and community supports would assist in this.

### 5.7 Recommendation 4- Recognition and promotion of parental self-care.

There is a need for more promotion of parental wellbeing. There is a gap in policy relating to this. There are no group classes in wellbeing and self-care which are flexible to the time constraints of parenting, especially those parents in employment. Peer support groups are not prioritised. Websites provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth under support and advice for parental health and wellbeing were Mychild.ie, Barnardo's, HSE.ie for effects of alcohol consumption on parenting and Drugs.ie for drug consumption effects on parenting. A helpline contact number operating Monday to Friday called parent line is also provided (Department of Children, 2021). Barnardo's provide Family Wellbeing support in the form of the Partnership with Parents (PWP) programme which focuses on parenting skills to support the parent-child relationship, there is no specific support for parent wellbeing and self-care. From this research it is apparent that this service should support and promote this.

### 5.8 Recommendation 5- Future Research

There is an opportunity for further research in Fairhill with a focus on a different cohort such as people aged 65 and over or people with disabilities, in order to determine their needs in the community. Fairhill is a close knit and resilient community where funding would be beneficial for their community to develop in accommodating their needs.

### 5.9 Reflective piece

#### **Looking back**

In completing this CARL project, I now know the value of primary research and the importance of enabling the voices of a community to be heard as sometimes they are not listened to. They are the expert of their community and are integral to community development. I was aware at all times how busy the participants lifestyles were and was very grateful for their time. This research was very enjoyable, primarily because of the participants and their friendliness and enthusiasm in their parenting and towards my research. This was also seen in the community partners through the constant

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communication and support throughout the research. I learnt that I enjoyed being a researcher, due to this type of research conducted. Interviewing participants gave me an insight into their life and created a clear picture for me of what effect the research could have.

### **Looking in**

The pandemic brought a lot of challenges in conducting this research. Meeting people face to face was not an option due to social distancing precautions. Therefore, in the recruitment process, gaining consent was done through sending consent forms in the post to the addresses provided. This process proved to be time consuming and a source of stress due to dissertation having a deadline for submission. The process of gaining consent involved obtaining addresses by calling each participant, whose number was supplied by the community partner. Some phone numbers provided were not in service or were unanswered. Those contacted, were then explained what the aims of the research were and the ethical approval process of UCC. Once in agreement, the consent forms were then sent by post along with an information sheet and contact details of the community partner and I. Due to the dissertation deadline, I felt under pressure to begin the semi structured telephone interviews as soon as was possible. As a result, I, the researcher personally dropped these to participants addresses as well as sending by post. These consent forms were either then collected at an address that suited the participant, or the community parochial hall. This added significant time delays in beginning the qualitative research method of the semi structured interviews and was a stressor for me. The original research method was to be focus groups. I was excited about this method due to the anticipated discussion and group dynamics. However, the participants did not feel comfortable taking in part due to the face to face and contact and the rising number in COVID at the time they were to be scheduled. Due to this, another MSW research ethics approval form was completed and sent to the MSW Social Research Ethics Committee (MSW REC) for ethical approval. This again caused a time delay in beginning the qualitative research.

### **Looking out**

During the telephone interviews, I found I missed visible communication cues, which in turn, I felt inhibited a flow in the conversation and elaboration on certain points. This I feel, has taken some quality away from the research findings. Through conducting telephone interviews with parents in Fairhill, I was able to understand the experience of parenting in Fairhill and the supports in place and needed, because of this, I feel I have completed my research aims and objectives.

### **Looking forward**

I am also thankful for the skills I learned, these being organisational, communicational, technical and interview skills. Organisational skills in organising participants contact details, posting and collecting documents and adhering to deadlines. Technical skills in operating an audio recorder, transferring audio files, transcribing these while ensuring GDPR guidelines

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followed at all times. Communication and interview skills in conducting telephone interviews, use of open-ended questions, silence for reflective and time management in completing the questionnaire within each half hour interview. Going forward, I will continue to apply these skills in my professional practice as a social worker, of listening to the voice of the participant, enabling that voice to be heard and being flexible in approaches, due to challenges such as the pandemic in this research process. As I begin my professional practice as a social worker, I will always remember how determined a parent is in providing the best quality of life for their child and to listen and support them in finding the supports they need while applying a systemic lens, this being integral in social work practice.

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### Appendices

#### Appendix a- Ethical Approval

##### Changes to your Research Project ☆

26th December 2021

Tutor(s):

Eilish Forrest

Reference:

2021-11

Dear Kasia

Thank you for informing the MSW research ethics committee about the changes to your approved project.

We are writing to let you know that we have noted your changes, and wish you the best of luck with your study. If you have questions, please contact your MSW tutor.

Best wishes,

Dr Kenneth Burns

On behalf of the MSW Research Ethics Committee

##### Changes to your Research Project ☆

Apologies, Kasia – that email was meant to be dated today, 26th January 2022! Thanks. -Sara

Reply



Sara Kelleher, +3  
26 Jan 2022, 17:39



MSW Research Ethics Committee

School of Applied Social Studies

Applicant:

Kasia O'Leary, MSW2, 2021/2022

Committee Date:

26th December 2021

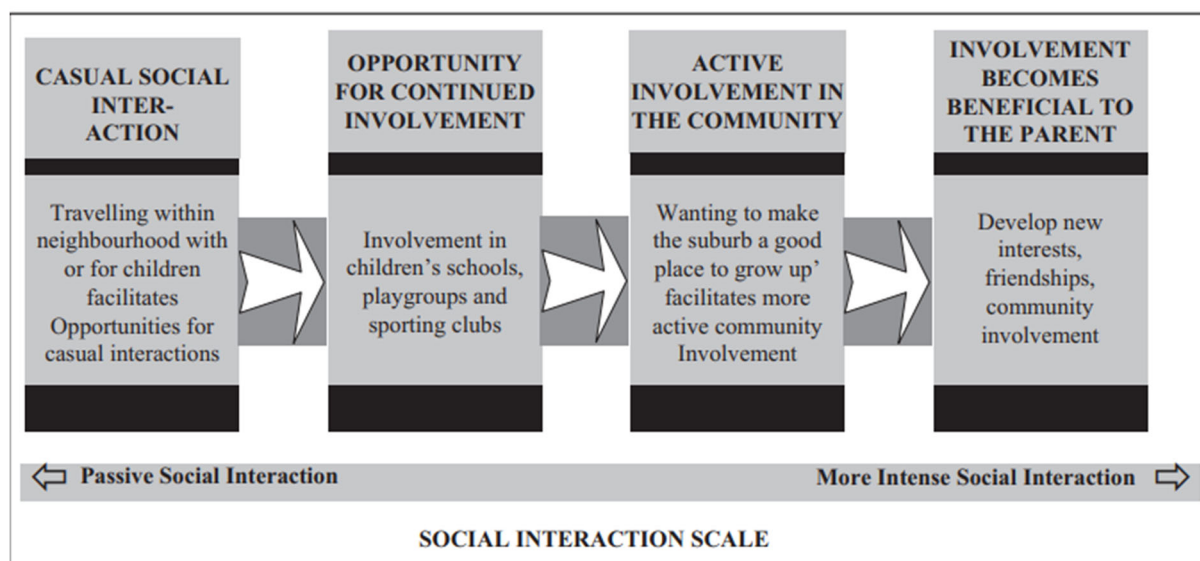
Tutor(s):

Eilish Forrest

Reference:

2021-11

Appendix b – Continuum of social interaction precipitated by children



**Figure 2.** Continuum of social interaction precipitated by children.

(Wood et al., 2013, p. 359)

Information Sheets and Consent Forms for Research Participants

Information sheet

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. This research project will constitute part-fulfilment of my MSW degree. The findings from this research project will contribute to my MSW dissertation. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the work is about and what your participation would involve, to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study to examine the parenting experience in the Fairhill community. There will be a focus on understanding the parenting needs in Fairhill community and what could have a positive impact on the experience of parenting in the community. This research project is building on the work of previous research done on the topic of anti-social behaviour among young people in Fairhill. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to take

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part in a telephone interview which will be facilitated by me. This telephone interview will be audio recorded and is expected to take 30 minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so, you can refuse to answer specific questions, or decide to withdraw from the telephone interview. Once the telephone interview has been concluded, you can choose to withdraw your contribution at any time in the subsequent two weeks after the conclusion of the telephone interview.

All of the information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous, and will be available only to the researcher, the research team, my supervisor and will be presented as part of the CARL project UCC. The only exception is where information is disclosed which indicates that there is a serious risk to you or to others.

If I believe you will cause serious physical harm to yourself or another person then I will not be able to retain confidentiality and will have to contact my supervisor and your doctor.

Please adhere to the ground rules of

- Confidentiality
- Access to a private area for telephone interview

Once the telephone interview is completed, the recording will immediately be transferred to an encrypted laptop and wiped from the recording device. The data will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Once this is done, the audio-recording will also be deleted and only the anonymized transcript will remain. This will be stored on a University College Cork supported cloud storage platform UCC Google Drive. The data will be stored for 10 years.

The information you provide may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations. The data will contribute to my MSW dissertation.

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We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study. Should you experience distress arising from the research process, the contact details for support services provided below may be of assistance.

- Parentline 01 8733500
- Samaritans Ireland 116 123

This study has obtained ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any queries about this research, you can contact me at [110336303@uicmail.ucc.ie](mailto:110336303@uicmail.ucc.ie)  
Or my supervisor: Eilish Forrest

[Eilish.forrest@ucc.ie](mailto:Eilish.forrest@ucc.ie)

If you agree to take part in this study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

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Research Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in Kasia O' Leary's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my telephone interview with Kasia O' Leary to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use my data within two weeks of the telephone interview, in which my material will be deleted from the transcript. All audio files will be deleted 1 month after the transcript is complete.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from the telephone interview (e.g. my name / location won't be used) may be quoted in presentations and publications (e.g. article, book chapter, student thesis, social media publicity of the study's findings, etc.), if I give permission below (please tick one box):

I agree to participate in this study ☐

I do not agree to participate in this study ☐

Signed: .....

Date: .....

PRINT NAME: .....

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Questionnaire



Warm up Question:

- a. What words or phrases come to mind when you think of parenting in Fairhill?
  - b. What is your reaction to what you have heard?
1. What helps/would help your experience of parenting in Fairhill?
2. How has experience of parenting changed since the COVID 19 pandemic (social distancing, social isolation)
3. Are there any specific needs for parents in the following areas?
  - a. Health and wellbeing
  - b. Social activities
  - c. Local environment (GAA pitch, playground, meeting area, seated area)
4. What can the community do to support parenting in Fairhill.
5. Are there enough activities for children in Fairhill? Please comment. E.g., youth club, GAA
6. Do you know where to get diet and exercise information for children?
7. Are you interested in courses on children's health and wellbeing?

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