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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

An Investigation of Intensive Home Based Parenting Support Services offered by Barnardos South Cork City

Mary Dore

CARL Research Project

in collaboration with

Barnardos South Cork City

Student:	Mary Dore
Name of civil society organisation/community group:	Barnardos South Cork City
Name of community group liaison person:	Roisin McDaid
Academic supervisor(s):	Dr Carmel Halton
Name and year of course:	Masters of Social Work, Year 2
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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 grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also structured community 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 (www.livingknowledge.org).

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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.

How do I reference this report?

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

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Abstract

This research explore parent's experience of receiving home based parenting support services and investigates whether it is an effective model of intervention in creating positive and lasting change in the lives of children and families. It also investigates alternative approaches to improve parental engagement with the service and approaches that Barnardos might use to better engage parents in adapting/changing how they respond to their children's needs. The research is underpinned theoretically by social constructivism, an interpretivist approach and a community based research process. Five recipients of Barnardos South Cork City home based parenting support service were interviewed and each participant's narrative was thematically analysed and recorded authentically using direct quotes. Feedback received from participants was extremely positive and it clearly identified learning curves for participants in terms of knowledge and skills acquired as a result of support received from Barnardos South Cork City. Positive outcomes were evident for both parent and child. The findings demonstrate that the relationship with the support worker is highly valued as is the availability of the worker to provide support in the home and in some situations via telephone, email and in the Barnardos office. Suggestions for alternative approaches to encourage participants to engage with the service and or in creating positive change for children were limited. Participants were satisfied with the support received and minor tweaking was suggested in relation to learning methods, with an emphasis placed on visual aids. Some participants focused on efforts to engage other family members, namely male father figures and the operation of a distinct support service to encourage engagement from these members. The inclusion of children in some support sessions was also suggested. The benefits of home based parenting support were referred to by other participants during interviews.

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Chapter One: Research Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the research subject. It begins by providing the background and rationale of the research chosen followed by details pertaining to the aim of the research, the objectives and the research questions being examined. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of each chapter in the research report.

1.2 Research Background and Rationale

This research is carried out as part of University College Cork's (UCC) Community-Academic Research Link (CARL) initiative. It involves a community based research process which intrigued me as a student research as it offered me the opportunity to work collaboratively with a community organisation while carrying out a piece of research. The initiative also gave me the opportunity to engage with relevant community members.

Initially, I reviewed the list of CARL projects on offer for the academic year 2018/2019. None of the listed research topics were of particular interest to me and that was when I decided to make efforts to approach Barnardos. I have a keen interest in early intervention and family support as a practice intervention and I admire the ethos of Barnardos as an organisation and the services that they provide. The CARL co-ordinator contacted Barnardos in Cork City on my behalf, explained that a student was interested in working with them to carry out a piece of research and Barnardos South Cork City accepted the offer. Barnardos South Cork City proposed a research topic evaluating the support they offer to families. Discussions were held between Barnardos South Cork City, myself as the researcher and the research supervisor and over time the topic developed and evolved. Both parties agreed on the aim of the research, objectives and research questions which were all considered in generation of the research title "An Investigation of Intensive Home Based Parenting Support Services offered by Barnardos South Cork City".

Barnardos have been delivering home based intensive parenting support services in the South Cork region for twenty years using a variety of evidence based parenting

programmes. Barnardos South Cork City proposed to undertake this study in order to gain a robust understanding of what parents' experiences have been of receiving these services and to explore whether home based intensive parenting support practice is an effective model of intervention for families. Barnardos hope that this research will identify whether this intervention model can effect positive and lasting change in the lives of the children and families that receive the service. Furthermore, it is envisaged that the study will give Barnardos South Cork City Family Support Project an opportunity to learn from the valuable feedback of parents and to enhance the organisation's practice to fully meet the needs of those in which services are provide to.

A contextual note referring to the population of participants is important to reference as all participants interviewed participated with the home based parenting support service of their own free will and none of the interviewees resided in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area.

1.3 Aim of Research

The aim of this research is to explore parent's experience of Barnardos South Cork City home based intensive parenting support as a method of practice intervention to effect positive change in their children's lives and to identify any alternative approaches to improve parental engagement with the service.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of conducting this research project are as follows:

a) To develop an understanding of home based parenting support as a method of practice intervention, which sets out to effect positive change in children's lives.
b) To formulate a report on findings from interviews carried out in conjunction with a literature review relating to home based parenting support.
c) To present the findings of the research to Barnardos South Cork City.
d) To inform future parenting support work practice for Barnardos South Cork City.

1.5 Research Questions

This research project proposes to answer the following research questions:

a) What are parents' experiences of Barnardos home based parenting support approach and does it positively influence how parents respond to their children's needs?
b) What approaches might Barnardos use to better engage parents in adapting/changing how they respond to their children's needs, as necessary?

1.6 Overview of Chapters

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one introduces the research project. It provides an outline of the study, the background and rationale for completing the research and it details the aim of the study, the objectives and the research questions underpinning the study.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Chapter two examines the process in which the research was carried out. It explores the researchers theoretical and epistemological perspective in relation to the research topic and the research methods used. It explains the limitations of the study and provide detail relating to consideration given to ethical concerns.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Chapter three focuses on the secondary research component of the study. It explores available literature relating to the topic, specifically examining the role of home based parenting support and the delivery of it as a practice intervention, highlighting the role of the parent and suitable approach to the delivery of the intervention.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

Chapter four presents the analysed data collected through the primary research aspect of the study. The analysed data is discussed and referenced in correlation with the literature review.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter five is the final chapter and draws on the findings of the research and the literature to conclude the research and to propose recommendations going forward both

in terms of research and practice relating to the topic. The chapter finishes with a reflective piece outlining the researcher's experience of carrying out the research.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the research. It provided a deeper understanding and meaning of the research to the reader by describing the background and rationale for undertaking the research and it outlined the aim of the study, the objectives and the underpinning research questions. A brief outline of each chapter was also provided.

Chapter Two: Research Design

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the research process with due regard given to the process of undertaking a CARL project. The researcher's theoretical perspective and epistemological positioning in relation to parent's experience of receiving a home based parenting support service will be provided. The methods utilised in the data collection and data analysis will be discussed as will the ethical considerations posed by conducting the research. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the limitations imposed on conducting the research and how this shaped the research undertaken.

2.2 Theoretical Perspective and Epistemological Consideration

Scott & Marshall (2009, p. 648) refer to research design as a "strategic plan….. setting out the broad outline and key features of the work to be undertaken, including methods of data collection and analysis to be employed". This research is strategically planned and underpinned by the researcher's theoretical perspective and epistemological considerations.

2.2.1 Epistemological Consideration

Epistemology is described by Carey (2009, p.50) as the "theory of knowledge", suggesting that different ways of learning and knowing about the social world exist. It relates to how humans know what they know (evidence) and how they make sense of it (logic), irrelevant of how the knowledge is consumed. This theory applies to the social research in question as the primary focus of the research is on assessing research participant's individual personal experience. A number of epistemological positions could be taken however, the most appropriate to this research is that of **social constructivism**.

Social constructivism focuses on the context in which meaning is developed (Waloszek, 2017). This indicates that meaning is constructed rather than founded and reality is constructed through personal and social factors (Teater, 2010). Social constructivism theory demonstrates that an experience, of receiving home based parenting support for example, can have multiple meanings rather than one fixed understanding of the experience. This research seeks to retrieve and review the meaning of home based parenting support through the narrative of those previously in receipt of the support and undoubtedly people sought and received the support in varying contexts. Therefore a social constructivism positioning enables the researcher to consider the different experiences attained by research participants, the meaning of the experience and how the participants make sense of the experience.

2.2.2 Theoretical Perspective

As the research question suggests, the research requires the participation of parents who have received home based parenting support from Barnardos South Cork City. Participation will entail parents providing a narrative of their personal experience of home based parenting support. The researcher will need to develop an understanding of each narrative and this will be achieved through an **interpretivist** approach.

Carey (2009, p.152) states "interpretivism embodies and supports the core principles of both the life history approach, and qualitative research in general – emphasizing and allowing participants' vocal accounts to take precedence while also contextualizing and framing these perspectives within a theory". As a student social worker I recognise the importance of listening and understanding people's experiences and the context in which the experience occurs. Therefor the description of interpretivism provided by Carey (2009) will serve as the pinnacle theoretical understanding of the topic being researched. It will enable the researcher to frame each narrative contextually in conjunction with each participant's personal experience.

2.2.3 Research Methods

A person's experience is unmeasurable. Emphasis is placed on the individual's personal experience, the meaning of that experience for each individual and how the individual makes sense of the experience. Therefore, the research method used to explore the experience of parents who received home based parenting support is **qualitative research**. Carey (2009) suggests that qualitative research enables the interpretation of people's understanding and their corresponding experiences. It is also suggested by Carey (2009) that qualitative research enables the exploration of themes arising from the research such as attitudes, behaviours and experience. In order to achieve such attributes of qualitative research, the research consists of both primary and secondary qualitative research methods.

2.2.4 Primary Research

The researcher interviewed five participants, all of whom previously received home based parenting support. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from participants which comprised of open ended questions. This approach was utilised to allow participants to express freely their experience of the support received and the interview questions, generated collaboratively with Barnardos South Cork City, were used as a guide for topics to be covered during the interview. Semi-structured interviews also allowed the interviewer to use probing questions. This enabled the interviewer to get a deeper understanding of how the interviewee constructed meaning in relation to the experience being described (May, 2011).

2.2.5 Secondary Research

Initially a broad literature scoping exercise was carried out in relation to Home based Family Support using secondary sources such as academic books and journals and also Barnardos reporting documentation. However, a number of months later Barnardos decided to shift the research focus to Home based Parenting Support. Parenting support is one of the many supports offered by Barnardos under the umbrella of Family Support. Subsequently, the research questions were refocused and a further literature scoping review was required.

The literature scoping review continued having completed the interviews. The diversity of participants experience led to a variety of themes being identified and the literature was reviewed again to provide a greater depth and meaning to the themes presented. The scoping review was limited in a sense, time constraints prevailed and did now allow for an in depth review.

2.2.6 Sampling

Initially it was agreed with Barnardos South Cork City that potential interview participants would be selected randomly and the only criteria for selection was that potential interview participants had previously received home based parenting support. However, after submitting my research application to the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC), SERC requested that purposive sampling be used and requested that Barnardos South Cork City screen out families referred through the family courts or child protection services due to the seriousness and sensitive circumstances for which families may be referred to Barnardos. This was then agreed with Barnardos and they selected and contacted 15 potential participants, six of whom expressed an interest to participate in the study. I contacted the six participants and scheduled interview dates and times with participants. I presented participants with an information sheet detailing the particulars of the research and of participating in the study in addition to consent forms should they wish to proceed with the interview.

Retrospectively, the first interview I carried out was a piloting interview. During the first interview, I began to realise that the interviewee did not receive home based parenting support and I suspected that her family received a different support service form Barnardos. I contacted the Barnardos link person specific to his research project, to confirm the details shared with me in the interview were not related to support received from the home based parenting support programme but instead related to a different programme. The link person confirmed this and apologised, stating that it was a mistake and that, that participant's details were selected in error. The second interview scheduled was relevant to home based parenting support however, the third was not. At the beginning of the third interview I learnt that the participant had not received

home based parenting support. I explained to the participant that the research was focused on families who had received home based parenting support only and that she had been selected in error. I apologised and ended the interview. I contacted the Barnardos link person to explain the scenario presented during interview number three and we agreed that I would contact the three remaining participants to confirm they had received home based parenting support. One out of the three received home based parenting support.

Barnardos purposively selected an additional three participants which resulted in a total of five interviews. Six interviews were originally planned however, time was limited after the discovery of the selection error and it was agreed with Barnardos that five interviews would be adequate.

2.2.7 Data Analysis

It was decided that a thematic data analysis would be the most suitable method to analyse data obtained from the interviews. This involved reading the transcripts, which were manually transcribed from the digitally recorded interviews, multiple times to become familiar with the content of each interview and to identify any similarities in details provided. When transcribing the interviews, as the interviewer, I generated a short summary at the end of each transcript detailing points of interest or similarities arising amongst interviews. The transcripts and summaries were reviewed and similar themes amongst interviews were identified and grouped together (Bamberger et al, 2006). The grouped concepts will be coded by colour, interpreted and examined in conjunction with the literature review. This process will assist in answering the research questions posed at the beginning of the study, formulate conclusions and propose recommendations based on the research findings.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

As part of the Community Research Academic Links process, at the commencement stage of the research, a research agreement was developed and agreed upon between the researcher, research supervisor and Barnardos South Cork City. The researcher then

completed a research application and sought written permission from Barnardos to carry out the research.

As the research involved interviewing members of the public, the researcher also had to apply to UCC's SREC for ethical approval. The application was completed and submitted for initial review of the Masters of Social Work (MSW) Social Research Ethics Committee prior to submitting the application to SREC. It was agreed within the MSW SREC that the application did not warrant further ethical approval from the overarching Social Research Ethics Committee and ethical approval was granted from MSW SREC. Prior to approval being granted, MSW SREC required some minor changes to the application. The changes were mainly concerned with sampling, data storage and the publication of the final report on the CARL website, changes were made to the application and adhered to in the research process.

Also, in accordance with the ethical considerations of conducting the research, the researcher briefly explained the details and background information to participants during the initial phone call and answered any question potential participants had at that initial stage. Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of the researcher being responsive to interviewees concerns while also ensuring that minimal inconvenience is caused. This was considered when arranging interview location, date and time with interviewees. The researcher followed this approach through to when the researcher met in person with participants. An information sheet was developed by the researcher, which is included in the appendix, detailing aspects of the study such as confidentiality, voluntary participation and data storage which was shared with participants at the beginning of each interview. Participants were reassured that confidentially would be highly regarded and that interviewees would be assigned a pseudonym and any identifying information from the interview would be excluded from the transcripts and would be excluded from the report. Participants were also offered support from Barnardos South Cork city should any emotional distress arise from the interview. Having read and discussed the information sheet and if participants were willing to proceed with the interview, participants were requested to sign a consent sheet.

2.4 Research Limitations

Apart from the research being limited by time and word count restrictions, the other significant limitation was purposive sampling. This limited participants to low risk cases whereby four out of the five participants were self-referrals to Barnardos South Cork City home based parenting support service.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided and overview of the process undertaken as part of a CARL project. It gave insight into the researcher's theoretical and epistemological positing, providing a framework for the research. Data collection and analysis methods were discussed. Ethical considerations relating to the project were explored and the chapter concluded by discussing the research limitations.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examine relevant literature to provide the reader with a framework in which to understand home based parenting support, what it is and what it looks like in practice. The parental role is explored and the concepts underpinning parenting support practice.

3.2 What is Home based Parenting Support?

No specific definition to explain home based parenting support can be identified within the literature. However, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA] (2015) state that parenting support is located under the umbrella term of family support and it is considered as a subdivision of this type of support. Family support is "provided mainly to particularly vulnerable children in disadvantaged areas, and often include preschool, parental education, development, and support activities, as well as homemaker, visiting schemes and youth education and training projects" (Murphy, 1996).

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency describe parenting support as "a style of work and a set of activities that provides information, advice and assistance to parents and carers in relation to the upbringing of their children, in order to maximise their child's potential" (Child and Family Agency, 2013, p.9). Connolly and Devaney (2017) suggest that parenting support focuses on parent well-being and its significance in contributing to improved child well-being. The location of the parenting support services is highlighted by Rochford et al. (2014) as being important, stating that it should be in places that are accessible and at time's suitable to the parent's needs. The need for outreach work was also identified as being important in supporting engagement from vulnerable or hard to reach individuals (Rochford et al., 2014).

Iwaniec (2006, p.222) explores the parenting component specifically in which she refers to "good enough" parenting. She suggests that, in order for parents to provide "good enough" parenting, they must have personal commitment and certain resources to fulfil the parenting role. Iwaniec (2006) clarifies further, stating that in order for parents to fulfil such duties, their needs as a parent and as an individual must also be met. This conforms with what Bowlby (1951, p. 84) suggested "Just as children are absolutely dependent on their parents for sustenance, so in all hut the most primitive communities, are parents, especially their mothers, dependent on a greater society for economic provision. If a community values its children, it must cherish its parents". The sustenance in which Iwaniec (2006) refers to can be wide raging covering basic needs such as shelter, psychological needs for support, recognition and approval from family members and the community in which they live.

To consider parenting support in conjunction with Bronfrenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, support can be offered at a societal level, community level and at an individual level. However, for the purpose of this study, the latter level of the system will be explored. The individual level of the system will be explored but individual in the context of a family system also. Psychiatrist Murray Bowen (1978) discusses the theory of family systems, relationships within families and the roles individuals hold within family systems and he suggests that the emotional symptoms of an individual are an expression of emotional symptoms of the wider family. He maintains that the driving force underlying human behaviour is the culmination of family members seeking balance between togetherness and distance. Bowen (1978) refers to forces that shape the functioning of a family unit such as the family emotional system and the family projection process. His research on emotional systems within a family identifies four patterns of emotional functioning that exist in a family; martial conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of a child and emotional distance. Bowen's (1978) theory of the family projection process suggests that parents pass their emotional problem on to their child.

Parenting support at an individual family level, as outlined in Tusla's Parenting Support Strategy (2013) comprises of preventative work with a view to achieving better outcomes for children, reducing and or preventing difficulties emerging in children's lives, enhance family functioning and for children's rights to be realised. Additionally, DCYA (2015)

break down the composition of the support further stating that parenting support includes formal support directed at individual parents, children or families by providing advice, emotional and practical support.

3.3 Providing Parenting Support

Literature provides guidance when providing parenting support however, a statutory requirement is also placed on the parent in terms of rearing their children. Parenting support is an opportunity for parents to enhance and develop parenting skills in meeting their parental responsibilities.

3.3.1 The Parental Role

Parents' primary responsibility in the upbringing of their children is to ensure the fulfilment of the child's best interest in a manner that is non-violent, nurturing, empowering, and which provides recognition and guidance by setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child (Council of Europe, 2006). This responsibility is also underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in correlation with the rights of the child. The Child and Family Agency (2013) recommend the following parenting responsibilities and tasks should be followed in order to meet the needs of the child and to ensure the responsibilities of the parent are carried out effectively.

Area of responsibility	Task
Physical care	Provide your child with nutritious food, shelter and rest. Encourage age appropriate physical exercise.
Safety	Provide a healthy and safe environment.
Affection and Positive Regard	Give overt physical and verbal warmth and comfort.
Emotional security and Belonging	Give approval, responsiveness and be aware of non-verbal signals. Be warm, sensitive and comforting. Listen to your child and allow them to make choices.
Boundaries & Managing Behaviour	Adopt a positive parenting style: be consistent, predictable and provide explanations. Give clear statements on what is acceptable. Provide good supervision.
Cognitive and Language Development	Talk a lot to your child. Encourage learning and exploration. Play with your child and be responsive to your child whilst playing together. Encourage constructive play. Read to your child and help them as they learn to read.
Learning Environment	Provide a stimulating learning environment and allow challenges within the child's capability. Monitor and participate in your child's schooling. Manage Transitions well.
Social Behaviour and Communication	Be a good role model. Foster reliability, reasonableness, and assertiveness. Facilitate peer contact and facilitate new social experiences.

Figure 1: Parenting responsibilities and tasks

It is also suggested that parents play a vital role in influencing their children both before and after birth (Connolly and Devaney, 2017) in areas such as social, physical and emotional well-being and subsequent outcomes within each domain (DCYA, 2015).

An outcome is described by Bandura (1977a, p.22) as a "consequence of a performance, not the performance itself" and while it is acknowledged that families live in a variety of different contexts and family needs differ, it is also acknowledged that parenting as a set of skills can be learnt (Daly, 2011) to help manage corresponding context and needs.

Similarly, children can learn skills and gain knowledge from a very early age. Children need to receive instructions indicating what they can and cannot do and the reason why (Iwaniec, 2006). In terms of behavioural development, Iwaniec (2006) states that children have to learn the appropriateness, inappropriateness and boundaries of their behaviour which can be learnt and copied where appropriate parenting models are provided. The provision of an

appropriate parental model includes a framework whereby rational and instruction are provided by the parent as well as correcting the child, supervising them and guiding them (Iwaniec, 2006). Subsequently, knowledge is acquired by the child in terms of boundaries and behaviour management however, the level of knowledge attained is dependent on the parent's ability, awareness, willingness and motivation to guide the child.

Psychologist Albert Bandura refers to motivation and learning from models in his research. The psychologist links motivation to self-efficacy and defines self-efficacy as a person's ability to believe that they can master a particular skill. He suggests that individual's self-efficacy beliefs act as an important element in human motivation and states the higher a person's self-efficacy beliefs are, the more confident they are in believing that they can master a challenge (Bandura. 1977b). It is suggested that such individuals recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments. Conversely, individuals with lower self-efficacy beliefs are likely to be less confident and do not believe that they can perform well (Bandura, 1977b). Nonetheless, Bandura (1977b) suggests that self-efficacy beliefs can be developed or increased though different process:

- Mastery experience - helps a person achieve simple tasks which ultimately lead to more complex goals
- Social modelling – an identifiable model is provided and demonstrates the processes that succeeds a behaviour
- Verbal persuasion – encouraging an individual to compete a task or achieve a certain behaviour

Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977b) revolves around knowledge acquisition and the ability of an individual to learn directly from observing others, a process referred to as "*modeling*". Bandura's theory suggests that effective modeling teaches individuals general rules and strategies for managing different scenarios.

The engagement and participation of parents in contributing to better outcomes for their children is increasingly acknowledged as being an important aspect in delivering a support service (Darlington et al., 2010). Parents can play a role not

alone as a parent receiving parental support but also in terms of decision-making in relation to service planning, service delivery and service evaluation (Katz et al., 2007). This type of practice is considered to be more ethical and a more effective method in providing a service (Corby et al., 1996) and particularly effective in terms of reducing barriers of engagement and in promoting social inclusion (Katz et al., 2007). Engagement and inclusion are considered especially important when parents seek support voluntarily and where help is accepted according to Katz et al. (2007).

3.3.2 Parenting Support Concepts

Parenting support has a preventative element to its practice whereby the parent is the target of the intervention and the support worker offers a wide range of support in a multitude of forms.

3.3.2.1 Preventative Practice

Hardiker et al. (1991) developed the Hardiker model to prevent family breakdown by utilising preventative practice. The model demonstrates how support can be offered at different stages according to different levels of need. The Child and Family Agency (2013) used the Hardiker model template to categorise the level of parenting support.

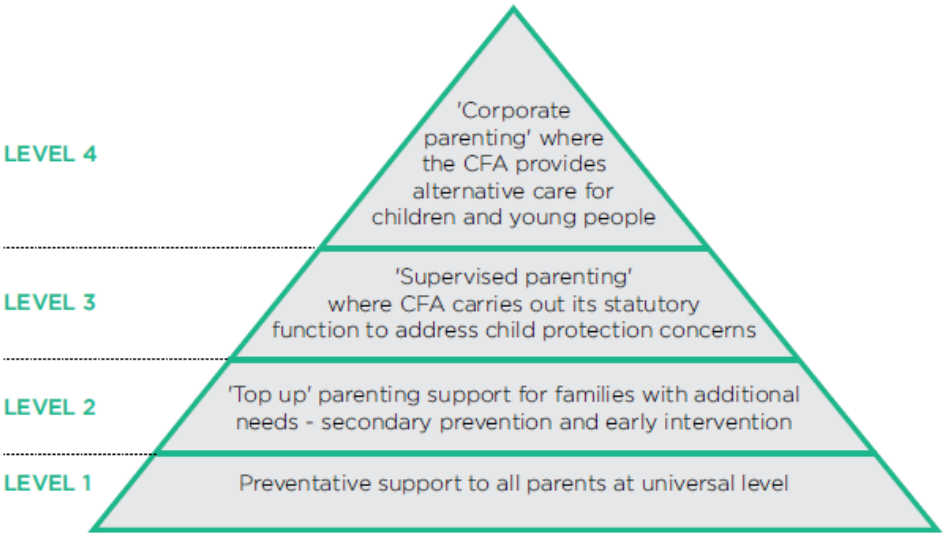


Fig. 2: Parenting Support and Hardiker's (1991) levels of need

The support is tailored by the parenting support practitioner to meet the individual needs of the family while endeavouring for the minimum support required (Child and Family Agency, 2013). Broadhurst et al., (2009) suggests that the role of the "expert" is essential in providing advice and in circumstances where parents require more intensive support than that offered by a standalone programmatic approach, Fives et al. (2014, p. 15) states that an alternative approach "requires observation, attention, and discrete interventions from key professionals and services".

3.3.2.2 Intervention Focus

Parenting support in practice, according to Daly (2013) is when parents are the target of the intervention and that the intervention is focused on increasing parent's child-rearing competencies and resources such as knowledge, information, skills personal, social and material. The Child and Family Agency (2013) state that the support can range from something as simple as signposting parents to services or providing information to more intensive support where families have significant additional needs, where parental capacity may be questionable and the potential for children to be at risk.

3.3.2.3 Therapeutic Relationship

The parenting support practitioner's capacity to establish and develop a therapeutic relationship with the family is suggested by the Child and Family Agency (2013) as being a key component in providing support to parents. Biestek (1957, p. V) speaks about casework relationships and notes that the relationship is "the soul of social casework" and suggests 7 guiding principles to casework relationships. The guiding principles refer to workers listening purposively, sensitivity to parents feelings, acceptance of the parent for who they are while maintaining dignity and self-worth, recognising that each parent is a unique individual, non-judgemental attitude, parents having the freedom to make own choices and the preservation of confidentiality.

It is not surprising that a therapeutic relationship is a crucial feature of providing parenting support as parenting support is underpinned by theories where relationships are a featuring theme. For example, social support, social capital and resilience (Child and Family Agency, 2013).

Social Support: Social support can be described as the giving and receiving of help which, according to Cutrona (2000) encompasses four elements of support; practical, emotional, advice and esteem. Formal support in the form of professional relationships is sometimes required (Gilligan, 2000 and Gardner, 2003). It is suggested by the Department of Health, Social Service and Public Safety (2009) that for the support to truly benefit the recipient, the support must be offered in a positive and giving manner in order for the support to be perceived as helpful by the recipient.

Resilience: Resilience is a person's ability to cope with difficulties and challenges and to be optimistic, positive and strengthened after the experience (Rutter, 1985). Rutter (1985) states that "good relationships outside the family can have the protective effect similar to that which apparently stems from within the immediate family". Factors associated with resilience are self-esteem and confidence, the ability to manage change and to possess problem solving skills.

Social Capital: Social capital is described as the social connections and links between people based on trust, reciprocity and shared norms, created by peoples' actions (Bullen and Onyx, 2001). Coleman (1988) cited Hanifan (1916) describing social capital as "those tangible assets that count most in the daily lives of people" such as time, resources, effort and energy parents invest in their relationship with their children (Coleman, 1988).

3.4 Conclusion

The literature suggests that parenting support is a preventative practice, targeted at parents and focusing on parental well-being and its significance in achieving better outcomes for children. It is evident that parenting support is an opportunity for parents to learn, develop and improve parenting skills to fulfil their parenting responsibilities and subsequently enhance the life of the child.

Chapter Four: Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings gathered from data collected through face to face interviews with five participants who received home based parenting support from Barnardos South Cork City. The data was analysed thematically and subsequently the research findings are grouped as follows:

- Motives for Participating with the Service
- Valuing the Relationship Factor
- Learning Outcomes
- Future Service Developments

The themes generated offer a glimpse of home based parenting support and how parents experienced the service. The lived experiences of interviews are authentically shared with the reader by using direct quotes from interviews.

4.2 Motives for Participating with the Service

All participants described having "*difficulties*" and or "*problems*" with their children's "*behaviour*" and or "*emotions*" when asked how they became involved with Barnardos. Other motives for participation also became evident during the interviews. Participants spoke, directly or indirectly, about motives relating to parental wellbeing, information received form peers and or government agencies which influenced their involvement with the service.

4.2.1 Parent Wellbeing

Interviewees referred to a variety of personal wellbeing factors during the course of interviews

> "*I was doubting my parenting skills…. myself; as a parent as an individual … the decisions I was making…I though Barnardos might help give me clarity…*

I could use it to enhance other areas" (Molly *pseudonyms used for all participants*)

Similarly, Tess spoke about "*self-doubt*" and decision making

"*thinking I was doing the wrong thing with the kids*"

and she also spoke about having

"*no control in the house…no respect…I kind of went from being a parent to a person who was just trying to keep the peace*".

Kate also indirectly referred to control being a motive for participating in the service

"*she (daughter) had been in control of us really when we started*".

Marian used the analogy of domestic abuse between parents in a household to explain partially her motive for becoming involved

"*somebody never says anything, it gives that person more power to continue doing what they're doing…she (daughter) was quite happy to continue…nobody else outside the house knew…maybe it wasn't comfortable for her but maybe it was something that she needed to realise, that mom was struggling with this kind of behaviour…and that I needed…help* ".

A "*very abusive marriage*" was the originating motive for participation for Tess in the sense that

"*he (ex-husband) actually kind of replaced the control and abuse that he had on me with her (daughter)…telling her that her mom was bad, make things difficult for her…she was acting up big time for me…everything I was doing, she was making difficult*"

Embarrassment and isolation were other influencing factors

> "*I'm retired, I suppose I felt a bit isolated…I suppose there was a bit of embarrassment there as well that I felt that my twelve year old Amy that I was trying to help, she was getting angry and I suppose I wouldn't be inclined to say it to the rest of the family*" (Marian)

4.2.2 Peers

Molly is part of a support group for parents whose children have dyspraxia and explains that she

> "*heard about their service (Barnardos) through other people…for general wellbeing and things like that, I heard Barnardos coming up quite a bit…as being a strong service form the parenting side of things"*.

4.2.3 Government Agencies

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) were acknowledged in two interviews as routes to accessing the Barnardos service

> "*Barnardos became involved through CAMHS*" (Ann).

Ann also stated that Barnardos was more to

> "*help me to help him*".

and Marian notes that

> "*I made a call to CAMHS when I was having difficulties…they felt it was more behaviour and emotional rather than mental area so they put me in contact with Barnardos*"

Tess shared that her time working with the Child and Family Agency was coming to an end and she was

> "*begging them not to leave…and they put me onto Barnardos just as a complementary thing*"

4.2.4 Discussion

Is it clear that all interviewees were motivated to participate in the home based parenting support service.[SW1] Participants had an understanding of what Barnardos could offer them in terms of parental support and they also had an understanding of their own personal needs and wellbeing. Interviewees demonstrated an awareness of forces that shaped the functioning of their respective families. This can ultimately be linked to what Bowen (1978) references as the family emotional system which is influenced by martial conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of a child and emotional distance.

A comment made by Ann articulates perfectly the function of parenting support "*help me to help him*" which resonates with suggestions made by Connolly and Devaney (2017) who maintain that parenting support focuses on parent well-being and its significance in contributing to improved child well-being. Parental well-being emerged indirectly from the findings and appeared to be a strong motivating factor for participating in the service. Interviewees spoke about self-doubt, having no control, no respect from their children and difficulties managing children's behaviour which perhaps demonstrates parents having low self-efficacy beliefs at the beginning of the support service. Although, Bundura (1977a) believes that individuals with low self-efficacy beliefs avoid challenging tasks, this cohort of service recipients appear to have accepted the challenge and used it as a motivating factor to participate in the home based parenting support service.

4.3 Valuing the Relationship Factor

Interviewees were not asked directly about their relationship with the Barnardos worker however, interviewees spoke about it when asked what did Barnardos do?, what was their experience of working with Barnardos? and what aspects did they like?. When answering these questions, most interviewees referred to the worker and used positive adjectives when talking about them; "*lovely*" (Ann), "*marvellous*" (Molly), "*very good*" (Kate), "*excellent*" (Marian). When asked to break down what these adjectives meant and through the course of conversation the following elements of the relationship with the Barnardos worker came to fruition and were valued by interviewees.

4.3.1 Characteristics of Availability

All interviewees valued the availability of support being offered in the home

> "*I liked the way she came to the house, you didn't have to leave the house…she could see John in his own home setting and how he copes in his own environment which was brilliant*" (Ann)

> "*I found that very helpful…the fact that they were coming to my home*" (Molly)

> "*found it an advantage coming to the home especially when she (daughter) would get involved sometimes*" (Kate)

> "*I liked that she came to my house…it was very comfortable, I felt more at home in my own house*" (Marian)

> "*it was easier for me to do it at home…it was a god send really because there would have been weeks I'd have been cancelling with night feeds and children off school sick. It did make a huge difference*" (Tess)

The availability of the staff member for advice and support outside of the scheduled home visit time was mentioned by most interviewees

"*if you had any questions like you could ring up and ask…for a bit of advice and a bit of support*" (Ann)

"*what I found good too was when we had a crisis with her (daughter), I could ring and they'd say come in*" (Kate)

"*I always knew that if I needed help all I had to do was to ring May*" (Marian)

"*if I ever needed her (Barnardos worker), which I have done, I can email her if they've (children) got me into a tizzy I can ring her so it's grand*" (Tess)

The availability of the staff member to visit at times that suited the individual was appreciated by some

"*she was very flexible…made it very easy for me to continue with the course…I found that really helpful…able to work around my schedule…went out of her way*" (Molly)

"*I'm quite busy…she facilitated that*" (Marian)

Having somebody to talk to and feeling listened to were described by some participants

"*able to tell somebody…got things off my chest…May understood*" (Marian)

"*she really got to know the family through listening to me…she would always give time*" (Tess)

4.3.2 Aspects of Engagement

Nearly all interviewees made reference to positive aspects of engaging with the staff worker and what that meant for them

> "*she was very easy to get on with…the support was amazing*" (Ann)

> "*from the moment Caroline picked up the phone to me I kind of connected with her…another really personable thing, I never really felt intimidated, I felt like it was a friend visiting…there for support rather than judging…very much on your side…supportive beyond the call of duty*" (Molly)

> "*something I could look forward to…she was very practical… approachable, she never once gave me the feeling that she thought that what I had done, or was doing, was really not the right thing*" (Marian)

> "*I actually really enjoyed it, I was kind of sad when it was over because I got so used to Olive calling…it was more someone coming to have a nice chat…it didn't feel like work even though we were making progress…Olive was very very respectful of my feelings*" (Tess)

4.3.3 Source of Reassurance

Some interviewees indicated that the presence of a worker was comforting and a source of encouragement

> "*it was nice to reaffirm that you were doing this right…she was good at affirming what I was doing and then kind of said well next time you might think about doing this, you might think about doing that*" (Marian)

> "*I liked knowing that I had back-up…I could say to Olive…what do you think?... it was nice to have the reassurance and back-up*" (Tess)

4.3.4 Discussion

All interviewees spoke positively about Barnardos support staff members that they worked with. This is important as the literature suggests that parenting support practitioners ability to establish and develop a therapeutic relationship with the family is a key component in providing support to parents the (Child and Family Agency, 2013). When interviewees described the relationship with the worker, they indirectly referred to some of Biestek's (1957) guiding principles in casework relationships. The findings demonstrate that interviewees felt that they were listened to, that their feelings were respected, they were not being judged, it was a personable experience and that they were free to make independent choices. The findings also illustrate the advantage of the service being available in individual's homes and at times that suited them personally, a feature of parenting support referenced by Rochford et al. (2014) as being an important provision in the delivery of parenting support services.

4.4 Learning Outcomes

All interviewees described the service as being beneficial in influencing how they parented their children

- Ann said that it "*enhanced*" her parenting to influence positive change,
- Molly stated that "*the whole thing was a positive experience*",
- Kate said things were "*working very well… we were getting there*",
- Marian thought that "it definitely did help…*positive side of things then was when I saw there was some improvement in my Amy's behavior*"
- Tess said "*it actually did work*"

When asked if the parenting support still positively influences how they parent their child, interviewees said

- "*oh definitely, 100%...I'm still using them today*" (Ann), Ann also stated elsewhere in the interview that "*we've slipped back a small bit*". Ann finished the programme in "*I think it was about 2015*".
- "*it absolutely does, now I'm human, I forget at times but the core of what I learnt is still very much there*" (Molly), Molly also stated elsewhere in the interview that "*it's a long slow process but we're getting there*" and that "*we're going*

through a difficult stage again at the moment but I'm handling it much better". Molly finished the programme "*in the last year or two*".

- "*I do try some of them, sometimes they don't work as well anymore*" (Kate). Kate stopped receiving the service "*about a year ago*".
- "*well ya I would still refer back to things we would have spoken about*"(Marian), Marian also stated that "*it is still a work in progress I would think*". She finished the programme "*last year*".
- "*ya definitely. It goes a bit wayward sometimes but most of the time I do have it*" (Tess). Tess finished the programme "*around last June*".

Interviewees referred to being "*taught*", made "*think*", "*realise*" and being "*reminded*" by the Barnardos worker which resulted in a range of different learning outcomes for the interviewees.

4.4.1 Knowledge Acquisition

Knowledge acquisition is achieved through a variety of different methods and this was apparent from speaking with the interviewees.

4.4.1.1 Skills, Techniques and Strategies

All interviewees spoke about different parenting skills, techniques and strategies that the Barnardos workers taught them to help influence positive change in their child's life.

> "*showing me strategies…breathing exercises and things like that, that I never thought of before which were introduced, which was brilliant… he will do it himself now which is great*" (Ann)

> "*taught me to come down to their (children) level of thinking…to be clear about my instructions…to be simple and clear…being consistent…since I'm giving clear instruction, she's completing her task or chores. She's actually asking to do more…she takes pride in her work*" (Molly)

> "*we got lots of steps off Barnardos, we were taught to go together because she was playing us off each other…we knew that as such but we didn't know ways of working it.*" also "*being consistent, sticking to something*" (Kate)

Marian acknowledged the different methods that she was taught by the Barnardos worker

> "*a programme of parenting techniques…programme of strategies… relaxing techniques, playing soothing music at night time, massaging my Amy's hands…another idea was lighting, different colours…at night time…to sooth down*"

She also identified how her child benefited from one particular strategy and how her child was able to acknowledge the value of the technique

> "*the idea about calming her at night time…she did resist very very much to having the calming music to begin with…but after awhile she realised that yes it was calming her down and she was starting to sleep better so from that point of view those techniques were good*" (Marian)

Tess also demonstrates how the knowledge she gained form Barnardos was transferred to her daughter

> "*Olive taught me that if she (daughter) does want to engage with it, ask her what it is she wants to say…and then she doesn't want to do it. She knows that actually if you spell out what happened in this situation, it usually starts from nothing and she just didn't like it*" (Tess)

4.4.1.2 Formal Mediums

Knowledge was also acquired through formal mediums. This took the form of books and online resources

> "*she was very good at giving me websites, different things to go on and things to look up…May was quite good as well, she'd print out pieces out of a book, a parenting book and she'd give me a chapter to read and I found that helpful*" (Marian)

4.4.1.3 Reflexivity

Reflection was another method used by some interviewees to acquire information and understanding

> "*Every week there was some little bit of homework you would have had to have done for the next week…you'd write down when that happened and what did you do when it happened. Did it work and that*" (Marian)

> "*if there was something that cropped up that week, it would often come out at the meeting and how do you handle thatI*" (Molly)

Molly spoke about being taught to be "*simple and clear*". When asked how she was taught this she explained

> "*just the questions that were put, the phraseology that was used. Trying to figure out my own…the way I applied myself to parenting. Just I suppose intelligent questioning is what I would call it. It was conversational*"

4.4.2 Confidence

Self-doubt was expressed by Tess and Molly as a motive for participating in the service and later in the interviews they acknowledged that they felt more confident.

"*She got me to have a bit of confidence there as well even though that's not what she was here to do*" (Tess).

The power of confidence and the impact that it can have is represented by Molly

"*from the moment I figured out that I was doing things okay, things started to get better and better*" (Molly).

"*helped restore the confidence in myself and my parenting and that had a knock on effect on the rest of the family…even the school have said it to me, she's (daughter) a different girl…she's becoming more confident in herself, she's sure about where she's going* " (Molly).

4.4.3 Respect

One of the motives for Tess participating in the service was that "*they'd no respect, anything I said*". Since completing the programme, Tess can see that "*she's definitely (daughter) more respectful*" and also feels that "*I've got a bit more respect for myself back as well*"

4.4.4 Control

Control was a verb that was used by most interviewees at some stage throughout the interviews either as a motive for participating or a consequence of taking part in the programme. Focusing on control as an outcome, interviewees shared that

"*not letting the behaviour get out of control, limiting it and controlling it before it gets too extreme*" (Ann)

"*we were being stricter with her*" (Kate)

Molly and Tess described outcomes for themselves but also for their children in the form of a parent being an authority figure and setting boundaries

"*we've a basket for the mobile phones now… It never goes into the room at night time, at bed time… these are practical things and that was an important one for me because we were having problems with my son and technology…he's actually okay about it. Like I can hear him boasting to his friends, actually my mum and dad took my phone off me…he likes the boundary, they love the boundary*" (Molly)

"*Olive kind of helped me take the reins back and I think even though she (daughter) wouldn't admit it, I think secretly she was craving that. The mom take the lead and she'd always say to me, why can't you be a mom like everyone else?"* (Tess)

"*the younger ones, they engaged in it and embraced it, it was like they wanted that*" (Tess)

4.4.5 Clarity

Molly stated that "*clarity was the big thing that I got from it*" and that

> "*the clarity of being able to think, that's what Barnardos gave me, was the mental space to be able to think clearly… it took the fuzz out of my head*"

4.4.6 Relaxed Approach

Ann identified that she is more relaxed and could also identify it in her child's behaviour

"*me being a bit calmer as well, not going off the handle and just giving him time to react…give him a few minutes just to process what you want him to do before jumping in…I'm more relaxed and if you're more relaxed, he's more relaxed*"

4.4.7 Practical Things

Most interviewees referred to being taught practical things by the Barnardos support worker, the value of practical knowledge and the impact it had for them and family members

> "*she helped me with…just day to day living…help and support really through strategies for day to day living*" (Ann)

> "*practical support…sometimes a small practical thing like the laundry bin upstairs. Those small little things can make the world of difference in a house… we've a basket for the mobile phones now… these are practical things and that was an important one for me because we were having problems with my son and technology*" (Molly)

> "*it was all practical. It was things like…I didn't realise and it was only when May brought out, it was the stages of emotional development… we sat down and went through them… made me realise…I was trying to reason with my Amy thinking she was 12…I had to back back a bit, that really I was trying to reason with somebody who was 7 or 8 years old emotionally*" (Marian)

> "*at the end we started getting into more practical things, me putting down rules…they (rules) were kind of more realistic…I had never joined the dots with like consequences…whereas we kind of had consequences that were in line with the crime I suppose…they (children) did slag me and a lot of arguments…but it did work* " (Tess)

4.4.8 Discussion

Connolly and Devaney (2017) acknowledge the key role that parents play in influencing their children in areas as social, physical and emotional well-being and subsequent outcomes within each domain (DCYA, 2015). Parenting support in practice is illustrated in this section and clearly confirms what Daly (2011) suggested in relation to idea that parenting as a set of skills can be learnt.

It is evident from the findings that many outcomes were achieved by recipients of home based parenting support. An outcome is described by Bandura (1977b, p.22) as being a "consequence of a performance, not the performance itself". The findings clearly demonstrate that through the knowledge and strategies shared with parents by the Barnardos worker, positive outcomes were achieved by parents and subsequently by children. In essence, the outcome or positive change achieved in the child's behavior was a consequence of the parent modeling what they learnt or observed from the Barnardos worker. Bandura (1977b) and Iwaniec (2006) reference modeling in their research, both of which are evident in the findings. Bandura (1977b) suggests that effective modeling teaches general rules and strategies for coping with different scenarios. Iwaniec's (2006) reference to modeling states that children can learn the appropriateness, inappropriateness and boundaries of their behavior by copying parental models. Example of which are evident within the findings.

Iwaniec's (2006) also notes in her research that for parents to fulfil their role as "good enough" parents, their needs as parents and individuals must also be met. The findings suggest that this occurred in terms of self-efficacy beliefs, whereby self-efficacy beliefs amongst interviewees increased as a result of completing the home based parenting support programme. Parents began the programme having problems with their children's behaviours and emotions, parent were self-doubting and they had lost control and respect form their children. However, having completed the home based parenting support programme, people reported being more confident in their parenting, they had regained control and respect within the family home and that they were more clear and relaxed in their parenting approach which also reflected positively in their children's behaviour.

4.5 Future Service Developments

Interviewees were satisfied with the service received from Barnardos and suggestions for alternative or additional approaches were limited. When asked what Barnardos could have done differently to assist them creating positive change for their children, some

interviewees struggled to identify or suggests areas of the programme that could be reformed or enhanced.

4.5.1 Focusing on the Positives

Most participants instantly focused on the positive aspects of the service

> "*Oh they could have stayed with me…I would love if someone like Barnardos could come and help again*" (Ann)

> "*I think they were pretty good*" (Kate)

> "*The paperwork, the programme, the presentation, the…May was excellent*" (Marian)

> "*No I don't think so, like I think they kind of covered everything*" (Tess)

When these interviewees were probed a little further, interviewees shared that

> "*No, no they were fantastic, they were brilliant really*" (Ann)

> "*one thing that might help is that you talk about situations and scenarios when somebody would do such and such a thing and somebody would react to it or whatever, if there was maybe a video, that you'd put on a video and say maybe that person is doing that now they really shouldn't do that they should do this…seeing it as well sometimes…there are different ways that people learn, some people are more visual than they are listening to it*" (Marian)

> "*I don't know maybe a dvd that's not aimed at a group because some of the questions were not relevant because I wasn't in a group*" (Tess)

4.5.2 Considering other Family Members and Family Dynamics

Two interviewees spoke about the inclusion and involvement of children, their partner or husband and also referred to family dynamics in their response.

> "*Like my partner now, they kind of helped with him having a say in the house as well…they could do a course for stepparents, that would be brilliant…I think if there was a course for stepparents it might give them a little bit of empowerment because it is difficult going into a situation and you don't know where your boundaries should be…Olive did offer for John to come down if he wanted to learn or whatever but at the time he didn't want to because he thought it was more for me…now he was very happy when I'd go back and tell him you know*" (Tess)

Molly also referred to her partner in this section of the interview, her children and her family as a whole

> "*maybe have the children more involved…they did take a video of us interacting at one point…it was played back to me and I found that really great*"

When asked what having the children more involved would look like, Molly stated

> "*a group family session…for the kids to air their like "oh mom always does this"…kinda a venting session with all the family, husband as well. I think it needs to me more than once because sometimes relationships can get tottered and twisted and I think a group family session would be great*"

Earlier in the interview Molly mentioned that

"*my husband was involved as well initially and he opted out…he found the whole thing too much emotionally…a bit too challenging for him at that particular time*".

When asked if she thought there was a space for Barnardos to do something specifically with men she replied

"*absolutely, it's an area I spoke to an awful lot of mothers…about six or seven… who have been faced with a diagnosis of something wrong with your child…we've all been on the same wavelength and it's quite frightening actually. Men go into total denial…resist everything…can't seem to come to terms…I think we need to embrace more how the men think…their opposition to whatever is wrong, their acceptance of whatever is wrong and their willingness to go ahead. I think they need to start looking at it being okay for men to say 'yeah things aren't great, things aren't right'…it's to get the men to interact first, that's the big problem. The initial interaction, the initial connection and I think from the Barnardos perspective is maybe reach out more specifically to men as well as the family*".

4.5.3 Discussion

All interviewees were happy with the home based parenting support service provided by Barnardos however, some ideas for future developments were offered by some interviewees. A visual component in the form of a video or dvd were mentioned and the benefits of watching oneself and family members interacting and others suggested benefits from seeing different scenarios being played out and the opportunity this offered for discussion with the staff member. This resonates with Bandura's experiments in the 1960's using a bobo doll to illustrate that people learn from watching others.

Comments made by interviewees in relation to the inclusion of other family members in future developments could be considered in correlation with Bowen's (1978) research on family systems and the significance of roles and

relationships within such systems. Family roles and relationships according to Bowen (1978) are the underlying cause of human behaviour, aspects of which were referenced in the findings.

4.6 Conclusion

The data collected in interviews was thematically analysed and presented in this chapter. It provided an insight into the lived experiences of parents who received home based parenting support from Barnardos South Cork City and the aspirations parents have for the service going forward.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This is the final chapter of the study and it provides the closing comments of the research. It presents recommendations based on the findings illustrated in the study and subsequent discussions based on relevant literature. The chapter concludes with a reflective note from myself as the researcher, reflecting on the research process and the value of undertaking this research project.

5.2 Concluding Comment

This research set out to explore parent's experience of Barnardos South Cork City home based parenting support service as a method of practice intervention to effect positive change in their childrens' lives. It also set out to identify any alternative approaches to improve parental engagement with the service or in adapting/changing how they respond to their children's needs.

The community based research approach enabled the researcher to interview parents who received home based parenting support in the past. Five parents were interviewed all of whom were female and identified as each respective child's mother. It emerged from the interviews that all parents were willing and motivated to engage in the home based parenting support and all parents engaged of their own free will. All interviewees sought support in the parental areas of responsibility referred to by the Child and Family Agency (2013) as "Boundaries and Managing Behaviour". All interviewees could be placed at level 2 of Hardiker's (1991) level of need, categorised by the Child and Family Agency (2013) as "top-up parenting support for families with additional needs – secondary prevention and early intervention".

Both the literature and findings suggest that families are complex and the functionality of the family as a system is impacted by factors such as family relationships, roles, behaviours and emotions. It is clear from the findings that parents valued the support they received in navigating their family system which encouraged positive change for them and for their children. Parents reported missing the support and in particular, missing the support worker when the programme was completed. Barnardos support workers were held in high regard by parents. Parents felt listened to, respected and engaged with in a non-judgemental manner. The support workers availability was also valued, such as flexibility with time, the service offered in the home and the security of being able to contact the worker outside of the dedicated support time within the home. Positive outcomes were achieved by parents and by children, some of which are still evident today. Parents were satisfied with the service they received and struggled to identify alternative approaches that could be used to respond to their children's needs. Some interviewees suggested visual aids being utilised as a learning means and some participants focused on efforts to engage other family members, namely male father figures and an emphasis on the inclusion of children in support sessions.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from interviews carried out with past recipients of home based parenting support and in conjunction with the literature review carried out relating to the research topic.

- The benefits of receiving a home based parenting support service are clearly evident from the findings. This programme should be recognised and promoted at a national level amongst all relevant organisations to encourage the distribution of support pertaining to the standard illustrated through the findings of this study.

- All participants were motivated to participate and sought support themselves. Future research should explore the views of participants perhaps less motivated to participant in home based parenting support services and participating only as a result of instruction from statutory bodies.

- All participants in this study were female. Some participants referred to male partners participating to some extent in the support offered by Barnardos South Cork City and the desire to have separate parenting support programmes for fathers and stepparents. I would recommend getting the opinions of paternal family members who have previously participated with the service to obtain a reflection of the service from a male's perspective and the possibilities going forward for additional programmes.

- The findings illustrate that participants valued the support and missed it when it was over. Feelings of isolation were expressed and a need to talk through different parenting scenarios with an adult were stated. With this in mind a follow up focus group or peer group may be appropriate.

- Different learning methods were evident in the findings and some participants had a preference for visual aids such as dvds where they could visualise a situation. The use of role play between support worker and parent may be a suitable approach to include in the worker's toolkit.

5.4 Conclusion

The analysed data demonstrates that recipients of Barnardos South Cork City home based parenting support service are very satisfied with the support that they received and the subsequent positive changes identified in their children. Recommendations have been

made for future endeavours and it is hoped that the data collected and presented in this study is beneficial to Barnardos South Cork City and can be used accordingly.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET



An Investigation of Home based Parenting Support Services offered by Barnardos

Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for the Masters in Social Work at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with Barnardos home based parenting support services in the south Cork city area and how the service effects positive change in a young person's life.

What will the study involve? The study will involve interviewing parents that have received Barnardos home based parenting support services in order to understand their experience of the service. There will be one interview in January or February and it will take less than one hour to complete. The researcher will ask nine questions during the interview.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because you have received home based parenting support services from Barnardos in south Cork city in the past and therefor you are a suitable candidate to provide data for my research study.

Do you have to take part? No, participation is voluntary. If you do decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. In signing the consent form you will give permission to be interviewed by the researcher and for the interview to be audio-recorded and later transcribed. If you decide after signing the consent form that you no longer wish to participate, you still have the option to withdraw from the study without any repercussions. You can withdraw from the study at any time up until two weeks after the interview. If the interview has been completed and if you wish to withdraw from the study in the two weeks after the interview, all data from the interview will be destroyed and it will not be used in the research.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous. Also, Barnardos will not know if you participate in the study or not.

What will happen to the information which you give? The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to me and my research supervisor. The data will be securely stored and password protected. On completion of the project, they will be retained for minimum of a further ten years and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal. The results may be used in further research studies.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. It is possible that talking about your experience in this way may cause some distress. In the event that distress is caused, please contact Barnardos and support will be offered.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, you should contact Barnardos Project Leader of South Cork City Family Support Project on 021 4357679.

Who has reviewed this study? The Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact:

Name: [redacted] (researcher)

Email address: [redacted]

OR

Name: Carmel Halton (research supervisor)

Email address: chalton@ucc.ie

Telephone number: 021 4902828

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

Appendix Two: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

This consent form is designed with qualitative research in mind. Where quantitative methods are used, issues such as quotations and audio-recording do not arise.

I……agree to participate in [redacted] 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 interview with [redacted] to be audio-recorded and transcribed

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

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

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and in any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to anonymized publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview □

Signed: …… Date: ……..

PRINT NAME: …….

Appendix Three: Interview Guide

1. How did you get involved with Barnardos?
2. What did they do?
3. What was your experience of working with them?
4. What specific aspects did you like/dislike?
5. How did the home based parenting support impact/hinder your parenting to influence positive change in your child/children's life?
6. When did you stop receiving the home based parenting support service and why?
7. Does the parenting support that you received still positively influence how you parent your child? If yes, how?
8. What could Barnardos have done differently to have assisted you in creating positive change for your child/children's life?
9. Is there anything that I did not ask you that you would have liked to discuss?