

Capacity Building in the Children and Young People's Sector in Ireland: A Field-Level Study

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Conducted for The Atlantic Philanthropies by
Mary Rafferty and Anne Colgan

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Background to the Study

A core focus of the strategy adopted by The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic) in achieving its vision, mission and goals has been to build capacity in the sectors and fields in which it has chosen to work. As Atlantic moves towards ending its grantmaking, this case study aims to capture the legacy and the learning about capacity building in the field of children and young people over the past 10 years and to offer ideas for sustaining the capacities. The case study is the final part of a wider examination of capacity-building strategies in use in Atlantic's grantee organisations¹.

The case study focuses on Atlantic's role in capacity building in the children and young people's field in Ireland over a 10-year period. It prompts interesting questions as to what is meant by a field, why field building is important and what are the characteristics and dimensions of a field.

This paper uses the lens of 'field' to examine the changes in the children and young people's sector in Ireland over the period of Atlantic's involvement, drawing on the Strong Field Framework², which proposes the key elements that create a sustainable field. This lens highlights important learning about the elements that make up an 'ecosystem' with sufficiently shared purpose, focus, concepts and practices. Examining the changes in the field of children and young people over this time using the framework emphasises the interconnecting importance of policy, leadership, knowledge base and models of, and supports for, practice.

1.2 Atlantic in the Children and Young People's Field in Ireland

Since the late 1980s, Atlantic worked closely with government and civil society in areas as diverse as promoting higher education, funding research to create new knowledge, strengthening the voluntary sector, enriching the lives of children and older people, and promoting human rights.

The Atlantic Philanthropies has been funding in-depth work in the children and young people's field in Ireland since 2004. Over the course of a decade, Atlantic has invested heavily in a series of programmes focused on improving services and public policy for children and young people in support of its belief that every child has a right to education, health, safety and a comprehensive set of services to help them reach his or her full potential.

During that time, Atlantic has provided funding and support for large national service-providing organisations, small-scale organisations, evidence-based programmes, evaluation research, technical supports for capacity development and supports for network-building across several domains of children's lives including literacy and numeracy, mental health, parenting, and family support and advocacy.

The core objectives of The Atlantic Philanthropies' Children & Youth Program in Ireland and Northern Ireland (the Children & Youth Programme) and the detailed account of grantees and their area of work are presented in detail in the Mathematica Policy Research programme evaluations conducted in 2008 and 2011³.

Objective 1 (2011) focused on **prevention and early intervention**, with the aims of:

- Demonstrating effective practice leading to policy reform
- Informing and influencing policy and practice
- Developing capacity and infrastructure in the sector

Objective 2 was directed at **advancing children's rights** through:

- Building a strong body of core children's rights organisations to strengthen the field
- Developing the voice and leadership capacity of communities, families, and children and young people
- Supporting key campaigns



In order to achieve systemic impact and sustainability, Atlantic adopted a blend of solution-focused approaches, using multiple entry points and mobilising strategic partners, and strongly focusing on impact and outcomes. The use of interventions at different levels and at a variety of scales, with and through different organisational partners, is an important strategy that both reflects and strengthens a particular view of the field. Alongside new kinds of practices that reflect the evidence on what works for children, services that are not based on evidence continue to be funded and delivered. While implementation science has been helpful in understanding how to put evidence into practice, it has been less explicit about how to stop doing things that don't work or for which there is no evidence.

Atlantic believes that every child has a right to education, health, safety and a comprehensive set of services to help him or her to reach full potential. Deeper commitment to a rights framework underpinning all services to children will strengthen access to the services they need, while services designed and delivered within a rights framework will guarantee both participation by service users in their design and delivery, and also high quality.

To advance children's rights, Atlantic focused on building core advocacy capacity, building coalitions and alliances, developing youth leadership and voice, and supporting strategic campaigns.

The issue of promoting the participation and voice of children and young people is central to the rights agenda. Atlantic has therefore supported the development of youth civic engagement/leadership models and the development of capacity in organisations so that they can identify and nurture youth civic action, and build the capacity of those that advocate for the most marginalised young people.

1.3 The Context

The first National Children's Strategy, *Our Children – Their Lives*⁴, published in 2000, was a foundational policy instrument for children's services in the Republic of Ireland in the years that followed. The strategy had its roots in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and began to articulate the case for focusing on prevention and early intervention:

'There has been public concern over the increasing number of children who are presenting with needs that existing services appear unable to meet.... While it is important to ensure that there is an appropriate response to these problem behaviours, it is also necessary to see them, in part at least, as indicative of an imbalance in service provision leaning towards treatment rather than prevention'. *Our Children – Their Lives*

Atlantic's work was undertaken at a time when there was, at the international level, a growing body of knowledge and expertise in the areas of evidence-based practice, understanding what works and in implementation science. This was a strong supportive context for Atlantic's objectives in Ireland. Some particular developments in Ireland may also have helped to create a supportive context; for example, the 2009 *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (known as the Ryan Report on institutional abuse) brought a critical lens to bear on service practice and the fault lines in the way services were organised and connected.

Working against this supportive context since 2004 has been the change in the economic environment, with deep cuts in spending on all services, including children services. The impact of these cuts on children's services is a matter of debate and different perspectives.

1.4 Fields and Field Building

The literature on philanthropic field building gathered as part of the wider capacity-building study helps to frame this enquiry into the role of Atlantic in the children and young people's field in Ireland.

Definitions of field include 'a multidisciplinary area of specialised practice that engages diverse stakeholders'⁵ and 'a community of organisations and individuals, working together towards a common goal and using a set of common approaches to achieving this goal'⁶. Key features of a field, arising from these definitions, include:

- A sufficient number and variety of organisations
- Connections between organisations that are strong enough to establish and maintain a coherent, shared identity and common goals
- A shared focus on the needs of the community
- Collaboration among organisations of different sizes and capacities to address needs

In this critical mass of organisations, individuals and organisations are aligned and working together effectively. This means:

- There is support for weaker organisations.
- Gaps in service are recognised and addressed.
- There is better understanding of peers working towards the same or similar goals.
- Communications are improved and coordinated among those in a particular field⁷.

Field building occupies a unique place in the work of philanthropic funders that want to bring about positive and lasting social change in some aspects of people's lives, and where the work of any one organisation cannot hope to achieve or sustain this level of systemic change. Contributors to this report (described in Section 1.5) identify the need for sustainable change, beyond the lifetime of a funding initiative, as a rationale for philanthropic field building. While this is a way of making organisations more stable and going beyond a time-bound approach, field building is seen as significantly more complex than supporting capacity development of a single grantee organisation:

'Field building inherently involves the consideration of an entire ecosystem of organisations, and often emphasises work at the intersection of organisations'⁸.

The literature suggests that to invest in developing capacity in an individual organisation without an understanding of the field or fields in which that organisation operates carries significant risks. To attempt capacity development in fields without an appreciation of the field's dynamics and impact on its members carries similar risks.

A key dimension of a field is that of mindset or orientation. An 'organisation' mindset differs from the 'network' mindset. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Organisation versus Network Orientations

Dimension	Organisation Orientation	Network Orientation
Mindset	Competition	Collaboration
Strategy for Impact	Grow the organisation	Grow the field/sector
Typical Behaviours	Compete for scarce resources	Increase the funding pie for all
	Protect knowledge	Share knowledge
	Develop competitive advantage	Develop skills of competitors
	Hoard talented leadership	Cultivate and disperse leadership
	Act alone	Act collectively
	Seize credit and power	Share credit and power
Structure	Centralised (siloed)	Decentralised (matrix)

Source: Bernholz, L., & Wang, T., 2010, Building Fields for Policy Change. Blueprint Research +Design

The Strong Field Framework⁹ was developed by the Bridgespan Group as a way of assessing the strengths and needs of a field. It offers a way of examining the capacities that have been built in the children and young people's field in Ireland over the past 10 years. That framework highlights:

- **Policy** – an enabling policy environment supportive of practice models and organised funding streams from a range of sources
- **Leadership** – where influential leaders and organisations work across practice, research and policy
- **A knowledge base** – with a community of researchers, a body of evidence, and ways of collecting and disseminating evidence
- **Standards of practice** – with exemplary models, professional development and resources for implementation

These themes resonate with the themes highlighted in the views of contributors to this paper and offer a useful framework within which to explore and examine the capacities developed within the children and young people's field in Ireland over the past 10 years.

1.5 The Approach

The authors have sought to reflect the experience of change in the field of children and young people, with a specific focus on the role of Atlantic in these changes, based on consultation within the field, reviews of core documentation and familiarity with the work in the children and young people's field over many years.

The main sources of information for the case study were a series of in-depth interviews with a cross section of contributors who offered a range of lenses on the questions, including the lens of service provision, policy making, funding and research. Perspectives were sought from a senior public servant in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, from evaluators, grantees and from the Centre for Effective Services. The perspective of Atlantic itself was sought through examination of documents and interviews with programme executives active in different stages during the period from 2004 to 2014. Key documents were reviewed, including Atlantic programme plans and evaluations, sector evaluations and national policy documents.



1.6 The Structure of the Case Study

This study looks at capacity building supported by Atlantic between 2004 and 2014 in the children and young people's field under the key themes that have emerged from the literature as the core elements of an effective field. For each of these themes (policy, research, leadership, practice and resources), the study looks at two questions:

- How has the field changed?
- How did Atlantic support contribute?

This report uses the structure of the Strong Field Framework although the changes in focus and key concepts are reflected throughout the report. Policy is addressed in Section 2. Section 3, Research and Research Capacity, examines the knowledge base and its development in the field. The dimension of leadership is the subject of Section 4 and Section 5 covers service practice. The changes and impact of resources are described in Section 6. Finally, in Section 7, the study offers an overview of the impact of Atlantic's investment on capacities in the children and young people's field over the period under review. It makes observations about the sustainability of those capacities into the future and draws out some learning for philanthropic investment in strategic change.

2. Policy

2.1 What has changed?

A series of seminal policy documents and new structures built on the foundation of *Our Children – Their Lives*, published in 2000. One of the key policy documents was *The Agenda for Children's Services* (2007)¹⁰, which introduced an implementation framework, strategic direction and goals based on a single set of national service outcomes for children and supported by extensive practice guidance. The government's 10-year *Social Partnership Agreement* (2006) reinforced the new focus on children's policy as a distinct policy arena separate from health or education, and laid the foundation for integrated local service delivery through the coordinated local structures of Children and Young People's Services Committees.

New children-focused structures were established to drive policy; the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2005) was the forerunner of a full Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011). It brought together a number of key areas of policy and provision for children and young people, advanced the pressure for a coherent policy focus on children and is probably the most significant structural development in support of coherent, integrated children's policy. The publication of the second National Children's Strategy, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, in 2014, represents another critical stage in the journey of policy development and structures in the children and young people's field. *Healthy Ireland*¹¹, the national framework to improve health and wellbeing, which adopted a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to improving health from 2013 to 2025, recognises the critical importance of the very early years through a range of initiatives. One of Atlantic's final grants in Ireland, *The Nurture Programme – Infant Health and Wellbeing*¹², builds on the long-term cycle of investment to focus on sustainable systemic change that makes a difference to the lives of children and their families.

A number of key developments in policy, strategy and structure over the past 10 years have brought the field to the point where prevention and early intervention are embedded in the landscape of services for children and young people. The dual emphasis on outcomes and what works are part of the day-to-day language of policy and strategy and can be seen throughout *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. There have been significant changes and achievements in relation to understanding children's lives and children's participation through an authoritative body of research, evaluation and participation practice, which were key themes of the first National Children's Strategy.

The language of outcomes and evidence now underpins policy, culture and practice. Within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the focus on evidence and outcomes is well established. Within the Department of Education and the Department of Justice, especially those parts with strong connections with Department of Children and Youth Affairs, there is increased congruity. The substantial research that has been undertaken gives rise to an authority for policymakers and practitioners, as well as researchers. The strategic focus on prevention and early intervention is now well established and integrated into *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

Another important emerging development in the policy domain is the focus on effective policy implementation. The introduction of the language of implementation has allowed a discourse about, and attention to, the research to practice gap in services for children and young people. This high-level, conceptual understanding of implementation as a discrete element of change and development, which requires understandings, capacities and tools, is now widely accepted in the field. This understanding and language gives rise to an openness to specific models and tools such as those offered by Implementation Science. The Centre for Effective Services¹³ has provided knowledge translation mechanisms in support of implementation in practice.

A question arises about the extent to which these developments are embedded in a sustainable way and whether shifts in policy translate into changes in practice through robust implementation. This question elicits varying responses from policymakers, policy advisors and practitioners.

For practitioners, a core concern is with consistency of vision and approach across the full spectrum of services for children and the robustness of the policy-to-practice continuum. High-level strategy must find its way into departmental strategies, for example in early childhood education, where service quality must be supported by significant shifts in professionalising the field.

In one view, the capacity to achieve the goals of the policy and strategy are being undermined by resource constraints and short-term cutbacks; there is a concern about an absence of joined-up thinking across service-providing departments and an absence of investment in longer-term goals. There is particular concern about the vulnerability of the commitment to prevention and early intervention; can it retain political and public support across electoral cycles long enough to become embedded in policy and resource allocation? Can it withstand the competition for resources coming from the crisis-intervention requirements? Where does it look for a strong leader and champion at the governmental level? The tension between a policy of investing in prevention and early intervention, and the practice of crisis intervention was a concern for contributors at both policy making and practitioner level.

In terms of structures, whole-of-government work is strongly in evidence in the field, in the view of policymakers; for example, in the manner in which *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was developed through a cross-departmental structure. A senior policymaker highlighted a structural weakness in the mismatch between the budgetary process and a whole-of-government approach to policy development and implementation; budgetary process favours silos and does not prompt or reward cross-agency or cross-departmental projects. The growth of the Children and Young People's Services Committees network is evidence of efforts to embed a cross-agency structure at the local level that is capable of carrying through on a whole-of-government commitment to children.

In summary, while there are differing views as to what is working well at the policy level, there is agreement that several core features of the policy landscape have changed in a positive way over the past 10 years. There is also agreement that implementation is the weak link in the push for sustainable development in this field.

2.2 How did Atlantic support contribute?

Two core objectives of the Atlantic investment in this field have been 1) promoting prevention and early intervention, and 2) advancing children's rights. The focus on evidence-based prevention and early intervention, on increasing efficiency, and on improving outcomes for children and families is seen by contributors as a strong positive outcome of Atlantic's investment, even if there are questions about its reach and sustainability.

Atlantic funding and support for research capacity and infrastructure has provided resources for policymakers and policy making, and strengthened the link between policy development and implementation. Such resources did not previously exist, or did not exist in a way that policymakers could access. For instance, the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in the National University of Ireland Galway, developed the Agenda for Children's Services in 2007⁷⁴. This policy framework helped to establish the focus on outcomes rather than process and this was a very important new way of connecting policy and services. The influence of Atlantic was to bring programme evaluation and good quality research and researchers to the policy process.

The Atlantic grantee network was another way of mobilising people in the field to influence policy. There was considerable learning about how to identify and target key influencers. The work of the Centre for Effective Services, an independent nonprofit, in bringing attention to the importance of a rigorous and research-based approach and in offering technical assistance and support to the work has built specific capacity for implementation. The collaboration between the Centre for Effective Services and the Institute of Public Health in Ireland¹⁵ in relation to child health is an example of a relevant and sustainable collaboration aimed at influencing policy.

The focus on implementation that has emerged from Atlantic's mission has given rise to important changes in conceptualising and planning change, as well as establishing structures such as the Centre for Effective Services. From a policy point of view, there has been important learning about the need for better evidence and processes for generating and capturing evidence. The language of prevention and early intervention, a core focus of Atlantic's work, is now a policy foundation, albeit one that must be protected and supported at the highest level. The connection between effective policy making and understanding needs and practice problems is more clearly understood, and a foundation has been laid on which approaches to effective implementation can be strengthened and developed.

In Summary

A focus on prevention and early intervention is embedded in the landscape of services for children and young people, along with an emphasis on outcomes and 'what works' as part of the day-to-day language of policy and strategy for children's services.

The language of implementation has allowed attention to be paid to the research-to-practice gap in services for children and young people. The understanding of implementation as a discrete element of change is now widely accepted in the field. Whole-of-government structures are in evidence in national policy making and at local level.

There is concern about the vulnerability of the commitment to prevention and early intervention and whether it can retain political and public support long enough to become embedded in policy and resource allocation. There is also agreement that implementation is the weak link in the push for sustainable development in this field.

3. Research and Research Capacity

3.1 What has changed?

In the area of research and research capacity to underpin and inform policy and services for children and young people, the key changes over the 10-year period have been in several domains – the focus on research and evidence, the investment in research, capacities in undertaking research, the research infrastructure, and the uses and application of research to underpin policy development and practice.

The first National Children's Strategy, *Our Children – Their Lives*, created a context and foundation for the emphasis on research by setting down as one of its key goals that children's lives will be better understood¹⁶. That strategy committed to a programme of long-term research into children's lives, a new emphasis on measuring effectiveness in delivering on outcomes for children, and use of research to identify and disseminate best practices.

*The National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives, 2011-2016*¹⁷, prepared by the research unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in partnership with a range of agencies and partners, grew out of a commitment in the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* for the development and publication of a national data strategy on children's lives. Both data and research are included in the strategy as an explicit recognition of the importance of attaining a comprehensive insight into children's lives. An important aspect of the strategy is to ensure that data from *Growing Up in Ireland*, the National Longitudinal Study of Children¹⁸, is used by as many researchers as possible. Atlantic has contributed funding to both of these strategically important resources.

There is now a stronger emphasis by policymakers on the need for research evidence relating to outcomes and impact as the basis for decision-making about initiating services and providing funding for services. A strong cadre of credible researchers has been built up. There has been an important change in the capacity of policymakers, commissioners and funders to commission and make use of evidence and research, to evaluate research quality, and to identify gaps in research evidence. This capacity is reflected in a distinction between data and information related to outcomes. Increasingly, a more sophisticated use of evidence requires measures of impact rather than activity and places information about inputs in the context of good quality evidence.

The move towards developing internal research and evaluation capacity in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, supported by training for staff at the principal and assistant principal levels, is a significant development, enabling a 'house-style' of evaluation suited to the work of the department. Alongside this is the shift from looking at data and outputs to outcomes and impact – a relatively new departure for government departments.

While there may be a growing recognition of the need for research and a new research orientation among many policymakers and practitioners, there are concerns. One concern is about government's commitment to investing in continuous research; ongoing research is seen as essential in order to continuously update knowledge in areas such as education, but this culture and investment in new knowledge remains to be embedded. There is also a concern that there may be signs of a watering down of the commitment to evidence-based practice, with the readiness to accept evidence-informed approaches and a view among senior administrators that we have 'done' evidence. This can impact on the availability of resources for ongoing evaluation of programmes.

There is a new research orientation among practitioners and others. While there are still constraints in terms of undertaking new research, there is an increased capacity to access, read and evaluate the quality of research.

3.2 How did Atlantic support contribute?

All contributors recognise that Atlantic support for access to and use of good quality research has been a 'game changer' in children's services in Ireland. The impact grew over the 10-year period, driven by Atlantic's insistence, from the start, on programme evaluation as part of the requirement for grant funding. Through Atlantic influence, organisations have become much more effective commissioners and consumers of research. Locating the ownership of research processes and outputs clearly with the commissioner increased the authority of the commissioning organisations in shaping research focuses and outputs and led to a stronger investment in the quality and utility of research. Evaluation was undervalued at the start of Atlantic's involvement; neither providers nor government sought evidence to underpin decisions, but the stringency of that Atlantic requirement embedded the beginnings of an evaluation culture.

Building a new understanding of the importance of evidence, and introducing ideas like logic modelling and theory of change was one of the early priorities for Atlantic. Access to good quality international research and researchers helped Irish settings to recognise the difference between good quality and poor quality research. Directly, Atlantic kept asking the fundamental question: what works? The model of expert advisory committees brought world-class expertise to Ireland and Irish programmes. The opportunity for Irish practitioners, policymakers and researchers to work alongside international experts, over several years, was a source of important learning, according to practitioners, researchers and policymakers. The opportunities for study visits to centres of excellence in other countries are also identified as valuable and influential. While most contributors believe that the Atlantic investment has created a new common language around evidence and types of evidence, there was also a view that there is not yet a consistent, shared understanding about what constitutes evidence and quality.

A key objective of Atlantic was to replace reliance on international researchers with Irish researchers and research centres. The Centre for Effective Education in Queen's University Belfast, the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College Dublin, and the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in the National University of Ireland Galway⁹ were established with significant funding from Atlantic. The Centre for Effective Services was set up to connect research, policy and practice to improve outcomes for communities, children and young people across Ireland. Investment in university settings enhanced the capacity of Irish researchers. Atlantic funding and support for important research capacity and infrastructure established a resource that did not exist in the area of evaluation in particular, or did not exist in a way that practitioners could access. A benefit arising from these developments is a body of Irish research and confidence in that research.

Alongside the systemic changes that contributors point to in relation to building research capacity, contributors highlight practical examples of key initiatives that can be directly attributed to the use of research evidence, and in particular, the evidence for early intervention. Annual government budget statements cite the evidence that the early years matter and investment in early childhood education has been maintained despite economic difficulties. A universally available preschool year was introduced in early 2010. Some 95 per cent of eligible children took part from the outset. The outcomes of this significant investment have been evaluated and the need to improve the quality of the preschool year has been recognised. In recognition of the important contribution of early education, the free preschool scheme has been extended to two years in Budget 2016.

Atlantic practices changed the ownership of research outputs from the researcher/academic setting to the commissioner, empowering grantee organisations such as Barnardos to assert ownership of their data and to engage proactively in using study data themselves.

A cadre of leaders has been created in organisations with a commitment to research and evidence, and to research-based prevention and early intervention.

An overarching legacy of Atlantic has been to open up the discourse about the need to invest scarce resources in good programmes, and the need to interrogate the difference between good and poor programmes as measured by outcomes for children, using insights from research-based concepts such as fidelity to help build an understanding of what works and why.

The very substantial body of evidence generated by well-funded research is a core resource for the ongoing design and development of effective services. Atlantic's commitment to providing access to the data generated and to supporting and encouraging access and secondary analysis of large data sets through some final grants amplifies the value of the initial research and ensures that these data will continue to support learning for many years.

In Summary

There is now a stronger emphasis by policymakers on the need for research evidence to underpin decision-making, a strong body of researchers has been built up and increased capacity among policymakers, commissioners and funders in the use of research.

There is a new research orientation among practitioners and an increased capacity to access, read and evaluate the quality of research. The substantial body of evidence generated by well-funded research is a core resource for the ongoing design and development of effective services.

While the Atlantic investment may have created a new commonality of language around evidence and types of evidence, a question remains as to whether there is a consistent, shared understanding about what constitutes evidence and quality.

4. Leadership

4.1 What has changed?

Strong and effective leadership provided by influential leaders among practitioners, researchers and policymakers provides an essential broad base of support for building a strong field, according to the literature on field building²¹.

In the children and young people's field, it is possible to identify a series of structures, such as the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, that have emerged and that have the potential to provide leadership in this field. The advent of a separate government department gives public visibility to children's policy as well as a presence at the cabinet table. The range of policies, strategies and frameworks described in previous sections can be viewed as expressions of effective leadership, as can the existence of researchers and research bodies focused on supporting the use of evidence and the implementation of evidence-based policies and practice.

In exploring the influence of leadership in the field, the themes that arose include:

- Atlantic's strategy for identifying and developing existing and potential leaders
- The kind of disposition that enabled key people to act as leaders
- Barriers to realising the benefit of the capacities that have been developed

Contributors identify leadership capacity as related to personal strengths and attitudes, location within the system, and capacity to leverage change. A passion for and commitment to the change agenda for children and young people meant there was a readiness to capitalise on the scope that Atlantic funding and strategy offered. Atlantic identified and developed relationships with organisations that were already demonstrating leadership through delivering quality services. Senior administrators who offered leadership were able to leverage cross-governmental support, create a new culture of cross-agency collaboration or act as agents of strategic change.

While acknowledging the influence of key individuals, those consulted did not see important changes as the result of charismatic leadership alone. What has changed is that many people now understand and use the concepts of evidence and outcomes, and have experience putting these ideas into everyday practice and capturing that practice in toolkits, manuals and evaluations. In leadership practice, there is increased dialogue among practitioners, policymakers and funders, with a strong base of common knowledge and information.

Contributors also point to barriers to using those leadership capacities to the maximum. There is a question as to whether they are in the right place – would practice leaders have more impact if they had migrated to the statutory sector? There is some resistance within the statutory sector to drawing in the expertise and capacities of people from 'outside'. There is a view that there has not been a high-level champion for children and that there are still not enough champions. However, it is also recognised that there is a group of leaders in small and large organisations who are committed to the core concepts of evidence, evaluation, prevention and early intervention, and outcomes-led implementation, and that these leaders will maintain this commitment and will continue to influence the field in the service of these concepts for many years to come.



4.2 How did Atlantic support contribute?

The capacity-building strategy adopted by The Atlantic Philanthropies aimed to increase the funding available to the field through leveraging the contribution of statutory funders. This approach, delivered through a range of organisations, displays a network or field orientation as described by Bernholz & Wang (2010).

Models of effective leadership were both integrated into the format of grants and supported through the development of individuals. Interventions in different parts of the field helped to create a network committed to the core concepts and with capacity to carry them forward diffused throughout the field. Grantees were required to disseminate and share knowledge and learning, and evidence was made available throughout the field and beyond through a range of dissemination and knowledge-transfer strategies. While there was significant investment in key organisations and individuals as leaders in the field, leadership was cultivated and dispersed, rather than concentrated or competitive. There was active encouragement to share credit and power.

Atlantic adopted an approach of building relationships with key people in leadership roles across a wide spectrum of the public, nongovernmental organisations and private sectors; at the local and national levels; at political and senior administrative levels; and from among those in academia, advocacy, the justice system, higher education, journalism, public relations, research and service delivery systems. This rich landscape of people enabled Atlantic and its grantees to connect to leaders in critical areas of public life in support of the work, to build coalitions and start conversations.

In Summary

The leadership capacities that have emerged in the field include personal strengths and attitudes, strategic location within the system, and capacity to leverage change.

A passion for and commitment to the change agenda for children and young people created a readiness to capitalise on the scope that Atlantic funding and strategy offered.

There is also a view that success and sustainability is related to the mainstreaming of ideas and practices, so that many people – practitioners, researchers, policymakers – in many settings, are advocates.

5. Service Practice Capacities

5.1 What has changed?

The literature on the development of social fields identified the capacity to deliver high-quality, evidence-based services and high practice standards as one of the key elements of an effective social field.

The views about where we are at in Ireland now in relation to service delivery standards focused on several interlocking themes – the research-to-practice links, the policy/funding/practice nexus and how it may be supporting or impeding the spread of effective practice, the extent of mainstreaming of established good practice, implementation, and issues of professional development and training.

Research-to-practice linkages have been strengthened in many settings; there is a move, especially among the larger nongovernmental organisations, to look to the evidence when planning services and, in particular, when submitting funding applications. However, there is a view, also commonly held, that there is still a considerable distance to travel. There are concerns that practice for which there is no evidence continues to be funded and delivered because of familiarity or comfort levels. Poor practice can be allowed to continue alongside good practice where funders are unwilling to say 'stop'. A contributor referred to 'a layering of everything on top of everything else because no one ever wants to undo anything'.

The question 'why not test the practice' if only to confirm that it is good, was raised. The narrowing research-to-practice gap can sometimes be impeded by a service-provider view that the research does not apply in their particular context or that international research does not apply in Ireland.

Contributors felt that work on the ground needs affirmation and support from policymakers; practitioner interest and commitment can be undermined by the absence of policy-level support or unwillingness to endorse a new practice. Positive developments in the relationships among policymakers, researchers and practitioners were also noted.

Contributors felt that while there are examples of excellent models of whole-system practice on the ground, there remains a need to build relationships across boundaries and between researchers and practitioners at the local level. At the policy level, the need for ongoing dialogue between policymakers and practitioners is seen as a core feature of work in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and an essential tool of developing both quality policy and quality services. There is not consistency of practice across the entire field. In services for both children and young people, the sector has clearly understood the focus on evidence and the big providers have changed their practice to reflect a focus on outcomes. But there is variation across services and there are still established practices, especially in statutory services, that are not based on evidence and do not measure outcomes for children and young people. Mainstream practice has been least impacted by research and this is a serious concern given that the bulk of public investment is in mainstream services.

A gap has opened up between the statutory and the nongovernmental organisation sector, mainly as a result of cutbacks in services provided by the statutory sector. There is evidence of places where specialist providers are working with the statutory sector to embed effective practice, for example, by funding posts in the statutory services. However, one view was that opportunities have been lost for greater integration of 'model' services to build mainstream capacity and skillsets, since mainstream services have not had the level of investment. Contributors felt that there is potential in the Area-Based Childhood Programme to address this issue²². The consortium of statutory organisations and nongovernmental organisations in that programme is seen as offering a better chance of sustainability.

Standards are a key mechanism for ensuring that evidence is reflected in practice. The establishment of the *National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work*²³ and the *National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups* (2011) were important developments in improving quality in youth work. The Centre for Effective Services has supported the Youth Affairs Unit in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in planning the implementation of these standards, including the development of resources to inform and support youth work and youth activities.

Linked to the issue of mainstreaming effective practice was the need for evidence-based skill development, reflective practice and workforce planning, especially in early years services, to ensure a workforce with the right qualifications and training. This means building and sharing knowledge and integrating new knowledge into professional development and training. The need for effective knowledge management in the field was raised and this was linked to the value of strengthening the readiness to draw on the advice of practice leaders in Atlantic-funded sites. The value of inter-professional and inter-organisational approaches has now been demonstrated and the capacity to work across boundaries should continue to develop.

There is a concern about a sufficiently common understanding of evidence and outcome-focused implementation among professionals across the field. There is, as yet, not enough rigour at the funder level to propose and require outcome-focused planning.

Drawing these themes together, implementation has been one of the weaknesses of the system. Opportunities for policymakers and practitioners to work together directly, gathering and sharing learning about the detail of what is working, where and why, is a key mechanism for developing effective, outcomes-led implementation. Local, expert, continuous and structural supports for evidence-based practice are required for successful and sustainable implementation. The focus on outcomes has been made real in the development of the Children and Young People's Services Committees and this policy and practice engagement supports effective implementation.

There is an increasingly strong focus on outcomes and a scrutiny of the connection between what is delivered and what changes result for children. There is a new scrutiny of government capacity to have a clear, evidence-based rationale for what it is funding.

5.2 How did Atlantic support contribute?

Atlantic's focus on demonstrating more effective practice was significant. This focus, while slow to emerge, enabled changed practice to be documented and to take root. There was a heavy investment in planning and testing to create the conditions for mainstreaming.

The strategic choices made by Atlantic were also seen as a key influence, in particular the choice to focus on early intervention and prevention. Atlantic's wish to work 'on the ground' drove the impetus for the area-based approach.

As with other capacities, the investment in research and evaluation is seen as a crucial underpinning for the development of quality services. Practical strategies to link research and practice were adopted, for example, by inviting key practitioners to chair research committees. In particular, Atlantic generated many research evaluations. This was not being done before and was a different way of doing things and not likely to have emerged naturally from previous practice. Embedding the requirement for evaluation in the grantmaking has changed the focus and has led to a widespread understanding of evaluation and its importance. Atlantic has encouraged and funded dissemination and communication of learning from practice. It has helped to make links between actors in different places within the field.

*A practical guide to including seldom heard children & young people in decision-making*²⁴, developed jointly by Barnardos and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, is a good example of a material resource that demonstrates the concrete linking of theory and practice.

A cadre of practice leaders has been created with capacity to support other organisations and mainstream providers; these providers are starting to make use of that capacity when planning and making funding applications.



Atlantic insisted that all knowledge gained from research should be public and shared, all reports accessible, and all data archived. The commitment to networking and knowledge exchange would not have happened without Atlantic's insistence. Atlantic facilitated the setting up of networks – notably, the Prevention & Early Intervention Network²⁵; and the Children's Research Network for Ireland and Northern Ireland²⁶ – and there is now a strong core of organisations working together as practitioners, researchers and advocates. The dissemination initiative for prevention and early intervention was an attempt to leverage the grantee network to influence policy. This proved to be more difficult than anticipated and there was significant learning about how to influence policy, leading to a more targeted approach, employing specific strategies about information and knowledge. The Centre for Effective Services also has had an important role in providing strategic advice and guidance, connecting the learning from research and practice into policy development, and, in particular, in bringing the international learning on implementation science to bear on policy implementation and practice development.

In Summary

Mainstream practice has been least impacted by research and this is a serious concern given that the bulk of public investment is in mainstream services.

Government is increasingly required to have a clear evidence base for what it funds.

Opportunities for policymakers and practitioners to work together directly – gathering and sharing learning about the detail of what is working, where and why – is a key mechanism for developing effective, outcomes-led implementation.

There is an increasingly strong focus on outcomes and a scrutiny of the connection between what is delivered and what changes result for children.

Research-to-practice linkages have been strengthened in many settings. However, there are concerns that practice for which there is no evidence continues to be funded and delivered because of familiarity, inertia or lack of capacity to 'de-implement'.

6. Resources

6.1 What has changed?

The availability of resources and funding streams supportive of the aims of a particular field is one of the features of an effective social field²⁷. From 2004 to September 2013, Atlantic has invested €127 million in grants to more than 30 partner agencies and groups running some 52 prevention and early intervention services and programmes, and benefitting some 90,000 children and young people across Ireland²⁸. This investment attracted state funding of €51 million in the same period. Atlantic's final grants in the Republic of Ireland seek to further embed the learning from its investment. These grants to the Area-Based Response to Child Poverty Programme; the Development and Mainstreaming Programme in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; and to the *Nurture Programme – Infant Health and Wellbeing* totalled €35 million and will leverage budgets of up to €150 million.

The key themes that emerged related to resources were the approach that Atlantic used to guide and direct its investment and the impact of that approach, the effect of the recession on the development of services for children, and thoughts about the future direction of resource use as Atlantic leaves the field.

While the most evident impact of Atlantic on resources has been the amount invested and the amount leveraged from the state through that investment, particular characteristics of the Atlantic investment also strengthened its effectiveness. By insisting that state money to match Atlantic's investment was mainly 'new money', the overall level of resources for the sector grew. The investment in planning and design of services and projects was a strategic decision, enabling projects to take root with the benefit of a solid research and practice base. The investment in research and evaluation was central to the strategy of building the culture and practice of evidence-based approaches to service development.

Funds were directed to innovation and facilitated nontraditional projects such as the work commissioned on gathering material on children's cases going through the courts. The Child Care Law Reporting Project²⁹ gathers information and conducts research on child care proceedings in the courts with the aim of informing policy, promoting debate and making recommendations about better ways of addressing shortcomings in the child care system. This is an example of a project that brought a new lens to the field that would not ordinarily be supported through established or traditional service funding.

One of the features of the Atlantic investment was the wish to influence public policy and achieve social impact – an approach different from some more traditional philanthropic investment in 'big ticket' capital projects or social projects. This policy-led approach supported the shift to better funding of early education, investment in prevention and early intervention, and support for parents. Greater systemic change relies on investment in service developments in the state sector, which delivers most services. Such service developments should reflect the evidence about what works, including evidence generated by Atlantic investment in nongovernmental organisations.

An inevitable theme for contributors was the impact of the recession on resources for children's services. Some contributors noted that children were hit particularly hard, with systematic cuts to budgets across the board. Community organisations were also severely affected and many struggle to survive. On the other hand, contributors pointed to the fact that many organisations managed to thrive and their fears that research investment would be much reduced were not realised. At a macro level, it was felt that prevention and early intervention approaches have more traction at times of recession and that there is more appetite for innovation. The decision to invest in the pre-school year is evidence of a policy-led approach to embedding supports for children that survived the recession.

The financial crisis has limited the development of new services based on evidence. However, the severe constraints in resources have required increased scrutiny of spending decisions. This has allowed conversations between 'spending' departments and 'funding' departments that would not have happened in a normal economic environment. There is an increased attention and requirement to demonstrate evidence on outcomes in public spending decisions. The capacity to understand and provide evidence about impact strengthens the negotiation position when drafting a budget. While the relationship between evidence and resources is now established within the departments most central to children and young people, this has yet to be fully established in cross-governmental processes.

As well as the substantial new evidence generated in Ireland now available to shape future services, the commitment to knowledge translation also reflected the commitment by Atlantic to widespread and effective dissemination. Summary evaluation reports and knowledge syntheses are important tools in making knowledge available in accessible forms. Individual services document and share approaches, practice and learning in a range of ways. The Centre for Effective Services has a strong track record in developing evidence summaries and knowledge syntheses across the field³⁰.

Financial cuts reduced the amount of services delivered but also influenced the quality by failing to distinguish between evidence-based and non-evidence-based services. Across-the-board cuts meant that good services and poor services were affected in equal measure and the opportunity was lost to maintain effective services and close poor quality ones. While the capacity to implement evidence in service design had developed before the economic downturn, the capacity to 'de-implement' – to stop funding non-evidence-based services, was not sufficiently developed.

Despite the challenge that evidence presented to entrenched practices, the historical factors supporting established services were beyond the control or influence of individual professionals, organisations or systems³¹.

Looking to the future, there are concerns about how innovation will be supported in the absence of Atlantic. It is important to consider how to maintain Atlantic's 'moral hold' in support of evidence-based practice and quality implementation, especially in the face of crises such as homelessness, and in light of stronger public and political support for investment with immediate short-term impact. Influencers question how new models of commissioning and co-sponsorship linked to outcomes and evidence will emerge, and question how to resist a return to a 'scattergun' approach to the funding of projects.

6.2 How did Atlantic support contribute?

The range of diverse impacts of Atlantic's resource investment is evident from the observations on how Atlantic went about that investment. The impact stemmed from the volume of Atlantic's investment, what it managed to leverage from the state, the focus on sustainability through influence on longer-term policy development, and the focus on resourcing evaluation and evidence gathering. Atlantic provided significant resources and used that money to demonstrate effectiveness. This evidence was then leveraged to influence the distribution of resources away from unproven practice and towards practice and services delivering measurable outcomes.

Quite separately from the amount and model of investment, it is also important to draw attention to the role of Atlantic programme executives. Although much of the targeting and supporting of grants and grantees reflected the Atlantic corporate approach to philanthropy, there was something particular and specific about how programme executives took up their roles in ways that supported the development of a field of children and young people. Programme executives had a view of capacity at field level which shaped the focus and sequencing of interventions in the form of grants. Their availability, support and responsiveness were noted by practitioners.

Taken together, these influences were seen by contributors as making a significant difference at multiple levels over the 10-year period. The questions being raised now are how that influence can be maintained and sustained into the future.



In Summary

The investment in planning and design of services and projects enabled projects to take root with a solid research and practice base. The investment in research and evaluation was central to the strategy of building the culture and practice of evidence-based approaches to service development.

Financial cuts reduced the amount of services delivered but also influenced the quality by failing to distinguish between evidence-based and non-evidence-based services. Across-the-board cuts meant that good services and poor services were affected in equal measure and the opportunity to distinguish between effective services and poor quality services was lost.

Looking to the future, there are concerns about how innovation will be supported in the absence of Atlantic.

7. Atlantic in the Children and Young People's Field: Some Conclusions and Observations

7.1 Introduction

In this concluding section, we review the overall thrust of the thinking of the contributors and of reflections in published reports about how the children and young people's field has changed over the period of Atlantic's investment, the capacities that have been developed, the impact of the changes that have come about, and the contribution of Atlantic's funding and its legacy.

This overview of the legacy of Atlantic's investment in children, young people and families, and the learning about the process of building capacity in this field highlights the factors that have influenced success and points to factors that will sustain these capacities into the future.

While contributors do not attribute all developments in the field to Atlantic, there were clear directions evident in their thinking, as they reflected on the questions about Atlantic's influence on policy and structures, research, leadership, service practice and the resources for those services. In this section, we draw out some core themes regarding Atlantic's influence, and in particular, the sustainability of positive developments, since sustainability has been one of Atlantic's own fundamental goals in making its investments³².

We return first to the concept of field. While this study is framed around the idea of a field and the definition and elements of a field that emerge in the capacity-building literature, there was a range of views among contributors as to whether or not there is a children and young people field in Ireland. We then offer conclusions and observations about Atlantic's influence in this area of work and the sustainability of the changes this influence has achieved.

7.2 Is there a children and young people's field in Ireland?

Using the definition of 'a community of organisations and individuals, working together towards a common goal and using a set of common approaches to achieving this goal', there has been a strengthening of the field of children and young people since 2004. Concepts of evidence, evidence-based practice, outcomes, evaluation and other measurements and implementation are now widely understood, and this shared language increasingly underpins processes of planning, service design and evaluation. Together with an acceptance of the role of prevention and early intervention, these concepts now provide a solid foundation for integrated processes of conceptualising and operationalising approaches to supporting children, young people and families. A common language allows policymakers, funders, researchers and providers to communicate and collaborate more effectively. It supports alignment and integration within the field. Shared understandings make it easier to identify gaps in evidence and services and allow scrutiny of practice through a common lens.

New structures, and, in particular, the establishment of a government department with a singular focus on children and young people should serve to embed the policy focus on children in the work of cabinet, government and the public service. There is a definite strengthening of the commitment to whole-of-government approaches across many areas of policy development, including the policy framework for services to children and young people. The challenge to sustainability in this as in other areas will be in effective implementation.

Does this question of 'field' matter? Arguably, it matters a great deal for the sustainability of improvements for children and young people. A field of endeavour – where there is a robust and connected policy, research and practice community, a common goal, with a shared view that investment in this field can secure systemic change across people's life cycle – may have a better chance of surviving than disparate services and policymakers, no matter how effective they may be individually. To the extent that Atlantic has succeeded in, or contributed to, developing a field of children and young people in Ireland, they have done the state and citizens a service. The challenge will be to maintain and sustain the coherence and collaborative nature of that field into the future.

7.3 Atlantic's Influence and the Sustainability of Change

Atlantic's influence has stemmed from both the extent of its sustained investment in the children and young people's field and the strategic focus of that investment – both factors driven by Atlantic's overall philanthropic approach.

Strategic investment and core funding

The starting point of the influence of The Atlantic Philanthropies in this field was the initial decision to support and invest in improving children's lives and particularly the lives of children experiencing disadvantage. That decision made sense for an organisation seeking to effect long-term social change. The drive to strengthen and grow the culture and commitment to prevention and early intervention was a further investment in long-term strategic change. In terms of resources, the strategic impact came from the level of the investment – the biggest of Atlantic's investments relative to country size, facilitating and leveraging state funds well beyond what would otherwise have been spent by the state. The multi-annual nature of funding was especially important in the way it removed insecurity and enabled the grantees to invest in planning and take a medium- to long-term view of the future of their service, without undue anxiety about annual allocations.

Focused and multi-faceted resources

Building on that investment, the strategic intent was carried through by investing resources in strengthening the infrastructure of support for children at a number of levels:

- Supporting evidence-based policy development
- Creating linkages at high levels in the government and public services
- Facilitating access to international expertise
- Building strategic capacities in the academic and nongovernmental organisation sectors

This multi-level intervention in the provision for children and young people across multiple but connected entry points has had a demonstrable impact on capacities in the sector.

Applying knowledge of what works

The impact of these key strands of Atlantic's strategic thinking is evident across several aspects of work in the children and young people's field. The concept of evidence-based, outcome-focused policy is embedded in the discourse around policy and underpins *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the strategy that will guide service provision for years to come. The need to use evidence as the basis of policy development, service planning and service commissioning is now an integral part of the service landscape. There is also greater opportunity for services to influence future spending and to influence political thinking towards funding that reflects evidence.

Prioritising prevention and early intervention

The principles and policies supporting prevention and early intervention are well established and also firmly grounded in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* strategy. It is perhaps this particular change that holds most prospect for sustaining the improvements that have come about over the last 10 years, while also being the dimension that may be most at risk if funding or political pressure push the system to a return to crisis-intervention practices. Of its nature, prevention and early intervention approaches depend on a whole-of-government and whole-system approach to provision. There is a good infrastructure in place to enable networks to share knowledge and learning about prevention and early intervention and good practice more generally.

New, stronger capacities and capacity building

In terms of the support for key policy making and planning processes at national and organisational levels, the experience of participating in change has strengthened a whole range of capacities across the field. Interaction of different kinds between varied stakeholders has increased and strengthened and given stakeholders access to diverse people and practice, more data, and more evidence.

The research infrastructure has been strengthened and there is increased capacity and sophistication in both commissioning and use of research. Measures of impact rather than output are increasingly sought as the norm. Research is now influencing practice in many areas, in particular the design of new services. Research capacity in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has been strengthened and aligned with the needs of the field. There is useful synergy in research capacity across a range of research and applied settings supported by Atlantic investment: The Children's Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin³⁴; UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at National University of Ireland Galway³⁵; the Centre for Effective Services³⁶ and the Centre for Effective Education, Queen's University Belfast³⁷.

The orientation towards evidence and outcomes is also being seen in the training of professionals. There has been a diffusion of advocacy capacity across the sector, a strong core of leadership capacities and supports for leadership. Over time, these bottom-up and top-down influences should encompass the whole field.

The push to mainstreaming

A critical dimension of Atlantic's influence and the sustainability of the changes it has brought about is the extent to which change and innovation in service planning and service practice can be mainstreamed. There is evidence of an understanding in government about the challenge of mainstreaming good practice. Atlantic's final grants in the field are building on a readiness in mainstream services. The inter-departmental project team for the Area-Based Childhood Programme, for example, is explicitly considering the issues of mainstreaming, how to harvest learning from research and how to integrate that learning into practice.

The risks and challenges

While these interwoven strands of capacity are evident and many would appear to be embedded in systems, structures and practices, the context is ever changing, and, as Atlantic leaves the field, there are risks and challenges to the sustainability of what has been put in place. There is a concern that the ongoing, perpetual need for research is not widely understood among policymakers. Evidence is not a fixed, established, one-off event. The research base for authoritative, evidence-based policy has to be sustained through continuing investment in research. There is a risk that government or senior public administrators might consider that the research is 'done', leading to a reduction or ending of investment in research. Ongoing investment in publicly funded research in social fields will need champions at the highest level.

Notwithstanding the strength of the commitment to evidence-based practice in a core of service-providing organisations in the children and young people's field, there is a concern that the concepts of evidence-based practice and quality are not consistently understood and that there are differing understandings among professionals. Any watering down of the commitment to evidence-based policy making and planning, or moves to accommodate less-onerous concepts of evidence-based approaches, such as evidence-informed approaches, may pose a threat to essential rigour. A move away from a strong expectation for evidence-based services could erode the commitment to the commissioning and funding of services on a strong platform of evidence and outcomes.

While the investment in prevention and early intervention would seem to be well embedded in national policy and strategy, the risks to this arise from growing numbers of children requiring crisis-intervention services. Maintaining the focus on, and investment in, prevention and early intervention will take courage and leadership at the highest levels.



Use of best practice in preventive and early intervention poses a strong implementation challenge across policy making, planning, and, in particular, across budgetary processes and commissioning. Whole-of-government approaches to these processes will also present ongoing and significant challenges. There is a need to build implementation capacity at whole-of-government and whole-field level. The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* strategy, in particular, will require careful choreography of services and attention to some intractable difficulties. This will need implementation expertise at a macro or field level, and not only a series of implementation processes within the individual segments of the field.

The overall picture

The risks and challenges that have been named here only arise because of the extent of the progress that has been achieved. The other side of the risk analysis is the opportunity that has been created by Atlantic's investment – to continue to build and strengthen the field and its constituent parts, to build on the research foundations, to maintain the strong focus on prevention and early intervention, and to move further towards resourcing and implementing what works. In the end, whether these developments grow and thrive will be a political decision, but the impetus that has been given to them in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* augurs well.

7.4 The Learning

There is considerable learning about building capacity at field level from this examination of changes in capacity in the field of children and young people in the Republic of Ireland, 2004-2014. Key learning includes:

- Building capacity at field level requires a strategic and systemic approach which includes attention to the parts – organisations, structures, leaders and resources – and to the whole – relationships, common concepts and language, and agreed principles.
- A medium- to long-term engagement with the field allows learning to happen during, as well as after, investment and development.
- Sustained investment, with a clear strategic focus, brings about change at all levels in the system.
- The use of multiple partners, at many levels, with a range of entry points and different scales of investment, increases the diffusion of innovation and learning throughout the field and increases the ownership of transforming concepts and practices throughout the system.
- A consistent focus on outcomes for children and young people grounds a wide range of strategic developments in positive impact.
- The development of core capacities for research, practice and implementation makes it more likely that changes in services are sustained.
- A network orientation, developed through a requirement for collaboration, knowledge sharing, collective action, and decentralised power and influence in the field, can secure and accelerate change.
- Building a field and its related capacities takes time, sustained attention and consistency across a range of perspectives.
- Multi-annual core funding allows and supports strategic and systemic development.
- Investment in strategic learning and evaluation is difficult and costly, but has significant returns in terms of changes in practice and in outcomes for children.
- Investment at field-level changes the absorptive capacity for learning and readiness for change and these are important foundations for sustainability.

Endnotes

- 1 The study comprised a literature review and a series of organisational case studies that highlight the diversity of understandings of capacity building, approaches to capacity building and capture key learning about capacity-development work. The study can be found at <http://www.effectiveservices.org/ces-projects/promoting-capacity-building-in-ireland>.
- 2 Bernholz, L., & Wang, T., 2010, *Building Fields for Policy Change*. Blueprint Research + Design.
- 3 <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Mathematica-2011-Report.pdf>
- 4 http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/full_english_version.pdf
- 5 Bernholz & Wang, 2010.
- 6 Bridgespan Group, 2009, *The Strong Field Framework: A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Non-profits Committed to Large-Scale Impact*. James Irvine Foundation
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- 10 http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/cs_agenda_handbook_family_support_o.pdf
- 11 <http://health.gov.ie/healthy-ireland/>
- 12 <http://www.khf.ie/what-we-do/nurture/>
- 13 <http://www.effectiveservices.org/>
- 14 Ireland. OMCYA [Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, now Department of Children and Youth Affairs] (2007) *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook*. Dublin: Stationery Office. http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/cs_agenda_handbook_family_support_o.pdf
- 15 The Institute of Public Health in Ireland promotes cooperation for public health between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland by strengthening public health intelligence, building public health capacity, and supporting policy and programme development and evaluation.
- 16 <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/Aboutus/stratfullenglishversion.pdf>
- 17 http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/NSRD_main-report.pdf
- 18 <http://www.growingup.ie/index.php?id=83>
- 19 <http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforEffectiveEducation/>; <http://www.tcd.ie/childrensresearchcentre/>; and <http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/>
- 20 <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.aspx?fn=%2Fdocuments%2Fchildcare%2FChildcareMainPage.htm>
- 21 Bernholz & Wang, 2010.
- 22 <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.aspx?DocID=3034>
- 23 http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/NQSF_Publication_ENGLISH_270710.pdf
- 24 http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/playandrec/2015061.Seldom-heard-a_practical_guide.pdf
- 25 <http://www.pein.ie/>
- 26 http://www.childrensresearchnetwork.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=67
- 27 Bridgespan Group, 2009.
- 28 <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/learning/report-ten-years-learning>
- 29 <http://www.childlawproject.ie/about/>
- 30 <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/learning/report-ten-years-learning>
- 31 <http://www.implementationscience.com/content/10/1/24>
- 32 <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/cy-republic-ireland>
- 33 http://www.effectiveservices.org/downloads/Capacity_Building_What_the_Literature_tells_us_v1_4.11.13.pdf
- 34 <https://www.tcd.ie/childrensresearchcentre/>
- 35 <http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/>
- 36 <http://www.effectiveservices.org/>
- 37 <http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforEffectiveEducation/>