



The Early Learning Initiative basis.point Programme

Supporting the pre-school
education of Dublin and
Limerick's inner city children



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joined up giving

Early Learning Initiative



Early Learning Initiative
National College of Ireland

Working in partnership with the local community, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) at National College of Ireland (NCI) has developed a range of innovative programmes to improve the educational aspirations and outcomes of children and young people in inner city areas of Dublin, Limerick and Galway.

Early intervention is critical. At just 3 years of age there are already big differences between children from wealthy and poor backgrounds. Children from high-income families will experience 30 million more words within the first four years of life than children from low-income family. This gap never closes and in fact grows over time (Hart and Risley). It is well known that 90% of brain growth happens before the age of 5. Sadly, without

early intervention, generations of children's life chances have been determined before their very first day of school.

Working with educationally disadvantaged children and their families, ELI ensures these children can enter school and progress to third level able to fully benefit from the education system. There is no other similar programme in Ireland covering literacy, numeracy and oral language. No other organisation has the aim of building the educational capital of a disadvantaged community so the children in the area can achieve their educational and career goals in life. ELI continues to monitor and support the children's progress through primary school and on to second and third level education.



The Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP)

The Parent Child Home Programme is an innovative, home based literacy programme for pre-school children (18 months - 3 years) that strengthens families and prepares children to succeed academically. It involves two home visits a week for families with a pre-school child, for a minimum of 23 weeks for two years, by home visitors trained by ELI.

It focuses on:

- ① Building positive parent-child verbal and non-verbal interaction
- ② Promoting positive parenting skills
- ③ Enhancing the child's conceptual and social-emotional development
- ④ Developing pre-literacy and numeracy skills that are essential for school readiness
- ⑤ Creating language-rich home environments



Home Visitors

Through the employment of local women as Home Visitors and the involvement of parents in the assessment and learning processes, ELI have created an excitement about education in the community and improved the language, literacy and numeracy skills of the children involved in the programme.

Home Visitors are provided with a uniform and are seen as ambassadors for education in the community and are easily recognisable on the streets in their distinctive uniforms (including coats, shirts and bags). They provide an accessible point of contact about education for the whole community.

Social inclusion has been greatly enhanced with the Home Visitors linking groups such as immigrants, professionals and marginalised

families to ELI and other activities in the community. Relationships are being built and there is a greater sense of community ownership and cohesion.

Home Visitors receive 16 hours start up training (includes Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and Siolta, The Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education). They then receive ongoing training (approximately 10 hours per year) to get them trained up to Fetac Level 5.

Over a two year period, Home Visitors model oral language, reading and play in their twice weekly visits. The families then continue the activities in their own time, thereby enabling the PCHP child and his/her siblings to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills.

basis.point Funding

The average cost per year to provide a family with two home visits a week for a minimum of 23 weeks for two years, a library of high quality books and educational toys, accredited and supervised staff, and regular assessments and monitoring to ensure progress and quality is €3,000.

Funding 2015 to 2017:

- ① 25 families and children
- ② Inner city Dublin
- ③ Funding €75,000 over two years

Funding 2017 to 2019:

- ① 50 families and children
 - ② Inner city Dublin and Limerick
 - ③ Funding €150,000 over two years
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Regularly the PCHP programme is oversubscribed so some children miss out. Now, with funding from basis.point, ELI can expand the programme in Dublin and Limerick ensuring more families will be able to avail of this window of opportunity for their children.



Benefits of PCHP

PCHP bridges the “preparation gap” by helping families challenged by poverty, limited education, language and literacy barriers and other obstacles to school success, and prepares their children to enter school ready to be in a classroom. Home Visitors build parents’ abilities to proactively support their children’s education, act as advocates and get involved in school and community life.

PCHP works with a cross sectorial network made up of: Public Health Nurses; pre-school staff; community and youth workers; and primary to third-level educators. This network increases the educational capital of the community and develops a sense of ownership and responsibility for the educational welfare of children from all involved.



Parental benefits

Feedback from the families is very positive with all parents expressing a high degree of satisfaction with the programme. Parents feel confident in using the strategies modelled by Home Visitors.

Main benefits are:

- The positive, warm relationship, both they and their children have with their Home Visitor
- Parents learn a different and more enjoyable approach to reading and playing with their child
- Their children are developing normally for their age, with PCHP benefits extending to other family members such as siblings
- Parents have an understanding of their children’s early development in literacy and numeracy and are able to monitor their children’s progress
- Parenting strategies, personal skills and involvement of the parents in their children’s education, particularly in developing their children’s early language, literacy and numeracy skills, are improved
- The involvement of fathers has increased, which is extremely encouraging in light of research which highlights the importance of fathers’ involvement in their children’s learning if they are to succeed in education and life.

Impact

Over the past 50 years, there has been a strong, broad array of research conducted on the PCHP (<http://www.parent-child.org>) in the US, demonstrating not only the programme's significant outcomes for children and families, but also its effective replication in a wide variety of culturally and linguistically diverse at-risk populations.



From 2007 – 2017 836 children and their families have taken part in the PCHP programme. Over 30,000 home visits have taken place.

- Assessments indicate that the PCHP children's language, literacy and numeracy skills are at levels expected of their age unlike children in similar disadvantaged areas.
 - At the 3 year developmental check, Public Health Nurses notice the gains made by children who have had PCHP and those who have not.
 - Speech therapists see the improvement in the PCHP children on their waiting lists (2.5 yrs. wait) - the great majority of whom no longer need speech therapy.
 - Primary teachers see PCHP children, often the first of three generations, enter primary school ready to succeed.
 - Ten years on families are continuing to use the skills they learnt through PCHP. They continue to read for fun - using the books and toys with their PCHP and subsequent children.
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Feedback

Parent: *"What really worked well was the structure of the home visitor coming twice a week in the daily busy routine of life, it is great to spend quality time learning, playing and reading with your child."*

Parent: *"The relationship my daughter has with the home visitor is very important. Her approach is key. Bringing different books/toys is great for her attention span."*

Parent: *"The best thing was the way the home visitor really encourages the child's imagination."*



Research and Outcomes

Community action research is used to systematically gather evidence on participation; learning outcomes and satisfaction. Bi-annual child assessments enable the Early Learning Initiative at NCI to monitor the progress of individual children and the success of the programme.

Supervision

ELI conducts regular evaluations on parents and home visitors at the end of the year to evaluate the impact of the programme on them.

ELI also conduct assessments on the children involved in the programme, using the PCHP Child Behaviour Traits (CBT) checklist twice a year to track their overall development. These assessments, CBTs, are completed in November and May by the Home Visitors.

The CBT's assess the child's skills in cognition, behaviour and language. 96% of children exhibited an increase in positive verbal interaction and behaviour from when they began PCHP in November 2014 to when they finished in May 2016. The average score rose from 36 at the beginning of the year 1 to 83 at the end of year 2.

The greatest increase over those two years was in their language skills.

PCHP U.S.

NCI is the only European partner site of PCHP in the U.S. which is in the Social Impact 100 Index. The college's programme is modelled on the successful U.S. programme, results of which have been published in peer-reviewed journals and reviewed by a variety of U.S. federal and state agencies, which have concluded that PCHP works; is evidence-based, and should be replicated. For 50 years, PCHP evaluations in the U.S. are demonstrating improvement in children's performance in IQ and school readiness assessments and increases participants High School graduation rates by 30% - to the same level as their middle class peers.



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