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An Exploration Of How Early Years Managers and Staff Are Responding To The Needs Of Children Experiencing Homelessness

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**An Exploration Of How Early Years Managers and Staff Are Responding
To The Needs Of Children Experiencing Homelessness**

Jacinta Corcoran

Submitted to

**Department of Social Sciences, Technological University Dublin in partial fulfilment of
the requirements leading to the award of Masters of Arts in Mentoring Management
and Leadership in the Early Years**

Word Count:13,964

Technological University Dublin.



April 2019

Declaration of Ownership

I declare that the attached work is entirely my own and that all sources have been acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Submitted to the Department of Social Sciences TU Dublin, in partial fulfilment of the requirements leading to the award of M.A. Mentoring Management and Leadership in the Early Years.

Word Count:

Technological University Dublin

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Table 1 Overview of number children accessing services

Abbreviations

ABC	Area Based Childhood Programme
A&E	Accident and Emergency Hospital Care
B&B	Bed and Breakfast Accommodation
CCSRT	Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (Transitional)
CCSP	Community Childhood Subvention Plus
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education Programme
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum Assessment

Glossary Of Terms

Area Based Childhood Programme	Targeted additional investment in evidence-based early interventions to improve the long-term outcomes for children and families living in areas of disadvantage.
Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)	A programme of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the ECCE Programme in mainstream pre-school settings.
Better Start Quality Development Service	National early years quality development support service for early years education and care providers.
Family Hubs	Supported temporary accommodation arrangements intended to facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services, and appropriate family supports and surrounds.
Circle of Security	Parenting programme aiming to help parents understand their child's emotional world enabling them to help their children manage their emotions and develop self-esteem and sense of security.

City & County Childcare Committees

There are 31 CCCs who operate as local agents of DCYA and support the delivery of early education and childcare programmes at a local level. Services include Advice, support and training for providers and information in relation to services and networks for parents.

CSSR(T)

Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (Transitional) Programme. As part of the “Rebuilding Ireland – an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness” the DCYA has provided access to free childcare for children of families experiencing homelessness.

ECCE

Early Childhood Care & Education Programme (ECCE) - provides early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age (over three and not more than 5 and a half years old). A capitation fee is paid by the state to participating Early Childhood Education services that provide a pre-school service free of charge to all children within the qualifying age range.

Family Hubs

supported temporary accommodation arrangements intended to facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services, and appropriate family supports and surrounds

Highscope

Model of education designed in U.S.A promoting high quality equitable educational programmes to promote positive outcomes for children and young people.

Meitheal

A case co-ordination process for families with who require multi-agency intervention but who do not meet the threshold for referral to the Social Work Department under Children First. Practitioners in different agencies can use and lead on Meitheal so that they can communicate and work together more effectively to bring together a range of expertise, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the child and family within their community.

Abstract

Homelessness in Ireland has increased rapidly over recent years with children and families making up increasing proportions of the numbers recorded whilst single parent families are representing a disproportionate number of families experiencing homelessness. Consequently many early years services are supporting unprecedented numbers of children who are experiencing homelessness to engage and fully participate in early education programmes.

The experience of homelessness can permeate many levels and various aspects of a child's life particularly when historical risks and adversities are to be factored. Within this context this study guided by an ecological framework explores the range of influences on the experiences of children and their families during periods of homelessness and early years service providers responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness.

Guided by a qualitative approach Semi structured interviews were carried out with early years service managers and a development officer working for a government funded company providing support to early years service providers to explore what approaches early years services are adopting while responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness.

Findings show despite many challenges early years services face those who work in the sector and in particular for the purposes of this study, early years managers are incredibly committed to their role maintaining the highest standards for all children using their service while acknowledging that children and families experiencing homelessness possess a set of unique needs that may need a unique approach.

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study explores provision of early years care and education to children who are experiencing homelessness identifying available resources and capacity of a number of early years services. The perspectives of early years service managers is explored identifying supports and challenges observed while responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness.

This opening chapter sets out the Aims and objectives of the study, illustrates the rationale for the research and provides an outline of the study.

1.2 Aims And Objectives

The overall aim of the study is to explore the perspectives of early years managers in relation to their role in the provision of early years care and education while responding to the needs of children who are experiencing homelessness. In particular it will address the following research questions.

- What role do early years services have in responding the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
- What models of engagement are currently being used by services?
- What are the challenges for early years services responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
- What impact has responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness had on management structures and approaches to service provision?

1.3 Rationale

This study is undertaken amid a national housing crisis where despite government policy response within the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness the numbers of those being recorded as homeless continues to grow. Families are the currently the fastest growing group presenting as homeless with a disproportionate number of one

parent families recorded. A recent study on the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness and living in emergency accommodation (Scanlon & Mc Kenna 2018) identifies that many schools and early years services are providing opportunities for increasing numbers of children experiencing homelessness to fully engage with education. A number of critical areas were identified as requiring support for teachers to meet the childrens educational needs including access from agencies, specific funding to support pupils training and coordination of services. Although early childhood professionals were included in the sample the low response rate to the quantitative surveys provided limited insights to early years providers who are working with children in emergency accommodation.

Parallel to the homeless crisis is a staffing crisis within the early childhood care and education sector wrought with underinvestment, high staff turnover due to burnout and an exodus of qualified staff from the sector and sustainability issues for services (House of the Oireachtas 2017) Despite recent responses by policy to enhance access and quality of service provision through funding initiatives for childcare places, and training for practitioners the number of graduates leading the workforce remains considerably lower than the EU recommended level required for quality provision. This is significant in view of the relationship between qualifications and improved outcomes for children particularly children from disadvantaged families (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Blatchford & Taggart 2004).

In consideration of the above points this topic presented to the researcher who within their role works with children and families who have experienced homelessness, as an interesting and under researched area. In exploring how services are currently responding and what challenges they are meeting while engaging with children and families experiencing homelessness may inform how services provide supports in the future to ensure provision for the diverse and changing needs of children and families particularly the most vulnerable.

1.4 Outline Of The Study

Chapter one provides an outline of the study presenting the rationale for the research and illustrating the aims and objectives of the study.

Chapter two will present the literature. Firstly prevalence of children and families currently experiencing homelessness in Ireland will be presented to highlight the severity of the homeless crisis and how it impacts the early years sector. Literature discussing the impact of

homelessness on children from a national and international perspective will be presented keeping in mind an ecological framework. Current policy in relation to housing will be briefly introduced followed by an exploration of policy in relation to early childhood care and education. Finally implications for service provision and the role of the manager will be represented.

Chapter three will outline the methodology used discussing research design and detailing research methods used. The sampling method and sample will be presented and data analysis methods used described.

Chapter four will present the findings from eight semi structured interviews seven of which were undertaken with managers of early years services and one with a development officer from a government funded company providing support to early years service providers. The interviews were completed within three weeks in January 2019. Findings will be presented under three main headings engagement, service provision and impact on staff. A number of sub headings are also included.

Chapter five discusses the key outcomes from the findings in relation to the literature review and the aims and objectives of the study. Recommendations are made based on these outcomes and are also presented. A conclusion will be drawn to the study.

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There have been many changes in recent years in relation to policy and legislation in Ireland regarding the provision of early childhood Care and education. While changes have been implemented to promote accessibility and quality, managers as a consequence are faced with complex challenges in relation to workforce, finance and service delivery. Managers are presented with further challenges in relation to the development of service provision due to the diverse social cultural contexts within which children and their families are living. Increasingly early years services are supporting children who are experiencing homelessness as a changing homeless dynamic sees increasing numbers of families becoming homeless and entering emergency accommodation (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government 2016).

This literature review will highlight the relevant research in relation to early years services responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness. Firstly the research will explore homelessness, it's prevalence and impact on young children and their families. This will be followed by a brief description of policy response in relation to homelessness and a policy response to early education. The research will present implications for early years care and education provision following implementation of these policy responses.

Finally the research will explore the implication for the early years managers role and leadership within the service implementing policy responses and responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness.

2.2 Prevalence

In order to measure homelessness it is necessary to consider it's definition. In an Irish context under the Housing Act 1988, a person is considered homeless if there is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the local authority would be suitable accommodation for them and whoever might be reasonably be expected to reside with them. It takes into account those accommodated in emergency accommodation, hospitals and night shelters and in the opinion of the authority those unable to provide accommodation from their own resources

(Irish Statute Book 1988). The omission of those residing with family may be problematic in relation to creating a comprehensive picture of the issue and for those hidden homeless to access supports. The phenomenon of Homelessness is complex and often a combination of a number of factors. These include structural factors such as lack of affordable housing, unemployment, poverty and personal factors such as relationship breakdown, addiction and mental health. Structural economic factors are seen as the main force of the current homelessness crisis in Ireland. (Government of Ireland 2016, Hearne & Murphy 2017, Focus Ireland 2018).

The past three years has seen a rapid increase in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness in Ireland. Included in the 9,724 individuals reported homeless in Oct 2018, which was an increase of 17% from Oct 2017, where 1,709 families and 3,725 children who were accessing emergency accommodation (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018). One in every three people homeless being a child (Focus Ireland 2018). Of 23 families surveyed during December 2017, 56 children were included, 42% of which were four years or younger (Focus Ireland 2017). During the last census in 2016, 765 children aged 0-4 years represented the largest group of child age category recorded as homeless (CSO 2016). It is also important to note that national homeless figures do not include those who may be sleeping rough, living in squats, staying with friends or women and children staying in refuge accommodation (Focus Ireland 2018).

Due to this crisis many early years services and schools are supporting unprecedented numbers of children who are experiencing homelessness to engage in services and schools and fully participate in education and are doing so without additional resources or guidance (Scanlon & Mc Kenna 2018).

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

Children experiencing homeless, while sharing similar needs to children within families living in more stable accommodation have additional unique needs. Furthermore homelessness may intensify these needs and generate new stressors. It may be additionally challenging for children experiencing homelessness to have basic needs met such as physiological and safety needs and the need for belongingness, love, esteem and self - actualization as proposed by Maslow (1943) being fundamental to healthy growth. In exploring childrens needs and how they are met it is useful to consider how they are closely

linked to the realities of their parents and families under Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological perspective (Swick 1999). This perspective considers the many systems in which the family are engaged and reflects the dynamic nature of family relationships. By understanding the needs and strengths of families they may be supported and empowered during periods of stress such as that experienced during periods of homelessness (Swick & Williams 2006). As explained by Bronfenbrenner, human development or "*lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment*" (Bronfenbrenner 1979 p.3) occurs within a number of systems. The micro system or the inner most level may present to the child as the family or the early years service and where the child initially learns about their world. Relationships between settings in the micro system as they interconnect in a number of forms such as communication between the settings and the knowledge and attitudes by the settings in relation to each other are important as children have opportunity to engage with caring adults other than parents (Swick & Williams 2006). Contexts experienced within the exosystem may be positive or negative for the child depending on the experience of the adult. For example parents experiencing excessive stress related to work or issues that accompany homelessness such as constant searching and uncertainty related to finding accommodation which indirectly impacts negatively on the child. It may also be the experience of a positive quality early years programme empowering the whole family. Influences within the Macro system such as culture, beliefs, values and political policy influence how we behave and develop, as early years services planning programmes responding to the needs of children and families doing so within legislation and policy which informs early years care and education provision.

2.4 Impact Of Homelessness On Children And Families

Being aware of these dynamic and interactive systems which impact on family functioning may provide a framework for early years providers delivering support for children and their families. Families may have experienced a variety of problems that preceded or contributed to their becoming homeless while also experiencing new problems on entering homelessness (Halpenny, Keogh & Gilligan 2002). Further adversities may present as a consequence to supports implemented to address the immediate needs of children and families (Kilmer, Cook, Crusto, Strater & Haber 2012). Understanding the context and the impact of these

problems will further help early years providers apply appropriate support to meet individual child and family needs.

2.4.1 Adversities preceding homelessness.

Children and families may have faced adversities which preceded homelessness and which impact on the child parent relationship. In addition to lack of affordable housing other stressors such as, overcrowding, family conflict, poverty, addiction, and domestic violence may be present (Halpenny, Keogh & Gilligan 2002). Trauma during childhood and parent mental health or separation from a parent, have also been noted as contributory factors to pathways to homelessness (Lambert, O Callaghan & Jump 2018). Experiencing poverty may not only prolong homelessness but may also intensify other related problems (Swick & Williams 2010). Furthermore within families living in poverty parents are more likely to be less nurturing and children more likely to present with behaviour difficulties and depression (Kilmer et al 2012). Teenage mothers are more likely to become homeless than their peers who don't have children often dropping out of school early leading to poverty and without the support they require to foster positive relationship with their child (Swick and Williams 2010). Also impacting on their capacity to develop quality parent child relationships is their personal history in relation to family disruption during childhood, lack of supportive relationships and abuse. This is of critical significance given that it is recorded that women account for 41% of homeless adults in Ireland and represent 86% of the total number of lone parent households. They are more likely to experience hidden homelessness as they avoid homeless services that may not be female appropriate or are uncounsed as they are residing in refuge accommodation following a domestic violence experience (Focus Ireland 2019).

2.4.2 Adversities faced as a result of becoming homelessness.

The experience of becoming homeless may be traumatic and expose children and families to further trauma impacting on *“how children and families think feel, behave cope and relate to others”* (Guarino & Bassuk 2010 p. 14). The prevalence of traumatic stress among families who are homeless is particularly high. With new threats or dangers becoming reminders of past trauma, families experiencing trauma may be constantly on guard and engaged in emergency fight, flight or freeze responses which may affect thinking, planning problem

solving and managing emotional states which impact on relationships (Guarino & Bassuk 2010). Trauma or exposure to household dysfunction or abuse during childhood is also linked to risk factors in relation to disease, quality of life, health care utilization and mortality (Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg et al. 1998). As children and families remain in emergency accommodation for extended periods often under poor conditions many aspects of their lives are impacted including health, well-being, development and education (Halpenny, Keogh & Gilligan 2002).

Inappropriate amenities in emergency accommodation such as poor heating and cooking facilities, overcrowding, lack of play space may aggravate existing or increase the risk of health problems. Temple Street Children's University Hospital reported an increased number of children presenting to their emergency department who are homeless with 842 recorded for 2018 and with the majority of the 260 admitted between October and December 2018 having presentations attributed to unsuitable cramped temporary accommodation (Temple Street Children's University Hospital 2019). Mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, emotional and behavioural disorders and developmental delays are exacerbated. Daily routines are affected as restrictions may be placed on access to accommodation during the day or where lack of space and privacy lead to families being out and about for long periods resulting in children experiencing exhaustion. Long periods spent within confined space may lead to conflict and stress among parents. (Keogh, Halpenny, & Gilligan 2006).

Many families experience isolation when placed in accommodation which allows minimal contact with extended family and friends due to the distance and with no visitors policies in place. This disconnection impedes access to natural supports in the community, also impacting negatively on minority families interrupting their cultural norms of social connectedness (Kilmer et al 2012). Living in the same place for short periods prevents parents building relationships with other parents and therefore may miss out on the experience of that support network (Keogh, Halpenny & Gilligan 2006). Homelessness has particular impact on children's sense of identity, security and sense of place in the community (Guarino & Bassuk, 2010, Swick 1999).

Public perception or actions toward families experiencing homelessness may highlight stigma that is present among employers, school and also among the professionals within services in place to support families. Stigma may be more personal in the form of self blame and shame. Children may be afraid to tell others where they live because they are embarrassed. The fear

of rejection or stigmatisation by peers may impact relationships and further magnify the feeling of isolation (Keogh, Halpenny & Gilligan 2006).

Parenting capacity may be challenged during periods of homelessness as barriers present impacting ability to provide a safe nurturing environment where healthy emotional attachments with their child can be developed and where access to resources to further empower the family are limited. Parental self esteem is crucial in the development of healthy parent child relationships (Swick & Williams 2010) but may be affected during periods of homelessness as parents experience loss of control over daily routine and feel judged by their status. Homelessness generates a stressful environment for parenting where parental attention is diverted to managing the instability of accommodation and uncertainty of everyday life and where significant stress may make it furthermore challenging to escape homelessness (O' Carroll 2012).

Homelessness impacts on educational access and participation across four domains, basic physiological needs, safety, routine and predictability, friendship, trust and belonging and attitudes to school and educational aspirations (Scanlon & Mc Kenna 2018). Many challenges may be faced by families maintaining consistent educational experiences including having to travel long distances and associated costs. Children may have to wake up earlier and return home later impacting on sleep routines. Despite the challenges to homeless families maintaining attendance at school it may be the only source of consistency or stability in the child's daily routine serving as a support enabling them to cope with instability and insecurity (Keogh, Halpenny & Gilligan 2006, Scanlon & Mc Kenna 2018).

2.4.3 Adversities associated with service system response.

Responses while designed to meet the immediate needs of children and families entering homelessness may unintentionally compound the experience and cause more harm (Kilmer et al 2012). With lack of housing options families may be forced to avail of family hubs where there is a danger that while they are a temporary solution they may become a permanent feature as families remain in this accommodation for excessive periods of time. The risk associated with this being that families may become institutionalised restricting capacity to have normal family lives where functioning in relation to parenting, child development, employment, education and maintaining family networks is inhibited leading “ *to a form of therapeutic incarceration*” (Hearne & Murphy 2017p. 2) with society over time blaming

these families for a situation they did not cause. Hearne & Murphy (2017) further caution that in particular hubs may become the new institutionalisation of vulnerable women and children who, when the failure of the housing market has been forgotten about, will become the problem that needs to be solved.

Stereotypical views of homeless parents by others as lacking in competence may result in their strengths being overlooked and if these views are held by individuals they encounter within services they access it may lead them to underuse valuable resources required to address their needs and impede their empowerment (Swick, Williams & Fields 2014).

2.5 Policy Response To Homelessness

Government Homeless policy has been led by a housing first approach for some time. Rebuilding Ireland (Government of Ireland 2016) the Action Plan For Housing and Homelessness people sets out a specific aim to increase efforts and resources towards providing those experiencing homelessness with a home following a housing led housing first approach. It prioritises the need to address the level of homeless families and those who are long term homeless living in emergency accommodation. It proposes rapid delivery housing alongside additional measures which would prevent others from losing their homes, improving the rental sector and utilizing existing housing. The plan acknowledges issues that may arise in relation to school attendance for children who are experiencing homelessness (Government of Ireland 2016). The Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (Transitional) CCSR (T) was introduced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2018 and in collaboration with Focus Ireland provides free access to free childcare for families experiencing homelessness for up to five hours per day with a hot meal included (DCYA 2018).

While not originally included in the Action Plan For Housing and Homelessness, family supported accommodation or family hubs were also introduced in 2017 as an alternative to unsustainable and less stable emergency accommodation such as hotels and B&BS.

2.6 Policies and Perspectives in Early Years Care and Education

Following ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, Ireland made a commitment to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights including the right to a standard of living adequate to the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (article 27). Commitments within the programme for Government (2011) included, the referendum on children's rights, the establishment of Tusla the child and family agency and the establishment of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) presenting improved integrated services directed at the early years which are also based on research evidence reporting positive outcomes for children (Institute of Public Health and the Centre for Effective Services 2016).

A distinctive element of recent policy development in relation to early childhood in Ireland is prevention and early intervention work underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Considering the diverse influences on development and adaptation highlights how a multidimensional approach to working with young children may be the most appropriate. The ecological framework may be a useful perspective from which to examine the adaptation of children and families experiencing homelessness and to examine the basis for system responses (Kilmer, Cook, Crusto, Strater & Haber 2012, Institute of Public Health in Ireland and the Centre for Effective Services 2016). Early childhood is acknowledged as critical period where with good nutrition, adequate housing secure relationships and safe learning environments, the development of child health and well being can be achieved. However adverse childhood experiences such as poverty, abuse and neglect may negatively impact child health and wellbeing and also a wide range of future outcomes. Early intervention has been identified as key to achieving positive outcomes within Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020 and Healthy Ireland: A framework for improved health and wellbeing 2013-2025. Following investment from the Atlantic Philanthropies 52 prevention and early intervention programmes which were rigorously evaluated provide evidence of the positive impact of early intervention during early childhood. (Institute of Public Health in Ireland and the Centre for Effective Services 2016). Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy focusing on children up to six years old identified five key areas that needed to be addressed to improve resources for young children including increased investment in early care and education, extended paid parental leave, strengthened family support, good governance and accountability and quality in services, enhancement and extension of quality

childhood care and education services. First five A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 proposes commitment to a ten year plan to support children and their families making a huge contribution to the lives of young children, society and the economy over the short medium and long term. Included in this plan are measures to address poverty in early childhood including a DEIS type model for early years to narrow the gap for disadvantaged children (Government of Ireland 2018).

2.7 Implications For Provision Of Early Years Care and Education

Current provision of early years care and education occurs in a dynamic environment shaped by continuing policy changes and developments impacting on accessibility and types of provision. Current funding programmes implemented by the DCYA have provided access for 185,580 children to services during the 2017/2018 programme year. Furthermore two additional strands of CCS, CCSR and CCSRT provided access to 530 refugees and children of families experiencing homelessness (Pobal 2018). The National Childcare Scheme, which launches in October 2019, proposes to replace all targeted programmes with a single streamlined scheme enabling some families to access childcare subsidies for the first time (NCS 2019).

Further programmes aimed at supporting service provision and enhancing quality, include Better Start, Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), capital funding, the Learner fund and the Area-Based Childhood Programme (ABC) (Pobal 2018). While there are a range of services within both private and community sectors, using a varied curricula and quality standard approaches, Aistear is the most widely applied curriculum framework and the Síolta framework sets out quality standards. Both are used in the majority, also with the proportion of services applying the frameworks broadly similar across community and private services promoting a consistent approach.

Notwithstanding the complement of supports to early years care and education provision some services have more access to certain supports than others. In relation to the current 13 ABC sites while it was found that these programmes supported achievement of outcomes in select communities other communities which may have equally benefitted are excluded. This is an important observation given that highly mobile families who are experiencing homelessness may move between a number of communities. Families who are homeless face challenges in relation to parenting in relation to forming healthy emotional and social

attachments with their children, developing safe and nurturing environments and developing links to family supports which can empower the family (Swick and Williams 2010). Moreover, parents who participated in interventions within ABC programmes reported that they had change in level of perceived empowerment and confidence feeling better to set boundaries and discipline their children. They also had developed informal peer networks and increased knowledge and confidence engaging in local services (DCYA 2018). Therefore these supports are highly relevant to parents who are homeless when it is proposed that their relationship with their children is the core element at the centre of their efforts to resolve their challenges (Swick, Williams & Fields 2014). The recently launched First five (Early Years) strategy proposes the development of family and early childhood centres bringing together a range of services to support children and parents which will further modify service provision (Government of Ireland 2019).

2.8 Leadership

While considering services within the ecological framework the role of the manager is observed as working within the micro system with children, families and staff, while moving within the meso system as they engage with inspectors, funders and collaborating agencies also encountering legislators within the macro system. They manage challenges that may arise within and between the systems and among relationships of others within the systems, implementing the numerous initiatives under legislative frameworks while ensuring sustainability and quality service which meets the needs of services users (Moloney & Pettersen 2017). As a result the managers role is consequently evolving becoming more complex providing the link between policy and practice. Building leadership capacity is recognised as vital to ensuring development of solid reciprocal relationships between theory and practice. It is therefore beneficial for managers to be aware of their role as agents of change and the skills and leadership styles required to assume this role successfully (Urban, Vandebroek et al 2011). Effective management requires the ability to prepare and motivate practitioners for change confirming confidence in their capability to meet new requirements (Rodd 2013). Competence in cultural analysis is required if they are to lead change. As managers lead staff towards evidence based practices they may need to explore understand and challenge embedded values and assumptions while also understanding cultures existing within collaborating agencies which also support children and families (Schein 2010).

While the quality of early childhood care and education is related to the competence of the practitioners working with the children and families, competence can be understood as a characteristic of an entire early childhood system. Within a competent system support is required for practitioners to realise capabilities to develop responsible and responsive practices to children and families within a continuous changing societal context. (Urban, Vandebroek et al 2011). Accessing supports for staff is therefore a crucial element to the managers role in retaining qualified staff by providing opportunities for continuous professional development and improving working conditions. Engaging in joint learning and critical reflection will enable the development of reflective competencies supporting work within diverse and changing contexts. While improvement in qualifications, training and working conditions are identified as a crucial element of an effective policy lever for improving quality (OECD 2012), it is worth noting that the employment levels for graduates is currently at 22% of the workforce (Pobal 2018) which is comparatively low in contrast to the European recommended level of 60% of a graduate led workforce (Urban, Vandebroek et al 2011) A feature of this is the risk that poor salaries may make staff retention a concern and a challenge for many managers, who can struggle to employ suitably qualified and experienced early years professionals.

2.9 Conclusion

The following chapter will present findings in relation to managers responses following semi structured interviews carried out within a three week period in January 2019.

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the research methods chosen and describes the research design. Details in relation to the sample are outlined followed by data collection and data analysis applied. Ethical considerations and limitations are presented.

3.2 Research Approach

Due to the exploratory nature of this study a qualitative paradigm was adopted. Exploring how social phenomena arise in the interactions of the respondents indicates a qualitative approach is more appropriate, with quantitative methods being more useful for establishing social facts or the causes of the phenomena (Silverman 2017). Positioned within a constructionist ontology the researcher views the social world as social constructions being constructed through individual's perceptions and their interactions with others (Denscombe 2010). The research is guided by an interpretivist epistemology where it is understood that social reality has meaning for individuals and in turn attributes meaning to their actions. Individuals then act upon the meanings that they attribute to their own actions and the actions of others. The research interprets their actions and their social world from their point of view (Bryman 2016).

Data collected within a qualitative paradigm that is text, words and images are better suited than data in numbers associated with quantitative paradigms, in gaining an understanding of the complexities and subtleties of the social world. Qualitative research allows the research to gain an insight into the meanings that people give to a social phenomena from their point of view (Denscombe 2010). A qualitative approach for this research will allow exploration of the perspectives of early years managers in relation to their service responding to the phenomena of family homelessness and the increase in numbers of children attending services who are homeless.

Qualitative research is particularly appropriate to studying context, illuminating process including organizational change and decision making which in turn affect daily practice and interactions. Unintentional consequences or responses to change may be uncovered during qualitative research as respondents identify issues significant to them and how they affect their daily work practices (Barbour 2014). This research concerns response to change and the

decisions that have to be made around this change by early years services which makes it well suited.

Unlike quantitative research qualitative research highlights how the macro such as social class or locality is interpreted in the micro that is daily practices and interactions to guide individual behaviour (Barbour 2014). Qualitative research provides a rich account of how Early Years services interact and respond to features of the macro in relation to the context in which they are situated and the policy applicable to the early years service and the children and families who use the early years service.

A recent study in an Irish context in relation to the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness and living in emergency accommodation (Scanlon & Mc Kenna 2018) reported a low response rate by early years services to questionnaires, resulting in quantitative data being omitted. It was decided that given the time limitations for this study that a qualitative approach would allow for a more accessible and richer sample.

3.3 Research Instrument

Data for this research was collected using semi structured interviews where by using a protocol (see appendix 1), questions were arranged to allow systematic collection of data with the aim that the focus provided would also facilitate analysis of the data. Although the interview protocol included prearranged complete questions it was also possible to encourage the respondents to speak personally and at length about their experiences. The research while exploring a number of topics to uncover the respondents views respected how they framed and structured their responses. Semi structured interviews allows a large quantity of data to be gathered quickly with immediate clarification and follow up possible. However it is necessary to consider the importance of building trust and rapport with respondents ensuring they are comfortable answering questions and can do so providing the information or data required. The research is relying on the respondents ability to articulate their responses and the researcher must be able to understand and interpret them (Marshall & Rossman 2016). The researcher will also be aware that large quantities of data collected during interviews will need to be transcribed which may be a lengthy process impacting on time frames. Data was collected over a period of three weeks.

3.4 Sample and Access

3.4.1 Sample

The sample was comprised of six individual early years professionals in management roles within six early years settings in five different urban areas of Dublin. Five of the settings were community based early years services, three of which are full day services and two of which are sessional services. One respondent worked in a private full day service. All respondents had a number of children attending the service who were experiencing homelessness. Two of these services were set up specifically to meet the needs of children who were experiencing homelessness. In relation to one of the interviews conducted it must be noted that two managers from the same service were present and while one manager was the main respondent both responses were transcribed and presented in the findings. During the course of the research a network meeting for early years professionals was attended by the researcher and two additional respondents were invited to participate in the study. One respondent was the manager of a community based service and who had a number of children attending their service who were experiencing homelessness. The second additional respondent is employed by a Government funded company in a supporting role to early years providers. This respondent presented a recent brief within their role to develop links between staff and families placed within emergency accommodation such as hubs and hotels with early years services in the community. One particular objective within the brief was to highlight a childcare funding initiative specifically for children who are experiencing homelessness.

3.4.2 Sampling method

When the focus of a study is on a particular population a specific strategy should be developed in relation to that population that is conceptually or theoretically informed and will guide the researcher in making the many sampling decisions that will follow (Marshall & Rossman 2016).

A non-probability form of sampling, purposive sampling was used for this research project as the sample chosen were relevant to the research question and met the criteria in that they were in a managerial role within an early years service which had a number of children attending the service who were experiencing homelessness (Bryman 2016). The sample size is determined by a number of factors including time constraints and funding with the purpose

of the study of most concern. While larger samples including more diverse respondents and settings might enhance transferability of the findings smaller samples provide data with deeper cultural descriptions (Marshall & Rossman 2016). Six Services were identified from a list of services on the Dublin City Childcare Committee data base and listed as offering a variety of government childcare funding options for service users. The rationale for considering services offering a variety of funding schemes was that it would be likely that these services who would have a good mix of children from different socio economic backgrounds that is children availing of the universal two year free preschool years and children availing of funding for families on lower incomes and families experiencing homelessness. Six respondents were initially contacted by phone followed by emailing a letter of information and invitation to participate in the study. Two respondents were recruited following the researchers attendance at a child care providers network meeting hosted by the Dublin City Childcare Committee where they were approached and verbally informed of the study and invited to participate. They were sent by email the same letter of information and invitation. The information letter gives respondents details of the research and a sense of if they are a right fit for the study. Gatekeepers for organizations will be required to carefully consider invitations to participate in research so a detailed account will facilitate their decision and allay possible hesitations (Marshall and Rossman 2016).

3.4.3 Rational for target population

Early years service managers were selected for the sample as they are responsible for ensuring that the service they are providing is meeting the needs of the children and families using the service. They also have responsibility to ensure that the service complies with the relevant legislation and fulfils contractual agreement in relation to Government funding. They are in the most appropriate position to observe the changing needs of children and how current policy provides for the service meeting these needs.

3.5 Data Collection

Following the respondents agreement to participate in the study appointments were set to meet and carry out the semi structured interviews in the respondents place of work. One respondent requested an alternative location due to their working arrangements away from their usual place of work on the day that suited them best. This was facilitated in an office space at the researcher's place of work due to the convenient location for the respondent.

Before each interview respondents reviewed the letter of information regarding the study and signed a consent form. Respondents were reminded of their right to choose not to answer questions if they did not wish to and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Opening questions allowed participants to feel at ease and were followed by content questions and probing questions to deconstruct the central phenomenon being explored. Participants were invited to ask questions provide additional relevant information or information they may have omitted in an earlier response during the closing instructions (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Interviews lasted 15 mins -1hour 20 mins and took place in the participant's usual place of work. They were digitally recorded on a password protected recording device. Recordings were transcribed and saved in an encrypted file on a password protected device.

3.6 Limitations

Qualitative research, while providing extensive rich data is time consuming to prepare for analysis. During the process of transcribing interviews the responses become very familiar facilitating analysis. However transcription is an interpretive process and some context might be lost changing from one medium to the next. The feel of the interview session may not be captured as transcripts may not convey setting context and body language (Neuman 2011). Given the small sample size findings cannot be generalised to the experiences of all early years managers providing a service meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness. Furthermore the sample is not evenly distributed across types of early years provision such as community, private, or part of wider organisations.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Awareness of the ethical issues that may arise during research facilitates informed decisions about the implications of certain choices (Bryman 2016). Informed decisions will allow the interests of the participants to be protected and ensures that their participation takes place under informed consent. Deception is avoided and integrity of the research is supported while complying with the law of the land (Denscombe 2010). Research ethics approval was approved by Technical University (TU) Dublin.

Ethical issues were anticipated prior to and addressed at each stage of the study that is at the beginning of the study, during data collection, analysis and reporting and also in relation to sharing and secure storage of information (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

By ensuring that all relevant information was presented in relation to what was going to occur during the study in a manner that enabled the respondent to fully comprehend the information and agree to voluntary participation, informed consent by respondents was obtained (Denscombe 2010). Respondents were provided with an information letter in relation to the study and informed of their rights to anonymity, confidentiality and their right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the research project. (See appendix 3). All participants signed a consent form (see appendix 4).

Privacy was respected by providing anonymity which allows the social picture of the respondents to be provided without identifying information such as real name and location. This was ensured by assigning codes to identify respondents. Some respondents unintentionally included identifying information within their interview responses but these details were kept in confidence and stored securely by encryption (Neuman 2011).

3.8 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is used to promote validity of the research whereby bias is clarified and it is acknowledged that interpretations may be shaped by the background of the researcher in relation to gender culture, history and socioeconomic origin (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

As the researcher is currently employed within a service providing support to children and families experiencing homelessness it is acknowledged that respondents experiences were the focus of the study and that they may be very different. Another consideration in relation to the researchers employment experience is that some respondents may be hesitant with responses if they feel the researcher may hold more knowledge in relation to the topic.

As a number of respondents recounted stories in relation to families experiencing homelessness it was important for the researcher not to over empathise or get too drawn in and lose focus of the research. Given the sensitive nature and on closer examination the extent of the issue it is important to remain professional yet understanding.

At times respondents referred to other services and supports which may have been known to the researcher and this highlighted how the researcher needed to be very aware of confidentiality while engaging with the respondents and recording the responses.

It was noted during the interview process that a number of the respondents were very experienced within the Early childhood Care and Education sector and operating very well established services where it may be possible that respondents could assume that the researcher was familiar with all the services that they provide and omit certain information.

3.9 Data Analysis

Analysis allows us to improve understanding, expand theory and advance knowledge (Neuman 2011 p.507) By organizing data systematically integrating and examining, patterns and relationships are found with concepts and broad themes are identified (Neuman 2011). Data analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps approach to thematic analysis which facilitates organization and description of data concisely in rich detail often interpreting various aspects of the research topic.

The interviews were transcribed which allowed for familiarization with and thorough understanding of the data. Care was taken during this process as changing the medium of the data may have implications for accuracy, fidelity and interpretation (Gibbs 2013). Respondents were assigned codes (R1 to R8) to ensure anonymity and any identifying information in relation to children, families, staff and the service were omitted from the text. Ideas and potential coding schemes were noted throughout this process. During the second step Initial ideas or codes were generated manually in relation to data that was interesting or meaningful and that had related to the literature review. Codes went beyond the descriptive being analytic and as theoretical as possible (Gibbs 2013) Highlighters were used to colour code potential patterns noting that some responses were highlighted in a number of colours as they may correspond to a number of potential themes. These codes were then collated together and ready for the next step of identifying a number of codes that could combine under an overarching theme and arranging the codes under these potential themes. Reviewing these themes helped refine choice of themes in that some did not form a complete theme and where some themes needed to be further broken down. For the next step themes are defined and refined and sub themes developed. Extracts from the data were arranged under the related themes in a coherent and consistent account providing a narrative about what makes them

interesting and how they relate to the overall story and the research question. Finally the report was written up providing an account of the story that the data has to tell (Braun & Clarke 2006).

3.10 Conclusion

Semi structured interviews provide flexibility in that the order in which questions are asked may be strategically arranged or prioritised by importance by the research while allowing respondents to focus or elaborate on issues that hold importance to them (Barbour 2014).

The goal of qualitative data analysis *is to organise specific details into a coherent picture, model or set of tightly interlocked concepts* (Neuman 2011p.509). The next chapter will present the findings from the responses in a coherent account.

Presentation of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data that emerged during eight semi structured interviews which were undertaken within a three week period January 2019. Data presented includes findings that emerged from seven semi structured interviews which were carried out with managers of early years services. In addition findings which emerged from one semi structured interview with a development officer for a Government sponsored company providing support to early years providers is also presented.

The data gathered was organised and is presented under three overarching themes emerging from the responses.

The first theme relates to service providers experience of working with children and families who are experiencing homelessness. The second relates to access to resources and how this acts as both a support and a challenge to respondents. The third theme explores impact on services in particular relation to staff and the role of the manager.

The views of respondents are presented under the themes identified with a number of sub headings and direct quotes from transcripts. Quotes are represented in italics and specific abbreviations (R1 to R8) are used to attribute the quote without revealing identity of the respondent.

4.2 Engagement

All respondents who were managing early years services reported that they had a number of children attending their service who were experiencing homelessness. An overview of the number of children accessing the services is set out in table 1

Respondent	Type of Service	Total number Early Years Children Attending	Number of Early years Children Experiencing Homelessness Attending
R1	Community	112	23%
R2	Community	52	6%
R3	Community	117	3%
R4	Service provided within Organisation providing Supported Temporary Accommodation	6	67%
R6	Service provided within Organisation providing supports to lone parents.	16	8%
R7	Private	100	4%
R8	Service provided within Organisation providing Supported Temporary Accommodation	4	100%

Table 1 overview of number children accessing services

Initial response from one respondent in relation to the number of children attending their early years service and experiencing homelessness had included school age children. Further clarification sought by the researcher established the number in relation to early years children and this is the figure presented in the findings.

While some respondents noted that the numbers of children experiencing homelessness attending their early years service fluctuates others have observed a steady increase in recent years.

Last year I think we had eighteen homeless families using the service. The year before there was about seven. We had none the year before that. (R1)

4.2.1 Types of homeless accommodation.

Respondent's descriptions of children who were experiencing homelessness attending their services convey that most were living in various types of temporary accommodation while a number of children and families are staying with other family members.

So while they're they're not living in B&B accommodation or they're not living in hostels or anything like that. They are effectively homeless because they would have had a home and now they don't have one anymore. (R7)

Respondents noted that some families are remaining in temporary accommodation longer than is intended due to the shortage of alternative accommodation.

It's a short term accommodation so it's technically six to nine months that they could be with us [...] Some of our families are here two years at the moment, (R8)

Engagement has led to respondents achieving a deeper understanding of the issue of homelessness.

I had my own kinda preconceived notions of homelessness and I very much tied it all up with addiction and em, addictions of various sorts and kind of more associated it rough sleeping as opposed to what I actually saw then [...]. (R5)

4.2.2 Impact of homelessness on children.

A number of respondents described the negative impact of homelessness on child development, highlighting a negative impact on emotional development. Respondents observed children being tired from travelling distances between accommodation to the service which can also be a factor for erratic attendance or absenteeism. The lack of adequate cooking facilities in some accommodations results in poor diet for some children.

A lot of the children are eating from take away cause there's no cooking facilities in the hotel rooms. So they'd come in without breakfast. (R1)

The absence of laundry facilities sometimes results in children wearing inadequate or damp clothing.

They come in dressed inappropriately so if it's cold they might have something light on or their clothes are damp where they're not being dried properly. (R1)

A number of respondents discussed trauma of being homeless itself while others discussed the trauma of experiences preceding homelessness, which could be described as contributory factors. Concern was expressed that trauma manifesting in behaviours normally associated with a number of disorders possibly leading to misdiagnosis.

We're concerned that when these children go into the school system are they going to start getting diagnosed with ADHD em, when all they need is a bit of space. (R7)

4.2.3 Contributory factors.

Respondents acknowledged that there could be numerous reasons why families are experiencing homelessness.

Being homeless itself is such a trauma, but the other bits that go on as well, addiction, mental health everything that's attached to it that most of our families are dealing with [...] (R8)

Highlighted by one respondent (R5) subsequent to visiting twelve family hubs, is a cohort of young women who had to leave the family home following the birth of their child.

[...] So young girls kind of the seventeen to twenty five who em maybe have a child, maybe have a second child and due to overcrowding facilities in their parental home [...] (R5)

A number of respondents expressed the view that needs of children in homeless accommodation had become more complex presenting challenging behaviour, anger, anxiety and children appearing withdrawn.

There's a crossover of children in the population. Children of homelessness and children that are at risk...we are looking at children presenting with challenging behaviour. We're looking at children that are more at higher risk of neglect or any other forms of abuse, emotional, sexual, physical. But neglect would be the biggest thing. (R4)

4.2.4 Stigma, fear and isolation.

Respondents discussed that it can take time for parents to reveal that they have become homeless. In some cases a change is often initially noted in the child's behaviour.

And it might take a few weeks but you'll tease it out. You'll find out well actually they're not living at home anymore or we've had to move in with my parents. (R7)

Respondents reported how some families expressed fear and have experienced racism. Parents find it challenging to prepare food from their culture and there are language barriers to overcome which impact on professional relationships and obtaining necessary support.

Mum and dad take it in turns to stay awake to keep the children safe because they don't feel safe in the B&B. When they go down to use the kitchen they're being called terrorists because they are Muslim (R7)

Accounts suggest that parents worry about their future. Parents find it challenging to retain their employment while living in homeless accommodation as some accommodations do not permit visitors restricting the use of babysitters while working late shifts. Availing of education opportunities and supports is a challenge.

She had to take time off work because of all the other issues that were going on. So there was loads going on in her life so she was like I have no money [...] she was just so low. (R2)

[...], while the families are living in homeless accommodation it's very hard to commit and to participate either in the parenting course because they struggle on an everyday basis. They need to go there and there. They are looking for their accommodation. (R6)

One respondent acknowledged that families while living within supported housing accommodation, although they may become part of a community within the gated accommodation, with a strict no visitor policy, they may find it challenging to connect with the wider community, with limited access to friends and family leading to potential isolation. (R7) This was a similar experience for another parent residing in a hotel room.

[...] they can't bring anyone into the apartment [...] if they make friends with the girl in the room next door they're not allowed to go in out of each other's apartments because the cameras are in the corridors and they're watching (R1)

Parenting capacity is being undermined while families reside in emergency accommodation due to lack of space and noise restrictions where families may be reported if their child is upset or having a temper tantrum. Parent child relationships may be negatively affected by parents preoccupation in relation to accessing accommodation.

[...] mam being stressed out and running around and I don't think mam was fully there with her when she was with her. (R2)

4.3 Service Provision

Service provision was discussed in relation to resources, funding and staffing which increase organisational capacity to meet the needs of children and families. Particular issues relating to service provision included the availability of supports for children in relation to social and emotional development, conflict resolution and making choices while the need to provide supports for parents in relation to education and developing skills which promote positive relationships with their children was also identified.

4.3.1 Resources.

It appeared that some services had more access to resources that would enhance service provision for families. Services in areas of designated areas of disadvantage with access to ABC programmes had access to a variety of supports including funding for training for staff in Highscope, Circle of security and Infant mental health with enhanced access to an early years mentor and additional equipment. For some, being located in an area with a number of other services who are trained in the same approaches allows for consistency and continuity if children transition from one service to another. A number of respondents referred to an infant mental health network and an early years network as a source of support.

The services in [...] really work well together at that community aspect in helping each other out with it cause they're all facing the same difficulties. (R8)

In relation to services operating as part of larger organisations one respondent discussed how being the point of contact can connect the child and family onto further supports within the organisation.

Once you build that relationship with the parent then you can really refer them onto other services that could support them further so for example parenting courses or sometimes after that then counselling. (R6)

It was also highlighted how early years services can be an important link between families in emergency accommodation and services within the community

That child has got to four without engagement in services [...] it's [early years service] a life line for her (R5)

It emerged from accounts that some services were going beyond the expected level of service provision to support children and families in what ways they could.

He was really sick for a few days and we actually recommended she bring him to A&E...we actually organised to gather up all the other children and we kept them here until six o'clock that day (R7)

..They [DCYA] say five hours a day but we're open six so I let the children [experiencing homelessness] come in [...] at nine until three (R1)

We do give some food parcels and that to some of the parents that are homeless. (R3)

4.3.2 Statutory funding.

Respondents referred to childcare funding schemes implemented by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). While the CCSRT scheme is welcome and is accessed, it often does not meet the needs of the children.

That's only five hours a day [...]parents need the full day cause they're working part time and spending the rest of the afternoon trying to figure out like where they're going to go.(R2)

In contrast to this, one respondent recounted having to negotiate access to CCSRT funding on behalf of the child as the service only operated twenty hours per week instead of the stipulated twenty five. (R6)

Maintaining access and provision is a challenge particularly for highly mobile families with regular appointments for supports or therapies, and long commutes to the service.

We have families [...] and we are lucky to have them here. And they are being policed and then their funding was cut. If they're late in late out or early leaving it all gets cut back. (R3B).

Furthermore respondents conveyed how professional relationships with parents may be compromised as they regularly address issues in relation to time keeping and absenteeism.

In some cases CCSRT hindered access to supports which were a feature of other funding schemes.

[...] Better Start Aim funding for the child with the diagnosis we couldn't get it because DCYA and Pobal came back and says no. She wasn't entitled to another year under the ECCE programme. (R4)

4.3.3 Staffing.

A relationship between Staff qualifications, continuous professional development (CPD) and quality was indicated by responses.

Our room leaders are a level 8 or a level 9 [...] our room leaders work in our breakfast service and our afterschool service. So there is a real good level of quality in the service (R7)

4.4 Impact on staff.

While working with a diverse range of families respondents acknowledged that staff have adapted their practice to meet the needs of children and families accessing services.

I find they're [staff] doing more of the day to day support with parents and I am doing the bigger piece (R1)

*When the family comes you're supporting them because you're having to give them the time to chat with them. You know you're giving them advice [...]
(R7)*

4.4.1 Emotional cost.

Respondents expressed huge empathy for children and families experiencing homelessness.

I have parents here that would be very emotional, would be going through a lot of stuff and then they're trying to hide it from the kids but they're, they need someone. They haven't got that support outside (R2)

We're dealing with the parents also. But there are days when some parents are feeling so low that they can't even get a child in. They can't hardly get themselves out of the bed sometimes because they're feeling so low. (R3A).

Changing needs of children and families places extra demands on staff on an emotional level.

Staff need something there to to because they're going home worried sick about the children (R1)

4.4.2 Changing manager role.

Managing change was conveyed as a feature of the managers role in supporting staff to understand and implement change to meet the complex needs of children and families. Respondents discussed how training enabled them to support the staff in relation to change.

So I felt my job became much easier with the backup of Highscope [...] I'm trying to use the staff to facilitate a lot of stuff because it's it's bringing the staff up to another level as well. (R1)

They delivered workshops for our parents on healthy eating and they were a bag of nerves the two of them and I said no you'll be able to do it, you'll be great and the two of them done it and at the end of it the two of them said [...] I would never have pushed meself to do anything like that but they done it. (R1)

Respondents expressed frustration in relation to excessive periods of time spent on administration duties in relation to funding schemes which are frequently accessed by children experiencing homelessness, limiting their time spent with children and families. Record keeping was discussed as becoming more extensive due to the complex support needs of the children and families.

Another role would be around that you have like a case management file so that's would have been new to me when I started here ten years ago [...] (R4)

It was conveyed that managers are conscious of increasing workloads and the impact that might have on service provision.

I am managing the centre but I find I am getting pulled away more for counselling work than I am for the day to day running of the service and it's a huge service so like it's easy to miss something if you're not on the ball. (R1)

4.4.3 Changing role of early years service.

Further to change in roles of staff and managers, it was proposed by respondents that the role of the early years service has evolved where now it supports the whole family and support is required to fulfil these roles.

We are seen as a protector factor now with the, with the social workers. (R4)

[...] when do you say we're not a childcare service anymore? We're actually a family centre that's catering for all these needs that's not in our job descriptions. (R1)

4.5 Conclusion

The three broad themes emerging from the responses will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to the research questions and current literature.

Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the three broad themes that emerged from the findings which are engagement, service provision and impact on staff. These are discussed in detail in the context of existing literature.

Current statistics suggest that families and children are the fastest growing population of homeless in Ireland (Scanlon & Mc Kenna 2018, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018), and this is reflected in early years services, as respondents report an increase in numbers of children experiencing homelessness attending their services. This changing homeless dynamic impacts on how children and families engage with early years services. It provokes responses by early years services where in order to meet the needs of children and families experiencing homelessness approaches may have to be adapted and changed to meet consequential challenges placed on the service.

5.2 Engagement

While the level of engagement with children experiencing homelessness was quite varied, accounts of experiences suggest a heightened understanding among respondents in relation to pathways into and the impact of homelessness on young children.

5.2.1 Pathways to homelessness.

One respondent (R5) discussed how by working with service providers and families their preconceptions of homelessness as mainly linked to addiction and rough sleeping have been challenged. A number of Pathways to homelessness have become more apparent particularly in relation to increasing numbers of families becoming homeless due to the lack of affordable housing whether that be social housing or in the private rented sector (Government of Ireland 2016). Furthermore a disproportionate number of single parent families residing in short term emergency accommodation are reported in the literature accounting for 969 of the total 1614 families recorded in January 2019 (Government of Ireland 2019). Moreover, observed by the respondent is a cohort of young parents between the ages of 18-24 years experiencing homelessness who make up 20-25% of homeless parents and 9% of which, their first

experience of living outside their home of origin is in emergency homeless accommodation. Additionally It may be as suggested by preliminary research that these young families will spend more time in this type of accommodation due to a combination of their young age, lack of references from landlords or employment, financial limits, childcare demands and the likelihood that they will be situated low down on social housing waiting lists (Lambert, O' Callaghan & Jump 2018). Hidden homelessness was discussed by respondents (R7) in relation to families who had a home and have moved back in with extended family due to lack of available stable accommodation. Noting that women are more likely to experience hidden homelessness highlights that better understanding is required in relation to causes of homeless among women in order to develop appropriate responses or prevention strategies.

While it was discussed that the lack of stable affordable housing is a prime factor in relation to families experiencing homelessness respondents also identified other contributory factors such as poverty, domestic violence, mental illness, and addiction which were also reflected in the literature (Keogh, Halpenny & Gilligan 2006, Swick & Williams 2010, Swick, Williams & Fields 2014).

5.2.2 Understanding impact of homelessness.

In discussing the impact of homelessness attention was drawn by respondents to the fact that adversities faced by children experiencing homelessness presented in three categories as suggested by the literature. Firstly, preceding stressful conditions which may have contributed to homelessness such as poverty, addiction or exposure to trauma. Secondly difficulties faced subsequent to becoming homelessness such as stigma and isolation and thirdly adversities that present as a result of interventions to address the immediate needs of children and families who have become homeless (Kilmer et al.).

A number of respondents discussed how the basic needs of children are being met while attending the early years service. For example they are provided with hot meals and dry clothes and a number of respondents are sending food parcels home. Parents are actively encouraged to become involved in a number of the early years services activities developing parents sense of self- worth. Furthermore early years services are providing opportunities for parents to develop positive relationships through facilitation of parenting courses such as Marte Meo, Circle of Security and developing skills that will facilitate independent living

such as Healthy Ireland Smart Start. Some respondents talked about counselling for parents allowing them to develop self-care strategies for themselves.

The presence of complex needs and challenging behaviour dominated many of the narratives and were attributed to living in unstable accommodation with inadequate facilities. While being homeless in itself may not cause behavioural problems the presence of recent adversity, cumulative risk status and parental distress leading up to homelessness may be related more to behaviour problems than the family housing status (Keogh, Halpenny & Gilligan 2006). Nevertheless, it is recognized that children from homeless families who have experienced physical or emotional trauma may develop emotional and behavioural problems (O'Connell 2012) with the prevalence of traumatic stress within families experiencing homelessness extraordinarily high (Guarino & Bassuk 2010). Becoming homeless involves loss of belongings, sense of belonging and sense of safety. Children and families experiencing homelessness often live in unstable chaotic environments being exposed to other risks such as violence and various forms of abuse. They may experience isolation from extended family and undergo constant upheaval moving from one accommodation to the next. This can be very traumatic for young children and their families. Additionally unsafe or disrupted relationships with a primary caregiver is one of the most traumatic experiences that a child may have with acute impact on health and wellbeing while it is also found that traumatised children may present with behaviours that mimic other disorders such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder or bipolar disorder which was of concern to one respondent (R7) (Guarino & Bassuk 2010).

Understanding trauma and possible triggers to memories of traumatic experiences may help early years practitioners understand challenging behaviours as fight, fright or freeze responses which may also inform them of how best to present the learning environment to manage these.

5.3 Service Provision

Resources, Funding and staffing were discussed in relation to building organisational capacity to meet the needs of children and families.

5.3.1 Resources.

It emerged that some services had more access to resources that would enrich service provision for families. ABC programmes in thirteen areas of disadvantage which assessed local needs developing a theory of change and a high level implementation plan has provided a number vital supports to services which families can access. It was evident that respondents with access to ABC programmes were supported in the development of their services in relation to staff training and resources which further develops quality provision and positive outcomes for children. Embedding effective practices into mainstream provision allows for continuity within the communities which is very relevant given high mobility of families experiencing homelessness. This approach also provided time and space for planning and developing relationships among key stakeholders in the area creating a support network for service providers which respondents highlighted as being important peer support (DCYA 2018b).

It appeared that private providers who were working in the same areas as many community services received less support particularly in terms of capital funding to enhance capacity and quality. Where private services expanded services on their own initiative access for many vulnerable children to quality childcare was provided but there is no support available to further support this expansion in relation to addressing complex needs.

5.3.2 Funding.

Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness in addressing supports for homeless families with children proposes that access to crèches and preschool services will be provided to children experiencing homelessness. The CCSRT programme enables some families to do this and services are offering this option. However respondents, while they welcome this initiative point out the challenge in that there simply may not be enough supply of places to meet demand particularly in relation to the zero to three age group. Furthermore it seems that families are utilizing other schemes such as CCS/CCSP to avail of longer hours (Government of Ireland 2016). Respondents also referred to the number of children living with extended family who cannot avail of CCSRT. Some respondents found it challenging to apply the CCSRT programme to specific families who although they were homeless had needs that did not meet the criteria. These challenges either take time from respondents' schedules while they negotiate and advocate on the behalf of children and parents or the

children may miss out on a service they require highlighting the complex contexts that some families are living within and the need for a system to reflect this.

Within the Rebuilding Ireland action plan, city and county childcare committees are asked by the DCYA to liaise with these families to assist with engagement with early years services and it would appear that this work has begun but one respondent (R5) discussed the extent of the issue of family homelessness is limiting this approach as families remain longer in family hubs and the number of families using hotel accommodation continues to grow.

5.3.3 Staffing

A relationship between Staff qualifications, continuous professional development (CPD) and quality was a common theme within responses. While incentives to raise early years practitioners qualifications by the introduction of regulatory and contractual qualification requirements, investment in education and training, graduate employment levels currently at 22% of the workforce (Pobal 2018) remain generally low in relation to European recommended level of 60% of a graduate led workforce (Urban, Vandebroek et al 2011).

5.4 Impact on Staff

The subject of change was prominent within the narratives. The increasing diverse range of children and families accessing early years services and the growing complexities of the contexts in which they are living present challenges and manifest in a range of issues such as challenging behaviour and developmental delay. The importance of parental involvement especially in relation to children experiencing shifting family dynamics and relationships, is embedded in Aistear The National Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2009) and Siolta the National Quality Framework (CECDE 2006) also highlighting the need to work with children within the contexts in which they live. By engaging with parents in meaningful ways exploring their perspective of the challenges that they and their children face allow practitioners develop effective approaches to support families and children in meeting these challenges.

Respondents emphasised that staff need to adapt approaches in responding to these changes and CPD can support and empower staff to take on these evolving roles and engage with families in meaningful ways. Change Management is conveyed as a feature of the manager's role in supporting staff to understand and implement change to meet the complex needs of children and families highlighting the need for quality management and leadership for learning as recognised within the early years education focused inspections (DES 2015).

Managers are leading services within a historically fragmented sector with an array of actors following assorted practices and policy agendas (House of the Oireachtas 2017). Leadership within the early childhood sector is inextricably grounded in change where managers and leaders are active agents of change initiating and responding proactively to the requirements for improvement and change. Managers are therefore required to develop strong attitudes and skills for leading change (Rodd 2013). It is apparent that respondents place a high value on learning and creating a culture or community of lifelong learning where staff feel psychologically safe and cope better with change (R1).

For early years managers to lead change within the early years service they must adopt a cultural perspective to identify and explore the deep cultural forces including visible structures, strategies and values or underlying basic assumptions that may be operating within the service and other organizations, groups and agencies that interact or impact on the service. Respondents discussed how reflective practice with staff can encourage a reevaluation of structures, strategies, values and assumptions and used alongside training and CPD minimises learning anxiety leading to positive change (Schein 2010).

Respondents expressed frustration in relation to certain tasks associated with their role in particular the administration tasks accompanying statutory funding schemes. Excessive amount of time is spent retrieving information and supporting documentation which is challenging especially in relation to highly mobile families (R7). There is deep concern among respondents in relation to funding being retracted for time that children were late or absent and in particular relation to children who have to travel long distances from temporary accommodation and those who have appointments for additional supports such as speech therapy (R3B). This poses concern for sustainability and maintaining positive relationships with parents. Further administration duties in relation to the management of case files particularly in relation to families presenting complex issues including child welfare and child protection are increasingly a feature of respondents' growing workloads (R4).

Respondents discussed that they may be considered a protective factor for children (R4). Gilligan (2000) supports this view linking a positive relationship with a caring adult with a genuine interest such as a teacher or care giver may initiate a small change initiating a ripple effect triggering a positive spiral of change and resilience. Keogh, Halpenny & Gilligan (2006) also discussed school as potentially the only form of consistency in otherwise uncertain routines providing opportunity for children to develop vital social skills that will support their academic skills and ability to form stable relationships with peers. As this may be, respondents expressed the concern that because of this protective factor, children may not be prioritised with social workers when practitioners and managers express serious concern.

Reflecting on all the resources and supports provided to children and families respondents acknowledge that they provide more than an early years service. Early years services are used to work with parents and families linking them to further available resources within the community. These were discussed as individual referrals and supports or as coordinated approaches such as Meitheal. Notwithstanding the challenges faced by families facilitating opportunities to build and strengthen support networks enables the establishment of a sense of belonging and community and allows professionals to highlight and encourage the use of individual families' strengths (Kilmer 2012 et al, Tusla 2019). Considering this point it is interesting that identified in First Five A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028, among initial actions under the goal of an effective early childhood system is *“pilot the development of family and Early childhood centres that bring together a range of services to support parents and children in the early stages of development”* (Government of Ireland 2019, p155).

5.5 Recommendations

Findings point to a number of key recommendations which are relevant to the areas of policy practice and research.

5.5.1 Policy.

Extension of targeted responses such as ABC programme to non-designated areas of disadvantage with access to private providers who are meeting the needs of vulnerable children.

- Funding for additional staff member to coordinate supports required by children, families and services.
- Framework or service model for young parents.

5.5.2 Practice.

- Increased availability of coordinated approaches for example Meitheal.
- Staff to become trauma informed.
- Training for practitioners in relation to nurturing parenting and parenting skills.
- Counselling accessible for staff working in the early years sector particularly for those working with vulnerable or marginalised groups.

5.5.3 Research

- Given the number of young families in particular young women heading single parent families highlights the need for research in relation to this cohort in an Irish context.
- Notwithstanding the limitations of this small scale research project it is highlighted that there is need for further research in relation to early years service response meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore provision of early years care and education to children who are experiencing homelessness. The main purpose was to document the perspectives of early years service managers in relation to their service response. It is of note that a number of concerns were identified at the beginning of the study. Notwithstanding the rate at which family homelessness has become such an enormous and immediate issue it is presenting as a relatively new phenomena and it was uncertain if early years services had experienced any impact in relation to the issue. Another concern was the lack of previous research in relation to homelessness and the impact on early years provision in an Irish context. However observing Government initiatives such as the provision of funding for childcare targeting children experiencing homelessness indicated a response to an identified need. A recent study carried out on the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness and living in emergency accommodation while focusing on school age children explored some early years provision highlighting the need for further research in this area (Scanlon and Mc Kenna 2018).

In order to explore the key issues of the study a qualitative approach using semi structured interviews was employed to generate data which revealed a varied but wealth of experience among the managers who participated, resulting in comprehensive informed responses.

The first core objective was to explore the role early years services have in responding to the needs of children experiencing homeless. Although levels of engagement with children experiencing homelessness varied among services there was evidence of heightened understanding of the needs of children experiencing homeless born of direct experience. Services are providing for basic needs in relation to mealtimes often providing clean dry clothes in addition to a caring nurturing environment with consistent routines. They are providing for developmental needs engaging in Aistear the national curriculum framework and Síolta the national quality framework and operating within the early years services regulations. Furthermore services are engaging in continuous professional development in relation to evidence based approaches to working with children including evidenced based approaches to supporting parents.

In relation to exploring models of engagement again there is variation in approach determined by a number of factors including location, type of service whether community or private and the overall remit of the service. That is some services are set up to address

particular issues such as homelessness, lone parenting early intervention or provision of quality childcare within the community. Models of engagement were also shaped by resources and supports available to the service, most evident among services with access to ABC programmes which facilitated engagement of children and families on a multidimensional level and provided consistencies among a number of services, extremely relevant in relation to highly mobile families and building a support system among service providers. Services established as part of a wider organisation addressing homelessness engaged with families providing intense support within smaller groups and parallel with a support worker assigned to the family. While the groups are smaller it was conveyed that the needs were very complex allowing for very challenging environments.

While government initiatives to promote access and quality within services in the form of funding for fees, capital funding and training are welcomed they also present challenges to managers particularly in relation to the administration tasks attached. Advocacy has become an important element to the managers role negotiating the terms of funding schemes for parents whose circumstances don't meet every aspect of criteria.

Responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness was found to impact on management structures and approaches to service provision. In line with the literature services are working within an ecological framework understanding the diverse contexts in which individual families live allowing the development of individual approaches. While policy advocates this approach it is often the case that the resources required to address often very complex needs are limited. Therefore managers are fulfilling additional roles in relation to accessing supports in the wider community for children and families while practitioners also take on more supportive roles in relation to parents as well as children. Managers demonstrate an openness to professional development eager to adopt new evidence based learning and approaches to enable them to develop effective responses to continually changing diverse needs. In embracing opportunities to further develop their own skills and those of the practitioners may require effective management skills. Adopting unique approaches often involves change and managers of early years services while managing the day to day operation of services must also demonstrate effective leadership to elicit resource and drive change.

Experienced managers especially in areas where there are coordinated approaches have built up connections and established networks which are still at a formative stage with less

experienced managers. Again this is an issue which could be addressed by a coordinated approach within more communities and would benefit children and families within the community in the process. Managers have revealed how highly resourceful and innovative they can be often going above and beyond remit to provide support to young children and their families. It is feared that this comes at a high emotional cost as practitioners and managers express deep concern for children and families living under extraordinary circumstances. This is a critical observation as it highlights the need to care for practitioners and managers who are deeply dedicated and invested in the work that they do especially noting that they are working in a sector facing a crisis in relation to staff retention.

Homelessness can pervade several levels and aspects of a child and family's world. In order to have a positive impact on child functioning and development, interventions, services and supports need to be equally comprehensive (Kilmer, Cook, Crusto et.al. 2012). Such plans are present in First Five a Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028, where it is proposed to bring a range of services together which will support parents and children in family and early childhood centres. It will be necessary to ensure that robust supports are provided for early year's practitioners and managers, if this vision is to be realised.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Protocol for Early Years Service Managers

An Exploration of How Early Years Managers and Staff are Responding to the Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness

Aims and Objectives

- What role do early years settings have in meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
- What models of engagement are currently being used by the service?
- What are the challenges for services meeting the needs of children?
- What are the implications for management structure and approach to service provision while meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little about your experience working in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector including how long have you been working in the sector and what are your qualifications?
2. Can you tell me about the service you provide including the ages of children provided for, type programme and curriculum offered, staff qualifications and experience?
3. What is your understanding of the specific needs of young children who are experiencing homelessness?
4. In your opinion how has the increase in numbers of children experiencing homelessness been reflected in the early years service that you manage?
5. In your role as manager are there processes that you have to carry out differently or additional tasks to complete associated with providing a service meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?

6. Do you think you are supported in your role as a manager meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness by Government policy?
7. Do you think you are supported in your role as a manager meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness by Government legislation?
8. Can you discuss other initiatives or resources which support you in your role meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
9. Can you discuss any challenges to you in your role as manager of a service meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
10. What alternative approaches would you consider possible approaches to meeting the needs of children that are homeless?
11. Is there anything else that you would consider relevant to this research that we have not discussed that you would like to add?

Appendix 2:

Interview Protocol for Development Officer Working for a Government Funded Company Providing Support to Early Years Services.

An Exploration of How Early Years Managers and Staff are Responding to the Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness

Aims and Objectives

- What role do early years settings have in meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
- What models of engagement are currently being used by the service?
- What are the challenges for services meeting the needs of children?
- What are the implications for management structure and approach to service provision while meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little about your experience working in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector including how long have you been working in the sector and what are your qualifications?
2. Can you tell me about your current role, in particular the recent piece in relation to homelessness?
3. What is your understanding of the specific needs of young children who are experiencing homelessness?
4. In your opinion how has the increase in numbers of children experiencing homelessness been reflected in early years services?

5. In your opinion are there processes that Early Years service managers have to carry out differently or additional tasks to complete associated with providing a service meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
6. Do you think early years service managers are supported in their role as a manager meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness by Government policy?
7. Do you think early years service managers are supported in your role as a manager meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness by Government legislation?
8. Are you aware of other initiatives or resources which support early years service managers in their role meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
9. Can you discuss any challenges to the role of manager of a service meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness?
10. What alternative approaches would you consider possible approaches to meeting the needs of children that are homeless?
11. Is there anything else that you would consider relevant to this research that we have not discussed that you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Letter To Participants

d06109747@mydit.ie

January 2019

Dear Participant,

My name is Jacinta Corcoran and I am a post graduate student studying at the Dublin Institute of Technology (D.I.T). As part requirement to completing the Masters in Mentoring, Management and Leadership in the Early Years Programme, I am carrying out a research project under the supervision of Emma Byrne MacNamee and would like to invite you to participate. The study is entitled *An Exploration of response by Early Years Services Meeting the Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness*. In particular the study will focus on the perspectives of Early Years Managers in relation to their role in providing a service meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness.

The role of the Early Years Manager is complex. While implementing policy and legislation to ensure quality service provision, a number of consequential challenges in relation to the workforce, finance and service provision often present. The changing and diverse cultural contexts in which children are living, and in particular, that of homelessness presents managers with further challenges in meeting the needs of children and families using their service. In your role with Dublin City Childcare Committee, encouraging links between families using emergency homeless accommodation and early years services, highlighting the relevant funding schemes, your participation would provide valuable insight to the research project.

I would be grateful if you would participate in a semi structured interview lasting approximately 30-40 minutes, the purpose of which will be to gain an insight to the early years manager's perspective in relation to early years service provision and meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness. I would ask your consent to record the interview on a digital recording device to ensure the data collected is transcribed accurately. All data will be stored to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity is respected throughout the project and each stage of the study will be carried out in accordance with the D.I.T. Ethics Committee Guidelines.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have questions in relation the project. Thank you for reading this letter and considering this invitation.

Yours Sincerely,

Jacinta Corcoran B.A Hons ECE

Postgraduate Student M.A. Mentoring Management and Leadership in the Early Years,

Dublin Institute of Technology,

School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences.

Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form

Title of Research project: An Exploration of the response by Early Years Services Meeting the Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness.

Researcher: Jacinta Corcoran.

Research Supervisor: Emma Byrne MacNamee

I confirm that I have read and understood the introduction letter in relation to the above titled research project and agree to participate in a recorded interview.

Yes

No

I confirm that any questions I presented were answered satisfactorily.

Yes

No

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research study at any stage of the study.

Yes

No

I understand that I am free to decline to answer any question that is asked during the interview.

Yes

No

I understand that data gathered will be stored securely and destroyed when required retention period has passed.

Yes

No

I understand that information gathered may be published in academic journals and/or presented at conferences.

Yes

No

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date

Research / Private study only

Appendix 5 Sample Interview Transcription

I= Interviewer

R8= Respondent 8

I: So thanks very much for em, agreeing to participate in this research study. Em, I really do appreciate the time you're taking out of a busy schedule.

R8: That's no problem at all.

I: So we'll head straight into the questions if that's okay?

R8: Perfect, yeah.

I: So can you tell me a little bit about your experience working in the early childhood education and care sector, eh including how long you've been in the sector and a little bit about your qualifications.

R8: Perfect yeah, em so I graduated about three to four years ago from D.I.T, so I did the early childhood and education level eight there. Em and I'm in ... in this service kind of since then on and off. Em, I would have done ... have a community service volunteer programme which is like a graduate programme. Em, so I would have done that and I was based here and in the childcare service as well em and working in housing so it was kind of a bit of both. Em, so I would have done that and then I am here as a project worker kind of a year and a half or so. Em, my main role here is to run ... our early years service and then I also link in with five families as well so I do child support work with those five families. Em, so it's a nice balance between the two em and I have also just completed last year the Highscope preschool curriculum as well the training in that so that's where I am at the moment. (laughs)

I: Em, So I suppose that leads onto the next question then can you tell me a little bit about the service you provide including the ages of the children provided for, type of programme curriculum and staff other staff qualifications and experience.

R8: So ... is our early years service. We're open three days a week, three mornings. So we're open half nine to half twelve on those mornings. Em, we have myself and another em child support worker are both in the service those three mornings. We also have community service volunteers on the graduate programme who come and help us out and we also have a D.I.T student as well. Em we have the Highscope curriculum in place so, em, which we love. We

find it really really brilliant with the children we're working with, with the room the way it's laid out and everything like that it gives them space. Ultimately the main thing I love about Highscope is the independence that it can give to the children as well eh you're kind of supporting them to name their emotions and name the feelings that they're having and kind of make sense of them as well em and it also, the conflict resolution gives them a way of saying no I actually don't like that or whatever it is and working through that and finding a solution to it as well. Em, so it works really well for our service. I think we have been using Highscope in the service for the last three years. Before that it was play based. But now we've moved into the Highscope and yeah we love it, we love it at the moment. Em, Yeah I think did I? Yeah so ... is open for it's only open for the customers that we have on site so ... is a supported temporary accommodation for families. Em, So our families will be coming from B&B's, from hubs em, wherever so that's where the referral process comes in so they, It's a short term accommodation so it's technically six to nine months that they could be with us but as I'm sure you're well aware the housing crisis and everything it's kind of gone beyond that. Some of our families are here two years at the moment. Em, so we have twelve short term houses inside the gates and then two outside with eight long term houses as well. So ... is only open to the short term customers em so it just depends on who's in, who's onsite at that moment as to who will be in So, at the moment we have four children. Em but that can change quite quickly or it just depends on when they're housed. Em, but we kind of we only take maybe six is our maximum at the moment. So we've four at the moment. Yeah so we are not too far off our full. But we do that for the children themselves to give them that bit of space em, and then they get a little bit of an intense support I suppose with us as well in that the ratio is so low with us. Em, so that works quite well.

I: So you mentioned em, a bit about the, the housing crisis at the moment

R8: Yeah, yeah.

I: So how has and there is an increased number of children experiencing homelessness, how is that reflected in your service?

R8: Yeah em, I suppose the main thing we note from we're in the service and from working in other maybe private crèches and maybe community crèches as well is the busyness of our service. So I'm saying we've four children. You may as well have maybe ten children in the room it's just so so busy. Em the needs are a lot more complex with the children as well when they come in they're coming from B&B's or hotels, or hubs or whatever it may be. They've

been in one room with their family for most of that time. Em and that in itself must be such a chaotic environment especially if you have children of different ages routines are kind of all over the place so when they come in here it's a little bit of space to breathe and kind of go okay we can do you know work around that sort of stuff. So if we're noticing things in ... that maybe a child is very tired in the morning or we can pick up on routines and stuff. We also then can go into the home and work around that with the family as well and kind of get them ready for their forever home so when they go onto independent living that they'll be able to put the routine in place. Em we also do homework support here as well so getting the routine of homework in place because if you're in a hotel room and you're trying to do homework on a bed or it just doesn't really flow too well. So ... does give the families a little bit of space to just have that time to kinda get to, to get to, get to find their own routine in it all. Em, so as with the children, as I was saying the busyness of the room. Em, their needs they're very, they can be challenging I suppose if you want to use that term. Em, but I think with the high staff numbers and the low children numbers with the ratios we can work through that with the children. Em, which is nice to be able to do and to give each child their own bit of time. Em, but yeah, yeah it can. Different things arise and you em, you can kind of see even see with toileting and stuff a lot of our, the older children we take, so we take from twelve months up in ... up to maybe three or four just depending on the family. Em but toileting for a lot of our customers is delayed with the children because they find it really hard to toilet train a child when they're in one hotel room and they can't let the child walk without their nappy on or whatever because of the carpets in the hotel and all that kind of stuff. So, it's working with that a lot with the older kids in ... as well is helping and supporting the families through even toileting or something that is just that bit more challenging when you're in one room, yeah, so.

I: So, I was going to ask in your role as a manager are there processes or em tasks you would have to do differently or extra tasks then, I suppose you don't have a mix here of children

R8: of community

R8: Yeah, they're all from ... yeah. Em, I suppose it's just as the manager in a service it's making sure that the supports are there for the children. Em so if you notice stuff you're referring you're linking in with the community. We did work a lot em in ... of getting the children transitioned into the community was our main goal. Em, cause our numbers were high but that wasn't the issue it was just our parents were kina becoming reliant on our

service em and our opening hours were different. Before they were later in the day so you'd kind of have parents coming over in pyjamas to drop the kids in and all that kind of stuff so we worked a lot on that transition into the community so ... is there as a transitional service but like the housing and all that kind of thing the childcare places in ... are so, there's, they're not existent like at all. Em, so that is a struggle as well. Cause when you have children You've seen them come in and they have worked and you've supported them through and you know they're at a place where the community would be the perfect and the family is ready as well to do that hurdle as well and then you go looking for a childcare place and there's nothing. So it kind of em, it can be frustrating do you know and our hours are short as well so that can be frustrating for families as well because they want longer hours for kids. Em, but it's just not something we can't provide at the moment but we do try and work around it but yeah the community places are just not happening at the moment and that is a huge block. Em, it's even a block when we go when our families are moving on from here is when you go to look for for crèches or community services there's not, there's nothing for when they're moving into whatever area it might be. Em, that is a huge block and it is, I now the twenty five hours are there for homeless children and stuff and that is being, some of our families coming in their kids are already in services where they're already availing of those twenty five hours which is brilliant. Em, but even though those initiatives are there the spaces are lacking so it's Yeah Yeah.

I: Which leads us on to our next question. Do you feel supported by Government policy and Government legislation?

R8: That is the most I suppose here we're, we're on our own as in we are funded ... like fund a lot of our the service em, so we're on our own in that regard as in we don't have do schemes and all that kind of stuff from the government so that is another mine field I'm sure. But, em it is that bit when we're trying to move the family on, it's just places and even we only take from twelve months obviously ratios go down younger than that so babies and stuff so babies here is an issue as well because our babies don't have a service as such because alot there is one baby group I think in the ... area maybe two. Em, and their obviously full and have waiting lists are extraordinary. So, em. The services for the babies and then when your moving families on finding schools that will take them, em, is really really difficult. So you're, you can ring a list and they'll all say no no no. Em, you can be lucky (laugh) and you might get in priority with some of them, em, if you build up relationships with some of them the crèches the community crèches that can work but that is a huge block, yeah.

I: So can you just talk a little bit more there you mentioned there some might give priority?

R8: Mmm, yeah, I suppose some, some areas. Like, I know one area in particular em, kinda ... area. The, we've had a few families move to that area so one of the crèches there we've worked with, em, in getting our families in there. And it's kind of as well it's like we do like a SLI referrals to support to live independently for families so the child support workers have a bit to do on that as well so about getting the children and into the crèche and how the family might struggle with that. Some of them might struggle a bit more than others. Em, but we so we always ring and try look for the places, and give a little bit of information just is to that this is a referral, they are moving into independent living but they've been living here in supported accommodation. Em and a lot of crèches and community services they're, they are willing to kinda give a little bit of priority to families that we work with em whether, yeah some do and some don't. It just depends on the circumstances of the family. And then a social worker involved, as well sometimes social work can put a referral in and that can go a little bit further than we could if that makes sense.

I: Yeah. So you mentioned that some families would struggle making that connection with the early years service.

R8: Em, I suppose here we are a gated community. Em, It's a buzz in buzz out system there's a no visitor policy and that's a really strict no the visitors policy. Em, so when they're in here they're in their own community as such and that kinda goes back to how we how we would try to transition them out into the actual community that's out there but by not disregarding that this is a community in itself. Em, so I think that can be a struggle because there's staff here all the time. It's 24 hour staffed and there's security at night time. Em, so they have support at all times throughout the day when they need it and if they really need it. Whereas when they're going into independent living that support is gone. Em. So we find that some of our families they're doing really really really well and then oh you've got offered a house and things can kind of go back a little bit. Em, but the anxiety then maybe just kicks in of God okay we're actually going to be going to our own house and we have to do these things em for ourselves. So when they do move on as I was saying we do the referral for SLI, for the support to live independently and that's somebody that can come out maybe it's every two weeks it just depending on the family. It could be every week they visit. Em, and then we also might put in a referral for a child support worker from ... to go out as well. A prevention child support worker. Who will work with the kids as well. If they have had difficulties,

maybe they are transitioning from the school here into whatever area really ... or whatever over that side so that child support worker will work with the kids and kind of help with that transition as well so that it's not just the family have landed out there and there you go. Do you know. You do have to maybe ease the support away a little bit because it is intense support once they're in here. So I'm sure that can be a struggle. Yeah definitely

I: That's interesting.

R8: Mmm

I: Em, so can you discuss any other initiatives or resources which support you in your role meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness? So you mentioned that you don't rely on government policy or legislation.

R8: Yeah, we have in ... they're an ABC programme and they are absolutely fantastic resource to have. Em, ... is our mentor. She's our early years mentor. So she can, there's training that comes up and one of the main trainings I've done over the last little while is the infant mental health training. Em, and I found that to be really really fantastic of just getting in tune with the child and kind of seeing things from a different perspective for em, even the relationship with the parent and the child, Em and kind of then being able to work on that as well. So that's been brilliant and I'm on the infant mental health network in ... as well so we meet once a month and discuss different topics that might be coming up. Which is always useful when you have the little ones in with in the service. Em, and we also have an early years network in ... as well. So that's where a lot of the community services sit down together and we talk about issues that are coming up and how best to support any one of the issues, obviously staffing in the early years. It's quite a struggle at the moment. Em so ... were looking at maybe doing a relief panel so that all services could pull from do you know so if you need someone for the morning, well I actually need them for the evening. The services in ... really really work well together at that community aspects in helping each other out with it cause they're all facing the same difficulties. Em, but it's so interesting when you hear, when you're going to those meetings and everything and you do hear it's they they're finding children who are experiencing homelessness difficult in the service as well and they're saying, they're calling out for support and knowledge as well around it because em, they're struggling to put in supports and to know what kind of supports the children need. Em, as well. So it's something that has come up an awful lot within those meetings about children and homelessness and how do we best support them. Em, especially if you have a

child in a service here and they're actually in town and they're late every day for a session and all that kind of stuff that has a knock on effect for that child every day. Em, and the stress that even has. So it is it has been spoken about a lot within the community about how can we support the children. So that's where the infant mental health network and all those things link together then and do you know you can have a whole approach and it also helps us build our relationships up with community services in ... So I know the managers quite well in ... so if we can put in the referral and stuff they will do you know they will look out for the family and then we can link in if one of our children goes into a different service and see how they are getting on and if there's anything we need to do on this side as well. You're trying to give a whole a holistic approach to that child and their early years. Yeah.

I: Okay. That's great. Are there any challenges in your role as manager?

R8: Yeah.

I: Meeting the needs of.

R8: Yeah. I suppose staffing in a way can be an issue. We are fully staffed here, em, which is brilliant. But training comes up and all that kind of stuff. Even today we had three little ones in today and there was two of us down there and we're going we kinda need another person don't we? Em, so some days the staffing can be a struggle in there in ... and I'm saying that as we are so, we have such a luxury then that we do have two full time staff members down there and the ratios are low. Em, but one staff, you'd notice it when you're missing one or two. So I can't imagine how community services are coping with that. Em, but, other challenges, I suppose just the busyness that eh a person a family experiencing homelessness can bring. Em, You might think that things are okay and then you go in to have a meeting or do a needs assessment with the family and you just see that things aren't going as well as you might have thought. So you're kind of working, it's brilliant to be able to work in ... with the children and see what's going on and then being able to go to the family home in the afternoon and say well okay look this came up today or whatever it is. But it's just I suppose time is always an issue as well and getting the time to have all those conversations but it is it's lovely that we can do that with the families so we can do whatever we've done in ... and then bring it home with them that afternoon and continue it then in the service as well. So.

I: And what specific needs or your understanding of the specific needs that would come up in with families and children, with children I suppose in particular.

R8: Em, I suppose I've seen a few children that stand out in my mind is the anger, em that some of them can have from the environments they've been in. They've been witness to a lot of maybe violence and stuff and violence happens in here as well. You're always trying to remind parents children are there, take the children in. Em, but sometimes they don't. Em, so it's managing that as well and it's the next day the child comes in and you just know that something isn't settled or you know they have questions about what happened yesterday. Em, we've had really challenging behaviour. One little boy he broke a window and all that kind of stuff, throwing things. You know. It's just stuff you don't see every day in the community. Em, but It's to do with the experiences they've had. Being homelessness itself is such a trauma, but the other bits that go on as well addiction, mental health everything that's attached to it that most of our families are dealing with at that time is a constant struggle and you can it's, it is hard for the children. It's very hard em, but it's the one bit of the work that you love doing then and that you get to work through it with them cause maybe mam or dad doesn't know that we need to talk to ... but he's only three, do you know that kind of way and they don't, the understanding isn't there that he knows what's going on and he can hear your conversations. And it's reminding the parents but in a subtle way of do you know we need to keep ... safe in all this or whatever it might be. Em, so those, it can be a learning curve for the parents but yeah the needs in ... can be high and then sometimes we have children come in who, who you would worry about as well who might not seem to be baffled by any of this em, and that's always concerning. So that's where I think Highscope really really comes in. And you can kind of give the children tools to cope with things or to name as I was saying name emotions and do you know if somethings not right with them that they're not just oh yeah that's fine. You know you're there to kind of support them to say. Actually no I was playing with that or whatever that's giving them their voice em, in it all and making sure that they can say no when they need to say no you know all those things that do add up to hopefully to a little bit more for them. But Yeah

I: So you obviously feel it's really important that they have a voice

R8: Of course

I: Or they can say no

R8: And that's

I: You've given them those skills

R8: Yeah and it is a thing and you can't blame parents at all because they're just trying to get from maybe one night to the next at some point. Em, but children don't have a choice in homelessness at all. It's, it's it's horrendous as in they're brought from one place to the next. It's decisions are being made for them whether they go to school or not go to school that decision has already been made for them. Em, and that is hugely important in ... is giving them a voice and letting parents know that the child has something to say or do you know or they are trying to say he did this, he did that and you go did you ask how that was or anything like that? It's those little cues that the parents go well no like em or talking to their children or them not realising that they can understand, or em that they can help the child supports. They can support the child to understand what's going on. Em, because they come in and they've been living in one room and our houses here are maybe two bed or three bed houses and You have that thing of where they're all actually still in one room So it takes even a while even to get the children into their own room and they're own space and this is your room and em, they're own routine for school and stuff as well. So that in itself is a huge transition for families because a lot of our children have been in homelessness since birth so they don't know anything different other than a one roomed place em and then they come in here they have a stairs, they have a full kitchen a full sitting room do you know it's a huge difference. It is a huge difference. So all those little things yeah.

I: So, what other, what alternative approaches would you consider possible approaches to meeting the needs of children that are homeless?

R8: Em,

I: So you mentioned Highscope as an approach

R8: Highscope yeah em. I suppose I am you've probably heard I am a high scope advocate at this stage. I think well all their all the ... has trained up sixty nearly to seventy practitioners in ... with Highscope. So most settings in ... are Highscope. Em, which is nice that when the children move that it's the same approach that is in the area all that kind of stuff. Em, but also the infant mental health. I think if practitioners and all that kind of thing could have a little bit more knowledge and training behind it em mental health of the children because obviously homelessness has a huge impact on infant mental health em and even a little bit more knowledge and a little bit more training around that for practitioners around the area I think would be fantastic. really really fantastic. Yeah.

I: That's great. So. We're at the end. Is there anything else you would consider relevant to the research or something we haven't discussed that you'd like to add in?

R8: No I think we covered everything I hope we did anyway

I: So that's great. I want to thanks very much for participating. That was very interesting.

R8: No problem at all ...