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Institute of Population Health,
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Poverty in South Dublin County - Developing our Understanding and Collaborative Planning



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Developing our Understanding and Collaborative Planning
2022 Seminar Report

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the seminar ‘Poverty in South Dublin County: Developing our Understanding and Collaborative Planning’. Held on the 5th October, 2022 in the Institute for Population Health, the seminar explored poverty experience, incidence, and mitigating factors with service providers working within South Dublin County.

A number of contextual factors led to the seminar including:

- Discussions at the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) to develop a country wide Child Poverty Plan,
- The commencement of the European Child Guarantee, which aims to ensure all children have access to the services and supports they need,
- The imminent development of a Local Community and Economic Plan, and the desire to ensure it is informed by those living and working in the Community.

A working group was established to plan and promote the seminar, with representatives from South Dublin County Council (Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme and the Social and Community Development Section), Tusla (CYPSC), and the two Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme areas in the County: The Childhood Development Initiative and Blueskies.

During the seminar inputs were provided by Mary Corcoran¹ and Jennifer Moroney Ward². Both speakers highlighted the importance and relevance of the forthcoming Local Economic and Community Plan, which sets out how South Dublin County Council will support economic and community development over the next six years, as a mechanism for tackling poverty within the county. Hugh Frazer³ outlined the concept of poverty and how we define, measure, identify and combat poverty. Professor Frazer stressed the complex and multifaceted nature of poverty and the need for a multidimensional and coordinated approach with clear priorities and targets to effectively respond to and tackle poverty. Professor Catherine Darker⁴, set out an illuminating overview of the wider determinants of health noting that clinical intervention is limited in its capacity to respond to health inequalities. Addressing health inequalities requires a community development and partnership approach underpinned by meaningful research to inform key recommendations for policy actions at national and local level. Jeffrey Shumba from The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) and Karen Costello from Blue Skies Initiative in Archways provided the final presentation of the morning on their work with the ‘Area Based Childhood Programme’. The programme works in areas experiencing high levels of poverty in Clondalkin and Tallaght and provides prevention and early intervention services for children and families. Key recommendations from the programme include: responsive housing policies; holistic support systems and prioritisation of early intervention and prevention.

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Consultation feedback

Following presentations, attendees participated in break out group discussions. Each group focused on one of the following themes relating to poverty:

- Children and Families;
- Community Safety and Belonging;
- Food and Energy Poverty;
- Healthcare;
- Housing;
- Education

Groups were asked to consider their concerns under the themes though the lens of poverty along with what is going well in relation to work taking place under this theme; what we can learn from experiences to date; opportunities for improvement and identification of existing strengths and resources that can be utilised. Feedback and recommendations under each theme are provided within the following sections.



Children and Families

Trauma and Mental Health

Participants noted that a trauma-informed approach should underpin measures to address poverty. It would be helpful if case studies were developed that link the strong relationship between the two elements and how they impact life and outcomes. Ballymun is a place we can look to for good practice in becoming a trauma informed community.



It is critical to include the voice of those with lived experience of poverty and trauma in research presentations. CDI's 2021 research

'Over the Fence': perspectives on and experiences of child poverty in Tallaght, is a good example of the powerful impact of centring the voice and insights of those who are most vulnerable to and impacted by poverty. It is equally important that qualitative research is underpinned by robust quantitative research – poverty is a substantial issue within areas of disadvantage and remaining solution-focused is key.

Service providers participating in this discussion group commented that mental health is a significant concern in relation to poverty and the impact it has on families and children. Supporting families to access children's mental health services needs to be looked at. Play therapy sessions have been made available to some families that service providers are supporting but providers are noticing lack of take up or attendance at sessions. There are barriers to accessing the service that must be considered. There are also wait lists for services and support should be provided to families waiting. Another participant noted that the five-year political cycle affects accountability and presents a significant challenge.

Staffing Issues

Waiting lists are affected by issues with staffing in services and difficulties in retaining and recruiting staff across services. Group participants commented that staffing issues will not be resolved until organisations respond meaningfully to burn out and other issues of concern to frontline service providers. Staff are coping with large workloads and limited resources and time. However, staff working in services supporting families and children are diligent, committed and willing to work together to support service users.

Emerging Issues

Emerging issues arising for service providers in relation to the ways in which poverty affects children and families are; the impact of the current energy crisis, the rise in cost of living on families and children and food poverty. Service providers noted that families are worried about how to manage the cost of living and taking measures, such as not buying a turkey for Christmas. There is a lot of stress in homes which children are exposed to. Policy measures are needed to support families at this time.

Collaboration and siloed ways of working affect capacity to work effectively and meaningfully. Genuine commitment to building partnership is important and could be better supported by strategic interdepartmental planning and collaboration. If it does not happen at the systemic level work on the ground becomes disjointed and staff feel demoralised.

Recommendations

- Contextualise trauma-informed community work approaches to South Dublin County.
- Collate and share best practice across organisations. The Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth should collate and disseminate models proven.
- Need political will to end poverty and recognise that there are those who benefit from poverty.
- Education is important for tackling poverty but not the only solution. A multifaceted solution is required to support the holistic needs of the family.
- Early intervention and investment is required. Good housing, police support, and playgrounds all have a role to play in bringing about change.
- Work with local communities to identify priorities and identify strong local champions with influence.
- Support people to vote and use their voice.
- Prioritise collaborative planning, including qualitative and quantitative information on the impact of interventions.

Community Safety and Belonging

Intergenerational Activity

Participants focusing on the theme of community safety and belonging commented on findings from a recent Age Friendly consultation where people aged 55+ living in South Dublin County communities said they generally feel safe until a certain time of day. Older people can sometimes feel unsafe where there is a gathering of young people. A potential solution is to promote intergenerational activities between young and older people such as young and older people coming together in a walking group each week to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Area Imagery

How an area looks has implications for how an area feels. Litter makes a place feel neglected. It also becomes unseen after time and therefore becomes normalised. Litter needs to be addressed before it becomes acceptable. It is important to pay attention to the look of an area in terms of creating greenery. Grey fences create a dull and grim look and are associated with certain areas. There are tools available for supporting community clean ups; corporate funding; visuals to increase sense of safety; summer projects can help clean up estates such as painting ESB poles. Additional suggestions were empowering young and older people to participate in Tidy Towns initiatives and local committees. Early intervention approach to litter, vandalism, and general maintenance in estates to avoid poor standards becoming embedded should be looked at.

Safety Forums

The issue of safety is prevalent, and it is important to acknowledge how serious it is and how much it impacts on people living in the area, along with the issue of drugs. Genuine collaboration between agencies and community gardai is important. A local policing committee with local residents and Gardai in attendance was suggested.

Local Actions

Targeted area-based action that is funded and supported at national and local level works well. Examples of these are 'Active Cities' and 'Sláintecare Healthy Communities'. Finding and supporting a 'local champion' to provide a connection between the local authority and community as well as empowering people to be involved in local community groups is key.

Recommendations

- Intergenerational activities for older and young people to connect and promote sense of safety.
- Reclaiming estates through community walks each week.
- Community centres opening later than 9am-5pm is critical, along with projects being available in late evenings and at weekends.

Food and Energy Poverty

Energy Costs

Participants noted that the rising cost of living and inflation is a serious concern that is impacting people in many ways. In terms of energy costs service providers reported working with communities that are worried about the cost of bills, particularly for people on a low income. There are issues to consider depending on the context, for example - prepay customers are concerned about the €600 commitment from the government and how they will access this. Additionally, pre-pay standing charges accumulate and there is a €100 re-connection fee. There are also concerns about what will happen if people are cut off. There is no back up plan in the case of this happening. People are making choices between heat and food. People are also using poor quality materials for heating such as wood from within the house which is a health hazard.

Recommendations

- District heating scheme could be expanded to include housing.
- Need to promote inclusion of energy efficiency schemes in all housing.
- Two-way communication and consultation with families on their energy needs.
- Recognition that cost of living has had a wide-ranging impact across socio-economic groups.
- Clarity on the application of the Government's financial supports, and management of services being cut-off to be sought, and appropriate solutions and communication put in place.
- Research and target areas of disadvantage in South Dublin County in relation to addressing the impact of food poverty and energy poverty.

Food Poverty

Several concerns were raised about the issue of food poverty, in particular the issue of quality of food available in the home. Some children may receive their only hot meal of the day in school. Participants wondered about the presence of organisations providing food and nutrition education in the area. For example, many people are using food banks and food is being provided through schools. It is useful to provide ingredients, but some families may require support with preparing and cooking meals as there may have been a reliance on frozen foods previously and limited cooking knowledge/skills. Also, important food groups are not generally available through food banks, such as fruit and vegetables. Reliance on food banks is not a long-term solution. It may also be useful to provide information on the impact of poor diet and malnutrition on life expectancy and health. Schools provide an important

platform from which to disseminate messaging and education around healthy eating and should be supported in doing so.

Recommendations

- Encourage shops to distribute food going out of date.
- Promote and support food preparation and nutrition knowledge and skills.
- Provide six-week cookery programmes for families.
- Assess availability of food cloud.
- Tackle stigma around food poverty.
- Explore what support schools need around food poverty.
- Develop area profiles – what agencies are in the area and how to refer families.
- Community gardens and allotments are successful in the UK and could be set up here. Need to be led and managed.

Health

Within the healthcare group participants echoed similar concerns in relation to supporting healthy food habits for families, supporting health and wellbeing for children and the need to address long wait lists so that families are not pushed to crisis point. Additional points included:

- Services need to meet parents where they are at.
- The medical model needs to include a community model and frame practice within an understanding of poverty and health inequalities.
- Build an ethos with organisations to collaborate and develop collective responses to the issues that impact on health such as why people might fail to show up to appointments.
- The PHN needs to take a strong role in the MacUilliam community.

Traveller Community

The Traveller Community experiences disadvantage and discrimination in relation to health which must be considered in local responses. There are 2,208 Travellers living in South Dublin County. 91 families are living in halting sites, 53 families are sharing accommodation, 15 families are in temporary bays and 3 families are unauthorised on sites. Accommodation issues have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of Travellers, including mental health. Discrimination within health service provision needs to be tackled and awareness and diversity training provided for health workers. Poverty is also affected by the wider determinants of health affecting Travellers such as reduced timetables for Travellers; intergenerational stress impacting on families and bias towards Travellers embedded into our institutions.

Mental Health

Mental health was raised as an area of significant concern for stakeholders working with young people and children. An implementation plan with ringfenced funding, actions and targets needs to accompany national mental health policy. In the absence of a clear plan national policy will not be effective. Dual diagnosis is a complex issue and mental health services must be linked in with addiction services. We also need to look at the mental health needs of the local community and support health and wellbeing within the community.

Recommendations

- Raise awareness amongst service providers on the impact of poverty.
- Develop cultural and equality awareness amongst service providers on the cultural needs of different communities.
- Send text message reminders for appointments too – postage is not suitable for all.
- Develop a community centre in MacUilliam where local hubs and a collaborative approach is instilled.
- Connect organisations and build stronger alliances.
- Develop county wide voice on needs and actions.
- Preserve certain core supports such as the PHN and GP.

Housing

Within the housing group discussion participants fed back concerns that poverty is impacting on the right to housing which speaks to the complex and multi-faceted nature of poverty. A cross sectoral approach must be developed to effectively address housing issues. There are concerns around the quality of the housing stock and these need to be looked at. Issues are the installation of insulation, better windows and tackling damp. Additional issues noted were the severity of the housing crisis and the impact of evictions. More supports need to be in place for people experiencing eviction. There is a long waiting list for housing in South Dublin County. Housing is being privatised meaning housing is not affordable for all. There is a need to return to more public housing being built and maintained by County Councils with land reserved for this purpose.

Recommendations

- Housing First programme to be extended to include families with ringfenced resources included.
- Extend accountability for delivering accommodation to local councils.
- Integrated planning around new housing developments, so that new accommodation is provided with aligned services.

Literacy and Education

Gap in Services for Age Cohort 6 - 10

There are limited services for children aged 6 – 10. An increase in after-school services with food provision for this age cohort is needed, supported by funding and staff resourced by the Department of Education. Support needs are being left to educational services, but teachers are overwhelmed and need to be supported by afterschool services and staff. Iceland provides a good example for us to look it where they provide afterschool programmes with every child engaged in afterschool activities, which are not limited to sport. Schools are willing to provide afterschool activities and care in some cases, but the challenge is insurance. This is an important age group to link in with to ensure that young children do not end up engaging in anti-social activity. Furthermore, funding is more attainable when services are integrated.

Cost of Activities

Afterschool activities need to be affordable. Children from low-income households cannot always afford to participate in activities and are therefore excluded. This can also leave households in the position of children being responsible for the care of younger siblings.

Recommendations

- Support and fund youth workers to establish and manage afterschool programmes for children.
- Build understanding of progressive universalism into our work.
- Link with school services such as the School Completion Programme.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The organisers of the consultation appreciate all stakeholders' contributions. Colm Ward⁵, acknowledged the inputs and noted that that all recommendations will be used to inform the forthcoming six-year Local Economic and Community Plan.

This report will be disseminated and considered by the Local Community and Development Committee along with the South Dublin County Children and Young People's Services Committee. The next step will be to host a consultation on the issue of poverty with young people living in Tallaght and Clondalkin. The recommendations from this will also be collated and disseminated.

Summary of Key Recommendations

National Actions:

- The Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth should collate and disseminate proven and best practice models.
- Need political will to end poverty and recognise that there are those who benefit from poverty.
- Education is important for tackling poverty but is not the only solution. A multifaceted solution is required to support the holistic needs of the family.
- Early intervention and investment is required to address child poverty. Good housing, police support, and playgrounds all have a role to play in bringing about change.
- Promote the inclusion of energy efficiency schemes in all housing.
- Tackle stigma around food poverty.
- The Housing First programme should be extended to include families with ringfenced resources included.
- Extend accountability for delivering accommodation to local councils.

Professional Development Actions:

- Raise awareness amongst service providers on the impact of poverty.
- Develop cultural awareness amongst service providers on the cultural needs of different communities.
- Prioritise collaborative planning, including qualitative and quantitative information on the impact of interventions.

Community Level Actions:

- Contextualise trauma-informed community work approaches to South Dublin County.
- Work with local communities to identify priorities and identify strong local champions with influence.
- Support people to vote and use their voice.

⁵ Director of Housing, Social and Community Development in South Dublin County Council

- Provide intergenerational activities for older and young people to connect and promote sense of safety.
- Reclaim estates through weekly community walks.
- Community centres opening later than 9-5 is critical, along with projects being available in late evenings and at weekends.
- District heating scheme could be expanded to include housing.
- Two-way communication and consultation is required with families on their energy needs.
- Recognition that cost of living has had a wide-ranging impact across socio-economic groups.
- Clarity on the application of the Government's financial supports, and management of services being cut-off to be sought, and appropriate solutions and communication put in place.
- Research and target areas of disadvantage in South Dublin County to address the impact of food poverty and energy poverty.
- Encourage shops to distribute food going out of date.
- Promote and support food preparation and nutrition knowledge and skills.
- Provide six-week cookery programmes for families.
- Assess availability of food cloud.
- Explore what support schools need around food poverty.
- Develop area profiles in terms of what agencies are in the area and how to refer families.
- Community gardens and allotments are successful in the UK and could be set up here, but their need to be led and managed.
- Send text message reminders for appointments as well as other mechanisms; postage is not suitable for all.
- Develop a community centre in MacUilliam where we provide local hubs and a collaborative approach.
- Connect organisations and build stronger alliances.
- Develop a county wide voice on needs and actions.
- Must preserve certain supports such as the PHN and GP.
- Integrate planning around new housing developments, so that new accommodation is provided with aligned services.
- Support and fund youth workers to establish and manage afterschool programmes for children.
- Build understanding of progressive universalism into our work.
- Link with school services such as the School Completion Programme.