



# Babbling Babies: Moving from an Impairment Model towards Promotion and Prevention in the Pre-Birth to 3 Year Period of Development for Speech and Language Therapists in Ireland.

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## Background

Speech & Language Therapists in Ireland predominantly provide assessments and interventions for speech, language & communication (SLC) delays and/or disorders. 'Research findings support the provision of high-quality supports to parents and families before children start to talk, rather than waiting until a delay or disorder emerges' (Rafferty, 2014). In order to move from an impairment based model of speech and language therapy (SLT) practice to a preventative model, Young Knocknaheeny (YK) Area Based Childhood Programme, established a 'Babbling Babies' (BB) Service.

BB provides a universal opportunity to *start the conversation about conversations with parents, in the context of their baby's first relationships* during the 7- 9 month period of development. Conversational serve and return between a parent and baby helps to build the language centres in the brain (Romeo et al., 2018). It is from this evidenced based perspective that BB aims to provide accessible information to all parents about how best to support their baby's communication and overall development as early as possible.

## Aims

- ◆ Build parent capacity to support speech, language and communication development in the context of the parent-baby relationship
- ◆ Develop and implement universal access to a prevention and health promotion Speech and Language Therapy model of service delivery in Ireland
- ◆ Engage, collaborate and work in partnership with parents, babies and Public Health Nurses (PHNs)
- ◆ Embed Infant Mental Health (IMH) principles and practice into SLT practice in Ireland



## Implementation of Babbling Babies Service

In 2015, an initial planning meeting was organised between relevant stakeholders including YK Oral Language Development Officers (OLOs), YK Programme Manager, Assistant Director of Public Health Nursing, local PHNs, and a Senior Speech & Language Therapist from Primary Community and Continuing Care. Discussions facilitated the development of a unique, collaborative, universal, health promotion service for families at their baby's routine 7 - 9 month developmental check up with their PHN...and Babbling Babies was born! BB utilises this early contact point as an optimal opportunity to support the nature and quality of parent-baby interactions; specifically providing developmental guidance to promote language and communication in the context of overall development. BB facilitates a paradigm shift; moving to an earlier and preventative contact point rather than providing intervention when the toddler becomes symptomatic.

During the BB session, the OLO completes a brief communication checklist with parents to screen their baby's current communication developmental stage. The OLO discusses specific SLC promotion strategies, and models interactions which support communication development in the context of the relationship. Parents are provided with an opportunity to ask questions on how to support their baby's development and to explore any concerns. This early contact point provides a pivotal opportunity to identify and intervene with any red flag signals that may be evident. BB also offers a port of entry into other areas of the YK IMH Service for families, if required.

## Methodology

### Data Collection

**BB Proformas:** A quantitative proforma was designed to record specific details of the BB Service. This included specific information provided to caregivers; nature of concerns regarding a baby's speech, language and communication development. OLOs completed a proforma for each baby seen at BB over an eight month period (February 2017 to September 2017, n=46).

**BB Interviews:** 1:1 practitioner interviews were conducted with YK OLOs, (n=3) and local PHNs (n=4). Phone interviews were conducted with parents of babies seen at BB (n=7). All interviews were semi-structured in nature, and consent was obtained prior to interviews.

### Data Analysis

**Quantitative Analysis:** IBM SPSS 20.0 was used to analyse BB proformas.

**Qualitative Analysis:** Interview transcripts were thematically analysed, guided by The Framework for Programme Evaluation in Public Health (CDC).

## Results

Table 1: Parent reported concerns regarding baby's SLC development

Parent reported concerns	N (total = 46)	%
Yes	4	9%
No	42	91%

Table 2: OLO observed concerns re: baby's SLC development

Specific area of concern	N (total = 11)	%
Communication	9	82
Parent-baby interaction	6	55
Developmental delay	5	45
Feeding / weight gain	3	27
Play	2	18
Eye contact	2	18
Hearing	1	9

Table 3: SLC promotion strategies provided during BB Service

SLC promotion strategy	N (total = 46)	%
Modelling of communication strategies	40	87
Singing	37	80
Reading	24	52
Play strategies	9	20
Parent-baby interaction	6	13
Other	3	7

Table 4: Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-themes
Development of the BB Service	Collaboration & partnership working
Benefits/outcomes of the BB Service	Building parent capacity Port of entry to additional YK services
Prevention & early intervention	Universal direct service delivery
Aids to service implementation	Parental engagement Novel nature of service
Challenges to service implementation	Staff turnover Resolving issues & recommendations for future roll-out

*"it's all through the IMH lens....it's hugely linked to communication because the relationships develop in the context of communication whether it's verbal or nonverbal, you build a relationship through communicating with somebody" (Practitioner interview, May 2017)*

*"I have used the things that the OLO mentioned everyday now with my son. We look at books more together and I always point out what's in the pictures" (Parent interview, May 2017)*

## Conclusions & Recommendations

- ◆ Parents reported on the novel nature of the BB Service and the benefits that they observed since implementing the communication and interaction strategies modelled.
- ◆ Practitioners observed increased parental awareness regarding the importance of communication development and willingness to engage in this novel, universal model of service delivery.
- ◆ BB Service demonstrated that a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach facilitates and enhances the provision of a health promotion and prevention model of service delivery.
- ◆ BB Service has offered a port of entry into community-based prevention and early Intervention services.
- ◆ SLTs have a vital role in supporting parent-baby interactions in the context of relationships to promote communication development at an early stage of development. A service delivery paradigm shift is required to emphasise universal prevention and early intervention at a national level in Ireland.