

Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025



**Let's Grow
Together!**

**INFANT & CHILDHOOD
PARTNERSHIPS CLG**

“Our communities are places where children experience happy, healthy and thriving childhoods that last a lifetime and no child is left behind.”



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Glossary of Terms

ABC Programme	Area Based Childhood Programme
AP	Atlantic Philanthropies
DCEDIY	Department of Child, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
IMH	Infant Mental Health
PEI	Prevention and Early Intervention
Tusla	The Child and Family Agency
YK	Young Knocknaheeny

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Introduction

'The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during those early years, starting in the womb, has life-long effects' (Marmot, 2010).

Prevention and early intervention (PEI) is supporting children realise their full potential in all aspects of their life, and as early in their life as possible. PEI is essential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and disadvantage and can have life-long positive effects on outcomes for children and young people (PEIN, 2019, p.3). This work puts families and children at the centre of a multifaceted model that includes building protective practice for families, reducing risk factors for children, strengthening local communities and connecting all this through systems change and policy (Nugent, 2015).

This report sets out the five-year strategic plan of Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG. It adds to the journey of the successful development of the Young Knocknaheeny Programme (YK) and brings it under a new governance structure which will oversee the long-term development of area based PEI work which it has committed to.

To read more about prevention and early intervention, child development, Infant Mental Health, the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme and the journey of YK, please see Appendices A-B

Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG

The Northside Community Health Project CLG (NICHE) kindly agreed to act as the Lead Agency for the YK Programme for the initial period of 3 years. This was further extended to provide the programme security during the transition of the ABC Programme from Pobal to Tusla. Owing to the success of YK, it was necessary from there to explore alternative long-term governance arrangements. The outcome was the establishment of a new organisation which was established in 2020.

Strategic Plan Development

In order to strengthen the development and define the direction of 'Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG', a high level strategic plan was developed. The strategic plan provided an opportunity, at an early phase, to establish the organisation's mission, vision, and values; address some fundamental questions; and develop medium and longer-term goals with associated objectives.

Methodology

Questions

A working group was established to develop strategic questions (see Appendix C) to inform the plan, identify the stakeholders and decide on the consultation processes.

Questions were adapted appropriately with emphasis on particular areas of interest and relevance depending on the stakeholder group. Stakeholders identified to inform the plan included: children from a local preschool and primary school, families and groups with experience of the services, members of the Parents Forum, YK Consortium and interagency partners, organisation directors and YK staff team.

The data received from these groups has been used to inform this strategic plan. The information obtained from stakeholder consultations has been recorded appropriately and is available as supporting documentation for this strategy.

Stakeholder Groups

Children: We consulted with children attending a local preschool and primary school through a mixed-methods focus group with draw and discussion activities.

Families: Families linked with the IMH Home Visiting Programme service were invited to participate through an online questionnaire.

Parents Forum: Virtual focus group conducted.

Consortium and Interagency Partners: Two virtual focus groups conducted.

Staff Team: Two virtual focus group conducted.

Ethical Considerations

Parents of children who attended the included preschool and primary school classes were provided with a Parental Information Sheet and an opt-out consent form. Families were also provided with this information prior to participation in the online questionnaire.

Vision, Mission and Values

Context

From the start of their lives, children grow and develop in the context of their relationships and their environments. All children should be afforded the opportunity to have the best start in life, to grow, thrive and be happy, safe and supported in their community.

Children and families have a right to be heard and participate in decision making that affects them. Service delivery and outcomes are better when the voice of children and families are included and they are empowered to participate equally. An integrated, community based service delivery model, designed around the child and family experience is important.

Continuous upskilling of all people that come into the lives of children through education, training, mentoring and reflection, facilitates change. Working together and using evidence informed Prevention and Early Intervention approaches, which are respectful and strengths based can support children's earliest relationships and development, and can disrupt the impact of child poverty.

Rationale for the new organisation

Drawn from the organisation constitution the main objective of Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG is to govern, support and develop area based prevention and early intervention programming and approaches that support early childhood development, relationships and environments; to set the foundations for infant and child development, learning, wellbeing, quality of life and outcomes; and by doing so mitigating the intergenerational impact of child poverty.

The subsidiary objectives are:

- Respectfully enhancing skills and early childhood development knowledge, of all parents, practitioners and services;
- Strengthening and supporting all relationships and environments that are important to every child's early development;
- Embedding systems and community change to support early childhood development
- Undertaking participatory learning and evaluation, documenting and policy development.

This work is underpinned by an innovative Infant Mental Health Framework and draws on best international evidence and practice.

The core work of Let's Grow Together! Infant & Childhood Partnerships CLG is funded by Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, Youth and is part of the Area Based Childhood Programme within the Tusla Child & Family Agency.

Our Vision

Our communities are places where children experience happy, healthy and thriving childhoods that last a lifetime and no child is left behind.

Our Mission

To work in partnership with everyone important in children's lives, sharing knowledge, skills and resources, empowering families and enabling children through their relationships and in their communities to be nurtured, fulfilled, achieving and learning.

Our Values



1. Inclusive

We will build trusting supportive relationships with families. Families include everyone who is important in a child's life: parents – Mams AND Dads, caregivers, and the wider family including grandparents, and the wider community. We will engage and be accessible to all while recognising that some require additional supports to facilitate inclusion.

2. Respectful

We will show respect in all our interactions at every level of the organisation. We seek to be a trusted and valued support to children, their parents and guardians, caregivers, educators, services and communities.

3. Empathetic

We place the relationship at the core of all aspects of our work. We offer empathy and kindness. We are trauma and adversity aware and responsive. We are non-judgemental. We acknowledge and accept challenges, but always build on strengths.

4. Integrity

We will stay aligned with the vision, mission and principles of our work. Our work is informed by evidence and good practice. We work to a high standard with positivity and commitment. We advocate with and for children, families, their services and communities.

5. Open

We will listen and communicate effectively at all levels of the organisation to be visible and accessible. We will continuously learn and engage with stakeholders in design, implementation and evaluation processes.

6. Collaborative

We will work in partnership with children, their families, practitioners, services and organisations, policy makers and the State, with the purpose of improving outcomes for children, families and communities. At all times ensuring that we have consent from participants.

7. Well Governed

We will be an organisation providing quality in terms of governance and compliance as an employer, and effective deliverer of services, offering value for money and sustainability.

Strategic Goals



Goal 1: Delivery and Integration of the YK Programme

Objective 1: Continue to deliver programme within current agreements

To transfer all the necessary undertakings of the Young Knocknaheeny Programme from NICHE CLG to Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG.

To maintain existing targets and achievements of the YK Programme in terms of benefits to children, practitioners, services and communities.

To provide continuity and support for the existing programme and future developments.

To manage the transition and integration of the Young Knocknaheeny name and brand over time. Initially maintaining appropriate visibility/acknowledgement of "Young Knocknaheeny", balanced with the need to identify with the new organisation name as more reflective of the work and more accessible to communities.

Objective 2: Revision of current presentation of service delivery model

To undertake reorganising the programme content from 4 interconnected strategies to a developmental approach: pre-birth to 3; 3 to 5 years and primary school age, with the incorporation of all existing activities.

Objective 3: Visibility, engagement & communication

To increase programme visibility, engagement and communication, particularly within local communities, but also in the wider Cork city region.

Objective 4: IT Infrastructure

To ensure IT systems and protocols within the organisation evolve to support the delivery of the service in an efficient and effective manner.

Goal 2: Consolidate Reach of Organisation

Objective 1: Overall Reach

Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG, will adopt a strategic approach to the reach of organisation activities that supports: a) direct service b) capacity building c) information sharing to inform practice and policy.

Objective 2: Age range

The organisation's expertise and resources of its direct services is currently positioned within the pre-birth to 3 years' period of a child's development. This strategy reconfirms this as the primary age range of direct services. However, dependant on need, resources, maintaining a PEI approach, and in the context of the wider interagency partnerships and capacity building model, the direct work may include children through primary school.

Objective 3: Geographical reach of direct services

The geographical reach of our direct services is currently Knocknaheeny, Hollyhill, Churchfield, Gurrabraher, The Meadows, Shanakiel regeneration areas. Families living outside the YK catchment area may gain access through referral from local GPs and the Kidscope Clinic for example. As resources will allow, the organisation will fully consolidate the geographical area of the direct service delivery to incorporate Cork city northwest as Knocknaheeny and surrounding areas.

Objective 4: Capacity building reach

In support of the direct work with families and children, the capacity building approach with other services and practitioners supports a whole community, interdisciplinary, inter-sectoral partnership with a common understanding, language and approach. Therefore, it is primarily located within the same geographical area as our direct service delivery. However, we will also continue to support and integrate city-wide, regional, national and in-service learning and capacity building, as resources allow.

Objective 5: Visual interpretation

We will work with a graphic harvester/designer to help to communicate to our stakeholders the reach, approach and age range of the services of Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG.

Goal 3: Stakeholder Involvement

Objective 1: Organisational level

Continuation of stakeholder involvement in the design and implementation through the Consortium as an expert advisory group, Parents Forum and child and family participation. This may include consultation, information exchange, working groups, research and evaluation, and feedback.

Objective 2: Service delivery level

Children and families: At the direct service delivery level, the focus will continue to be on supporting parents, caregivers and family members to provide warm, secure, attuned, nurturing relationships with their children. Children and families will continue to be at the centre of the work, and service responses are designed around their needs, strengths, interests and views.

Practitioners and services: We will continue to share knowledge, train, mentor and build capacity of all those important adults in the life of children to ensure warm, attuned responses to the children they work with to build and support secure, attuned, nurturing relationships. We will continue to build a culture of warm responsiveness to children in every centre, school, and service, and of collaboration and integrated planning and service delivery with all children's services. Those practitioners, centres and services will continue to be included in our decisions and responses, organisation service design, evaluation and reviews.

Goal 4: Monitoring, Research, Evaluation and Reporting

Objective 1: Programme support

We will undertake ongoing monitoring of the inputs and outputs of our services. We will continue to develop tailored research initiatives to understand the impact of priority areas of our services overtime. We will provide documentation that supports the accountability of the work, advocacy, informing policy and practice that the organisation commit to.

Objective 2: Collaboration

There will be a continued focus on collaboration and partnership to support the internal monitoring, research, evaluation and reporting. This collaborative process includes that with academic partnerships with UCC and other educational/research bodies, independent contractors, staff team and service partners.

Objective 3: Child and family voices

To build on the work initiated by YK to capture child and family voices, and to mainstream activities that support the integration of those voices in relevant areas and organisation services.

Goal 5: Sustainability

Objective 1: Premises

To secure an appropriate premises for the organisation, its staff team, administrative supports, equipment and service provision.

Objective 2: Funding

To secure long-term funding and to increase and diversify funding sources to allow for such actions as: consolidation of the geographical area; exploration of direct service provision/interventions for school age children; effective response to training and education demands, with consideration to the enterprise model in order to explore and develop new innovations and services, support the governance of the organisation and the wellbeing, progression and security of the staff team.

Objective 3: Programme and company development

Over the period of the strategic plan, to incorporate joint Board/staff team/stakeholder planning days and operational reviews.

To develop a detailed action plan arising from this strategic plan and to conduct a structural review of the organisations human resources in line with the action plan.

Goal 6: Good Governance

Objective 1: Company Board

To commit to developing the membership of the Board, to reflect the skills and diversity required to ensure the organisation is well governed and resourced. Also to provide the Board with the necessary training that they require, and undertake an annual review process.

Objective 2: Governance Code

As a company limited by guarantee, the organisation must adhere to all legislative requirements.

The organisation commits to the standards under the Governance Code and enhanced TUSLA requirements for management of funding.

To ensure that all policies and procedures are in place, implemented with oversight, and reviewed and revised in a timely manner to support organisation staff and Board, as well as funding and organisation obligations.

Objective 3: Employee wellbeing and development

Our employees are at the heart of everything we do, their wellbeing is important to us. Over the period of this strategic plan, HR management systems will support a high performance team, delivering the high quality services that the company are governing. This will include alignment to the strategic goals, and development and direction of services. Staff will be managed, supported and developed in line with established best practice in employee management, support and engagement.

Strengths, Limitations and Opportunities

Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG is assuming the responsibilities of the YK Programme, to oversee its current and future development and integration into the organisation as the organisation itself develops and grows.

The YK Programme is regarded locally, nationally and internationally for its commitment to children and families, their services, and communities; its fidelity to the approach of its work, and the innovation and evidence-based practice that it has incorporated.

At a policy level, the case has been made for PEI and the need for this to be grown and mainstreamed through learning, capacity building and service delivery models has been and continues to be made. Thus supporting the rationale for the vision, mission, strategic goals and objectives set out in this strategy. There are obvious challenges to the work of the organisation, such as annual funding, lack of premises, IT, and an ambitious strategy to deliver overall. Yet Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG starts its work with many assets and strengths to build on: it will be assuming expert team knowledge, reputations and existing partnerships and alignment to policy. It is also assuming a strong position built up by the YKABC Programme in terms of existing relationships with the community and families who are the benefactors of the work. It also assumes existing funding arrangements with Tusla and part of the ABC Programme.

No one sector or organisation can meet the challenge of intergenerational area based childhood poverty, it requires all of our efforts. In providing area based PEI, Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG will deliver on its remit to supporting childhood development, high quality relationships and environments; to set the foundations for child development, learning, wellbeing, quality of life and outcomes; and mitigating the intergenerational impact of child poverty.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Background

Early Childhood Development

Nurturing relationships with parents and other caregivers provide the basis from which children grow and develop. It is these early responsive relationships and supportive family environments that shape the child's future well-being, development, educational engagement and health.

'Families, however, do not exist in a vacuum. Communities and nations that value families and create environments where children are supported to achieve their full potential, perform better across a range of health and social indicators' (Nugent, 2015).

Adversity

'Mental Health can't be separated out from cognitive development, language development, and social competence, and they all have their roots early on in either a very sturdy or weak foundation' (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The risks which undermine family stability and relationships can make a child's development vulnerable.

There is a powerful connection between the experience of adversity in childhood and the incidence of many health and social problems. Toxic stress response can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity...without adequate adult support. 'This kind of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years' (Centre on the Developing Child, 2020). And so children who grow up in disadvantage, experiencing adversity in their early years are at much greater risk than their peers, of life-long poor outcomes in their physical and mental health, as well as their social, educational and economic achievement (Leventhal & Brooks Gunn, 2000).

Infant Mental Health

Infant Mental Health (IMH) is defined as 'the capacity of a child from birth to age five to experience, express and regulate emotions; form close, secure interpersonal relationships; and explore his/her environment and learn, within the context of family, community and cultural expectations. (Zero to Three, 2018). Caregiver-infant relationships form the proto-type for subsequent relationships throughout the course of the infants' lifespan, and the quality of this attachment has significant impact on future physical and mental health outcomes (McKelvey et. al, 2015).

Infant Mental Health is regarded as "everyone's business" – something everyone who works with or supports infants and young children should know about. The field of infant mental health is therefore "multidisciplinary and requires expertise and conceptualisation from a variety of perspectives' (Osofsky, 2016). It also requires an understanding of the wider ecosystem of factors that may promote or inhibit security; this is essential for prevention and early intervention IMH programmes (Coyle, Roggman and Newman, 2002).

Prevention and Early Intervention

'The things that matter most are a healthy pregnancy; good maternal mental health; secure bonding with the child; love and responsiveness of parents along with clear boundaries, as well as opportunities for a child's cognitive, language and social and emotional development. Good services matter too' (Field, 2010, p.7).

Prevention and early intervention (PEI) is therefore about supporting children realise their full potential in all aspects of their life, and as early in their life as possible. PEI is essential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and disadvantage and can have life-long positive effects on outcomes for children and young people' (PEIN, 2019, p.3). This work puts families and children at the centre of a multifaceted model that includes building protective practice for families, reducing risk factors for children, strengthening local communities and connecting all this through systems change and policy (Nugent, 2015).

We also know at this stage, through an increasing evidence base the extent to which effective interventions early in life can produce measurable benefits in later educational achievement, economic productivity and responsible citizenship (Heckman, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

It is important to note that PEI programmes are more effective when they are implemented with fidelity. Adaptation locally may be required. This is fully dependent on the availability of appropriate skills, structures and organisational supports. Capacity building, integration and quality improvement have been identified as three interconnected approaches which are essential to drive any successful local intervention (Hutchings and Gardner, 2012). Building workforce capacity in order to deliver high quality early childhood services requires coordinated efforts across sectors, effective governance, sufficient funding, an adequate workforce, reliable data systems, and continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement cycles; it also requires partnerships with parents, communities and the private sector. 'Children's development is multidimensional, and the efforts to support their development must be so as well' (Nores & Fernandez, 2018, p.70).

Area Based Childhood Programme

The national Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, initially funded by Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, builds on the previous 'Prevention and Early Intervention Programme'. ABC continues to be funded by Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), and is delivered by Tusla Child and Family Agency, targeting investment in effective services to improve outcomes for children and families living in areas of disadvantage.

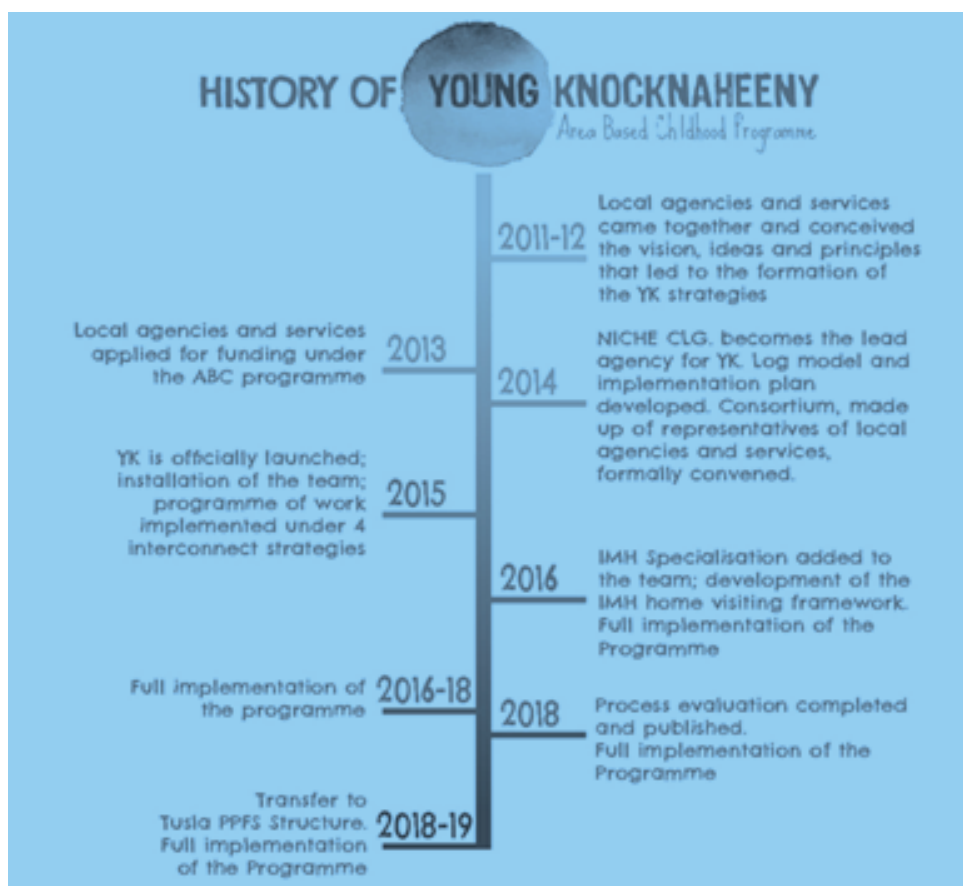
The ABC Programme is aligned to Rochford et al.'s (2014) report, Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services, which found that PEI Programmes in Ireland should focus largely on: the birth to three years' period, the development of practitioner skills and strong interagency structures, supporting parents in order to support children, and consulting communities in order to ensure appropriate PEI programmes in line with children's' and families' needs. The ABC Programme is in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (BOBF, 2014) and is also aligned with First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028, Sharing the Vision – A Mental

Appendix B: Our Journey

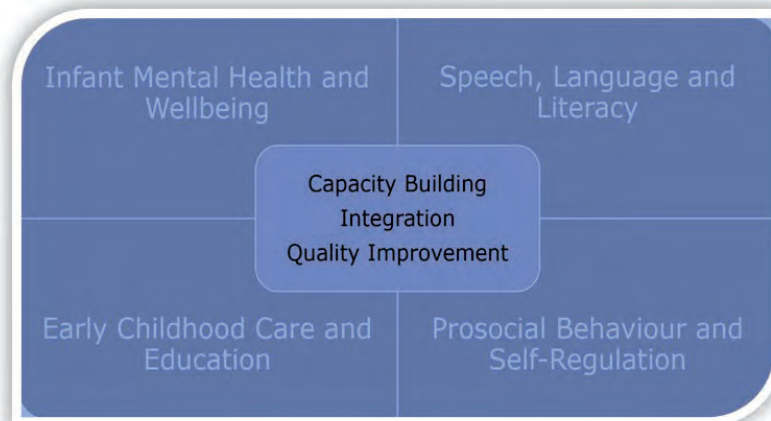
Within the area of Knocknaheeny and surrounding areas of the Northside of Cork City, there has been a long history of collaboration between agencies, services, practitioners and the community. On the part of those working in the area, there was an acknowledgement of the powerful commitment of parents to the best possible care and development of their children, often in difficult circumstances; an understanding of the very damaging impact of early adversity in a child's earliest years; and an acceptance that many parents who have experienced adversity themselves benefit from collaborative, respectful, practical support in their care of their children.

In 2011, a Consortium of like-minded partners shared a desire to develop a PEI programme building on the range of expertise already available within the community with a recognition that new methods of inter-agency working were also required. The need to shift the balance from crisis management to prevention and early intervention was high on the agenda.

This group of Consortium partners learned from the existing PEI projects in Ireland, and from international research and practice. They identified resources, opportunities and obstacles to developing a PEI programme in this area. From this shared vision, the Young Knocknaheeny Programme (YK) emerged and a framework of a PEI programme was developed and accepted as part of The Area Based Childhood Programme at the end of 2013. Careful planning, solidarity and trust, and effective working relationships established across local agencies and disciplines in the Knocknaheeny area, thus facilitated the implementation of the YKABC Programme from January 2015.



From 2015, the direct work of the YK Programme was delivered by the YK Inter-Disciplinary Team and strategy lead partners, including Infant Parent Support Workers, Oral Language Development Officers, Child Health Development Worker, IMH Specialist and a Programme Management and Administration team. The YK-Programme consists of 4 interconnected strategies supported by an integrated research and evaluation process and underpinned by an Infant Mental Health Framework. The strategies are connected by their common approaches of capacity building, integration and quality improvement.



Following implementation over a three-year period, a process evaluation was published. The report, Learning Together: Young Knocknaheeny Process Evaluation 2015 to 2017, described how the YK Programme achieved its aim of getting every child's life off to the best possible start. It drew on learning from perspectives of all key stakeholders, including practitioners and families within the community, and delivered conclusions and outlined views on the programme's next steps. The aim of the evaluation was to provide accountability to funders and the community for the investment made, to document programme impact, and to further inform practice and policy at local, national and international levels.



Appendix C: Strategic Questions

- What is 'Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG' most basic objective?
- Who are the primary beneficiaries?
- What is the age range of the primary focus?
- What is the defining model of servicedelivery/approach?
- What is the primary geographical reach?
- Does the name 'Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships' reflect the primary task and direction?
- What structures, governance, partnerships and otherwise, will support the primary task and direction?
- Who are the owners "owners"/stewards?
- Are these reflected in the Constitution and Articles of Association?
- What are the external influences driving and shaping primary task and direction?
- What is the vision, mission, values, reach and strategic goals?
- What are the strengths to build on and what resources are needed to achieve these goals?
- How will the plan be implemented?
- How will it monitor, track and evaluate progress and revise the plan as required?



info@letsgrowtogether.ie



www.letsgrowtogether.ie



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