Implementing HighScope in County Mayo

Executive Summary
Executive Summary
Implementing HighScope in County Mayo

Introduction
HighScope Ireland, in conjunction with the Child and Family Agency Mayo Early Years Services, commissioned an Evaluation of HighScope in County Mayo. The purpose of the evaluation is to document the implementation of the HighScope approach in County Mayo, as an evidence based, outcomes focused model for use in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Ireland. The intention of the Child and Family Agency (formerly HSE West) was to create a range of high quality community based early childhood care and education services that would in turn become the focus for family support services across County Mayo. Since 2007 forty one early years settings and over two hundred early years practitioners have completed the HighScope training and are implementing the model.

The HighScope Perry Preschool programme was an Early Childhood Education Programme developed at the Perry Elementary School Ypsilanti, Michigan, during the early 1960’s and has been researched for the effects of the programme for 40 years and more. The HighScope model was informed by the findings of the Perry Preschool programme which showed significant long term economic, social and individual benefits.

Background
In County Mayo there is a considerable history of statutory and voluntary/community sector involvement in the development of Early Years Services. In 2002 the HSE-West (formally the Western Health Board) established an Early Years Services Team to support Early Years Services in County Mayo and to improve the quality of practice. The HSE-West believed that this investment in local services would support all families and children in communities and build resilience in more vulnerable children. In 2007 the Early Years Development Workers (EYDWs) from the HSE Early Years Services Team were Trained as Trainers in the HighScope Approach. This provided the opportunity for early years settings in County Mayo to access a validated, evidence based approach to quality Early Childhood Care and Education with the added facility of local EYDWs to support their practice through on-site visiting and cluster group support.

The work of the Early Years Services team includes:

- Supporting best practice using the HighScope model for 0-3's, 3-5's and Childminders
- Providing core training, site visits, cluster groups, supporting parent programmes and continual professional development
- Supporting all services to achieve the minimum standard required under Regulation 5 of the 2006 Pre-school Regulations
- Implementing the National Voluntary Notification System for Childminders
- Collaborating to develop and implement the Guide for Inclusion Planning which supports the full participation of children with a disability in local early years settings
- Developing linkages with Primary Care teams, Social Work teams and Family Support
- We provided Keeping Safe Training to all early years practitioners in conjunction with the Children First Information Officer
- We provided training in Equality and Diversity Awareness Raising in line with the National Guidelines.

National Developments and Policy Context
The Early Childhood Care and Education sector has experienced significant developments in relation to quality over the last number of years, including:
- The publication in 2006 of Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education
- The introduction in 2010 of the Free Pre-school Year for every child between the ages of 3 years 2 months and 4 years and 7 months
- The selective implementation of Síolta and Aistear as well as other initiatives to improve quality in early years through the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) and the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI)
- The introduction in 2014 of the National Quality Support Service (NQSS)

As well as the introductions and implementation of these initiatives and frameworks there have been strategic and policy changes that impact the Early Years sector. These include:
- The formation of the Child and Family Agency which is a dedicated state agency responsible for improving well-being and outcomes for children.
- The introduction of the National Policy Framework for children and young people ‘Better Outcomes Brighter Futures’ (2014-2020). This strategy is suggested to ‘provide a detailed roadmap for the enhancement and coordinated provision of Early Years service and supports’. This strategy supports the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and recognises the case for public investment in Early Childhood Care and Education as a critical contributor to healthy child development from the earliest ages.

Methodology
The methodological design for this evaluation was guided by the principles of ‘Implementation Science’. The intent is to understand what, why and how interventions work in ‘real world’ settings and to test approaches to improve them. A multi-method approach was adopted for this evaluation which combined primary data collection in the form of interviews, focus groups, online questionnaires and documented case studies on film, with secondary data analysis of existing monitoring and evaluation information about HighScope implementation in settings in County Mayo.

A total of 41 settings in County Mayo have undertaken HighScope training at some point. While all 41 settings were invited to take part in the evaluation through an online questionnaire, 11 settings were selected using a sampling framework that reflected the demographics of Early Years Services in County Mayo, to participate in a more focused enquiry. This involved, among other methods, HighScope Trainers from HighScope Ireland administering a Programme Quality Assessment (PQA) in each of the 11 settings. The PQA is a rating instrument designed to evaluate the quality of early childhood programmes and identify staff training needs. The PQA is reliable and valid and is appropriate for use in all centre based early childhood settings, including but not limited to those using the HighScope Approach.6

A core part of the process was accessing the voices of relevant stakeholders who have direct and indirect experience of the HighScope model. The stakeholders included:
- Parents whose children have attended the programme in the 11 settings
- Staff at the 11 settings
- HighScope practitioners at the 11 settings
- Representatives from HighScope Ireland
- Trainers from HighScope Ireland
- Representatives from the Child and Family Agency
- Representatives from other statutory, community/voluntary agencies

The documentation of ‘inspirational stories’ from stakeholders engaged in and benefitting from the HighScope programme provided a visual account of the impact from the perspective of parents, children, staff, owners/management committee and supports. The filmed interviews provided a coordinated film of ‘inspirational stories’ across three varied settings.

A review of documentary sources relating to the history of HighScope and its implementation across County Mayo took place which identified inputs and outputs in terms of numbers of settings, types of settings and details on staff participating in the HighScope training. Feedback gathered from participants who completed the ‘Implementing the HighScope Approach’ training was considered in detail and formed the basis for question development on the interview schedules used in the primary data collection phase.

The research information collected during the project was recorded, collated and prepared for analysis. Examination of data and corresponding analysis formed the core of the evaluation report, offers lessons learned and recommendations. The Conceptual Framework for Implementation Fidelity was used as a coding scheme for analysis.

Conceptual Framework for Implementation Fidelity

Potential moderators: 
Participant responsiveness 
Comprehensiveness of policy description 
Strategies to facilitate implementation 
Recruitment 
Context

Adherence: 
Content 
Coverage 
Frequency 
Duration

Intervention

Outcomes

2 www.TUSLA.ie
4 www.UNICEF.org/irs
5 www.Highscope.org

Findings
Evaluations from HighScope training courses
Two hundred and twenty seven Early Years Practitioners have trained in the HighScope Approach since 2006 across thirteen different training programmes:
- Implementing the HighScope Approach (IHA) 3-5 years
- Tender Care and Early Learning 0-3 years
- Introduction to HighScope for Childminders

Based on the summative evaluation forms completed by HighScope trained practitioners at the end of their training, feedback was gathered about the core elements of the training programme and its impact on practice, quality and outcomes. The responses gathered from the evaluations could be grouped under three main themes:

1. Professional knowledge and understanding about early childhood education and child development
An increase in awareness, understanding and knowledge about the significance of core elements in childhood education and development featured frequently in participants’ responses. This was evident in feedback referring to ‘change in understanding the impact of active learning tools, the environment, relationships, routines and assessments in creating opportunities for high quality experiences for children.

“This has made a big difference to my knowledge in terms of understanding how best to create an environment best for children and indeed staff”

2. The importance of a child based rights approach and child centred learning
Equity and respect for children’s choices, voices and needs was prominent in the feedback offered by participants. Child directed learning and active participation in the daily experience was recorded as a significant change or improvement as a result of the HighScope training. The input, inclusion and partnering of children with adults in the learning process was noted repeatedly by practitioners. A less adult dominated approach was often welcomed by respondents who reported that their settings were now ‘calmer’, ‘happier’, ‘less stressful’, ‘more organised’ and ‘less pressured’.

“The overall quality of care has improved with greater emphasis on children’s rights and helping them realise their potential developmentally because of this way of working”

3. Outcomes for children and professionals
A pathway to improved outcomes for children was described by respondents in the feedback. They pointed to the impact of a child centred approach to learning involving active methods in an environment created to optimise discovery through play, supported by skilled practitioners rather than driven by adult agendas. The attachments formed through adult child interactions and routines followed that support individual needs led participants to make connections to better outcomes for children and their families.

“I was unsure at first and didn’t quite believe this would work but it has actually made my life and more importantly the children’s lives better…we are all happier”

“I value family relationships and feel more open to encourage parents to get involved through open communication about our practice here”

Online survey
All settings that took part in the HighScope training since its initiation (n=41) were invited to complete an online survey about the training, adherence to the model, implementation moderators they have experienced and support they would like. A total of 51 (25%) of practitioners were involved in giving responses to the survey. The degree of self reported implementation was recorded through the survey. Overall practitioners stated their knowledge of the HighScope model was high (average of 4.6 out of 5). Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they implemented the various components of the ‘Wheel of Learning’ and the HighScope curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheel of Learning</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Routine</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Child Interaction</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Learning</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Learning</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language, Literacy and Communication</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Emotional Development</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Development, Health and Wellbeing</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Science</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The online survey also revealed that practitioners would like:
more training, support for cluster groups, use of the PQA, regular review between practitioners and Early Years Development Workers.

Barriers revealed included:
financial considerations, time for non contact time, time for planning, support for managers, language and special needs and staff skill set.

Practitioners were asked what format support could take for them to continue to implement the model and they responded with:
paid time for planning and documenting observations on children and more workshops.
Practitioners responded to a query about outcomes for children in their setting as a result of implementing the HighScope approach. Responses included:

- The effect of the conflict resolution has been huge for us, the difference in the children and staff since we implemented is remarkable.
- More confident, improved language and decision making skill. Self pride and longer concentration on activities in work or group times.

Practitioners were asked in the survey to report if they have heard the children say anything about the approach, examples of what children have said included:

- We know what happens next because we look at the directions on the wall.
- We talk about it when we have a problem, use our own words.
- "Teacher can I do the planning with the children today," asked one child.

Programme Quality Assessment (PQA) in 11 focused sample settings

This involved direct observation of 11 settings and analysis using the PQA assessment tool. This measure 'examines all aspects of programme implementation, from physical characteristics of the setting and the nature of adult-child interactions to programme staffing and management.' The PQA was carried out in 10 settings providing a service for 3-5 year olds and 1 setting providing a service for 0-3 year olds.

The PQA scores awarded by trainers range between 0 and 5 representing the highest rating awarded for complete adherence. They offer insight into the degree of implementation and fidelity to the HighScope model. The table below gives the overall classroom score and associated mean for both programmes. An average of 3 is required by HighScope Ireland after completion of the 12 day training course for either Implementing the HighScope Approach (IHA) programme (3-6 year olds) or the Tender Care and Early Learning (TCEL) programme (0-3 year olds). A score of 4.5 denotes readiness for accreditation. Inspection of the table below suggests settings participating in the evaluation with an overall average of 3.8 (3-6 year olds) are performing above average and working towards accreditation while a score of 4.19 observed for the 0-3 year old setting is close to the accreditation point.

**Interviews/Focus Groups**

Staff discussions through focus group interviews were structured around key components of the model. Using the ‘HighScope Wheel of Learning’ to examine adherence to implementation, each component of the model was discussed to establish degree of adherence to implementation. The responses of participants were qualified for degree of implementation ranging ‘implementing all of the time’, ‘some of the time’ through to ‘none of the time’. The responses are presented graphically below to illustrate the levels of implementation to the HighScope model.
The focus groups were then asked how adherence and fidelity to the HighScope model was promoted and maintained. A number of different systems and protocols were put forward. The most frequently cited was that of support offered by the Child and Family Agency Early Years Development Workers. They were viewed highly positively by practitioners who valued their input, advice, guidance and support provided since completing the HighScope training programme. Settings offered numerous examples of actions taken by the Early Years Development Workers to improve fidelity. This occurred during planned and unplanned visits where guidance requested from the setting and/or development worker’s observations led to recommendations to improve fidelity and implementation.

Colleagues using the HighScope approach offered support and guidance with many settings seeing team work as essential for quality practice. Teamwork was nominated as a method for promoting fidelity and a checking system in terms of implementation. Communication and peer support was reported as being vital to maintain implementation and promote fidelity.

Peer support and learning was a constant feature in the feedback from practitioners with specific reference to cluster group meetings. The meetings took place three or four times a year and were an opportunity for practitioners to discuss, compare and improve practice by gaining further knowledge and awareness about HighScope activities implemented in other settings.

The meetings themselves took place in a setting where external practitioners to that setting could visit and learn in situ about selected topic arranged and delivered by the EYDW. One practitioner spoke of: “The cluster meetings are so important and vital to maintaining a high quality of practice as you learn of: examples of actions taken by the EYDWs to improve fidelity. This occurred during planned and unplanned visits where guidance requested from the setting and/or development worker’s observations led to recommendations to improve fidelity and implementation.

Child and Family Agency Early Years Development Workers

The role of the EYDWs have served primarily to support, guide and mentor practitioners in settings implementing and not implementing HighScope. Settings are not precluded from involvement on the basis of ‘management type’ with both private and community based organisations receiving support. For the purpose of this evaluation, reference to their work focused on their role in supporting the implementation of HighScope.

In this regard, EYDWs spoke of a tiered approach to their work which involved:

- Working with individual settings. Providing assistance in the implementation of HighScope was viewed as essential by the EYDWs who built relationships with staff so they would be comfortable with onsite observations and constructive discussions about practice. Changing practice and attitudes of staff regarding early childhood care was noted by EYDWs moving from adult driven practices to child centred practices. Helping practitioners and the whole setting understand and practically implement this way of working involves a transformative process that takes time. Supporting them to do this was reported as essential in ensuring the ethos and principles of the HighScope approach is embedded in the setting which in turn leads to greater levels of fidelity and predicted outcomes.

- Facilitating peer learning. The cluster groups offered practitioners an opportunity to meet and share ideas. The EYDWs facilitated these meetings with input from practitioners on the agenda and the host setting. The EYDWs felt these meetings were a huge benefit to the practitioners and the implementation of the HighScope model.

- Supporting groups to support parents. The EYDWs encouraged practitioners to consider how best to introduce potentially new and novel concepts to parents, including, ‘child initiated activities’, ‘open ended activities’. The settings had many ways to communicate the messages of HighScope that would benefit parents including parent workshops, parent information boards, newsletters to name a few. The EYDWs reported that setting have a range of ways that they communicate with parents but that with their support the most effective are short, simple and repetitive pieces of information offered a vehicle for awareness raising and knowledge transfer.

Moderators

Practitioners

Time for planning, reviewing and researching was an issue for practitioners, some setting provided some paid time for these tasks (50%) but others took the work home to complete.

“I can spend two hours a night sometimes staying on top of the work making sure there is a good plan in place following what the children are interested in and bringing ideas to small and large group time”.

There were a number of factors that affect implementation identified by practitioners and some of these included, language barriers with non English speaking children and parents, ideas for small and large group times, and maintaining the approach when stressful situations arise. There was also some uncertainty among practitioners as to what is the acceptable level of adherence to the model.

Support Required

When asked to offer suggestions about how the moderators identified by practitioners could be addressed a number of suggestions were put forward.

- Most were linked to support and training such as, more cluster group meetings, more frequent individualised support, refresher training, visits to other HighScope settings and specific support with assessment.

- Practitioners did acknowledge the support they had received from the EYDWs had been invaluable but felt a network could be created involving HighScope practitioners who could meet to offer advice, guidance and experience.

- More parental involvement initiatives, the involvement of parents and awareness raising about the HighScope approach was identified by some (55%) but not all settings.


- General capacity building around child observation records, note taking and curriculum planning.

Parents

A total of 75 parents across 9 out of the 11 settings participated in focus groups for the purpose of the evaluation. The questions asked formed a discussion about their experience as parents, their observations of their child/children, involvement in the setting and suggested actions arising from the evaluation.

Knowledge/awareness of the HighScope Approach

Parents had an ability to explain components of the HighScope model, its key principles and ethos. 90% of parents could provide an explanation, description or example of the HighScope model citing ‘conflict resolution’ most frequently.

Involvement in the setting

56% of the parents in the focus group stated they would be curious about attending a session to observe HighScope in action while 11% of parents had direct experience of this. All parents
interviewed experienced some level of communication regarding the practices, methodology and activities in the setting whether through written formats, open days, child journals/diaries and/or direct verbal communication with setting staff. Despite this within settings some parents held greater knowledge of HighScope than others in the same setting.

Changes observed in child as a result of attending a HighScope setting
Parents reported an collective experience of impact for their child as a result of attending the setting, including willingness to attend, the warmth of their feelings for practitioners and their motivation to replay activities that take place in the setting. Parents listed a number of types of changes for their child as a result of attending the setting and these included:
- confident, independent, happy, able to share, able to express feelings, wanting to plan, capable of calming himself, able to make friends and solve problems among others.

Bringing practices home
Transferring practices and activities from the HighScope setting to the home environment was a shared experience reported by parents. A very small number (7%) stated they had not seen evidence of setting activities carried into the home setting. In contrast, the majority of parents (93%) gave multiple examples which were common to many suggesting there is a strong desire for children to continue the practices learned at the setting and activities completed in their own home. Parents in the main recognised the importance of this continuity and had often facilitated the transfer by getting support from practitioners.

Suggestions for future involvement of parents
Varied responses were recorded by parents about how the setting might engage parents in the future beyond what is been implemented currently. The experiences of parents differed from setting to setting and within settings where the same protocol applied. Overall parents agreed they would benefit from more formal meetings about

their child/children where feedback and diaries could be shared. 70% of parents attended a parent meeting once a year, when the school year was completed. The remaining 30% experienced two parent meetings during the year. Parents in the latter group tended to report greater knowledge of progress in relation to their child compared to parents who had only one meeting. Informal communication at drop off and pick up times were favoured most by the parents as it gave an opportunity to develop a two way relationship with the practitioners sharing information about the session and home life.

Adjectives to describe the HighScope Approach
Parents were asked to provide three words that they would use to describe the HighScope Approach and a sample of the words are:
- Learning through play
- Interactive
- Fun
- Playful
- Engaging
- Purposeful
- Structured
- Supportive
- Professional

Stakeholders
Experience of the HighScope Approach
The experiences among stakeholders included direct practice knowledge to strategic awareness of the fit of HighScope as an evidence based quality assured programme. For those who reported experiences of the HighScope model, their feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Knowledge of the HighScope Approach
When asked to provide a description of the HighScope Approach all stakeholders were able to demonstrate a level of knowledge about at least one or more components of the model. It was clear that stakeholders were not denying that HighScope was one example of a quality approach and that it emerged from a rigorous evidence base. In addition, stakeholders recognised that HighScope does not just support education outcomes, but supports health and wellbeing outcomes for families.

Impact of the HighScope Approach
The emerging value of HighScope training was reported as a significant outcome in investing in practitioners who have become ‘confident and expert professionals’ who can link with other professionals to advice on the development of children in their care and provide valuable assistance to more vulnerable children.

Some comments from stakeholders included:
- “We now have an accessible community based service that offers a great start to children and parents.”
- “Prior to HighScope a greater level of support was required in terms of number of staff in settings but after HighScope this has moved to targeted support possibly one hour per session so children are learning on their own and with other children...this is leading to greater inclusion and shared learning so children are not isolated or treated differently”
  (Early Intervention Specialist)

Barriers preventing implementation fidelity
The majority of stakeholders (82%) believed firmly that HighScope had a significant contribution to make to quality provision in County Mayo settings. However one of the most significant barriers raised by stakeholders was the potential removal of support currently offered by the Early Years Services. Without this input, stakeholders were firm in their belief that all settings could not sustain their commitment, implement with fidelity and maintain the skills developed through supervisory support from the EYDs. It was perceived as being completely detrimental and ultimately lead to the obliteration of the HighScope pedagogy in County Mayo.

The inspectorate clearly identified a role for their office in supporting implementation by enforcing Regulation 5 which was closely aligned to the HighScope model. “Good, rigorous inspection where implementation was taken seriously due to very real consequences arising from inspection” could lend itself to ensuring settings were serious about the approach and committed to the fidelity on which the model is built and is most likely to achieve the proposed evidence based outcomes, while motivating staff to stay true to the intended practices of the HighScope approach.

Discussion
Implication Fidelity
Different moderating factors in the Conceptual Framework for Implementation can all affect fidelity in a complex, interrelated way. The effects of the moderating factors are likely to change over time, which further illustrates the challenges of evaluating impact of factors influencing fidelity. These were considered through analysis of the findings and discussed in this section

Adherence
Evaluation of the HighScope approach in County Mayo suggests an above average level of adherence achieved across early years settings. In terms of self reported adherence 85% of respondents stated they were implementing the HighScope approach consistently ‘all of the time’. This applied to the ‘Wheel of Learning’ and ‘Curriculum Content’.

Moderators
The credibility of an evidence based model is transferable to practice with a clear implementation structure marked a critical change point in early years provision in County Mayo. Prior to this the EYDWS talked about offering professional recommendations based on observations in settings and guided decision making regarding provision. However they viewed this has not necessarily having the same ‘weight’ an evidenced model with external validity and longitudinal impacts. In a way the introduction of the HighScope was welcomed by EYDWs and their
advice is now directly informed by the model, training protocols and comprehensive evidence linked to the approach. The continuous support and input by external consultants from HighScope Ireland and the HighScope Foundation brought a new layer of knowledge, skill and practices for early childhood provision to settings in the County. This formed a clear structure to support implementation fidelity between HighScope consultants, trainers, development workers and practitioners. The significant transformations in settings led EYDWs to report observing, “Very inspiring practice where the learning environment was one of shared control and mutual respect”.

The need for quality and responsibility on practitioners to deliver high quality provision was not reflected in policy where greater contact time is needed for staff in settings according to development workers. “Practitioners are asked to go above and beyond their role on a daily basis but are not paid for this. There are huge expectations but investment in quality provision does not reflect this”. They agreed that “quality costs but no incentive is given to early years practitioners to ensure quality and when they do deliver this there is not recognition”.

Responsiveness
Parental feedback about changes in their children and experience of the setting confirmed practitioner’s observations that children responded very positively to the approach and evidenced developmental progress as measured by the key development indicators. The observations of parents concurred that their children were ‘happy’, ‘motivated’, ‘confident’, ‘independent’ and ‘capable’ since attending the HighScope sessions. It was apparent from external reports documented that HighScope offered parents a model of shared control. By having a common language developed through engagement in settings where quality was translated into positive outcomes for their children, parents could advocate for their children’s needs and become a voice on the quality agenda.

A transformative effect was reported by practitioners themselves who experienced increased job satisfaction, improved confidence at a multi-disciplinary level and greater mutual respect generated among their colleagues. A recurrent theme was the attitudinal shift experienced between training and implementation which led to critical change in practice and attitude. This was characterised by thoughts of ‘disbelief’ and ‘doubt’ about the HighScope principles, practices and activities. However doubts of practitioners were completely transfigured when knowledge was put into practice in their settings. The responses of the children were described as “overwhelmingly positive”, “life changing”, “powerful”, “inspiring” and “convincing”. This led staff to report significant change in their own thoughts, feelings and actions as a result of the response by children both individually and as a group to the activities. Staff received positive feedback from the children and their families, which gave them further assurance that their work was valuable.

The Early Years Services team were confident and proud of having approximately 1000 ‘free’ (ECCE) places, geographically spread throughout a large rural county, that are community-based, accessible to all children and operate an internationally evidence-based model. These achievements and changes were generated as a result of the sustained relationships built across community and private sectors without discretion.

Organisational Fit
The placement of the HighScope approach within the Child and Family Agency’s agenda and operating objectives falls under Prevention, Early Intervention and Family Support. The recommendations of the task force are consistent with available evidence about the importance of prevention and early intervention which states that supporting families within the community and working to prevent children from entering the child protection system is essential requiring an emphasis on early intervention community based services. However, it is possible that implementation of this service model will be challenged given the tendency for urgent interventions at levels 3–4 to take precedence over acute interventions at levels 1–2.

The role of EYDWs within one cohesive support system supporting families known as the ‘Local Area Pathways’ (LAP) was clearly described in the evaluation. Historically EYDWs contribution to a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency approach was detailed in the evaluation with specific positives for future collaborations highlighted. The Early Years Services team can make and support the linkages for families and children to this highly positive resource through access to:

- Early Intervention and Autism teams
- Primary Care Teams
- Social Work both Child Protection and Alternative Care
- Family Support

The current involvement of HighScope practitioners in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary work was evidenced in terms of their confidence and expertly contributions at child protection meetings and working with other professionals to support vulnerable children and those with higher support needs. The task ahead described by key stakeholders in the evaluation is to help the Child and Family Agency understand the impact support of this kind can have at an early age by offering all 0-5 year olds in these situations support from a HighScope setting or practitioner. The role of the Early Years Services team in supporting families is set out as a ‘transformational goal’ in the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. The goal points to how Early Years Services has “a key role to play in child welfare, family support, the promotion of health and well-being and learning and development”.

Meeting the Policy Agenda
The advent of the National Framework for Children and Young people and formation of the Child and Family Agency brings to the forefront the imperative role of ECCE in leading to positive outcomes for children. The specific contribution of the HighScope approach in this context can easily be aligned through shared principles and objectives. Under the ‘Transformational Goals’ set out by the National Framework there is clear ‘read across’ between these national strategic intentions and HighScope focus on quality provision. The framework document identifies the six transformational goals as ‘core’ ensuring services are made more effective and achieve better outcomes. This evaluation found that HighScope settings in County Mayo share this intention and have a rigorous evidence based programme embedded within a demonstrable pedagogical philosophy. Together the national goals and HighScope aim to:

- Support parents
- Earlier intervention and prevention
- LISTEN to and involve young children
- Ensure quality services
- Strengthen transitions
- Cross Government and interagency collaboration and coordination

Concerns for the future
The 2012 local restructuring and division between Early Years Family Support and the Early Years Inspectorate led key stakeholders to express a concern about the vulnerability of the development team and the settings they support. Despite substantial investment and commitment at an organisational level from 2006 in training and support to settings undertaking the HighScope training and adoption of the approach, stakeholders reported feeling unsettled about the foresight of the organisation in recognising the return of investment to date. The very real possibility of losing the expertise of both trainers and practitioners was highlighted as a major worry to key stakeholders in the evaluation. One participant described the reality of this potential outcome; “In 5 years without champions, strong leadership, the development workers and calculating staff turn over, HighScope will become extinct”. Instead it was hoped that the evidence associated with preventative spending in early years would inform the Child and Family Agency’s decision to fully support the continued implementation of HighScope as a ‘flagship’ programme for high quality early years provision.
Lessons Learned
Each setting has a unique story set against a backdrop of its history, context and profile of staffing. These factors provide a framework for understanding the moderating variables affecting implementation of HighScope in County Mayo. The findings from evaluation have described the journey of settings from beginning training to current levels of implementation. In detailing the critical time points along this path, the evidence gathered has pin pointed ‘driving forces’ of successful implementation and ‘restraining forces/moderators’ challenging or diluting fidelity to the model. A complex interrelationship existed between the moderating factors which determined the degree to which implementation adherence could be achieved. These moved along a continuum of change due to the dynamic nature of ECCE.

Driving forces of implementation:
- Clear understanding of the ethos and principles of the model
- Supportive leadership
- Support from Early Years Development Workers/HighScope Trainers
- Designated paid time for planning
- Capacity to conduct assessments using the COR
- Positive and engaging relationships with parents
- Supportive management committee
- Commitment to fidelity of implementation
- Recognition and experience of good outcomes for children and families
- Cluster meetings

Restraining forces of implementation:
- Time for planning, review and record keeping
- Skill in implementation of components of the HighScope model
- Capacity to involve parents
- Poor leadership
- Commitment to the change process

Recommendations
The engagement of stakeholders was a fundamental part of the learning intended from the evaluation process. In recognition of this intention, the evaluation findings were presented to key stakeholders at a workshop in June 2014 to gather feedback and offer an opportunity to contribute to the final recommendations of the report. The draft findings and emergent themes encouraged practitioners, Early Years Development Workers, Child and Family Agency Managers and HighScope Ireland representatives to discuss the implications of the report’s results and propose actions to support continued and improved implementation of HighScope in County Mayo. These contributed to the recommendations put forward by the evaluation which are suggested below:

1. HighScope Ireland should allocate substantial resources to cultivate relationships with new commissioners in the Child and Family Agency to confirm the future fit of the HighScope approach within the ECCE sector in County Mayo. This should involve supporting commissioners to understand the alignment of HighScope with National objectives for Prevention and Early Intervention.

2. Training should be offered to the Inspectorate to increase awareness and understanding of how the HighScope approach can support their role in raising quality provision in ECCE setting.

3. The capacity of the Early Years Services team to contribute to Local Area Pathways should be clearly communicated and demonstrated within the Agency to identify the fit between Early Years Services and the future direction of the Child and Family Agency.

4. A network for HighScope practitioners, linked to HighScope Ireland, should be established which supports their professional development while acting as a forum to promote good practice at a local, national and international level.

5. HighScope Ireland and Early Years Services in County Mayo should create a support structure through training in fidelity measurement to improve adherence to full implementation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The implementation of HighScope in County Mayo has been the culmination of a considerable effort by a range of individuals and organisations that include:

The team of Early Years Development Workers/HighScope trainers in the Child and Family Agency who have supported the implementation of HighScope.

The Early Years Practitioners in services throughout the county who have shown skill, commitment and inspiration in their work with young children.

The parents, staff and children in the eleven services who contributed so eloquently to this evaluation: The Haven Ballina; Curious Minds Castlebar; The Neale Community Childcare; Woodland Park Pre-School Westport; Knockmore/Rathduff Butterflies Childcare; Ardnaaree Community Pre-School, Ballina; Roundfort Kreativ Kidz; Aughagower Community Pre-School; Stepping Stones Playgroup Claremorris; Louisburg Childcare Ltd.; McConville Park Community Playgroup, Westport.

Dr. Katrina Collins, who by her thorough approach to documentation combined with her considerable people skills, helped us to know ourselves better than we did before.

Dr. Michael Brown whose skill and expertise in documentary film-making is evident.

Paul Murphy Child Care Manager, Co. Mayo who championed the initiative and foresaw the beneficial outcomes for children.

Siobhan Fitzpatrick CBE, CEO of HighScope Ireland for her consistent and dedicated commitment to Early Years Services in Mayo.

All the staff and trainers in HighScope Ireland for their ongoing support.

Noelle Spring Development Director of the Katharine Howard Foundation for her encouragement and financial assistance.

The staff in the Centre for Effective Services whose facilitation of the ‘What Works Process’ with Early Years Services lead to this evaluation.

The Children’s Research Network for Ireland and Northern Ireland for helping us in the initial stages.

And finally . . .

To the children and families in Early Years Services in County Mayo who make it all worthwhile.

Jenny Bernard
Early Years Services Manager
Child and Family Agency