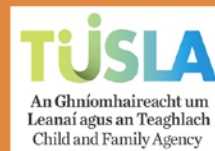


The Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Research & Evaluation Study 2015 - 2018



Children's Participation 'What Works'

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Date: 07.01.2016



Overview

The purpose of this presentation is to set out the findings of a study exploring 'what works' in terms of supporting children's participation in the context of child welfare, child protection and alternative care services.



Actions Required to Embed a Culture of Participation in Practice

(Kirby et al., 2003; Council of Europe, 2015)

- Establish a robust legislative and policy framework, accompanied by senior management support.
- Identify champions of Participation.
- Build staff capacity through training and support.
- Create openings for children to participate in decisions affecting them individually and at the service planning and review level.



Actions Required to Embed a Culture of Participation in Practice

(Kirby et al., 2003; Council of Europe, 2015)

- Provide children with child and youth-friendly **information**.
- Ensure there is adequate **time and resources**.
- Establish child-friendly **complaints procedures** and **feedback mechanisms**.
- Celebrate and **share good practice**.



Structures and Procedures that Support Participation

Study on 'What Works'

Study aim:

- To systematically review the literature to explore what is known about the effectiveness of structures and procedures intended to support children's participation in the child welfare, child protection and alternative care context.
- To systematically review the literature means:
“to identify, evaluate and summarise the findings of all relevant individual studies, thereby making the evidence more accessible to decision-makers”.

Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2009



Structures and Procedures that are Intended to Support Individual Participation

- Attendance at meetings;
- Submission of views in writing;
- Use of advocates to bring children and young people's views to the attention of the decision-makers;
- Family Welfare Conferences.




What the Research Tells us...

Attendance at Meetings

- There is some evidence that a child's attendance at a meeting makes it more likely that they will be involved in the decisions taken, particularly if they attend one or more meetings (Vis and Thomas, 2009; Thomas and O'Kane, 1999; Daly 2014).
- However, their participation can be inhibited by these meetings being dominated by adults. Children have reported being:

'frightened', 'anxious', 'bored', 'unprepared', and 'embarrassed' or 'exposed by the open discussion on their lives'.


How can Tusla create a structural system that encourages and facilitates attendance at meetings and how can these meetings be tailored to be more child-friendly?



Submission of Written Views

- This can take the form of a written statement, picture or video clip or including their views in case records.
- There is evidence that the indirect submission of a child's views in case records is not very effective in bringing the child's authentic views to the fore and ensuring their views are acted upon (Holland, 2001; Bruce, 2014; Roose et. al, 2009).

Good practice includes:

- Recording the child's direct views;
 - Documenting impediments to children being unable to communicate their views;
 - Asking the child to sign and read the report;
 - A requirement on staff to record disagreement when decisions are made;
 - Being aware of the exact purpose the views are being collated for.
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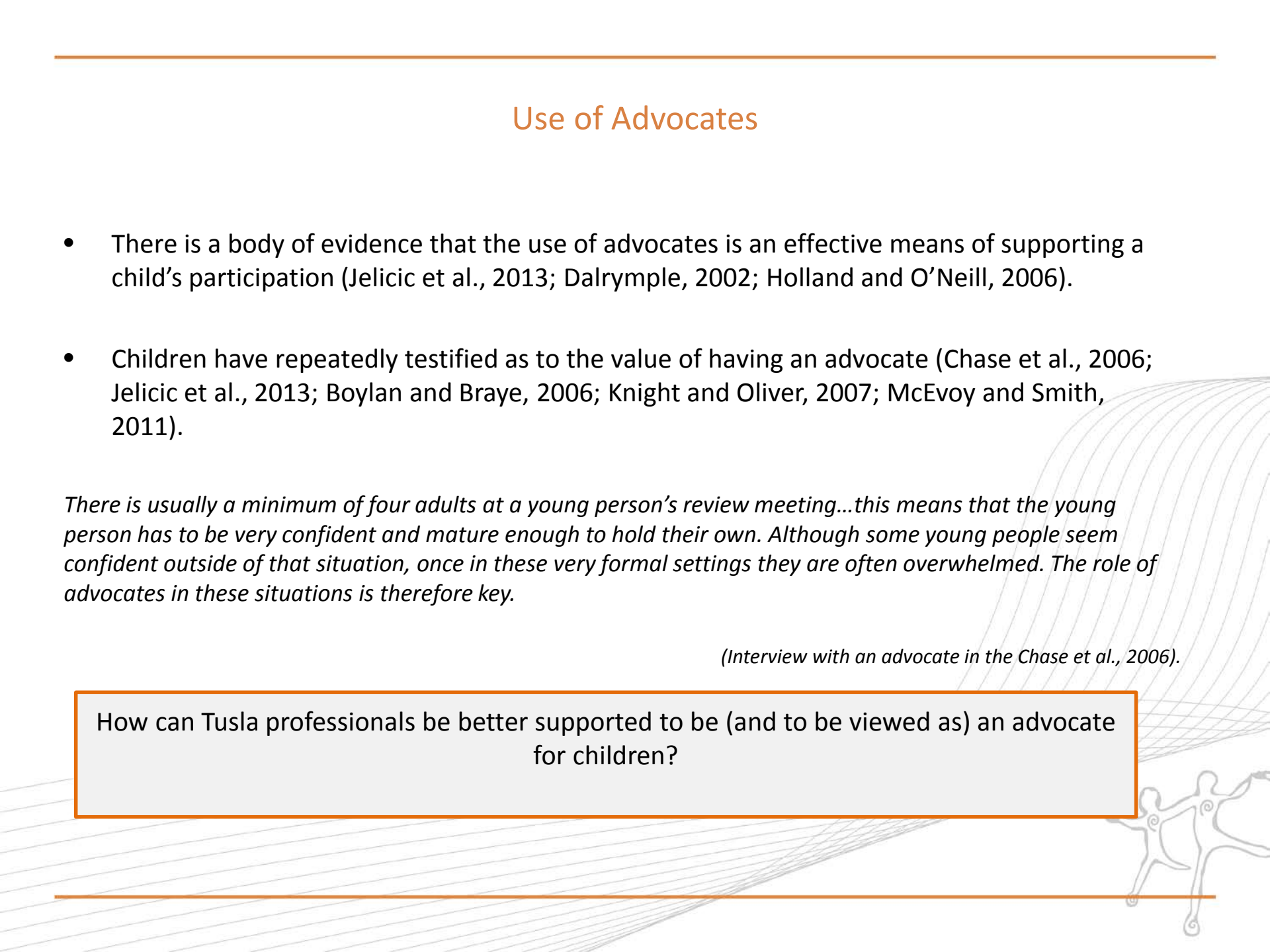
Use of Advocates

- There is a body of evidence that the use of advocates is an effective means of supporting a child's participation (Jelicic et al., 2013; Dalrymple, 2002; Holland and O'Neill, 2006).
- Children have repeatedly testified as to the value of having an advocate (Chase et al., 2006; Jelicic et al., 2013; Boylan and Braye, 2006; Knight and Oliver, 2007; McEvoy and Smith, 2011).

There is usually a minimum of four adults at a young person's review meeting...this means that the young person has to be very confident and mature enough to hold their own. Although some young people seem confident outside of that situation, once in these very formal settings they are often overwhelmed. The role of advocates in these situations is therefore key.

(Interview with an advocate in the Chase et al., 2006).

How can Tusla professionals be better supported to be (and to be viewed as) an advocate for children?



Family Welfare Conferences

- There is some evidence that Family Welfare Conferences are effective in supporting children's participation(Connolly and Masson, 2014; Holland and O'Neill, 2006; Bell and Wilson, 2006; Hoy, 2013).
- Their participation can be inhibited by the extent to which the child has been prepared in advance and whether the child's views were brought to the proceedings.

How can it become the norm that children's views are taken into account in Family Welfare Conference proceedings and how can these conferences be tailored to be more child-friendly?



Structures and Procedures that Support Participation in Service Planning and Review

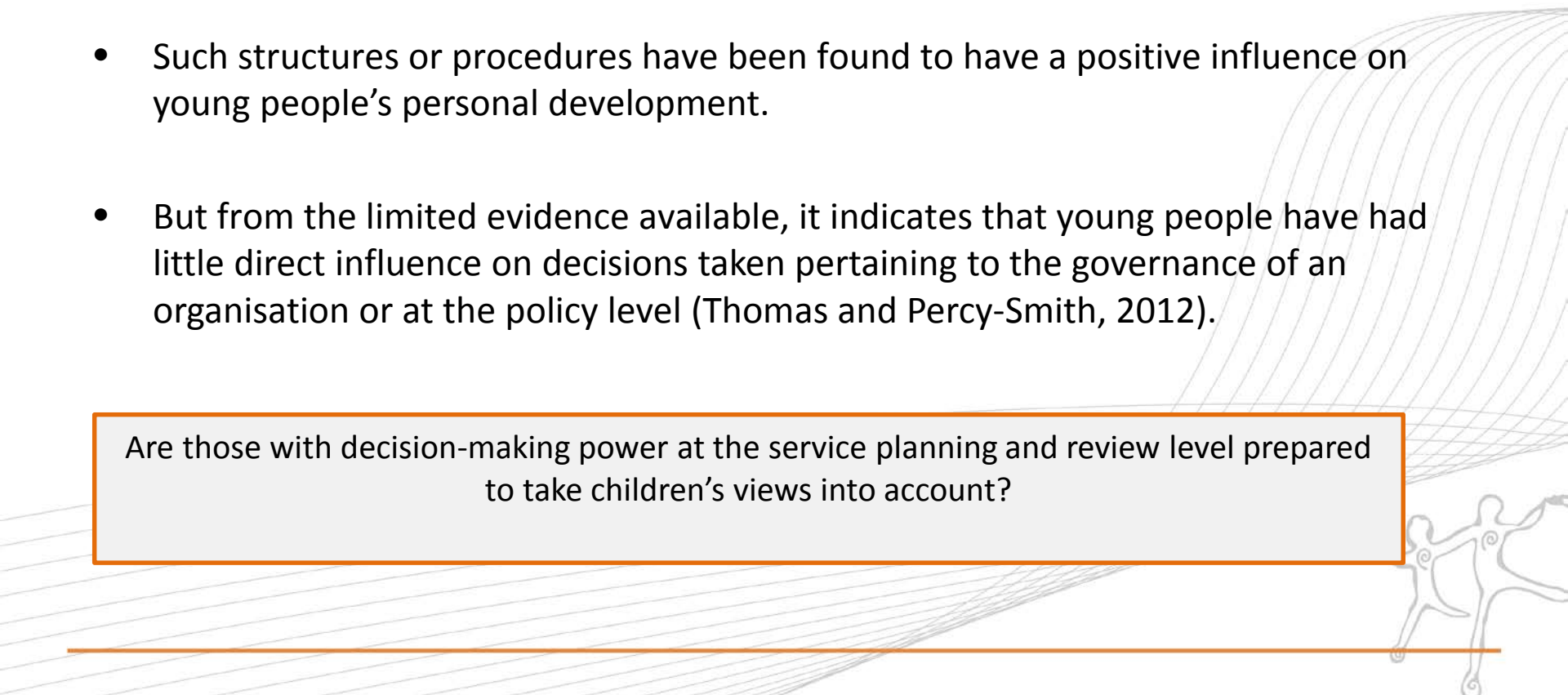
- National, regional or local youth advisory forums convened by service providers;
- County council structures for children to feed into service planning and review;
- The use of a panel of children to be involved in the recruitment of personnel;
- Inclusion of children's views in inspection reports;
- Consultations or research conducted with children in receipt of services;
- Youth -led action research.



What the Research Tells Us

- There has been very little evaluation or monitoring to measure the effectiveness of structures or procedures to enable children to influence decisions taken at the governance level.
- Such structures or procedures have been found to have a positive influence on young people's personal development.
- But from the limited evidence available, it indicates that young people have had little direct influence on decisions taken pertaining to the governance of an organisation or at the policy level (Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2012).

Are those with decision-making power at the service planning and review level prepared to take children's views into account?



Overall the effectiveness of these structures and procedures is dependant on a number of factors:

- Practitioners having the time to establish a **trusting and stable relationship** with the child;
- Practitioners having the **skills** required to communicate effectively with children of all ages and abilities;
- Whether the child is **adequately prepared** to input into decisions being taken;
- Whether there is **'buy in'** and support for the idea of children's participation, at both the governance and practitioner level;
- Ensuring the views of children are communicated to those with the **power to effect change**.



Key Literature

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