SURE START: (EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING)[1]

Keywords

Children's development, Parenting skills, Employment and IT, Hygiene and nutrition, safety, Involvement local community, Relationship with service providers

1.1 Case Study 2: Sure Start (Biztos Kezdet)

Name of practice: Sure Start (Biztos Kezdet)

Country: Hungary

1.1.1 Main objective and specific aims

The Sure Start programme is provided to families with 0 to 5 year-old children. Sure Start takes place in 'Children Houses'- centres specifically set up by the project- in the 36 most deprived sub-regions in Hungary. It provides mothers or other caregivers and their children with various capacity building activities delivered by trained staff.

The programme aims to reach families from diverse backgrounds to promote mutual learning and support as well as integration of children and parents facing multiple disadvantages into the community. Due to very limited day-care opportunities for young children before they enter the compulsory educational system at the age of five, Sure Start Hungary wants to reach children during the early years and strengthen parenting capacities, also providing advice and support to women seeking employment.

Four specific objectives of this programme are:

- to ensure the optimal development of the child;
- to establish a good relationship between parents, children and service providers;
- to strengthen cooperation within the local community; and
- to foster good relationships between professionals involved in the delivery of related child services.

1.1.2 Relevance for 3rd EU Health Programme objectives

This programme is relevant to objective one of the 3rd EU Health programme:

Promote health, prevent diseases and foster supportive environments for healthy lifestyles taking into account the 'health in all policies' principle, in that it allows children and families to access services (educational, employment, capacity building) that in turn affect their health.

1.1.3 Target groups

The target group of this initiative is children and families (including at risk groups such as lone parents) facing multiple disadvantages.

A secondary target group is long-term unemployed and inactive mothers.

1.1.4 Thematic focus of intervention in relation to reducing health inequalities

The programme has been specifically developed to support children and their families to reduce health, social and education inequalities in the most deprived regions in Hungary. It operates mainly in settlements where early education services are not available and addresses inequalities in child development and health by providing high quality services to groups with little or no access to these. Sure Start provides various forms of support for families during children's early years, which means that the health benefits are evident for the whole family.

[1]https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/social_determinants/docs/2017_vulnerable_casestudyinventory_en.pdf page 21

1.1.5 Key activities

The programme is still ongoing, and the following key activities are being implemented:

- Activities to encourage and promote children's physical development, communication and emotional stimulation, independence, attention, memory, major motor skills and sense of direction. This is mainly done through play (play groups) by encouraging the will and aptitude for discovery;
- Providing a safe area and play materials for children to develop;
- Setting up and running parenting classes as well as self-help groups and personal consultations;
- Assistance for parents seeking employment and support in using ICT services; and
- Access to the washing facilities, child care and snacks provided for children.

1.1.6 Geographical scope

National, with a focus on the most deprived micro-region within Hungary.

1.1.7 Intersectoral dimension

The programme is based on cooperation between local social, healthcare, education, child welfare institutions and services.

1.1.8 Duration

The initial piloting started in 2004 and the full programme is ongoing.

1.1.9 Lead organisation

The Ministry of Human Capacities[2], Hungary.

1.1.10 Partners

The Sure Start Children Houses have different forms of management – ranging from municipalities, religious organisations, NGOs and CSOs, coalitions of NGOs/CSOs and municipalities.

1.1.11 Main sources of funding

115 Sure Start Children Houses have started to operate in Hungary (49 operate under the local Hungarian financing system, 66 in the framework of EU funded projects). Specifically, the project has received funding from ESF/Norwegian Fund until 2012. After that, Sure Start received further state financing for 3 years[3].

1.1.12 Evidence base for implementation

The Sure Start programme[4,5] was first developed and implemented in the United Kingdom at the end of the 90's to tackle child poverty and social exclusion of children from disadvantaged communities with limited access to services. In the UK around 500 local groups, comparable to the Hungarian Children Houses, have been founded to reach some 4 million children. Sure Start has subsequently been adjusted to the Hungarian context and implemented since 2004. Initially, the programme was piloted in 5 different locations –a city, a town, a village, and isolated areas with high unemployment rate.[6]

1.1.13 Evaluation: Has the practice been evaluated?

Sure Start (Hungary) was also included in a descriptive and exploratory qualitative study that aimed to capture key information from implementers and end users on the effectiveness of early childhood development programmes to tackle social and health inequalities. This study was carried out by University College London and Eurochild, with

---

[2] http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-human-resources/news/funding-doubles-for-sure-start-children-s-homes
[3] http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13452&langId=en
[4] http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmchilsch/130/130i.pdf
[5] http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/
[6] http://www.tulipfoundation.net/en/programs/bg/programs/ssr_sure_start_regional-75/

the support of EuroHealthNet, as part of the European FP7 research project DRIVERS[7]. Methods used to evaluate the programme included quantitative data collection from other reports, interviews, and focus groups.

Information gathered via the above study highlights that Sure Start is externally evaluated every two years following a detailed indicator system. The evaluation assesses the socioeconomic context of the children and their families as well as children's development and success later on in kindergartens and schools.

The programme is internally assessed by measuring the development of every child every 6 months, the results of which are shared with parents. In 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013 studies on the outcomes of the programme were published by the committee which was set up to evaluate it and in 2012 a civic report on children's chances was also published.

1.1.14 Effectiveness: evidence of outputs, outcomes, results and cost-effectiveness

Most of the accessible information on the effectiveness of the programme is available via a study carried out as part of the European FP7 research project DRIVERS[7]. Collected evidence is mainly based on qualitative approaches.

1.1.15 Outputs and outcomes

The Sure Start programme currently reaches around 12,000 children and parents in 115 sites across Hungary. The types of services offered range from educational activities, socialising opportunities for children, to employment search support for parents and more practical access to facilities such as IT equipment or washing facilities. The Sure Start houses offer a safe space where children, in particular those facing multiple disadvantage, can be ensured the right developmental opportunities that will increase their social and educational success later on in life. At the same time, parents are supported via various capacity building activities that can have an impact on their children's lives. Given the scale of the programme, and the varying needs of individual beneficiaries, outputs and outcomes differ on a case by case basis.

1.1.16 Success factors

The involvement of the interest groups was a vital part of the implementation of Sure Start in Hungary. to ensure that the programme was transferred to the Hungarian context efficiently, various committees of professionals and interest groups were set up[8].

1.1.17 Innovative features

Two of the most prominent innovative characteristics of Sure Start are identified as:

- The multi-service collaboration between different actors and sectors to achieve a holistic approach to the health and well-being of families: The programme brought together health services, child and social services as well as services to support employment;
- The approach to eradicating child poverty included not only services to support the child in its development, but also practical ways to improve the socio-economic status of the parents.

1.1.18 Obstacles and lessons learnt

When initially setting up the programme in Hungary, communication between the different professional groups and interest groups involved was often difficult, due to different terminologies used and attitudes. In addition, the programme's approach required professional knowledge of early development, which was not readily accessible or available[8].

One of the lessons learnt is that at least 5 years are needed for a programme such as Sure Start to begin running smoothly and having an impact. This is partly due to the fact

[7] www.health-gradient.eu
[8] http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/pr_uk_en.pdf

that it has to achieve a change in attitudes of professionals, community members, and the target group, as stated in a Peer Review report published in January 2015 "*As the programme should and can enhance and facilitate the cooperation of local actors, especially various service providers, it has to play an active, initiating role in such co-operations"* [2]. It is vital to have a constant flow of funding to ensure service continuity and a high impact on cooperation between sectors and different actors.

1.1.19 Potential for transferability and sustainability

Sure Start in Hungary was adapted from the original UK Sure Start programme, showing the possibility for transferability. Recently, the Tulip Foundation, a Bulgarian charity encouraging social responsibility, set up a new programme to introduce the Hungarian Sure Start to civil organisations from Central and Eastern Europe to identify opportunities for introducing the programme in other counties in the region[6].

There is also clear evidence for sustainability. After the end of European Funding in 2012, the programme has been funded by the Hungarian government. Sure Start Children Houses are now listed in the national legislation for protection of children as a basic service for child welfare, which guarantees sustainability of state funding[2].

1.1.20 List of references

Morrison J, Goldblatt P, Pikhart H, Ruiz M (2015). Early child development: Report on case studies. EU FP7 funded DRIVERS project. Accessible at: http://health-gradient.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/DRIVERS_Case_Studies_Synthesis_Report_Early_Child_Development.pdf).

Albert, F. & Sörös, I. (2015). Peer Review: Children First – pilot local consultation platforms on child poverty. Prepared for the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion programme coordinated by ÖSB Consulting, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Applica, and funded by the European Commission. © ÖSB Consulting, 2015

Deven, F. (2006). Sure Start - Synthesis Report. Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion. Accessible at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/pr_uk_en.pdf

Background study on Sure Start (Hungarian): http://gyermekneveles.tok.elte.hu/6_szam/pub/koscsone.pdf

A detailed evaluation of the programme thus far including quantitative and qualitative data analysis: Szomor Éva – László Noémi: A magyarországi Biztos Kezdet Program alapelvei és működése a kezdetektől napjainkig. Összefoglaló tanulmány. 2014. (prepared in the framework of TÁMOP 5.2.1. measure). This document is not available online but might be available on request.