Saol trí Ghaeilge

Tuairisc Athbhreithnithe ar Sheirbhísí Luathbhlianta agus Imeachtaí Teaghlaigh i gCeantair Líonra Feirste Thiar

Dr. Órla Nig Oirc

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Tá tacaíocht faighte ag Fís an Phobail don taighde seo ó:

Foras na Gaeilge

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Is scáthghrúpa é 'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge' do ghrúpaí pobail, acadóirí agus tuismitheoiri atá lonnaithe sa líonra pleanála teanga in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste agus atá tiomanta le muinín agus tacaíocht chuí a chur ar fáil do theaghlaigh sa cheantar le gur féidir saol trí Ghaeilge a bheith acu. Tá sé d'aidhm againn go mbeidh eagraíochtaí ag obair ar bhonn comhtháite le tacú le teaghlaigh ag achan chéim den aistear ar bhealach a neartaíonn an Ghaeilge mar theanga bheo sa bhaile.

Ba mhaith linn buíochas ó chroí a ghabháil leis An Roinn Pobal agus leis an Chiste Tionscadail ón National Lottery as an mhaoiniú a chur ar fáil don taighde seo. Tá muid fosta faoi chomaoin ag bunmhaoinitheoirí Fhís an Phobail, Foras na Gaeilge fríd an tionscadal ceannródaíoch Scéim na Líonraí Gaeilge.

Tá moladh faoi leith tuilte ag na páistí agus a dtuismitheoirí a bhíonn ag freastal go rialta ar imeachtaí agus seirbhísí teaghlaigh trí Ghaeilge sa cheantar agus atá ag múnlú forbairt earnála fríd a rannpháirteachas bríomhar. Tá Fís an Phobail ag obair go dlúth le heagraíochtaí áitiúla, go príomha, Glór na Móna, Ionad Uíbh Eachach agus an Chultúrlann le seirbhísí cuimsitheacha teaghlaigh a fhorbairt sa cheantar. Ní mór aitheantas faoi leith a thabhairt d'Ionad Uíbh Eachach, Ionad na Fuiseoige agus Teach Mhamó atá ag soláthar seirbhísí luathbhlianta le blianta sa cheantar, atá mar bhunchloch na hathbheochana go háitiúil. Tá tacaíocht iontach á chur ar fáil, go háirithe i dtaca le cúrsaí traenála, ag Altram agus Gaelchúrsaí fosta. Tá eagraíochtaí eile ar nós Seachtain na Gaeilge agus Laochra Loch Lao CLG ag soláthar imeachtaí agus seirbhísí d'ardchaighdeán atá ag cur go suntasach leis an eispéireas atá ag teaghlaigh anseo.

Gabhann muid buíochas lenár gcairde sa Bhreatain Bheag a chuir fáilte romhainn don turas stáidéir, áit ar fhoghlaim muid go leor agus fosta le Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta. Chaith muid seal leo i gConamara agus is eiseamláir iontach iad dúinn i gcónaí. Tá muid buíoch as Glór na nGael as an chomhairle agus tacaíocht i gcónaí.

Ar deireadh, tá muid thar a bheith buíoch as an Dr. Órla Nig Oirc ach as obair cheannródaíoch, chuimsitheach atá déanta aici leis an taighde tábhachtach seo.

...ón Údar

Bhí sé de phléisiúir agam tabhairt faoin phíosa oibre seo bunaithe ar an earnáil teaghlaigh mar chuid de dhul chun cinn Phlean Teanga Iarthar Bhéal Feirste. Ba luachmhar an taithí seo dom go háirithe agus mé le bheith ag toiseacht amach ar mo chéad aistear féin mar thuismitheoir agus a bheith ag tógáil clainne le Gaeilge san Fhómhar agus ba mhór an sult agus tairbhe a bhain mé as na comhráití agus plé a bhí agam le gach rannpháirtí a thug ionchur tábhachtach óna gcuid cleachtais agus taithí san earnáil. Mo bhuíochas ó chroí leo siúd a thug a gcuid ama le bheith páirteach sa taighde seo. Ina theannta sin ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Choiste 'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge' agus Fís an Phobail as an deis seo a sholáthar dom; is sibh atá ag tabhairt faoin obair cheannródaíoch seo ar bhonn laethúil agus tá ardmholadh tuilte do chách as gach a dhéanann sibh. Le cois, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leo siúd a thug tacaíocht mhaoinithe don phíosa seo.

Brollach

Professor Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones

Stiúrthóir ar Lárionad um Ardstaidéar na Breatnaise agus an Léinn Cheiltigh in Ollscoil na Breataine Bige
Uachtarán - Líonra Eorpach um Chomhionannas Teanga

Tá an-áthas orm cuireadh a fháil chun réamhrá a scríobh ar an tuarascáil thábhachtach seo.

Mar acadóir agus mar Uachtarán ar an Líonra Eorpach um Chomhionannas Teanga, tuigim a thábhachtaí is atá sé athbheochan teanga a bhunú ar dhá bhunchloch: an fhianaise agus na léargais chriticiúla a thagann ó thaighde ceart chomh maith leis an chumasú pobail agus mandáid dhaonlathach a thugann tionscnaimh phobalbhunaithe dár gcomhghníomhartha. Tá an dá ghné sin le feiceáil sa tuarascáil seo agus ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a dhéanamh le Dr. Órla NIg Oirc as caighdeán an taighde agus le Fís an Phobail as an obair a choimisiúnú. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Tá sé cheart againn a bheith ag súil le polaiteoirí tofa polasaithe poiblí a fhorbairt atá bunaithe ar fhianaise. Ar an dóigh chéanna, thig linne mar ghníomhaithe, cainteoirí agus tacadóirí teangacha mionlaithe ár n-argóintí a threisiú agus na hathruithe do pholasaithe a mholann muid a bheith níos soiléire nuair a bhaineann muid úsáid as saineolas lucht taighde. Is eol don tsaol mhór na dúshláin atá roimh go leor de theangacha an domhain agus ár n-oidhreacht choiteann chultúrtha agus theangeolaíoch: ní mór do réiteach na ndúshlán sin a bheith chomh soiléir fosta. Tá réitigh dhearfacha uainn do thodhchaí ár dteangacha.

Tá méadú ar an aird idirnáisiúnta atá ar athbheochan na Gaeilge trí thionscnaimh pobail i mBéal Feirste agus sna sé chontae. Is spreagadh iad na gníomhartha leanúnacha de chuid na ngluaiseachtaí sóisialta thar na blianta (go minic i ndroch-choinníollacha) do na heagraíochtaí atá mar chuid den Líonra Eorpach um Chomhionannas Teanga. Sa tuarascáil seo, is léir an tábhacht agus an luach a bhaineann le daoine a cheangail le chéile. Thig linn foghlaim óna chéile i gcomhthéacs ár dteangacha: is é an chloch is mó ar ár bpaidrín sealbhú agus úsáid teanga i measc daoine óga agus ní mór dúinn fios a bheith againn faoi na gnéithe atá ag oibriú i sóisialú cultúrtha agus teangeolaíoch na nglúnta níos óige trí theangacha mionlaithe an oiread céanna leis na scéalta a bhaineann leis an tumoideachas inár dtíortha.

Agus muid ag breathnú ar an am atá thart, thig linn an dul chun cinn a fheiceáil atá déanta ó bunaíodh an scoil níos mó ná caoga bliain ó shin. Inniu, léiríonn torthaí an daonáirimh go bhfuil borradh as cuimse ar líon na ndaoine a bhfuil eolas acu ar an Ghaeilge. Anois an t-am le tuilleadh deiseanna a chruthú le haghaidh úsáid na teanga. Ádh mór leis an obair.

It is infinitely easier to socialise children into an environmentally utilised language than into one the remains unutilised outside of the easily compartmentalised school-experience...It is the linkage (with intergenerational social functions through the second language) that enables the threatened language to become a first language of a new generation...Were this linkage to come apart, then the school would again lapse into being only a second language institution and the threatened language would become compartmentalised there, having neither backward nor forward linkages

Joshua FIshman, 2001

Réamhrá

Is líonra ionadaíoch an phobal í Fís an Phobail atá i gceannas ar obair Phlean na Gaeilge (Foras na Gaeilge, 2021) in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste. Is Líonra Pleanála Teanga í freisin a dhéanann éascaíocht ar Fhóram Stiúrtha Tionscadal trastéamach atá bunaithe ar an cheantar lena gcuimsítear 11 eagraíocht forbartha Gaeilge in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste. Is eagraíocht phobail agus óige Gaeilge é Glór na Móna agus tá sé i gceannas ar an Phlean Teanga ar a bhfuil freagracht straitéiseach, oibríochtúil agus airgeadais chun maoirseacht a dhéanamh ar an Phlean teanga ar son an líonra Fís an Phobail agus tá sé ar cheann de dhá eagraíocht bunaithe ó thuaidh atá ag tabhairt faoin tasc forleathan faoi láthair chun cleachtas pleanála teanga a leabú ag leibhéal cosmhuintire. Cuimsítear leis seo naisc a láidriú idir tionscnaimh phobail agus theanga atá ann faoi láthair agus bearnaí a shainaithint, agus nuair is féidir, cláir agus tionscadail a fhorbairt chun na bearnaí sin a líonadh, ina réimsí faoi seach. Bhain Iarthar Bhéal Feirste stádas líonra pleanála teanga amach in 2018 agus ceadaíodh a bPlean Teanga i mí Márta 2020, mar thoradh ar an athbheochan cheannródaíoch arna stiúradh ag an phobal a fréamhaíodh in eagraíocht Ghaeltacht Bhóthar Seoighe agus is ann a bunaíodh an chéad bhunscoil Ghaeilge os cionn 50 bliain ó shin, rud a d'fhág gur tháinig borradh faoi fhás na teanga agus faoin spéis sa teanga, arna léiriú ag an infreastruchtúr éagsúil agus orgánach atá á fhorbairt ón bhun aníos. Agus stádas á bhaint amach mar cheantar líonra pleanála teanga, ceapadh an comhordaitheoir pleanála teanga i mí Mheán Fómhair 2022. Is é an aidhm iomlán atá ag Líonra Teanga Iarthar Bhéal Feirste (Fís an Phobail) ná tacú le forbairt líon criticiúil na gcainteoirí chun pobal teanga inbhuanaithe a chothú agus a láidriú sna blianta atá amach romhainn. Cuireann aitheantas oifigiúil an líonra seo stádas náisiúnta ar fáil dár gcuid oibre agus ceanglaíonn sé muid le limistéir pleanála teanga eile ar fud na hÉireann, sa Ghaeltacht agus lasmuigh di. Chomh maith leis sin, cuireann na hacmhainní breise a théann leis an tionscadal spás ar fáil chun cuid de na gnéithe dár bplean uaillmhianach a chur i bhfeidhm ina n-aithnítear soláthar reatha agus ina ndéantar measúnú ar an soláthar céanna agus a fhorbraíonn plean gníomhaíochta chun bearnaí i soláthar a líonadh, bearnaí a shainaithnítear tríd an phlean teanga, sna blianta atá amach romhainn.

Tugadh eochairghné de phleanáil teanga phobail chun solais mar thosaíocht le haghaidh tuilleadh forbartha agus infheistíochta, is í an eochairghné sin, seirbhísí polasaí le aghaidh pleanáil teanga teaghlaigh a sheachadtar tríd an Ghaeilge. Tá seirbhísí pleanála teanga teaghlaigh i bhfeidhm i gceantar Iarthar Bhéal Feirste agus ba bhunghnéithe iad chun spásanna le haghaidh sealbhú, babhtáil agus foghlaim teanga sóisialta a chur chun cinn, aithníodh sa phlean teanga go bhfuil roinnt mhaith forbartha

fós le déanamh chun an sainchúram riachtanach seo i bpleanáil teanga a fheabhsú agus a chothú. Trí Phlean Teanga Iarthar Bhéal Feirste, bunaíodh coiste de sholáthraithe seirbhíse agus cleachtóirí, mar aon le tuismitheoirí, do theaghlaigh áitiúla agus do pháistí sna luathbhlianta, 'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge' a tugadh ar an choiste agus tionólann sé ar bhonn rialta chun plé a dhéanamh ar imeachtaí amach anseo agus iad a phleanáil agus chun comhoibriú ar na himeachtaí mar chuid de Líonra Ghaeilge Iarthar Bhéal Feirste níos leithne. D'eascair inspioráid an taighde seo as an phlé ar fhorbairt earnála agus deiseanna féideartha a aimsiú le haghaidh forbairt i soláthar teaghlaigh tríd an choiste seo a choimisiúnaigh an píosa seo; agus é mar aidhm acu cleachtas agus forfheidhmiú beartais a mhúnlú amach seo maidir le seirbhísí Gaeilge do theaghlaigh.

Feidhmeoidh an tuarascáil seo mar athbhreithniú measúnachta ar sholáthar seirbhíse Gaeilge do theaghlaigh laistigh de Cheantar Líonra Gaeilge Iarthar Bhéal Feirste; agus beidh sé ann do theaghlaigh atá ag tógáil a gclann trí Ghaeilge nó do theaghlaigh atá ag déanamh cinneadh chun freastal ar sheirbhísí Gaeilge, chun tacú lena bpáistí chun Gaeilge a labhairt agus a úsáid ar bhonn laethúil. Cuirfear achoimre chomhthéacsúil ar thírdhreach reatha na Gaeilge ar fáil go háirithe maidir le comhthéacsanna teaghlaigh, cuirfear, mar aon le cuntas de scoláireacht ábhartha maidir le tumadh teanga teaghlaigh agus de na tairbhí a bhaineann le tumadh dúchasach agus le rannpháirtíocht sa phobal. Ansin, déanfar plé ar aidhmeanna an pháipéir taighde seo sula dtabharfar aghaidh ar na ceisteanna taighde a úsáidtear mar chuid de chur chuige measctha modheolaíoch, rannpháirtíoch a cuireadh i bhfeidhm sa chuid bailithe sonraí den staidéar. Cuirfear plé agus anailísiú ar na torthaí ó na suirbhéanna i láthair (Aguisín A) mar aon le plé fócasghrúpa leath-struchtúrtha (Aguisín B) a dhéantar le rannpháirtithe sula mbainfear na tátail agus sula ndéanfar cinneadh maidir leis na chéad chéimeanna eile maidir le gníomh ionas go mbeidh tuilleadh borrtha faoi sheirbhísí agus faoi sholáthar teanga teaghlaigh agus ionas go mbeidh sé in ann fás ar dóigh a bhfreastalaíonn ar riachtanais na ndaoine atá ag tógáil páistí go dátheangach agus ar dóigh a spreagtar láidriú athbheochan arna stiúrtha ag an phobal sa sainchúram is tábhachtaí – úsáid na teanga sa bhaile. Cuirfear achoimre ar fáil sa chéad chuid eile ar comhthéacs pobail na Gaeilge i ó thuaidh, go háirithe maidir le seirbhísí teaghlaigh agus maidir le hiarrachtaí pleanála teanga.

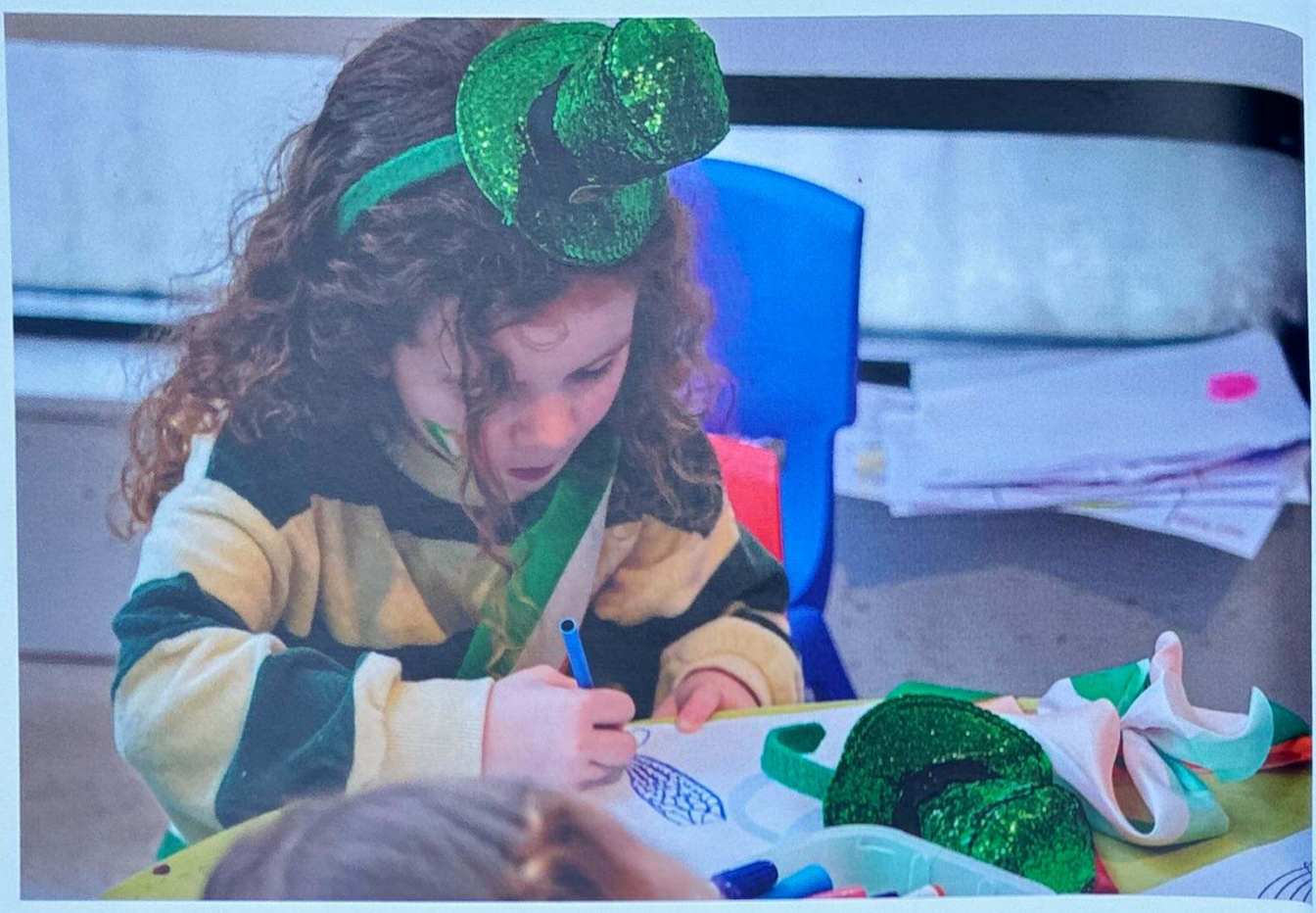
Achoimre Chomhthéacsúil

Le roinnt mhaith blianta anuas, tháinig méadú suntasach ar líon na gcainteoirí agus ar an mhéid suime a chuirtear i nGaeilge ó thuaidh, go háirithe. Léirítear an fás orgánach i dtorthaí Dhaonáireamh 2021, inar tuairiscíodh go n úsáideann 5,969 freagróir Gaeilge mar phríomhtheanga agus thuairiscigh os cionn 43,500 freagróir (2.37% den daonáireamh) go n-úsáideann siad Gaeilge go laethúil. Tuairiscíodh i sonraí daonáirimh freisin ceantar na nGaeilgeoirí, agus thug Béal Feirste é sin chun solais mar phointe fócasach úsáide laethúla na Gaeilge inar tuairiscíodh go raibh 36,837 cónaitheoir inniúil sa teanga. Deirtear gur roinnt rudaí is cúis leis an fhás, lena n-áirítear an méadú leanúnach atá ag teacht ar oideachas Gaeilge ag gach leibhéal, soláthar seirbhíse feabhsaithe do bhaill de phobal na Gaeilge agus do bhaill nua de agus na hiarrachtaí feachtasaíochta a dhéanann grúpaí abhcóideachta teanga. Bhí róil riachtanacha ag bunú agus fás ollmhór na scoileanna Gaeilge go háirithe agus ag tabhairt isteach na Gaeilge i gcuraclaim oideachais príomhshrutha níos ginearálta chun glúin cainteoirí nua a chothú, in ainneoin an laghdú atá tagtha ar staidéar agus ar thairiscint na nua-theangacha, go háirithe Gaeilge, ag leibhéal na meánscoile i scoileanna Béarla le blianta beaga anuas mar thoradh ar an treallús i dtreo conairí slí beatha agus céime STEM tríú leibhéal i measc scoláirí. Chomh maith leis sin, chuir tionscnaimh meán agus tionscnaimh arna stiúradh ag an phobal atá ag cur na teanga chun cinn leis an tóir atá ar an Ghaeilge agus le hinfheictheacht sa saol poiblí. Tá na mílte daoine fásta cláraithe ar ranganna Gaeilge seachtainiúla, a chuireann an iliomad eagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe ar fáil.

Is féidir a rá gurb iad iarrachtaí ceannródaíocha na ngníomhaithe Gaeilge i dtreo dheireadh na 1960idí is cúis le bunú oideachas na Gaeilge i dtuaisceart na hÉireann (O'Baoill, 2007). Cé gur iomaí cur in aghaidh reachtúil agus polaitiúil a bhí ann ar fud an tuaiscirt, bhunaigh na teaghlaigh seo pobal lonnaíochta tithíochta, curaclaim agus scoileanna tumoideachais agus seirbhísí Gaeilge poiblí eile a bhí pobalbhunaithe. Chuir a n-iarrachtaí sin tús le méadú na hearnála oideachais Gaeilge, a bhfuil méadú ag teacht uirthi go fóill agus spéis á léiriú inti (McKendry, 2007; McAdory agus Janmaat 2015). Is sampla iad na forbairtí claochlaithe seo de phleanáil teanga atá pobalbhunaithe, rud a ndéanann Hornberger (1996) cur síos air mar 'bottom-up rather than top-down' forbairtí atá orgánach agus ag leibhéal na cosmhuintire seachas oifigiúil agus tacaíocht faighte acu ón rialtas. Tugann figiúirí le gairid ón Daonáireamh is deireanaí (NISRA 2021) agus an Roinn Oideachais (2023) le fios gur rogha é oideachas Gaeilge a bhfuil an-tóir air i gcónaí agus is í an earnáil is mó fáis in oideachas anois in ainneoin na n-éagothroimí struchtúracha seanbhunaithe[1], agus 7,500 scoláire cláraithe in oideachas Gaeilge sa bhliain acadúil 2023/24.

Tá ról riachtanach ag scoileanna agus ag seirbhísí teanga tumthacha chun inniúlacht teangeolaíochta a thabhairt ar ais i measc na nglúnta óga ag a raibh beagán deiseanna a teanga oidhreachta a úsáid sa bhaile, rud a taifeadadh go forleathan go hidirnáisiúnta i gcomhthéacsanna teanga dúchasaí (Ó Baoill, 2007; Kipp, 2009; Hinton, 2011; McCarty agus Nicholas, 2014, Lewis agus Simons, 2016). Cuireann siad teangacha imeallaithe agus mionlaithe ar fáil a ndearna sochtheangeolaí Joshua Fishman tagairt dó mar spás nó 'breathing space' don teanga chun an teanga a fhréamhú agus go dtiocfaidh borradh fúithi. Is díol suntais é seo go háirithe in earnáil na Gaeilge, ina dtagann go leor scoláirí ó teaghlaigh nach í Gaeilge an an chéad teanga go hiondúil ag na príomhchúramóirí; déanfar tuilleadh plé air seo thíos. Is foghlaimeoirí dara teanga iad seo i dtéarmaí sochtheangeolaíocha. Mar sin, tá cláir agus seirbhísí luath-thumoideachais foirmeálta agus neamhfhoirmeálta araon ríthábhachtach chun tacú le cur chun

[1] https://www.independentreviewofeducation.org.uk/files/independentreviewofeducation/2022-09/Comhairle%20na%20Gaelscolaiochta.pdf



cinn agus forbairt na dteangacha dúchasacha, agus i gcás an staidéir seo, d'athbheochan na Gaeilge ó thuaidh.

Neartaíodh forbairt thapa oideachas na Gaeilge a thuilleadh de bharr fás orgánach ar infreastruchtúr teanga níos leithne, pobalbhunaithe. Éascaíodh é seo, go mór, le bunú an chomhlachta maoinithe Uile-Éireann, Foras na Gaeilge, mar chuid de Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta a chuir infheistíocht ar fáil i dtionscadail phobail Ghaeilge den chéad uair ó bunaíodh an stát ar bhonn comhsheasmhach i dTuaisceart Éireann. Chuir fás an infreastruchtúir pobail seo fearainn shóisialta bhreise ar fáil ionas go dtiocfadh borradh faoin teanga, lasmuigh den oideachas foirmeálta. Cé go n-aithníonn Joshua Fishman, Miquel Strubell agus sochtheangeolaithe mór le rá eile oideachas tumthach foirmeálta mar bhunchloch le haghaidh athbheochan rathúil, aithníonn siad freisin nach féidir leis feidhmiú go rathúil gan cur chuige aontaithe, comhtháite a chabhraíonn le: 'páistí a shóisialú isteach i dteanga a úsáidtear ina dtimpeallacht lasmuigh d'eispéireas scoile atá so-rangaithe nó' 'socialise children into an environmentally utilised language outside of the easily compartmentalised school-experience' (Fishman, 2001, lch.15) . Is é príomhaidhm na samhla athbheochana seo ná an sprioctheanga a thabhairt isteach sa bhaile, mar a rinne i bpobal Ghaeltacht Bhóthar Seoighe den chéad uair. Tugann fianaise starógach le fios gur tharla sé seo, cé gur ar bhonn teoranta a tharla sé, agus, den chuid is mó, iardhaltaí na scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge a tógadh le Béarla iad féin a bhí ann, agus iad anois ag roghnú chun a bpáistí féin a thógáil trí Ghaeilge.

Ní mór a thabhairt faoi deara ag an phointe seo na héagsúlachtaí atá ann sna déimeagrafaic de theaghlaigh laistigh de limistéar pleanála teanga Iarthar Bhéal Feirste; na teaghlaigh sin ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar phríomhtheanga (T1) an tí, na teaghlaigh sin ina bhfuil Gaeilge líofa ag tuismitheoir amháin

(Teanga-amháin-tuismitheoir-amháin nó OPOL) nó teaghlaigh nach bhfuil inniúlacht teanga ag aon duine de na cúramóirí ach a roghnaíonn tumoideachas Gaeilge mar oideachas foirmeálta a bpáistí agus mar sin déanann siad iarracht teacht ar sheirbhísí teaghlaigh breise chun a nochtadh teangeolaíochta a fheabhsú, i bhfianaise thábhacht seanbhunaithe an luath-thumoideachais le haghaidh forbairt theangeolaíoch agus chognaíoch.

In ainneoin an róil chriticiúil atá ag tumoideachas in iarrachtaí athneartaithe teanga i bpobail teanga dúchasaí ar fud an domhain, deimhníonn Ó Ceallaigh agus Ní Dhonnabháin (2015) gurb amhlaidh nach bhfuil bunú agus cleachtais tumoideachais foirmeálta atá le fáil i samhail Gaeloideachas leo féin chun an daonra a athGhaelú. Tá tumadh teanga trí oideachas foirmiúil srianta maidir lena acmhainneacht le haghaidh athbheochana; agus is iondúil go gcoinníonn sé an teanga laistigh de sheomraí ranga scoileanna agus de shuíomhanna oideachais foirmeálta. D'fhéadfaí cás a dhéanamh gurb é an fáth ar chuir forbairt na dtionscnamh agus na seirbhísí teanga feabhas ar fhoghlaim teanga agus ar dheiseanna teagmhála leis an teanga do gach ball an phobail, go háirithe do pháistí agus do dhaoine óga a bhféadfadh rochtain theoranta a bheith acu ar an teanga lasmuigh den suíomh scoile foirmeálta. Is sna spásanna seo a n-éiríonn modh sóisialaithe, nasctha, muintearais den teanga agus ligeann siad don teanga forbairt agus leanúint ar aghaidh go nádúrtha mar mhodh cumarsáide.

Bhí ról tábhachtach ag bunú agus ag forbairt na seirbhísí oideachais luathbhlianta Gaeilge in athneartú teanga sa phobal agus maidir leis an earnáil. Cuireann oideachas luathbhlianta teagmháil mhéadaithe ar fáil don teanga do pháistí atá ag aois na réamhscoile, agus cuireann sé deiseanna ar fáil do thuismitheoirí páirt a ghlacadh in eispéireas foghlama a bpáistí. In ainneoin an ratha seo, mar atá cruthaithe ag figiúirí an daonáirimh agus ag fás an IME, tá an pobal Gaeilge agus an earnáil dheonach agus luathbhlianta fós ag fulaingt de bharr laghduithe móra i maoiniú agus neamhréireanna maidir le hacmhainniú agus soláthar seirbhísí (Ní Gréacháin, 2023; Lynch, 2023; An Dream Dearg, 2023[2]; Conradh na Gaeilge, 2022). I mí Eanáir 2023, bhí laghduithe maoinithe ag earnáil na luathbhlianta suas le 45% agus bhí baol ann go gcaillfí Maoiniú Pathway, in ainneoin ráitis pholaitiúla agus reachtúla faoin tábhacht le soláthar seirbhíse luathbhlianta do pháistí ó thuaidh. D'fhéadfadh an cinneadh sin a bheith tubaisteach ach cuireadh ina cheart é agus fuarthas 40% den mhaoiniú ar ais roimh ath-insealbhú fheidhmiúchán Stormont go luath in 2024, agus leithdháil an tAire Oideachais reatha pacáiste tacaíochta dar luach £25m ar luathfhoghlaim agus ar earnáil cúraim leanaí (an Roinn Oideachais, 2024). In ainneoin an mhéid sin, bíonn go leor soláthraithe luathbhlianta ag streachailt freastal ar phríomhchostais chun a bpríomhsheirbhísí a chur ar fáil. Cuireadh an tábhacht le luathbhlianta Gaeilge agus na deacrachtaí maidir le tacaíocht reachtúil don Choimisinéir Leanaí do Thuaisceart Éireann le linn cuairt dea chleachtais ag seirbhísí cúraim lae áitiúla Gaeilge:

> *tá go leor dúshláin roimh earnáil luathbhlianta na Gaeilge freisin, san áireamh leo sin, tá easpa infheistíocht incriminteach mharthanach ann agus níl aon straitéis luchta saothair saincheaptha ann, agus tá éileamh ag teacht ar áiteanna inár suíomhanna luathbhlianta, teastaíonn tiomantas agus rannpháirtíocht ghníomhach uainn ónár rialtas'*
>
> **(Altram, 2024[3])**

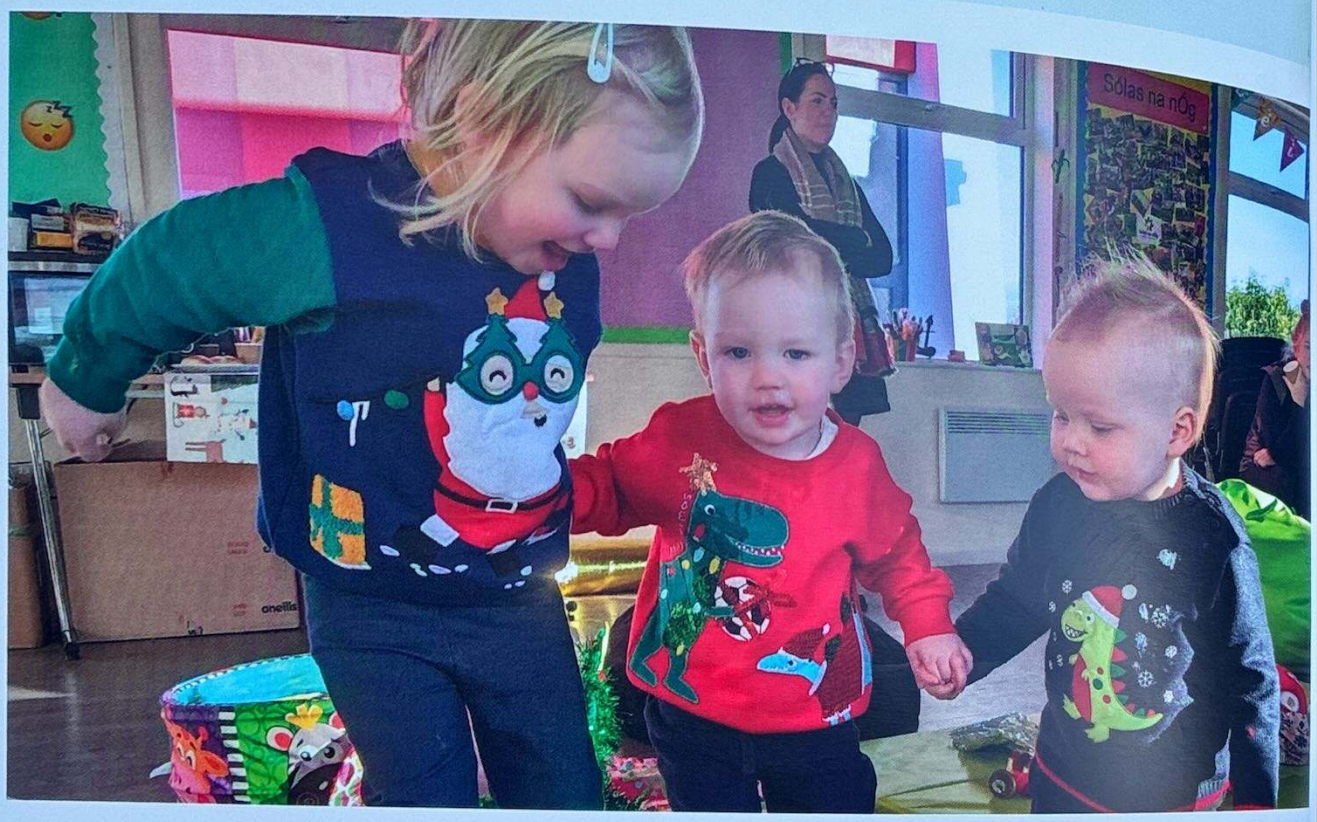
[2] Cuireadh tús le hachainí ar Rúnaí Buan na Roinne Oideachais chun srian a chur le laghduithe ar mhaoiniú Luathbhlianta - https://www.dearg.ie/ga/uirlisi/stad-an-slad

[3] Tuarascáil iomláin ar fáil ag https://www.niccy.org/news/commissioner-receives-cead-mile-failte-in-irish-early-years-childcare-settings/

Is cinnte gur mór an scóip agus an t-éileamh atá ar fhorbairt bhreise le haghaidh seirbhísí phobal na Gaeilge, go háirithe na daoine a bhfuil sé de rún acu freastal ar riachtanais na dteaghlach agus ar thacaíocht teanga sa bhaile, a dteastaíonn cur chuige straitéiseach intuigthe agus comhtháite uaidh a chuireann cultúr chun cinn ina n-úsáidtear agus ina atáirgtear an Ghaeilge. Deimhníonn McCarty (2018) go mbreathnaítear ar phleanáil teanga mar fheiniméan go minic, agus go dtugann comhlachtaí reachtúla nó rialtais fúithi agus, Tollefson (1991, in McCarty, 2018) ina ndéantar an argóint seo '[that] government backed language planning frequently has inequitable consequences for speakers of minoritised or lesser used languages'. Feidhmíonn an taighde seo a bhfuiltear ag tabhairt faoi de réir aidhmeanna Fhís an Phobail, mar scála tomhais chun measúnú a dhéanamh ar sholáthar reatha, chun fiosrú a dhéanamh ar bhearnaí atá ann i seirbhísí reatha agus mar sin a bhfuil sé d'aidhm acu feasacht a mhéadú faoi na deiseanna agus na tairbhí ar fad atá ann d'Éireannaigh óga nuair a thógtar a gclanna trí Ghaeilge.

Tá sé tábhachtach go múnlaíonn gach moladh ó na páirtithe leasmhara iad féin gach straitéis forbartha atá dírithe ar chúrsaí teaghlaigh (tuismitheoirí atá ag tógáil clainne trí Ghaeilge nó le Gaeilge) agus tá sé tábhachtach go bhfuil siad fréamhaithe i dteoiric agus i ndea-chleachtas pleanála teanga. Deimhníonn McCarty (2018) gur cleachtas é pleanáil teanga a nglacann teaghlaigh, pobail agus daoine aonair páirt inti gach lá; chuige sin, tá sé de rún sa taighde seo measúnú a dhéanamh ar; agus solas a chaitheamh ar na riachtanais agus na conairí éagsúla ó bhun go barr agus é cruthaithe trí thaighde rannpháirteach le haghaidh forbairt agus abhcóideacht do sheirbhísí teaghlaigh arna seachadadh trí Ghaeilge mar chuid de Líonra Pleanála Teanga Bhéal Feirste Thiar.

Sula leanfaimid ar aghaidh le plé a dhéanamh ar chur chuige modheolaíochta an taighde seo, tá sé tábhachtach na deiseanna agus na tairbhí éagsúla a bhaineann le seirbhísí dátheangacha agus tumthacha dúchasacha a leagan amach a thuilleadh do theaghlaigh agus do na daoine atá ag iarraidh rochtain a fháil ar sheirbhísí teanga teaghlaigh agus páirt a ghlacadh sna seirbhísí ceanna.



Achoimriú ar Litríocht Taighde maidir le Tumadh Teanga Teaghlaigh i gComhthéacsanna Dúchasacha.

Tá sé tuairiscithe agus glactar leis go forleathan go bhfuil go leor buntáistí ag baint le sealbhú dara teanga agus le luath-thumadh nuair atáthar ag déanamh machnamh ar chláir dhátheangacha agus tumoideachais (Bialystok, 2011,2018; Feldman agus Shen, 2012; Jawad agus Mutalib, 2021; Trebits et. al 2021). De réir Trebits et. al (2021), tá feasacht níos fearr ag páistí dátheangacha ar chúrsaí meititheangeolaíocha, tá inniúlacht chuimhne níos fearr acu, tá éirim neamhbhriathartha níos fearr acu agus tá tuilleadh cumais feidhmiúcháin níos éifeachtúla acu trí chéile ná a bpiaraí aonteangacha. Rinneadh taifead ar cháintí a bhaineann le haicme agus le míbhuntáistí socheacnamaíocha agus litearthachta i measc pobail dhátheangacha ach tugadh a ndúshláin agus bréagnaíodh iad le Bialystok (2018) ina ndeimhnítear gur féidir breathnú ar dhátheangachas mar acmhainn chognaíoch a chuireann le rath acadúil níos déanaí. Chuige sin, tá i bhfad níos mó i gceist ná na buntáistí cognaíocha agus cumarsáideacha a bhaineann le dátheangachas; agus tá go leor buntáistí a bhaineann le dúchas cultúrtha agus teangeolaíoch atá in ann cur le pobail mhionlaithe a d'fhulaing de bharr teacht isteach agus buanú an choilíneachais, rud a phléifear anois.

Cé go raibh cláir thumtha teanga agus curaclaim trí thimpeallachtaí scolaíochta foirmeálta lárnach maidir le caomhnú agus cur chun cinn na dteangacha dúchasacha ar fud an domhain (Engman, McGurk agus Mac Kenzie, 2023), tá gá ann i gcónaí le haghaidh deiseanna agus tionscnaimh shóisialta agus neamhfhoirmeálta chun timpeallacht a fheabhsú agus a ghineadh inar féidir le húsáid agus le rannpháirtíocht teangacha dúchasacha forbairt go dtí go mbeidh siad ina dteangacha beo i bpobail. De réir Hinton, Huss agus Roche (2018), níl ag an chuid is mó de na tíortha ar fud an domhain ach roinnt teangacha oifigiúla a fhaigheann tacaíocht agus teagmháil mhór reachtúil trí asraonta meán agus ina gcórais oideachais. Is ann don cheannas teangeolaíoch mar gheall ar 'language shift' (Fishman, 1991) atá ann de bharr impleachtaí cnaíteacha de choilíneachas ar dhaoine dúchasacha; próiseas a d'imir tionchar ar thírdhreacha, ar shícé, ar theangacha agus ar acmhainní nádúrtha. Mar thoradh ar nádúr cnaíteach an iompaithe teanga, is beag teanga sa saol atá ann i réimsí lasmuigh de phobal an fhocail labhartha ina ndéantar iarracht na teangacha dúchais sin a chothú agus a chaomhnú:

> *The destruction of languages is an abstraction which is concretely mirrored in the concomitant destruction of intimacy, family and community, via national and international involvements and intrusions, the destruction of local life.*
>
> **(Fishman, 1991, p.4)**

Maíonn McCarty (2021) go bhfuil tionchar athnasctha agus an athbheochana na dteangacha dúchais ina chabhair chun feabhas a chur ar fholláine ina hiomláine trí dheiseanna a chruthú chun cultúr a threisiú, agus chun ionchuimsitheacht a chomhtháthú, a chumhachtú agus a chothú. Ach, caitheann Biddle agus Swee (2012) solas ar an dóigh nach bhfuil dóthain taighde eimpírigh ann faoi láthair sa réimse seo, go háirithe maidir le torthaí agus tionchar meabhairshláinte. Ach, thug Chandler agus Lalonde (2008) faoi scoláireacht maidir le tairbhí meabhairshláinte de rannpháirtíocht teanga dúchais, rud a thugann le fios gur féidir le rannpháirtíocht daoine óga i gcleachtas maidir le caomhnú cultúrtha a bheith ina chabhair chun rátaí féinmharaithe a laghdú i measc daoine óga dúchasacha. Ina dhiaidh sin agus uile, iarrann Walsh (2018) ar thuilleadh staidéar fadaimseartha cainníochtúla lena gcuimsítear gairmithe sláinte le cur i gcrích maidir le torthaí sláinte iomlána de dhaonraí dúchasacha.

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Cuireann samhail theoiriciúil saibhrithe cur chuige iomlánaíoch ar fáil maidir le hathneartú teanga, ina leagtar béim ar an ghá le hiarrachtaí cuimsitheacha agus atá á gcur chun cinn ag an phobal lena chinntiú gur féidir na teangacha atá i mbaol a úsáid go hinbhuanaithe. Tugann an tsamhail saibhrithe rannpháirtíocht ghníomhach le fios i bpobal na teanga agus leagan sé béim ar an ghá le tionscnaimh atá á reáchtáil ag an phobal seachas cineálacha cur chuige ó bharr anuas. Tugann Fishman le fios freisin go bhfuil seachadadh teanga ó ghlúin go glúin sa bhaile riachtanach chun aistriú teanga a chur ina cheart trí dheiseanna a chur ar fáil i gcomhthéacsanna teaghlaigh agus trí theagmháil leis an teanga trí roinnt réimsí. Maítear sa tsamhail sin freisin go mba cheart iarrachtaí a dhéanamh chun stádas a thabhairt don teanga i gcomhthéacsanna oifigiúla agus acmhainní agus tacaíocht leordhóthanach a fháil ionas gur féidir borradh teacht fúithi agus athrú. Leagtar amach samhail i Scála Grádaithe um Briseadh Idirghlúine de chuid Fishman (2001) le haghaidh athneartú teanga rathúil:

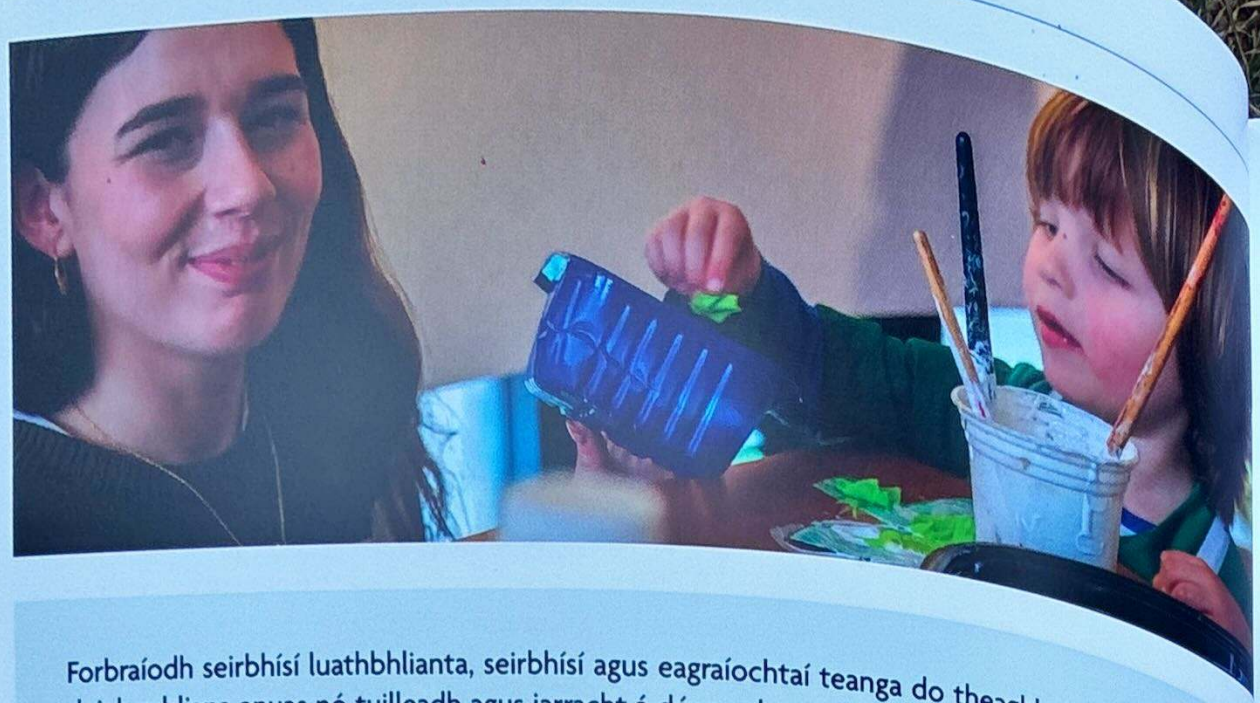
Scála Grádaithe Um Briseadh Idirghlúine	
1.	Ard-oideachas, réimse na hoibre, na hollmheáin chumarsáide, ardréimsí rialtais ag an leibhéal náisiúnta
2.	Na hollmheáin chumarsáide/na seirbhísí rialtais áitiúla nó réigiúnacha
3.	Réimse áitiúil/réigiúnach oibre (X-*ish* agus Y-*ish* i gceist)
4a.	Scoileanna poiblí do pháistí X-*ish*, roinnt teagaisc trí X-*ish*, ach faoi smacht ag Y-*ish* ó thaobh foirne agus curaclaim de.
4b.	Scoileanna faoi smacht X-*ish* ó thaobh foirne agus curaclaim de
5.	Scoileanna (ranganna), sa bhreis ar oideachas éigeantach, do gach uile aoisghrúpa, chun litearthacht a bhaint amach.
6.	Seachadadh na teanga ó ghlúin go glúin i réimse an teaghlaigh agus na comharsanachta.
7.	Cumarsáid in X-*ish* i measc na glúine is sine.
8.	Athchruthú X-*ish* agus sealbhú X-ish mar dhara teanga ag daoine fásta.

Cuimsítear leis na moltaí a tugadh mar thoradh ar an tsamhail theoiriciúil seo, ciorcail chainte, feachtais teanga pobail, samhlacha oideachais agus idirghabhálacha ina dtugtar tús áite do nascacht phobail agus chultúrtha (Hodge agus Nandy, 2011). Athluaitear na héachtaí gníomhaíochais agus rannpháirtíochta arna stiúradh ag an phobal ina leithéid de mholtaí agus de chleachtais a eascraíonn as an teoiric seo, éachtaí a bhfuil dlús á chur leo le roinnt mhaith blianta anuas i bpobal na Gaeilge i mBéal Feirste agus ar fud na hÉireann. Ach, cuimsítear le réimse na rannpháirtíochta pobail tacaíocht teanga don teaghlach agus sa bhaile agus úsáid na teanga, agus tá Piller agus Gerber (2018) ar aon intinn lena chéile go gcaithfidh méadú teacht ar an tacaíocht chéanna dá mba mhaith le tuismitheoirí go mbeadh inniúlachtaí ag a bpáistí i níos mó ná teanga amháin seachas Béarla.

Anois, pléifear soláthar reatha na seirbhísí teanga do theaghlaigh i limistéar pleanála teanga Bhéal Feirste Thiar.

Soláthar Reatha na Seirbhísí Teanga do na Luathbhlianta agus do Theaghlaigh i gComhthéacs na Gaeilge i mBéal Feirste Thiar

Sula ndéanfar scrúdú ar sholáthar na seirbhísí teanga do teaghlaigh, is fiú i dtosach aitheantas a thabhairt do roinnt beartas a bhaineann leis na seirbhísí seo ar fud Thuaisceart Éireann. Rialaíonn réimse beartas agus creatlach na seirbhísí luathbhlianta ó thuaidh agus tá na beartais agus na creatlach sin deartha chun tacú le forbairt agus le hoideachas na bpáistí agus na bpáistí óga. Tá sé d'aidhm ag na beartais seo a chinntiú go bhfuil ardchaighdeáin chúraim agus oideachais ann, go gcuirtear cothromas agus ionchuimsitheacht chun cinn agus go dtacaítear le tuismitheoirí agus le teaghlaigh. An beartas is déanaí a forbraíodh ag leibhéal reachtúil ná 'Straitéis Páistí agus Daoine Óga 2020 2023', agus tá sé d'aidhm ag an straitéis sin feabhas a chur ar fholláine na bpáistí agus na ndaoine óga trí dhíriú ar shláinte, ar oideachas, ar shábháilteacht agus ar fholláine eacnamaíochta. Cuimsítear leis cuspóirí agus gníomhartha ar leith le haghaidh seirbhísí luathbhlianta. Go sonrach, dírítear i Straitéis Luathbhlianta na Roinne Oideachais (0 6) ar fheabhas a chur ar thorthaí do pháistí óga, go háirithe do na páistí as cúlraí faoi mhíbhuntáiste. Leagtar béim ann ar luathoideachas agus ar chúram ardchaighdeáin, ar fhorbairt an luchta saothair agus ar thacaíocht do thuismitheoirí agus do theaghlaigh. Caitear solas sa dá straitéis ar chúinsí déimeagrafacha suntasach sa phobal Gaeilge, agus tá gealltanais iontu dálaí níos fearr a chur ar fáil do na páistí as cúlraí faoi mhíbhuntáiste, ina gcónaíonn formhór an phobail Gaeilge i mBéal Feirste Thiar (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2000). Bunaíonn sonraí na mBeartas Díthe Ilchineálaí 2021 é seo a thuilleadh ina gcuirtear in iúl go bhfuil an líon is airde cónaitheoirí (76%) i mBéal Feirste Thiar ina gcónaí sa 'Limistéar Aschuir is díothaí i dTuaisceart Éireann'. Chomh maith leis sin, déantar iarracht i gclár amhail Sure Start agus na cláir Oideachais Réamhscoile agus tionscnaimh thacaíochta tríd an Chiste Pathway chun rochtain agus comhdheis a chinntiú do theaghlaigh atá ag iarraidh leas a bhaint as seirbhísí luathbhlianta. Cé go ndéantar deighilt idir na déimeagrafaic ar leith seo sna beartais seo, lena n áirítear páistí ag a bhfuil riachtanais foghlama breise, páistí nuathagtha, páiste ó chúlraí socheacnamaíocha níos ísle, níl oideachas Gaeilge luathbhlianta acu, ná na soláthairtí teanga ar leith a theastaíonn chun freastal ar riachtanais an dátheangachais agus an tumtha i gcomhthéacsanna luathbhlianta go háirithe i gcás páistí atá á dtógáil go dátheangach.



Forbraíodh seirbhísí luathbhlianta, seirbhísí agus eagraíochtaí teanga do theaghlaigh go suntasach le deich mbliana anuas nó tuilleadh agus iarracht á déanamh acu freastal ar éileamh agus ar riachtanais na ndaoine a úsáideann na seirbhísí sin laistigh de phobal Gaeilge i mBéal Feirste Thiar[4]. Is féidir an fhorbairt seo a nascadh go dlúth le cleachtas cosúil leis arna chur i bhfeidhm ag scoileanna Gaeilge ó cuireadh tús leis an earnáil; ina raibh éileamh ar thacaíocht foghlama bhreise agus, mar shampla, bhí cúnamh le hobair bhaile ag teastáil, chuir scoileanna tús le tionscnaimh thacaíochta amhail clubanna obair baile, seisiúin bhreise i gclubanna luathbhlianta agus clubanna óige chun freastal ar riachtanais a scoláirí agus a dtuismitheoirí.

Agus méadú tagtha ar líon na bpáistí a chláraigh do scoil a luadh thuas in oideachas Gaeilge mar aon leis an mhéadú a tháinig ar líon na dteaghlach a rinne cinneadh a bpáistí a thógáil trí Ghaeilge, lean tionscnaimh phobail agus oideachais an nós seo agus forbraíodh leibhéil éagsúla de sholáthar seirbhísí ó sheirbhísí cúraim lae go dtí gníomhaíochtaí tumtha teanga lena chinntiú go mbeidh deiseanna ann do thumadh luath teanga agus d'úsáid shóisialta na Gaeilge do chónaitheoirí áitiúla. Faoi láthair, tá trí sheirbhísí cúraim lae ann laistigh de limistéar pleanála teanga Bhéal Feirste chomh maith le roinnt eagraíochtaí agus tionscadail phobail a chuireann seirbhísí teanga do theaghlaigh ar fáil trí fhéilte agus trí imeachtaí a eagraítear mar chuid dá gcláir phobail agus for-rochtana. Cuireann comhlachtaí reachtúla agus eagraíochtaí tacaíochta réigiúnacha amhail Glór na nGael agus Altram comhairliúchán, tacaíocht, oiliúint agus acmhainní ar fáil d'eagraíochtaí pobail, do theaghlaigh agus do scoileanna agus iad ag déanamh iarracht seirbhísí luathbhlianta tumtha Gaeilge a chur ar fáil. Chun éascaíocht a dhéanamh ar straitéis chomhtháite agus chomhoibríoch a bhaineann le seirbhísí teanga tumtha do theaghlaigh a chur ar fáil, cheap Fís an Phobail an chéad oifigeach Gaeilge do theaghlaigh, atá sa phost ó 2023, chun cláir agus imeachtaí teanga a chomhordú agus a éascú mar chuid de na haidhmeanna straitéiseacha iomlána i bplean teanga Bhéal Feirste.

In ainneoin na ndeacrachtaí a bhaineann le creatlacha luathbhlianta beartais Gaeilge agus leis an dóigh nach ann do Straitéis Ghaeilge, rinne pobal na Gaeilge forbairtí suntasacha chun seirbhísí a chur ar fáil, gan mórán tacaíochta reachtúla. Mar chuid den taighde seo, tá sé riachtanach scrúdú a dhéanamh ar shamplaí breise comhthéacsúla de sholáthairtí teaghlaigh, chun solas a chaitheamh ar thuilleadh deiseanna le haghaidh forbairtí, comhoibriú agus chur i bhfeidhm an dea-chleachtais. Déanfar plé sa chéad chuid eile ar sholáthar teanga do theaghlaigh sa Bhreatain Bheag tar éis casadh le heagraíochtaí ionadaíocha éagsúla de Mudiad Meithrin i gCaerdydd, sa Bhreatain Bheag i mí Márta 2024.

[4] Reáchtáil eagraíochtaí pobail amhail Ionad Uibh Eachach na hiarrachtaí ceannródaíocha seo. Níos déanaí, d'fhorbair grúpaí pobail eile agus soláthraithe príobháideacha amhail Ionad na Fuiseoga agus Teach Mamó seirbhísí luathbhlianta Gaeilge chun freastal ar an éileamh atá ag méadú.

Cás-Staidéar i gCaerdydd, sa Bhreatain Bheag (Márta 2024) – Samplaí de Dhea Chleachtas a Roinnt

I mí Márta 2024, chomhoibrigh cohórt d'oifigigh pobail agus luathbhlianta Gaeilge darb ainm 'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge' a dhéanann ionadaíocht ar eagraíochtaí éagsúla, chomhoibrigh siad le Fís an Phobail ar chás-staidéar arna mhaoiniú ag an Roinn Pobal chun cuairt a thabhairt ar an Bhreatain Bheag chun fiosrú a dhéanamh ar sholáthar na seirbhísí Tumtha Luathbhlianta agus Teaghlaigh i gcomhthéacs na Breataine Bige (WM). Fuarthas léargas thar a bheith luachmhar sa turas seo ar na hionchuir bheartais, reachtúla agus eagraíochtúla éagsúla a bhí ina gcabhair chun go leor deiseanna a fhorbairt, a chothú agus a chur ar fáil do theaghlaigh atá ag tógáil a gclann trí Bhreatnais a úsáideann an teanga go sóisialta agus go neamhfhoirmeálta. Tá go leor gnéithe ag baint leis na hiarrachtaí chun seirbhísí Breatnaise a chur chun cinn, lena gcuimsítear tionscnaimh, beartais agus eagraíochtaí. Tá sé d'aidhm sna hiarrachtaí seo úsáid na Breatnaise a mhéadú ó luath-óige, ach aghaidh a thabhairt ar rannpháirtíocht sa phobal agus an tsuim atá ag méadú in oideachas Breatnaise. Tá Mudiad Meithrin lárnach sna hiarrachtaí seo, is brateagraíocht í seo a chuireann saineolas ar fáil in oideachas teanga do na luathbhlianta agus do theaghlaigh. Tá sé d'aidhm ina dtionscnamh darb ainm 'Cymraeg for Kids', tuismitheoirí nach as an Bhreatain Bheag iad, go háirithe i nDeisceart Thoir na Breataine Bige, áit nach n-úsáidtear Bhreatnais chomh fairsing céanna. Díríonn siad ar fheasacht a mhéadú, ar dhátheangachas a chur chun cinn ó naíonacht, agus gníomhaíochtaí a chur ar fáil amhail lámhchuimilt do leanaí,ióga agus am le haghaidh rímeanna.

Tá borradh tagtha faoi fhorbairt beartas reachtúil straitéiseach mar thoradh ar chur i bhfeidhm straitéis Bhreatnaise an rialtais, Cymraeg 2050, ina bhfuil an phríomhaidhm chun 1 mhilliún cainteoir Breatnaise a bhaint amach faoi 2050. Cuimsítear leis sin úsáid laethúil na Breatnaise a mhéadú, go háirithe i measc páistí, trí chleachtais Bhreatnaise a fhí isteach i seirbhísí sláinte, amhail bileoga eolais a chur san áireamh le pacáistí réamhbhreithe agus scaoileadh amach do thuismitheoirí nua. San áireamh le tionscnamh reachtúil eile Clár ARFOR, ina ndírítear ar fhorbairt eacnamaíoch chun cainteoirí Breatnaise a mhealladh ar ais chuig croíthailte traidisiúnta, ina bhfuil laghdú tagtha ar líon na gcainteoirí Breatnaise ach an oiread le líon na nGaeilgeoirí sa Ghaeltacht. Déantar iarracht ann tacú le tionscnaimh atá bunaithe ar phobal agus le bunú na scoileanna WM i gceantair uirbeacha agus iad a chur chun cinn, ceantair ina bhfuil méadú tapa ag teacht ar an tsuim a chuirtear in oideachas tumtha. Chomh maith leis sin, tá sé d'aidhm ag an *Acht Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* a chinntiú gur teanga bhríomhar í Bhreatnais de bharr gur gné lárnach í sin de chultúr beoga agus ceannasach. Cuireann an reachtaíocht seo taca faoi straitéisí náisiúnta chun an Bhreatnais a chur chun cinn ar fud gach earnáil den tsochaí. Lena chois sin, tabharfar aghaidh i bhforbairt an Bhille Oideachais Breatnaise atá le teacht ar oideachas teanga ar fud gach céim den saol, agus béim ar leith á leagan ar oideachas tumtha agus tá sé mar aidhm aige freisin aghaidh a thabhairt ar bhearnaí maidir le soláthar don lucht fágála scoile.

Fuair na cláir Bhreatnaise tacaíocht mhór reachtúil agus seirbhísí teanga do theaghlaigh, agus mar thoradh ar an mhéid sin, tá forbairtí suntasacha déanta san obair agus sna seirbhísí atá á ndéanamh ag leibhéal na talún go háirithe maidir le heispéiris tumtha do theaghlaigh. San áireamh le ceann de na tionscnaimh sin, tá Cymraeg i Blant, a reáchtálann grúpaí do thuismitheoirí agus do pháistí, agus é mar aidhm acu a n-úsáid laethúil as Breatnais a dhúbailt. Socraíonn siad spriocanna bliantúla chun páirt a thabhairt do os cionn 21,000 tuismitheoir trí éascaíocht a dhéanamh ar 2,800 grúpsheisiún lena gcuimsítear cur chun cinn na teanga i gcleachtais sláinte teaghlaigh agus i seirbhísí údaráis áitiúil. Bhunaigh Mudiad Meithrin a gclár darb ainm 'Set Up and Succeed Programme' ina leagtar amach spriocanna do bhunú an 'Cylch Meithrin' nua (Grúpaí Súgartha Breatnaise). Faoi dheireadh na bliana 2021, bunaíodh 43 grúpa nua agus staitisticí acu ina léirítear an áit ina mbunaítear grúpa súgartha laistigh de limistéar scoile WM, agus táthar ag súil le ráta aistrithe de 90% go dtí bunscoileanna WM.

Ó thaobh oiliúint luchta saothair agus forbairt ghairmiúil, bunaíodh cláir oiliúna uileghabhálacha do chleachtóirí agus d'éascaitheoirí luathbhlianta i gcomhthéacsanna WM agus thug rialtas na Breataine tacaíocht dóibh i bhfoirm mhaoinithe, lena n-áirítear córais amhail ardáin áirithinte ar líne a dhearadh agus seisiúin bheaga chun naisc a chothú le tuismitheoirí. Is é an comhlacht breithnithe Estyn a dhéanann iniúchadh ar; agus a chinntíonn dea-chleachtas agus seachadadh seirbhíse, comhlacht a chuireann na tuarascálacha téamacha agus na huirlisí forbartha patrún teanga i dtoll a chéile chun tuilleadh tacaíochta a thabhairt do pháirtithe leasmhara Luathbhlianta WM. Forbraíodh Cláir Bhreise amhail Coresi'r Bront agus Cynllun Trochi Iaith, a chuireann aonaid féinstaidéir ar fáil le haghaidh tumadh teanga agus chun tacú le grúpaí súgartha Béarla (EM) atá ag aistriú chuig soláthar WM, a chuireann acmhainní ar fáil do na baill foirne agus a chuireann úsáid na Breatnaise chun cinn i ngníomhaíochtaí laethúla amhail am lóin agus níochán lámh.

In ainneoin an dul chun cinn mór a rinne na grúpaí pobail agus oideachais mar aon le tacaíocht leanúnach an stáit, bhí dúshláin shuntasacha roimh sholáthar seirbhíse WM ar féidir iad a fheiceáil i gcomhthéacs na Gaeilge freisin, mar a mhíneofar ar fud an chuid eile den taighde. Bhí dúshláin ann maidir le soláthar foirne agus earcaíocht mar le hiarrthóirí ag a bhfuil inniúlacht sna scileanna teanga cuí do chleachtóirí teanga teaghlaigh. In ainneoin an mhéadaithe atá tagtha ar rannpháirtíocht na dtuismitheoirí i gcláir theaghlaigh agus in ainneoin an bhorrtha ghinearálta atá tagtha faoin spéis in oideachas Breatnaise,

teastaíonn feabhsú maidir le bailiú sonraí agus rannpháirtíocht aiseolais. Bunaíodh tionscnaimh amhail Cymraeg yn y Cartref ó tharla gurb iondúil go dtagann laghdú ar an daonra WM maidir leis na daoine a labhraíonn an teanga tar éis aois na scoile (20-44).

Is follas go bhfuil cur chuige ilsrathach ag teastáil chun na seirbhísí teanga Breatnaise do theaghlaigh a chur chun cinn, lena gcuimsítear straitéisí rialtais, rannpháirtíocht sa phobal agus cláir oideachais nuálaíoch. Níl aon dabht ach go bhfuil an comhoibriú spreagúil idir na heagraíochtaí éagsúla, a bhfuil tacaíocht faighte acu ó reachtaíocht dhaingean agus ó thionscnaimh dhírithe agus ba cheart don chomhoibriú céanna oibriú mar chreat dea-chleachtais le haghaidh seirbhísí agus oideachas teaghlaigh a fhorbairt i gcomhthéacsanna teanga dúchasaí eile amhail i dtuaisceart na hÉireann.

Sa chéad chuid eile, déanfar plé ar na ceisteanna modheolaíochta agus taighde a cuireadh i bhfeidhm chun an chuid den staidéar seo a bhaineann le bailiú sonraí a chur i gcrích.

Modheolaíocht

Baintear úsáid as cur chuige modheolaíochta measctha sa taighde seo, is cur chuige rannpháirteach é seo trí chúrsaíocht suirbhéanna dátheangacha agus trí phlé i bhfócasghrúpaí atá leath-struchtúrtha chun páirt ghníomhach a thabhairt do ghuthanna na bpáirtithe leasmhara agus na dtuismitheoirí ábhartha atá ag déanamh cinneadh a bpáistí a thógáil trí Ghaeilge agus a bhaineann úsáid as na seirbhísí luathbhlianta agus teaghlaigh agus atá bainteach leis na seirbhísí céanna laistigh de limistéar Bhéal Feirste Thiar. Is cur chuige taighde córasach, straitéiseach agus comhoibríoch é Taighde Gníomhaíochta Rannpháirtíochta lena gcuimsítear daoine a bhfuil tionchar ag deacracht orthu agus iad ag déanamh iniúchadh ar an deacracht chéanna (Baum, MacDougal agus Smith, 2006).

Tar éis dul i gcomhairle le comhordaitheoir pleanála teanga agus le hoifigeach tacaíochta do theaghlaigh Fhís an Phobail, agus tar éis an deis a fháil chun freastal ar an turas oibre allamuigh chuig an Bhreatain Bheag, dréachtaíodh na ceisteanna taighde seo a leanas agus comhaontaíodh orthu chun bunús an tsuirbhé agus ceistiúchán an fhócasghrúpa a chruthú don taighde seo:

1. Déan plé ar na cláir agus ar na seirbhísí a eagraíonn tú/a bhfreastalaíonn tú orthu ina gcruthaítear deiseanna do theaghlaigh a bheith rannpháirteach le Gaeilge.
2. Cé na buntáistí a bhaineann le seirbhísí Gaeilge do na luathbhlianta agus do theaghlaigh atá ag iarraidh go dtógfaí a bpáistí trí Ghaeilge?
3. Cad é na cleachtais/modhanna/acmhainní atá ar fáil do thuismitheoirí atá ag iarraidh Gaeilge a chur chun cinn sa bhaile?
4. Cé na dúshláin a bhaineann le soláthar seirbhíse teanga reatha do theaghlaigh?

Chun sonraí a fháil ón oiread tuismitheoirí agus is féidir agus gan bheith in ann gach úsáideoir seirbhíse a chur san áireamh i bplé fócasghrúpa, scaipeadh suirbhé dátheangach, ceann i nGaeilge do theaghlaigh atá ag tógáil a gclainne trí Ghaeilge agus leagan Béarla do theaghlaigh le tuismitheoirí a bhfuil a bpáistí

ag freastal ar sheirbhísí teaghlaigh agus teanga ionas go bhfoghlaimeoidh a bpáistí Gaeilge. Cuireadh ceisteanna suirbhé i dtoll a chéile ar Google Forms ach úsáid a bhaint as réimse de cheisteanna ilrogha, scálaí Likery agus roghanna bosca tráchta freagartha ina ndearnadh scrúdú ar sheirbhísí agus ar acmhainní Gaeilge do theaghlaigh i limistéar Bhéal Feirste Thiar. Bhí sonraí an tsuirbhé anaithnid i gcónaí gan aon ainm ná seoladh baile iomlán a bailíodh agus bhí rannpháirtíocht sa suirbhé roghnach.

Chun cur le sonraí an tsuirbhé, bailíodh iomlán de 5 thacar sonraí bhreise le linn na tréimhse bailithe sonraí sa staidéar taighde seo lena gcuimsítear agallaimh leath-struchtúrtha agus plé fócasghrúpa le baill foirne na ngrúpaí pobail Gaeilge, bainisteoirí cúraim lae Gaeilge, tuismitheoirí, ionadaithe ó eagraíochtaí reachtúla agus comhairleacha agus eagraíocht aistrithe teanga náisiúnta do theaghlaigh atá ag feidhmiú i bpobail Ghaeltachta i dTuaisceart Éireann. Tras-scríobhadh gach tacar sonraí sular tugadh faoi phróiseáil théamach de láimh, rud a leagfar amach sa chuid thíos. Bhí rannpháirtíocht sa phlé fócasghrúpa deonach agus gealladh neamhainmníocht do na rannpháirtithe ar fad sa tuarascáil deiridh den taighde. Tá tábla achomair thíos de rannpháirtithe an fhócasghrúpa de réir mar a ndéanfar tagairt dóibh sa phíosa plé, ansin:

Participant/Representative Organisation	Number of Participants	Participant Discussion Code
Coiste ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge (Oifigigh agus Bainisteoirí) *Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge Committee (Officers and Managers)*	6	ATCG
Bainisteoir Curam Lae (Earnáil Príobhaideach) *Irish language daycare manager*	1	CL
Tuismitheoirí *Parents*	3	T
Eagraíocht Abhcóideachta *Advocacy Organisation*	2	EA
Eagraíocht Seirbhísí Ó Dheas *Service Organisation in the South of Ireland*	1	SOD

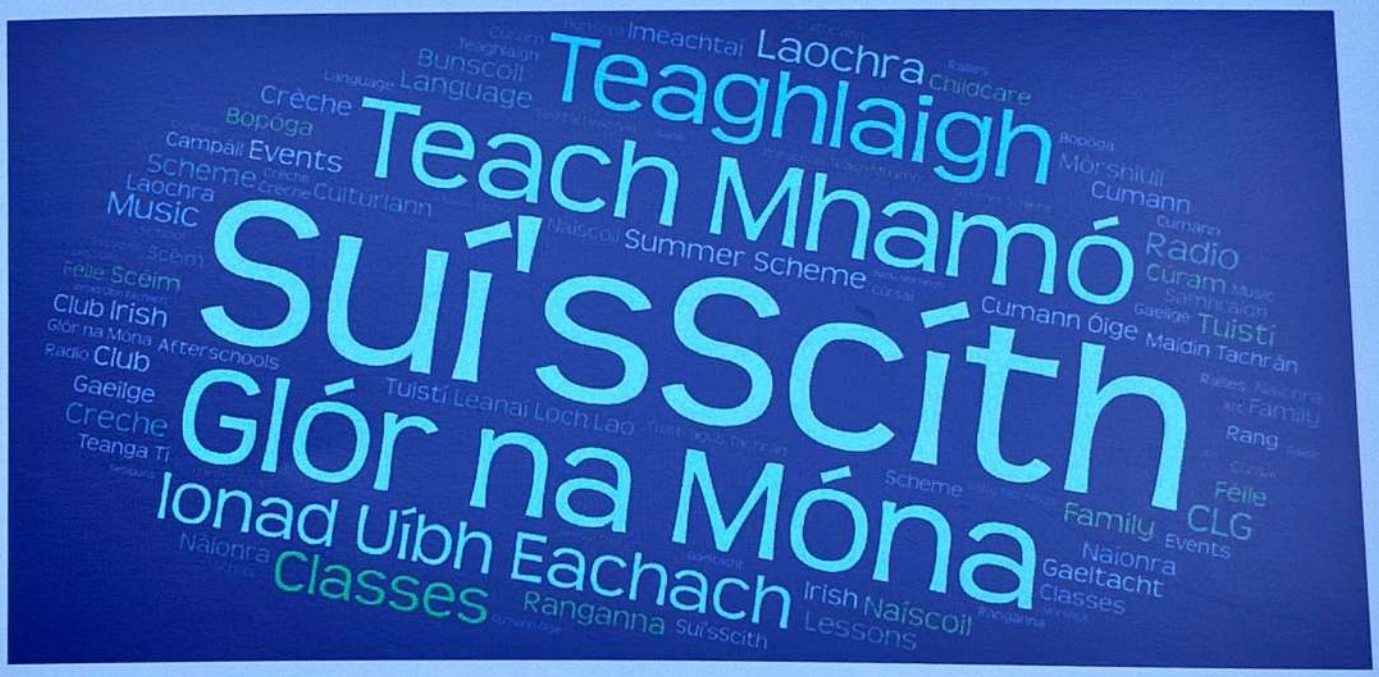
Anois, déanfaidh mé ar na sonraí a bailíodh sa dá shuirbhé agus sna grúpaí fócais sula gcuirfidh mé torthaí an taighde i láthair agus sula gcuirfidh mé deireadh leo agus ansin, tabharfaidh mé moltaí le haghaidh tuilleadh forbartha agus feabhsaithe cleachtais i gcomhair seirbhísí teanga do theaghlaigh i Limistéar Líonra Pleanála Teanga Gaeilge Bhéal Feirste Thiar.

Plé ar Thorthaí

i) Suirbhé

B'ionann méid an tsampla de rannpháirtíocht iomlán sna suirbhéanna dátheangacha don taighde seo agus 66 (N=66) agus chomhlánaigh 27 freagróir an leagan Béarla agus chomhlánaigh 39 freagróir an leagan Gaeilge den suirbhé. De bharr go raibh rannpháirtíocht neamhainmnithe, bailíodh cóid phoist na bhfreagróirí chun idirdhealú a dhéanamh idir na freagróirí a bhí ag freastal ar sheirbhísí teanga do theaghlaigh atá ina gcónaí laistigh de Limistéar Pleanála Teanga Bhéal Feirste Thiar (BT11, BT12, BT17) agus na freagróirí a bhíonn ag taisteal seans chun úsáid a bhaint as na seirbhísí do luathbhlianta agus do theaghlaigh a chuirtear ar fáil laistigh de limistéar Bhéal Feirste Thiar. Léiríodh i sonraí an tsuirbhé go gcónaíonn 38% de na freagróirí a chomhlánaigh an leagan Béarla sa limistéar pleanáil teanga ach bhí roinnt mhaith de na freagróirí (58%) a chomhlánaigh an leagan Gaeilge den suirbhé ina gcónaí laistigh de limistéar pleanála teanga Béal Feirste Thiar. Tugann sé seo le fios, cé nach bhfuil ach 50% de na freagróirí ina gcónaí, laistigh den limistéar pleanála teanga Gaeilge reatha de Bhéal Feirste Thiar, d'fhéadfadh freagraí sa suirbhé a thabhairt le fios go bhfuil tuismitheoirí toilteanach taisteal chuig Béal Feirste Thiar chun úsáid a bhaint as seirbhísí nó atá ag cur eolas ar fáil maidir leis na seirbhísí Gaeilge do theaghlaigh atá ar fáil ina gceantair féin. Bhí réimse cóid phoist ann ó BT5 (Béal Feirste Thoir) go dtí BT79 (An Ómaigh, Contae Thír Eoghain).

D'fhreastail gach freagróir sa suirbhé ar sheirbhísí Gaeilge do luathbhlianta agus do theaghlaigh ar bhealach éigin agus chuir siad léargas ar fáil ar réimse leathan imeachtaí agus seirbhísí sa bhosca tráchta atá ar fáil. Seo thíos achoimre ar na cineálacha seirbhísí ar fhreastail siad orthu in éineacht lena dteaghlaigh:



Chuir an chuid seo a leanas den suirbhé Scála Likert 5 phointe chun measúnú a dhéanamh ar shásamh na dtuismitheoirí maidir leis na seirbhísí teaghlaigh agus Gaeilge atá ar fáil ina limistéir thart orthu ó 1 (an-mhíshásta) go dtí 5 (an-sásta). Ar fud na leaganacha Gaeilge agus Béarla de na suirbhéanna, thug 53% de na freagróirí 3 mar scór do na seirbhísí reatha nó níos lú maidir leis an sásamh a bhain siad astu. Cé gur mhol siad na seirbhísí Gaeilge ar fhreastail siad orthu, léiríodh míshástacht na bhfreagróirí i neamhréireacht na gclár seirbhísí agus in infhaighteacht na gclár trí Ghaeilge i gcomparáid lena bhfuil

ar fáil ina gceantar áitiúil i mBéarla. Cuireadh bosca tráchta leis thíos faoin scála seo chun tuismitheoirí a spreagadh le plé a dhéanamh ar a bhfreagraí. Léiríodh in go leor nótaí tráchta go bhfuarthas tacaíocht agus aiseolas dearfach maidir leis na seirbhísí ar fhreastail na teaghlaigh orthu trí Ghaeilge nó maidir le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge, agus dúradh go raibh caighdeán na mball foirne agus na n-imeachtaí a eagraíodh ar ardchaighdeán agus gur chuir na tuismitheoirí buíochas in iúl as bheith in ann rochtain a fháil ar sheirbhísí Gaeilge ina gceantair áitiúla. Moladh imeachtaí a eagraíodh i gcomhar le Laochra Loch Lao CLG go hard na spéire as a n-iarrachtaí chun deiseanna a chruthú do theaghlaigh páirt a ghlacadh sa Ghaeilge. Is fiú a lua freisin go ndúirt na tuismitheoirí freisin gur cuireadh folláine dhearfach mheabhairshláinte chun cinn sna himeachtaí teaghlaigh, go háirithe ag an chéim iarbhreithe, agus gur cuireadh deiseanna ar fáil iontu casadh le máithreacha nua agus le máithreacha a bhí ag súil le páistí.

Ach, cuireadh moltaí ar fáil i gcuid den aiseolas agus rinneadh tagairt ann do laigí sna seirbhísí Gaeilge i réimsí ar leith agus luaigh go leor freagróirí gurb amhlaidh go bhfuil ganntanas seirbhísí Gaeilge ann do theaghlaigh ar fáil lasmuigh de cheantar Bhéal Feirste, rud a léiríonn míshástacht na bhfreagróirí maidir leis an soláthar seirbhíse reatha, mar atá thuasluaite. Mhaígh na tuismitheoirí freisin go raibh fógraíocht míshoiléir in amanna agus go bhfuil gá le hidirdhealú a dhéanamh idir imeachtaí atá ann d'fhoghlaimeoirí na teanga agus imeachtaí atá dírithe ar na daoine atá ag iarraidh a gclanna a thógáil trí Ghaeilge amháin. Rinneadh ráitis freisin maidir leis an dóigh gurb iondúil nach dtarlaíonn imeachtaí teaghlaigh go minic agus sách leanúnach chun príomhdheiseanna a chur ar fáil le haghaidh sealbhú teanga do pháistí atá in aois scoile. Rinne na tuismitheoirí tagairt freisin do na dúshláin atá roimh an earnáil maidir le laghduithe ar an bhuiséad, le deacrachtaí earcaíochta agus arís rinneadh tagairt don teorainn atá leis a roghanna, agus dúradh go raibh seirbhísí Béarla i bhfad níos fairsinge don aoisraon 0–3.

Rinneadh plé sa chéad chuid eile den suirbhé ar chleachtais agus ar acmhainní a úsáidtear sa bhaile chun labhairt na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn agus a spreagadh i measc páistí. Thug na freagróirí chun solais go n-úsáidtear réimse modhanna sa bhaile, agus luaigh os cionn leath na dtuismitheoirí sa dá shuirbhé

go n-úsáideann siad an focal labhartha, frásaí a múineadh dóibh agus stór focal, agus úsáideann freagróirí eile meáin phrionta agus amhairc chomh maith le himirt thumtha. Chuir na tuismitheoirí samplaí ar fáil de na modhanna éagsúla seo; rinne roinnt tuismitheoirí tagairt d'áiseanna foghlama agus d'acmhainní a chuir an pobal áitiúil agus eagraíochtaí Gaeilge luathbhlianta ar fáil, rudaí a chabhraigh leo príomhfhrásaí a fhí isteach i ngnáthchúrsaí lae a bpáistí. Luaigh go leor tuismitheoirí go n-úsáideann siad leabhair, amhráin, cláir theilifíse Ghaeilge éagsúla, mar shampla, Cúla 4 mar theagmháil bhreise le Gaeilge dá bpáistí. Rud suntasach a luadh sa suirbhé is ea, gur luaigh roinnt tuismitheoirí nach raibh líofa sa teanga go raibh sé de nós acu rudaí a lipéadú timpeall an tí i nGaeilge chun iad a spreagadh le húsáid a bhaint as an fhocal Gaeilge agus iad i mbun comhrá agus spreag siad a bpáistí a bhí ag freastal ar oideachas Gaeilge chun a oiread Gaeilge a labhairt agus a d'fhéadfaidís. Labhair na tuismitheoirí a bhí ag tógáil a gclainne trí Ghaeilge ar an tábhacht atá leis an chéad teagmháil lena bpáistí a bheith i nGaeilge agus labhair siad ar na dúshláin a bhaineann le timpeallacht Ghaeilge a choinneáil, go háirithe ag comhrá le baill dá dteaghlach sínte nach labhraíonn an teanga.

San áireamh leis an chuid deiridh den suirbhé bhí plé ar na dúshláin leanúnacha a bhíonn roimh thuismitheoirí agus iad ag déanamh measúnú ar sheirbhísí Gaeilge do theaghlaigh agus d'iarr siad moltaí chun é sin a dhéanamh agus a chur i bhfeidhm amach anseo. Cuimsíodh leis na dúshláin easpa seirbhísí a bhí ar fáil agus tuilleadh rudaí ar fáil trí Bhéarla do theaghlaigh chomh maith le heaspa seirbhísí ar fáil go háirithe i gceantair thuaithe do teaghlaigh atá ina gcónaí lasmuigh de Bhéal Feirste. Labhair go leor tuismitheoirí freisin nach raibh siad ar fáil chun freastal ar sheirbhísí a bhíonn ar siúl le linn uaireanta oibre, agus rinneadh moltaí go mbeadh tuilleadh imeachtaí ar siúl le linn an deiridh seachtaine. Rinne tuismitheoirí tagairt freisin don rochtain mhéadaithe ar sheirbhísí sláinte Gaeilge lena n áirítear measúnuithe altra ceantair agus ranganna réamhbhreithe agus iarbhreithe chun tuilleadh deiseanna a chruthú don chéad teagmháil teanga. San áireamh leis na moltaí freisin bhí forbairt spásanna sóisialta breise do teaghlaigh chun teacht le chéile agus chun aip a fhorbairt ar a mbeadh amhráin, rímeanna gus scéalta a mbeadh teaghlaigh in ann úsáid a bhaint astu le haghaidh forbairt teanga sa bhaile.

ii) Plé Fócasghrúpaí

Rinneadh plé fócasghrúpaí le hoifigigh phobail agus luathbhlianta, leis an bhainisteoir seirbhísí cúraim lae, leis na hionadaithe reachtúla agus abhcóideachta do sheirbhísí Gaeilge do luathbhlianta agus do teaghlaigh agus le cleachtóirí seirbhísí do teaghlaigh atá ag feidhmiú ó thuaidh. Roghnaíodh na rannpháirtithe bunaithe ar a dtaithí agus ar a stór eolais i réimse na Gaeilge do na luathbhlianta agus

i seirbhísí tumtha do theaghlaigh; bhí sé riachtanach freisin ionchur ó sheirbhísí a bhí ar siúl de limistéar pleanála teanga Gaeilge Bhéal Feirste Thiar chun iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar fhócas ar chomhoibriú féideartha. Agus plé an fhócasghrúpa tras-scríofa agus códaithe de láimh dhéanamh ceithre théama a leanas as na sonraí:

- Caidrimh agus Maoirseacht Tuismitheoirí a Chothú
- Acmhainní agus Tacaíocht
- Oiliúint agus Forbairt Lucht Saothair
- Feasacht a Spreagadh

Déanfar plé ar thorthaí fócasghrúpa anois de réir na dtéamaí seo roimh an anailís agus sula gcuirfí na smaointe deiridh i láthair.

Caidrimh agus Maoirseacht Tuismitheoirí a Chothú

Rinneadh go leor plé ar an téama a bhaineann le caidrimh a chothú i measc teaghlach agus tuismitheoirí chomh maith leis an tábhacht le ról na dtuismitheoirí maidir le sealbhú teanga a chothú. Thug an oifigigh seirbhísí teanga agus teaghlaigh agus tuismitheoirí léargas suntasach ó eispéiris le teaghlaigh thabhairt le chéile agus spásanna tarraingteacha, tumthacha a chruthú inar féidir an teanga a fheiceáil scríofa agus inar féidir í a chloisteáil. Chaith oifigeach amháin solas ar an tábhacht le cleachtadh teaghlaigh a bheith agat ag a bhfuil líofacht teanga chun éascaíocht a dhéanamh ar sheisiúin ionas go féidir beartas teanga leanúnach a chur i bhfeidhm:

> **SOD:** *Tá sé tábhachtach go dtagann tuistí le chéile go horgánach, ach go mbíonn sé deacair aon pholasaí teanga a chur i bhfeidhm mar ní bhíonn aon cheannaireacht ag tuismitheoir amháin tharais a chéile, mar sin bíonn éascaitheoir i gceist le polasaí teanga a chur i bhfeidhm is fáilte a chur roimh thuistí agus iad a chur in aithne dá chéile.*

Chuir tuismitheoirí léargas luachmhar ar fáil ar a n-eispéiris le freastal ar sheirbhísí teanga do theaghlaigh agus do na luathbhlianta agus leis na bealaí ar fheabhsaigh na seirbhísí céanna cumas teanga a bpáistí agus ar chuir siad ar a gcumas caidrimh nua a chruthú le tuismitheoirí eile. Labhair tuismitheoir amháin ar an dóigh a raibh tionchar ag a n-eispéireas le linn phaindéim COVID19 ar a gcumas chun rochtain a fháil ar sheirbhísí Gaeilge do theaghlaigh mar thoradh ar bheartais scartha sóisialta.

> **T:** *Is é Suí is Scíth an t-imeacht is fearr a chuidigh go mór liomsa, tá an rud i ndáiríre de dhíth, go bhfuil muid ag plé le máithreacha eile agus go gcluineann na páistí muid ag plé agus go gcluineann siad an Ghaeilge, thart timpeall orainn.*

> **T:** *Sula mbíonn páistí agat, ní bhíonn a fhios agat really cad é atá de dhíth, ach ní thiocfadh liom a bheith gan na seirbhísí teaghlaigh, is cinnte nach mbeadh muid chomh rathúil is atá le cumas labhartha Gaeilge na bpáistí gan na seirbhísí agus gan an teanga a bheith chomh feiceálach thart orthu.*

> **T:** *Eispéaras iomlán éagsúil a bhí agam ag tógáil an dara leanbh sa chlann, nuair a rugadh mo chéad mhac bhí covid ann agus ní raibh rud ar bith ar siúl. Bhí Suí is Scíth mar bhuaicphointe dom achan mhí, fiú just ó thaobh bualadh le teaghlaigh eile, bhí sin iontach tábhachtach domhsa go háirithe nuair nach as an cheantar seo mé.*

Chaith na rannpháirtithe solas freisin ar an tábhacht le ról na dtuismitheoirí chun 'tearmann teanga' a ghineadh agus a chothú ní hamháin lena bpáistí féin sa bhaile ach le teaghlaigh eile ina ndéantar an chéad teagmháil trí Ghaeilge lena chinntiú gur dócha go leanfar ar aghaidh leis na caidrimh agus leis na naisc seo trí mheán na Gaeilge.

> **SOD:** *Go háirithe leis an chéad pháiste...bíonn saghas deich mbliana ansin nuair a bhíonn tú dírithe don pháiste sin, so is mó a bhíonn siad ag lorg na hócáidí sin, so bíonn na treochtaí seo ann...tiocfaidh na tuismitheoirí sa cheantar sin le chéile, cuirfidh siad aithne ar a chéile trí Ghaeilge agus seo grúpa a bheas mar chuid mór de do shaol amach anseo, seo an dream a bheas le chéile go ceann 20 bliain eile agus má chuireann tusa an caidreamh sin ar bun trí Ghaeilge, seans maith go leanfar sin trí Ghaeilge.*

Déantar tagairt freisin don tábhacht le noirm theanga bhunúsacha a leagan amach agus do mhaoirseacht tuismitheoirí agus measúnú á dhéanamh ar sheirbhísí lasmuigh den timpeallacht bhaile, inar dócha go dtiocfaidh laghdú ar úsáid na Gaeilge. Labhair na rannpháirtithe ar thionchar na seirbhísí reachtúla agus oideachais ina dtugtar Béarla isteach i saol a bpáistí, rud a d'fhéadfadh tionchar a imirt orthu agus iad ag úsáid na Gaeilge le linn dóibh a bheith ag dul in aois:

> **SOD:** *tá an saghas 'ceannas' nó an smacht ag an tuismitheoir ar an teanga a chloiseann an páiste, a úsáideann an páiste, agus eile, de réir mar a thosaítear ag meascadh sa phobal, bíonn an ceannas sin ag laghdú mar nuair a théann an páiste amach sa phobal, caithfidh muid na rúin an tearmann teanga a chur ar bun ach níl an ceannas nó an smacht iomlán sin ag an tuismitheoir.*

> **T:** *Ní féidir linn an Béarla a sheachaint, tá muid ag snámh in éadán na dtonnta, agus tchítear domhsa, faoi chúig bliain d'aois tá fuinneog iontach beag agam mar mothaím cheana féin go bhfuil sé ag aithint an difear agus go bhfuil níos mó Béarla thart air...tá Gaeilge iomlán líofa ag mo mhac as a bheith ag freastal ar chúram leanaí, anois tá an Béarla ag teacht fríd níos mó go cinnte toisc nach bhfuil Gaeilge sa bhaile ag na páistí eile.*

Chaith na rannpháirtithe solas freisin ar an tábhacht le ról agus le maoirseacht na bpáistí chun eispéiris teanga thumtha a chruthú sa bhaile agus ar an tábhacht leis an dóigh a bhfeidhmíonn siad mar chonair go dtí tumadh Gaeilge dá bpáistí de bharr inbhuanaitheacht agus fhás phobal na Gaeilge. Labhair na rannpháirtithe ar an dóigh a ndéanann siad iarracht cláir, acmhainní agus timpeallachtaí sábháilte a chruthú chun tuismitheoirí a chumhachtú agus a`spreagadh, beag beann ar a gcumas teanga agus ba cheart an cur chuige seo a spreagadh do thuismitheoirí chun a oiread Gaeilge atá acu a úsáid lena bpáistí ar bhonn rialta:

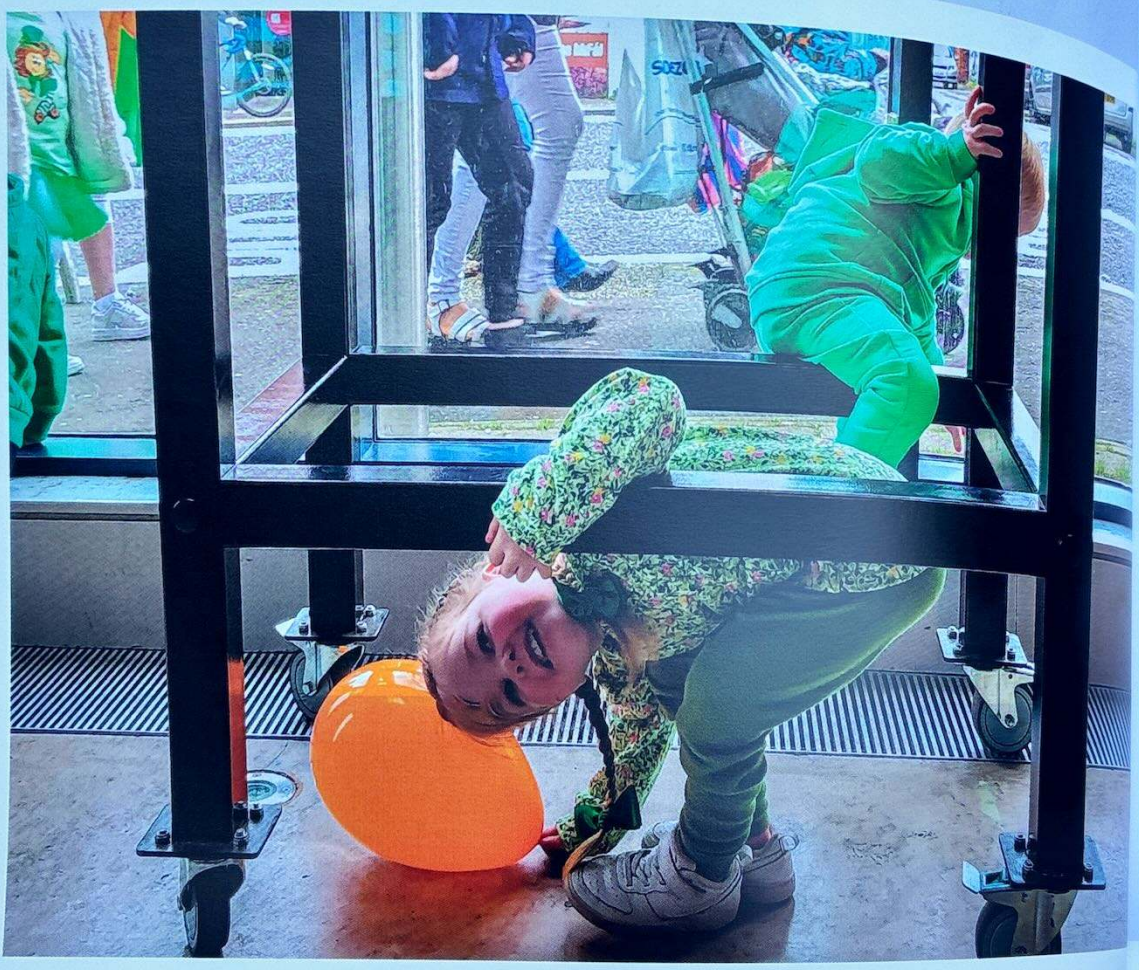
> **ATCG:** *An fhís a bhí againn ón tús ná go bhfuil na tuistí mar phríomhchuid den Oideachas. Ní thiocfadh leat seirbhísí a chur ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge gan na tuismitheoirí a bheith páirteach iontu, so má tá tú ag ceannach seirbhís cúram lae mar sin tá tú ag ceannach na seirbhíse iomlánaíche seo, tá tú mar chuid den phobal. Dar liomsa ó thaobh na feasachta teanga de, tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach ranganna, acmhainní a shocrú, áiseanna, leabhair a dhearadh srl agus tá sin ar fad dírithe ar thuismitheoirí; sin an chéad chéim isteach, sin an doras foscailte dóibh b'fhéidir freastal ar ranganna nó ag baint úsáid as seirbhísí eile.*

ATCG: *Tá muid ag iarraidh go dtógfaidh muid féinmhuinín na dtuismitheoirí - gan a bheith docht daingean ann a chiallaíonn go mbeidh nó nach mbeidh siad in ann Gaeilge a úsáid sa bhaile, agus sin an fáth a bhfuil na seirbhísí tacaíochta seo ríthábhachtach.*

ATCG: *Sílim go raibh an dearcadh ag daoine 'teanga amháin - teanga tí' so muna raibh tú chomh muiníneach le teanga amháin a úsáid, níorbh fhiú, agus mothaím nár chuidigh sin. Caithfear tús áite a thabhairt don Ghaeilge go cinnte, agus na himeachtaí agus spraoi, amhránaíocht agus eile trí mheán na Gaeilge...ach tá muid ar fad in ann cód mheascadh a dhéanamh, so sílim go gcaithfidh muid a rá nach gá a bheith buartha faoi aistriú teanga.*

Chuir rannpháirtithe léargas ar fáil ar na dúshláin a bhaineann le timpeallacht teanga leanúnach agus thumtha de bharr an stóir focal theoranta atá dírithe ar theaghlaigh atá acu agus ar an dóigh a bhfuil gá leis na cláir nó na ranganna ar leith a fhorbairt chun frásaí socraithe teaghlaigh a mhúineadh chomh maith le stór focal dá gclanna.

T: *Tá an stór focail atá agam, tá sé gann. Bheadh na himeachtaí de dhíth orm le cur leis an rud atá ar fáil sa teach, níl na hamhráin nó na ranntaí ar eolas agam...Níor tógadh le Gaeilge mé agus níor fhreastal mé ar Ghaelscoil, mar sin tá stór focail úr de dhíth ormsa. Cé go bhfuil Gaeilge agam, ní raibh mise ag plé le saol an pháiste ag an aois sin, mar sin tá mé ag foghlaim focail úra i rith an ama, agus sin an rud atá iontach faoi na leabhair, so bheadh tuilleadh a dhíth.*



Acmhainní agus Tacaíocht

Bhí an chuid is mó den phlé fócasghrúpa lárnaithe ar na hacmhainní agus ar na tacaíochtaí atá ar fáil do thuismitheoirí atá ag fanacht le húsáid na Gaeilge a mhéadú sa bhaile dá dtuismitheoirí. Rinne na rannpháirtithe a bhí ag obair i gcomhthéacs abhcóideachta tagairt ina bhfreagraí ar an tionchar a bhí ag COVID19 ar theaghlaigh agus chruthaigh siad acmhainní a chuirfeadh ar a gcumas leanúint de choinneáil a bpáistí rannpháirteach leis an teanga lasmuigh den eispéireas foirmeálta scoile. Thug sé seo an tábhacht le dul i gcomhairle le tuismitheoirí agus le measúnú a dhéanamh ar riachtanais chun solais a thuilleadh:

> **EA:** *Bhí muidinne ag iarraidh cinntiú go raibh ar a laghad rud éigin buan acu sa bhaile, go raibh siad ag cloisteáil na Gaeilge gach lá, so thosaigh muidinne ag forbairt áiseanna do thuismitheoirí, ach bhí béim níos mó air agus bhí muid ag iarraidh cinntiú go raibh muid ag freastal ar riachtanais na dtuismitheoirí. Fuair muid aischothú ó na tuismitheoirí a rá 'I thought I would never be able to read my child a story because they went to Irish school and I didn't' agus chum muid scéaltaí bunaithe ar an phaindéim ar nós ábhair cosúil le níl mé in ann mo chairde a fheiceáil, gníomhaíochtaí sa bhaile agus eile, agus ó shin, threoir sin muid san obair atá idir lámha.*

Labhair cleachtóirí agus tuismitheoirí go leor ar na seirbhísí éagsúla a chuireann siad ar fáil agus labhair siad go dearfach ar a n-eispéiris trí fhreastal ar imeachtaí do theaghlaigh trí éascaíocht a dhéanamh ar na himeachtaí céanna. Rinneadh tagairt faoi leith do chlub CLG Gaeilge, Loch Lao CLG as deis a chur ar fáil le haghaidh forbairt stóir focal agus gluaiseachta, ach as spás sóisialta a chur ar fáil freisin ina bhfuil daoine óga ag déanamh comhrá lena chéile tríd an teanga mar a threoraíonn a gcóitseálaithe:

> **ATCG:** *cumann spóirt ag feidhmiú trí mheán na Gaeilge, ag barr an chumainn bheadh céatadán níos lú de pháistí le Gaeilge acu sa bhaile ach de réir mar a théann tú síos, éiríonn sin i bhfad níos airde agus is léiriú sin ar an dóigh a bhfuil an an athbheochan ag dul i bhfeidhm... Níos mó is níos mó tá muid ag feiceáil go bhfuil daoine ag roghnú an chumainn, ní hamháin mar gheall go bhfuil an cumann ag feidhmiú trí Ghaeilge ach go bhfuil níos mó teaghlaigh ag tógáil clainne agus ag úsáid Gaeilge sa bhaile.*

Ní hamháin go ndearnadh na forbairtí dearfacha seirbhísí seo, ach rinneadh tagairt shuntasach maidir leis na tairbhí a bhaineann le hoifigeach teaghlaigh don earnáil sin amháin sa phost atá in ann naisc chomhtháite a chruthú idir eagraíochtaí sa limistéar pleanála teanga atá thart orthu, chun tacú leis an dualgas a chuirtear ar oifigigh Gaeilge a bhfuil sé d'oibleagáid orthu clár cuimsitheach imeachtaí a chruthú do gach ball den phobal chomh maith le bheith mar phointe teagmhála do theaghlaigh chun tacaíocht agus treoir a thairiscint maidir le seirbhísí Gaeilge do theaghlaigh:

> **ATCG:** *'Is buntáiste eile dúinn go bhfuil oifigeach teaghlaigh ag obair ar an achar oibre seo den chéad úr ariamh. Bíonn oifigigh forbartha agus oibrí pobail go mór gafa le réimse leathan oibre le clár a sholáthar ar bheagán airgid agus is iontach go bhfuil duine ann anois leis an choiste a tharraingt le chéile agus cuid den ualach oibre sin sa chlár a bhrú chun tosaigh agus fiú le teagmháil dhíreach a dhéanamh le tuismitheoirí.*

Chuir na rannpháirtithe léargas ar fáil chomh maith maidir leis na deacrachtaí i soláthar seirbhísí agus acmhainní lenar cuimsíodh plé ar chineálacha éagsúla meán agus inrochtaineacht, uainiú agus minicíocht na seirbhísí. Mhol tuismitheoir amháin an áis léitheoireachta ag a leabharlann áitiúil ina bhfuil réimse

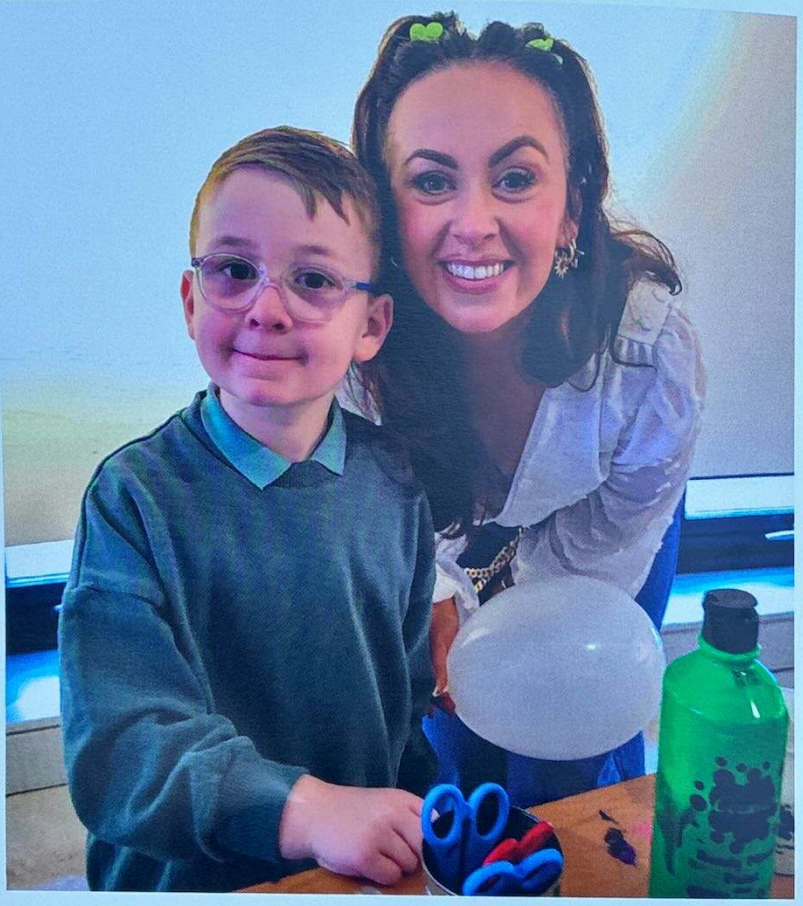
leabhar Gaeilge atá aois-oiriúnach, ach; luadh deacrachtaí maidir le líon an ábhair oiriúnaigh ó leab
go cláir theilifíse atá oiriúnach do pháistí atá idir 0-3 bliana d'aois. Cheap siad gurbh iondúil go na
struchtúir chasta teanga ag baint leis na cláir a bhí dírithe ar pháistí a bhí in aois na réamhscoile.

> **T:** *Cuid de na cláracha nach bhfuil fóirsteanach - tá easpa cláracha ar fáil don aoisghrúpa sin idir 0-3.*

> **T:** *Tá easpa leabhair ann faoi choinne an aoisghrúpa faoi 3 bhliain d'aois - ní miste liom na scéaltaí céanna a léamh leo ach muna bhfuil na scéaltaí níl ceachtar againn chun sult a bhaint as. Tá sé tábhachtach go bhfuil caighdeán maith ann don leanbh agus tuismitheoir*

> **T:** *Maidir le Cbeebies, tá cláracha deasa ann cosúil le scéaltaí am dhul a luí agus ba bhreá liom dá mbeinn in ann sin a fháil i nGaeilge.*

Maidir le hinrochtaineacht na seirbhísí do theaghlaigh trí mheán na Gaeilge, thug tuismitheoirí agus cleachtóirí léargas ar uainiú agus ar mhinicíocht na n-imeachtaí agus ar an dóigh ar féidir leis tionchar a imirt ar chumas na dtuismitheoirí freastal ar sheisiúin. Moladh go bhféadfadh na seisiúin a bheith dírithe ar thuismitheoirí agus ar leanaí nó lapadáin le bheith ar siúl Dé Céadaoin le linn uaireanta oibre chun freastal ar mháithreacha atá ar saoire mháithreachais ag an am sin. In ainneoin seirbhísí a chur ar fáil chun freastal ar riachtanais na máithreacha nua, caitheadh solas ar dheacrachtaí a bhaineann leis na rannpháirtithe a choinneáil agus le tuismitheoirí a bhíonn ag an obair:



> **ATCG:** *Don chuid is mó san obair tuistí agus tachráin bíonn tú ag plé le máithreacha, ach i ndiaidh dóibh pilleadh ar obair i ndiaidh tréimhse máithreachais, cailleann tú iad, is ansin tá tú ag toiseacht arís.*

> **T:** *Mar thuismitheoirí, is breá linn leanúnachas. Bíonn an saol ar fad bunaithe ar schedule agus cuidíonn sé le routine a choinneáil...Maidin dé Sathairn nó maidin dé Domhnaigh, sin an t-am is luachmhara atá ann.*

> **T:** *Nuair a bhíonn imeachtaí ann, uair sa ráithe atá ann agus cailleann tú é agus i ndiaidh sin b'fhéidir nach bhfaighidh tú deis eile freastal ar imeacht go ceann 6 seachtain eile.*

> **T:** *Thaitin scéim samhraidh na dteaghlach go mór liom ach anois i mbliana go bhfuil mé ar ais ar obair, ní bheidh mé in ann freastal ar an tseachtain ina iomláine. Bheadh sé ar dóigh dá dtiocfadh le himeachtaí teaghlaigh a reáchtáil ar bhonn seachtainiúil in áit seachtain iomlán, go háirithe do na tuismitheoirí atá ag obair.*

Labhair tuismitheoirí freisin faoin ghanntanas seirbhísí a bhí ann dar leo maidir le seirbhísí agus imeachtaí Gaeilge a bhí dírithe ar theaghlaigh mar thoradh ar bheith ina gcónaí díreach lasmuigh de limistéar pleanála teanga Gaeilge Bhéal Feirste Thiar. Labhair siad ar a dheacra a bhí sé béim leanúnach a leagan ar rannpháirtíocht trí Ghaeilge sa bhaile gan na seirbhísí seo agus ar an dóigh a mbeadh siad toilteanach taisteal go Béal Feirste chun freastal ar a leithéid de sheirbhísí:

> **T:** *Tá fíorbheagán sna ceantair taobh amuigh de Bhéal Feirste ó thaobh imeachtaí de, tá rud amháin ann, tá dhá rud i lár na seachtaine, ceann acu atá maith ach tá sé dírithe ar dhaoine atá ag foghlaim, ach don té atá ag tógáil clainne le Gaeilge, níl sé ag freastal ormsa...tá neart ar siúil ag Sure Start agus eile ach níl mé in ann freastal orthu mar gheall ar chúrsaí oibre. Tá imeachtaí de dhíth ormsa ag deireadh na seachtaine atá measartha rialta, tá mise sásta tiomáint go Béal Feirste nó go hArd Mhacha nó go Muineachán fiú, tá na himeachtaí ar fad dírithe ar an tsaoire máithreachais.*

Rinneadh tagairt do Mhaoiniú agus d'infheistíocht sna Luathbhlianta agus i seirbhísí Gaeilge do theaghlaigh mar rudaí práinneacha ionas go mbeadh comhlachtaí reachtúla agus abhcóideachta in ann freastal ar an éileamh agus chun acmhainní a chur ar fáil do na seirbhísí riachtanacha sin. Labhair na hoifigigh ar an dóigh a bhfuil siad ag brath ar photaí maoinithe gearrthréimhseacha, beaga, dírialta chun clár seirbhísí a chur ar fáil lena gcuimsítear roinnt mhaith ama agus acmhainní maidir le riarachán na ndeontas maoinithe seo.

> **T:** *Tá muid ag brath ar photaí beaga maoinithe chun clár cuimsitheach agus éascaitheoirí a íoc. Ar a bharr sin, coinníonn muidinne na táillí a ghearrann muid ar na himeachtaí iontach íseal, cuid mhaith de na himeachtaí atá saor in aisce, bíonn sé deacair iarraidh ar thuismitheoirí £50-£60 a íoc as seirbhísí ar bharr na gcostaisí maireachtála agus a thagann le clann a thógáil.*

Rinneadh go leor tagairtí do na costais mhaireachtála atá ag méadú agus don bhrú atá ar theaghlaigh ar fud Thuaisceart Éireann go ginearálta chun íoc as seirbhísí teaghlaigh nach bhfuil dóthain tacaíochta reachtúla acu, gan trácht ar an easpa sruthanna maoinithe ar leith ná ar na beartais maidir le soláthar Gaeilge na seirbhísí do theaghlaigh atá bunaithe sa phobal ó mhaoinitheoirí reachtúla, lena n-áirítear Foras na Gaeilge. Ar an dóigh sin, tá tionchar aige seo ar chumas na dteaghlach rochtain a fháil ar phríomhsheirbhísí teanga a bheidh ina gcabhair cultúr de thumadh teanga a chothú i mblianta múnlaitheacha i saol na bpáistí:

> **T:** *Ba cheart go mbeadh tuistí in ann teacht chugainn ag tús aistear agus leanúint leis an chlár sin ar feadh na mbliantaí, an t-eolas ar fad tugtha dóibh agus tacaíocht chuí tugtha dóibh. Níl na hacmhainní againn chun é sin a dhéanamh, bheifeá ag caint ar infheistíocht shuntasach chun sin a chur sa tsiúl.*

> **CL:** *Bíonn muidinne i gcónaí a rá go gcaithfidh muid a bheith ar an chaighdeán is airde agus is féidir linn ach tá sé deacair mar níl an tacaíocht ann ón Rialtas do na tuismitheoirí chun tacú leo a bheith ag íoc as seirbhís ar ardchaighdeán...Níl infheistíocht ar bith curtha isteach sna luathbhlianta Gaeilge.*

Oiliúint agus Forbairt Lucht Saothair

Chuir na rannpháirtithe léargas go leor ar fáil ar na deacrachtaí a bhaineann le ceisteanna earcaíochta agus ganntanas oiliúna a bhaineann le soláthar seirbhísí do na luathbhlianta agus do theaghlaigh sa Ghaeilge. Labhair rannpháirtí amháin ar 'ghéarchéim earcaíochta' ag a bhfuil tionchar ar an earnáil mar thoradh ar easpa rannpháirtithe cáilithe ag a bhfuil na tacair scileanna le hoibriú i gcomhthéacsanna do luathbhlianta agus do theaghlaigh. Rinneadh plé ar dheacrachtaí a bhaineann le cúrsaí oiliúna atá ar fáil do chleachtóirí luathbhlianta, rud a chaith solas ar easpa fócais ar chleachtais tumtha do dhaoine fásta oiliúint atá ag obair i gcomhthéacsanna Gaeilge. É sin ráite, chruthaigh eagraíochtaí atá fréamhaithe sa phobal áitiúil, Altram[5] agus Gaelchúrsaí[6]na chéad chláir oiliúna le haghaidh na luathbhlianta a rinne difríocht mhór mhillteach agus a bhí lárnach maidir le forbairt na hearnála IM.

Thuairiscigh na rannpháirtithe freisin gur tháinig laghdú ollmhór ar fhostaithe ón earnáil sin mar thoradh ar phaindéim COVID19 agus go raibh sé dúshlánach líon na mball foirne a bhí ag obair sna háiteanna seo a thabhairt ar ais. Gné mhór ag a bhfuil tionchar ar a gcinneadh an earnáil teaghlaigh agus luathbhlianta a fhágáil ná mar thoradh ar na tuarastail ísle a íoctar do na baill foirne:

> **ATCG:** *Níl an lucht oibre ag fás gasta go leor. Níl go leor daoine ag teacht fríd an chóras agus tá sé thar a bheith deacair maoiniú a fháil chun daoine sa bhreis a fhostú chomh maith.*

> **CL:** *I ndiaidh covid, chaill muid cuid mhór daoine, cuid acu chaill muid iad chuig a leithéid de Tesco agus Lidl a bhí ag tabhairt níos mó airgid faoi choinne níos lú oibre agus ní raibh na freagrachtaí céanna orthu...tá sé thar a bheith dúshlánach daoine a fháil isteach agus ní shílim go dtuigeann daoine an mhéid oibre atá i gceist le cúram lae agus an mhéid foghlaim a dhéanann na páistí agus iad anseo.*

> **EA:** *Níl an luach atá curtha ar rólanna sna luathbhlianta maith go leor. Seasfaidh siad suas ag Stormont a rá cé chomh tábhachtach agus luachmhar is atá na luathbhlianta...bíonn oibrí sna luathbhlianta freagrach as cúram leanaí, cumhdach leanaí, forbairt iomlánach an pháiste, sláinte mheabhrach, sláinte mhothúchánach...tá siad freagrach as an oiread seo agus táthar ag tabhairt pá íseal dóibh.*

Bhí na rannpháirtithe ar fad ar chomhaontú go bhfuil an ráta pá d'oibrithe seirbhísí luathbhlianta thar a bheith íseal de bharr na freagrachta agus na tábhachta a bhaineann le bheith ag obair le teaghlaigh agus daoine óga. Mhaígh na rannpháirtithe nach gcuirtear luach ar na hoibrithe seo an dóigh chéanna gus a chuirtear ar mhúinteoirí mar shampla, in ainneoin a bheith ina n-oideoirí ag a bhfuil freagrachtaí cúraim agus a dteastaíonn tacar sainscileanna uathúil uathu le hoibriú le daoine óga agus lena dtuismitheoirí. Ní

[5] https://www.altram.org/

[6] https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057252048592

hamháin sin ach tá próiseas fada a bhaint leis na cáilíochtaí a theastaíonn le hoibriú i gcomhthéacsanna seirbhíse luathbhlianta agus teaghlaigh a shealbhú, agus is cosúil gur rud é a chuireann na hoibrithe ó dhoras:

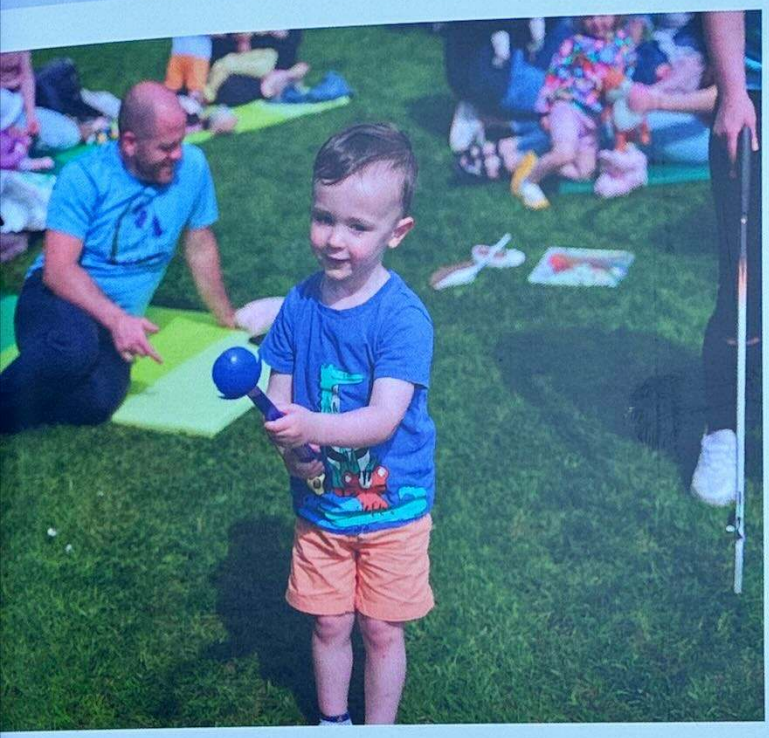
> **EA:** *Cuid mhaith de na hoibrithe sna luathbhlianta, bíonn post eile acu, bíonn 2 nó trí phost acu, agus don chuid is mó mná óga atá iontu, tá an obair millteanach trom agus tá an fhreagracht millteanach trom, agus níl an tuarastal ag teacht leis an ualach oibre.*

> **ATCG:** *Glacann sé 2 bhliain ar dhuine a bheith cáilithe ag leibhéal 3 - tá muid ag cailleadh daoine mar gheall air sin agus níl go leor daoine ag teacht fríd. Níl an luach ceart ar an obair. Nuair a amharcann tú ar na rátaí tuarastail agus eile, níl sé ag teacht leis na smaointí gurb iad na luathbhliantaí na bliantaí is tábhachtaí...caitear leis na daoine atá ag tabhairt faoin obair seo go huafásach.*

Chaith na rannpháirtithe solas freisin ar éilimh na n-oibrithe a bhaineann le nádúr na seirbhísí luathbhlianta agus teaghlaigh, agus maíonn na rannpháirtithe céanna go bhfuil tacar sainscileanna ag teastáil chun déileáil le teaghlaigh ar leibhéal tréadach. Bíonn dualgas orthu comhairle agus tacaíocht a chur ar fáil do thuismitheoirí freisin. Mhol na tuismitheoirí na cleachtóirí Gaeilge go hard na spéire i limistéar pleanála teanga Bhéal Feirste Thiar as a ngairmiúlacht agus as a saineolas.

> **ATCG:** *Nuair atá tú ag plé le teaghlaigh, go háirithe leis na luathbhlianta, caithfidh an duine a bheith iomlán cumasach. Ní oibrí luathbhlianta amháin atá i gceist, caithfidh tú a bheith mar chomhairleoir, oibrí sóisialta in amanna agus tú ag láimhseáil dúshláin a thagann chun solais. Glacann sé am ar dhaoine a thraenáil.*

> **T:** *Tá an-saineolas ag na hoibrithe ansin atá ag obair sna tograí Gaeilge a bhfuil muid ag freastal air...ba léir sin. Sula raibh páistí agam bhí mé iomlán aineolach agus shíl mé go dtiocfadh le cibé duine a bheith ag plé le páistí ach ba léir nach fíor sin.*



Feasacht a Spreagadh

Cuimsíodh leis an téama deiridh a pléadh le linn na seisiún fócasghrúpa, feasacht a [illegible] tuismitheoirí, eagraíochtaí agus comhlachtaí reachtúla maidir leis na tairbhí a bhaineann [illegible] thógáil trí Ghaeilge agus na tairbhí a bhaineann le dátheangachas luath. Labhair na [illegible] an dualgas atá acu cur in iúl do na tuismitheoirí faoi na buntáistí ar fad a bhaineann le páistí [illegible] go dátheangach. Labhair na rannpháirtithe ar na tairbhí a bhaineann le cláir thumtha luath [illegible] dóigh a gcuireann seirbhísí do theaghlaigh blianta breise de theagmháil leis an teanga sula [illegible] na páistí oideachas foirmiúil.

> **CL:** *deis forbartha iontach a bheireann sin do pháistí, bheireann an t-eispéireas luathbhlianta agus é trí mheán na Gaeilge bliantaí breise de thaithí do pháistí a bheith sáite sa teanga aischothú a fuarthas ó tuismitheoirí nach bhfuil Gaeilge acu.*

Labhair na rannpháirtithe freisin ar an ghá le cur chuige uileghabhálach agus comhoibríoch i bhfeidhm idir comhlachtaí reachtúla agus grúpaí teanga chun soláthar a leathnú a thuilleadh [illegible] chun feabhas a chur ar sheirbhísí. Labhair na rannpháirtithe freisin ar na buntáistí breise a bhaineann [illegible] teagmháil leis an teanga a mhéadú ar mhaithe le pobal na Gaeilge agus ar mhaithe le cur le hiarraidh [illegible] maidir le hathbheochan na teanga.

> **SOD:** *is gá cur chuige iomlánach idir phobal agus stáit le sin a dhéanamh, agus feictear don[illegible] nach bhfuil sé sin really ag tarlú. Tá an phleanáil teanga ag déanamh an-obair ach feictear dom nach bhfuil an tacaíocht acu ón mbarr anuas.*

> **ATCG:** *Caithfidh muid a bheith muiníneach i dtaobh fís s'againn... is cinnte go bhfuil buntáistí ann a bhaineann leis an dátheangachas ach tá rud eile níos doimhne i gceist anseo, inár gcro[illegible] inár n-anam, tá muid ag iarraidh tabhairt faoi athbheochan, athreimniú teanga, tá muid ag iarraidh tabhairt faoin díchoilíniú, agus sílim go gcaithfidh muid a bheith muiníneach é sin a rá.*

Luaigh na tuismitheoirí na buntáistí arís eile a bhaineann lena bpáistí a bheith á dtógáil trí Ghaeilge agus an dóigh ar fhorbair siad feasacht chultúrtha agus theangeolaíoch, an dóigh a mbeidh siad [illegible] shócmhainn dá bpiaraí nuair a chuirfidh siad tús le hoideachas foirmeálta agus an dóigh a mbeidh [illegible] ina dtacaíocht do pháistí nach bhfuil á dtógáil trí Ghaeilge agus chomh maith leis sin, an dóigh ar c[illegible] pobal na teanga braistint chómhuintearais dá bpáistí.

> **T:** *Aithníonn mo mhac nuair atá duine ag labhairt i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla, fiú mé féin agus mo chéile nuair a bhíonn muid ag labhairt i mBéarla, tugann sé amach dúinn. Tá an tuiscint atá aige ar an domhan cheanna féin chomh suimiúil, fiú ar an dóigh a mbíonn daoine ag labhairt, an dóigh a n-aithníonn sé an éagsúlacht sin, nuair a chluineann muid daoine, b'fhéidir ó thíortha eile ag labhairt sa pháirc, bíonn sé a rá liom, an bhfuil siadsan ag labhairt i nGaeilge, but aithníonn sé gur teanga iomlán éagsúil í.*

> **T:** *Dúradh linn go mbeidh mo mhac chomh luachmhar sa tseomra ranga, cosúil le support worker, sa rang mar gheall go bhfuil Gaeilge sa bhaile aige. Beidh tuiscint mhaith aige ar cad é atá ag dul ar aghaidh, beidh sé in ann treoracha a leanúint agus beidh páistí eile ag déanamh aithris air.*

> **T:** *An dóigh a mothaíonn muid mar chuid de phobal, agus an dóigh a mothaíonn mo mhac cheana féin mar chuid de. Sílim go bhfuil a sense of place i gceist leis agus sílim go bhfuil sin thar a bheith tábhachtach dúinn mar chlann.*

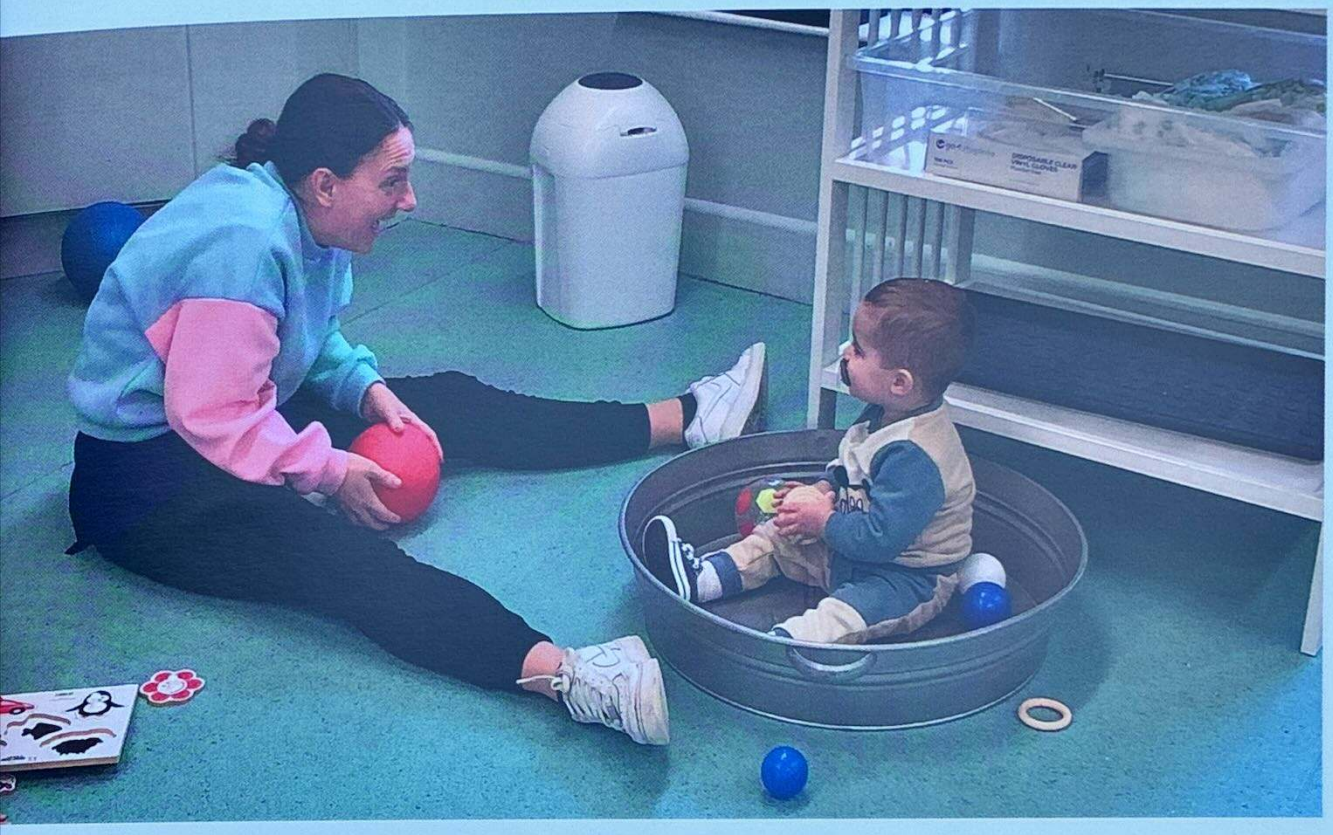
Labhair na rannpháirtithe chomh maith ar an dul chun cinn a rinneadh maidir le spásanna a chruthú inar féidir an Ghaeilge a úsáid ar leibhéal sóisialta agus orgánach; an dóigh nach bhféachtar uirthi mar mhodh sealbhaithe ach mar mhodh cumarsáide agus comhrá le hÉireannaigh. Mhol na rannpháirtithe na deiseanna atá ar fáil do thuismitheoirí anois, agus chaith siad solas ar na forbairtí suntasacha a rinneadh thar thréimhse deich mbliana anuas go háirithe:

> **EA:** *Sílim le blianta fada, ní raibh mórán ann, agus bhí an dearcadh ann go raibh an Ghaeilge mar ábhar scoile agus ba sin é. Nuair a bhí mise ag teagasc, bhí daltaí ann a shíl ok labhairfidh mé Gaeilge anseo, ach a luaithe is a théim amach geata na scoile, Béarla amháin...mothaím anois go bhfuil roghanna níos fearr ann agus go bhfuil fógraíocht níos fearr déanta ar na himeachtaí.*

> **ATCG:** *Sílim go bhfuil muid in áit éagsúil anois ná mar a bhí muid 20 bliain ó shin nuair a bhí muid féin ar scoil, agus an Ghaeilge mar theanga a labhraíodh ar scoil amháin, agus sílim gur sin an sprioc is mó atá againn mar ghrúpa comhoibrithe ag teacht le chéile, go bhfuil an Ghaeilge le cloisteáil agus le húsáid thart ar na háiteanna a théann teaghlaigh de ghnáth agus é sin a dhéanamh chomh nadúrtha agus is féidir.*

> **ATCG:** *Cuireadh an bhéim ar an ghaeloideachas; is é sin an tobar ach ní sin an ceann scríbe, mar sin tá muid ag iarraidh pobal, inmharthana teanga a thógáil. Ní thig linn sin a dhéanamh le Gaeloideachas amháin...an áit a bhfuil muid ag iarraidh dul agus an áit is dúshlánaí ná daoine a bheith ag tógáil clainne le Gaeilge sa bhaile.*

Labhair na rannpháirtithe ar an tábhacht leis na hiarrachtaí leanúnacha chun feasacht a spreagadh ní hamháin ar mhaithe leis na buntáistí cognaíocha a bhaineann le dátheangachas ach an tábhacht le teanga agus le haithint na gcearta agus dóigh ar féidir tuilleadh deiseanna a ghineadh agus a fhorbairt chun tuilleadh teaghlach a spreagadh an Ghaeilge a úsáid sa bhaile.



> **EA:** *Ghlac sé tamall fada orainn a bheith ag comhoibriú lena leithéid de chláir den saoi oideachais, 'Getting Ready to Learn' mar shampla, go háirithe mar gheall ar covid agus na comhráití agus feachtasaíocht a thit amach maidir le cúrsaí dlíthiúla agus dualgas i dtaobh cearta teanga, tá anois daoine ag teacht chugainn ar lorg tuilleadh deiseanna den chomhoibriú.*

> **ATCG:** *Tá an ardú feasachta ríthábhachtach - leis an chaidreamh le leanbh ach go háirithe ba mhaith leat go mbeidh an teagmháil sin chomh nadúrtha agus is féidir, caithfidh muid a bheith tuisceanach faoi seo, cad é is féidir linn a dhéanamh le tacú le níos mó tuismitheoirí na céimeanna seo a ghlacadh.*

Tar éis achoimre a thabhairt ar na téamaí follasacha ó na sonraí taighde a bailíodh mar chuid den mheasúnú seo, cuirfear anailís achoimre ar fáil ar na téamaí taighde sula ndéanfar moltaí le haghaidh tuilleadh forbartha maidir le seirbhísí teanga do theaghlaigh.

Achoimre

Sna sonraí a bailíodh mar chuid den tuarascáil taighde mheastóireachta seo, aimsíodh cuntais shaibhre agus léirsteanacha ó pháirtithe leasmhara éagsúla in earnáil na Gaeilge do theaghlaigh, lena n-áirithe ó thuismitheoirí iad féin, rud tábhachtach. Luadh na téamaí seo a leanas mar phointí coitianta plé i measc na dtuismitheoirí, i measc baill foirne d'eagraíochtaí seirbhíse do theaghlaigh, agus ionadaithe ó chomhlachtaí abhcóideachta agus reachtúla:

- Caidrimh agus Maoirseacht Tuismitheoirí a Chothú
- Acmhainní agus Tacaíocht
- Oiliúint agus Forbairt Lucht Saothair
- Feasacht a Spreagadh

Is léir go bhfuil eagraíochtaí atá páirteach in earnáil na Gaeilge do na luathbhlianta agus do theaghlaigh ag tabhairt faoi cheannródaíocht chun an réimse seo a chruthú agus a fhorbairt, agus is minic nach mbíonn ach beagán tacaíochta reachtúla acu má bhíonn ar chor ar bith ná infheistíocht leordhóthanach i seirbhísí. In ainneoin na ndúshlán seo, leanann siad de sheirbhísí riachtanacha a chur ar fáil a chothaíonn fás na Gaeilge i measc páistí óga agus a dteaghlaigh. Leagann an gealltanas seo béim ar thiomantas agus ar acmhainneacht na ndaoine atá ag obair san earnáil, rud a cruthaíodh roinnt uaireanta i sonraí an taighde. Caithfear céimeanna a thógáil chun tuismitheoirí a chumhachtú trí thacú leo muinín agus inniúlacht theangeolaíoch a fhorbairt, rud atá riachtanach chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar theanga a bhfuil borradh fúithi sa phobal trí chultúir de thumadh teangeolaíoch a chothú i ndinimic theaghlaigh. Nuair a chuireann na tuismitheoirí acmhainní agus tacaíocht ar fáil, d'fhéadfadh sé go n-aireodh na tuismitheoirí níos cumasaí chun Gaeilge a thabhairt isteach ina saol laethúil, rud a neartaíonn an teanga laistigh den bhaile. Is féidir an cumhachtú seo a bhaint amach trí cheardlanna, trí ghrúpaí tacaíochta, trí sholáthar seirbhísí agus trí eolas inrochtana faoi shealbhú teanga. Tá feasacht ar teanga an bhaile agus ar stór focal atá dírithe ar an teaghlach riachtanach agus teastaíonn acmhainní ó

theaghlaigh atá in ann freastal ar idirghníomhaíochtaí laethúla, rud a chabhraíonn le húsáid na Gaeilge a normalú sa bhaile. Tá an bhéim seo ar stór focal atá praiticiúil, dírithe ar an teaghlach in ann an teanga a dhéanamh níos inrochtana agus inúsáidte sa saol laethúil laistigh de chomhthéacsanna tumtha nó dátheangacha. Tá sé riachtanach freisin go mbeadh imeachtaí agus seirbhísí ar fáil go leanúnach agus go bhfógrófar iad go soiléir agus go ndéantar idirdhealú idir na cinn atá dírithe ar theaghlaigh a úsáideann Gaeilge mar theanga bhaile cheana agus na cinn atá dírithe ar theaghlaigh atá ag foghlaim na teanga. Tá an t-idirdhealú seo ina chabhair lena chinntiú go ndírítear ar na himeachtaí go cuí, agus fágann sé seo go gcothaítear timpeallacht thacúil do gach teaghlach beag beann ar a n-inniúlacht teanga reatha.

Maidir le soláthar na n-acmhainní, tá cruthú na n-acmhainní atá aois-oiriúnach riachtanach le haghaidh forbairt éifeachtach na scileanna teanga teaghlaigh. Ba cheart do na hacmhainní seo freastal ar chéimeanna forbartha na bpáistí, rud a dhéanann an Ghaeilge níos spraíúla agus níos tairbhí do na páistí agus dá dtuismitheoirí araon. Tá riachtanas géar ann le tuilleadh seirbhísí a spreagann páistí Gaeilge a labhairt lena chéile. Nuair a chruthaítear timpeallachtaí inar féidir le páistí idirghníomhú i nGaeilge, is féidir leis sin a bheith ina chabhair scileanna teanga a fhorbairt go nádúrtha agus go tarraingteach lena bpiaraí. Mhol go leor rannpháirtithe taighde go mba cheart go mbeadh na seirbhísí seo a bheith ar fáil ag an deireadh seachtaine agus ar bhonn rialta chun freastal ar sceidil teaghlaigh éagsúla agus chun teagmháil leanúnach leis an teanga a chinntiú. Tá infheistíocht shuntasach i soláthar seirbhíse pobail agus forbairt beartais ábhartha riachtanach freisin chun tacú le fás na hearnála Gaeilge do theaghlaigh. Cuimsítear leis sin, a bheith ag díriú ar acmhainní leordhóthanacha a chur ar fáil idir ábhar agus airgead, chun teagmháil agus tionchar na gclár seo a chothú agus a leathnú, cláir, is léir, atá ag teastáil ó phobal na Gaeilge atá ag fás.

Maidir le deiseanna oiliúna agus deiseanna maidir le forbairt an luchta saothair, tá sé riachtanach go n-aithnítear agus go gcuirtear luach ar an mhéid a dhéanann na hoibrithe seirbhíse teanga luathbhlianta

agus teaghlaigh. Má dhéantar infheistíocht ina bhforbairt agus má chinntítear go bhfuil na scileanna agus na cáilíochtaí cuí acu, cuirfidh sé sin feabhas ar cháilíocht an oideachais agus an chúraim a chuirtear ar fáil. Cuimsítear leis seo feasacht a spreagadh ar na buntáistí a bhaineann le dátheangachas agus le suntasacht chultúrtha de bheith i do chainteoir Gaeilge, rud a chothaíonn braistint phobail agus braistint chómhuintearais. Tá straitéis forbartha luchta saothair riachtanach chun tacú le fás na hearnála, agus ba cheart go gcuimseofaí leis sin athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar na cáilíochtaí a theastaíonn le haghaidh oibrithe seirbhíse teanga teaghlaigh agus oiliúint ar leith a chur ar fáil le haghaidh soláthar seirbhíse tumtha teaghlaigh.

Faoi dheireadh, tá sé riachtanach go gcruthaítear deiseanna maidir le húsáid na teanga lasmuigh den seomra ranga agus lasmuigh de sholáthar foirmeálta do na luathbhlianta ionas go gcothófar an teanga do na glúnta a thiocfaidh inár ndiaidh. Nuair a spreagtar úsáid na Gaeilge i roinnt comhthéacsanna, cabhraíonn sé le páistí agus le teaghlaigh glacadh léi mar theanga bheo, teanga atá lárnach in saol laethúil agus ina n-idirghníomhaíochtaí sa phobal. Tá sé riachtanach go spreagtar feasacht faoi na buntáistí a bhaineann le dátheangachas freisin; rud a chruthaítear ar fud na tuarascála, cuireann dátheangachas tairbhí cognaíocha, síceolaíochta, fiseolaíocha, agus sóisialta ar fáil. Má chuirtear na buntáistí sin chun cinn, d'fhéadfaí tuilleadh teaghlach a spreagadh páirt a ghlacadh in oideachas Gaeilge agus tacú le fás na teanga laistigh dá bpobail féin, agus sa bhaile go háirithe. Ina leith sin, nuair a spreagtar feasacht faoin tábhacht le deiseanna a chruthú lasmuigh den seomra ranga, cabhraíonn sé leis an teanga a chothú mar theanga phobail. D'fhéadfadh imeachtaí pobail, gníomhaíochtaí seach-churaclaim, imeachtaí tuismitheora/lapadáin agus tionscnaimh eile a bheith ina ndóigheanna spreagúla do pháistí agus do theaghlaigh úsáid a bhaint as an Ghaeilge sa saol laethúil.

Nochtann meascán de thorthaí ó shonraí an fhócasghrúpa agus an tsuirbhé, léargas suntasach ar na riachtanais agus ar na dúshláin a léiríodh a bhíonn roimh an earnáil Gaeilge teaghlaigh. Má thugtar aghaidh ar na dúshláin agus má dhéantar infheistíocht i bpríomhréimsí amhail caidrimh a chothú agus maoirseacht tuismitheoirí, acmhainní agus tacaíocht a chur ar fáil, an lucht saothair a fhorbairt agus feasacht a spreagadh, is féidir timpeallacht thacúil agus bhríomhar a chruthú do na baill is óige inár bpobal atá ag fás.

Conclúid agus Moltaí

Rinneadh scrúdú sa tuarascáil taighde mheastóireachta seo ar sholáthar seirbhíse Gaeilge reatha do theaghlaigh i Limistéar Líonra Pleanála Teanga Gaeilge i mBéal Feirste Thiar. Leagadh amach forléargas comhthéacsúil ar an earnáil teaghlaigh chomh maith le scoláireacht ábhartha agus beartas ábhartha maidir leis na himpleachtaí a bhaineann le cláir thumtha dhúchasacha agus maidir le soláthar seirbhíse. Úsáideadh na ceisteanna taighde mar chreat treorach chun modheolaíocht ilmhódach, rannpháirteach lena n-áirítear cúrsaíocht suirbhé anaithnid i measc tuismitheoirí agus i measc cúig fhócasghrúpa leath-struchtúrtha agus plé agallaimh le cleachtóirí luathbhlianta, le heagraíochtaí reachtúla agus abhcóideachta agus le tuismitheoirí. In ainneoin an tsampla bhig, fuarthas cuntas cuimsitheach sna sonraí agus sna fianaisí a bailíodh, cuntas cuimsitheach ar soláthar seirbhíse reatha sa limistéar pleanála teanga agus lasmuigh de, lenar cuimsíodh ionadaíocht ó lasmuigh de Limistéar Bhéal Feirste Thiar agus tuaisceart na hÉireann.

- Forbairt ar fheachtas straitéiseach, dírithe agus leanúnach a léiríonn ní hamháin na buntáistí cognaíocha a bhaineann le tumadh luath teanga ach na buntáistí fiseolaíocha agus aigneolaíocha a bhaineann le cur chun cinn agus caomhnú teanga dúchais
- Tá tuilleadh deiseanna le cur san áireamh leis an soláthar seirbhíse feabhsaithe agus breise sa Limistéar Líonra Pleanála Teanga Gaeilge le aghaidh tumadh Gaeilge agus teagmháil leis an Ghaeilge i seirbhísí sláinte agus cúram réamhbhreithe do theaghlaigh atá ag súil le páise, a dtugtar na hacmhainní cuí agus an t-airgead ceart dóibh.
- Infheistíocht leanúnach shuntasach ó ranna reachtúla chun soláthar Gaeilge do na luathbhlianta agus do theaghlaigh a fheabhsú agus a mhéadú.
- Tá acmhainní foghlama agus tumtha baile feabhsaithe le forbairt agus le cur ar fáil do theaghlaigh ón chéim réamhbhreithe suas chomh fada le haois na scoile ag a bhfuil ionchur ó pháirtí leasmhar Gaeilge agus a chuirtear ar fáil d'úsáideoirí agus d'fhoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge ag brath ar riachtanais na dteaghlach.
- Dearadh agus cur i bhfeidhm straitéise forbartha seirbhíse Gaeilge do theaghlaigh a spreagann agus a mheallann daoine glacadh le róil cleachtóra teanga do theaghlaigh amach anseo mar aon le hathbhreithniú ar thuarastal reatha agus dálaí oibre d'oibrithe luathbhlianta.
- Forbairt an tumtha teanga fheabhsaithe dírithe ar chláir oiliúna do chleachtóirí teanga do theaghlaigh.
- Forbairt na modhanna tumtha teanga atá níos feiliúnaí ó thaobh aoise agus teanga de trí thuilleadh acmhainní meán agus litríochta clóite a chruthú atá dírithe ar na blianta 0–3.
- Cur i bhfeidhm na moltaí sin sa limistéar pleanála teanga Gaeilge i mBéal Feirste Thiar chun samhail dea-chleachtais a chruthú atá in ann tacú le feabhsú na seirbhísí ar fud Bhéal Feirste agus níos faide i gcéin, go háirithe i gceantair thuaithe.

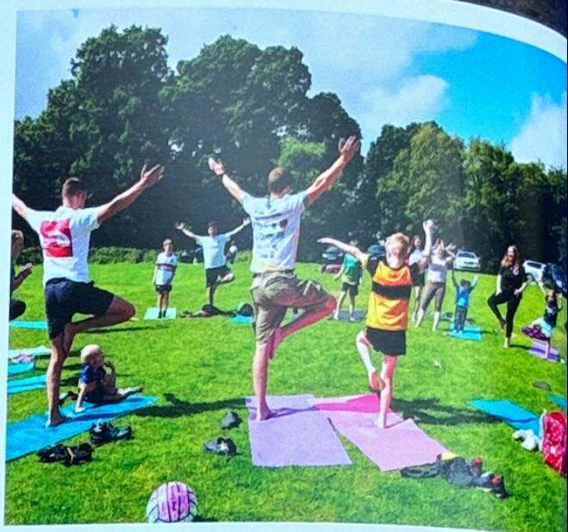
Tugann na torthaí le fios, cé go raibh tionchar suntasach ag na seirbhísí Gaeilge reatha do theaghlaigh i mBéal Feirste Thiar ar theaghlaigh atá ag tógáil a gclainne trí Ghaeilge agus ar na teaghlaigh atá ag foghlaim Gaeilge lena bpáistí, tá roinnt saincheisteanna a bhaineann leo maidir le maoiniú leordhóthanach, acmhainní agus lucht saothair. Léirigh na tuismitheoirí ar fud Thuaisceart Éireann, a ghlac páirt sa taighde, tacaíocht shuntasach agus dúirt go mbeadh tairbhí na seirbhísí ar fhreastail siad orthu thar a bheith dearfach. Is iad na héascaitheoirí cláir, a d'eagraigh agus a reáchtáil na seisiúin, a chabhraigh le deiseanna sóisialta a chruthú dá dteaghlaigh chun páirt a ghlacadh ann, a fuair moladh

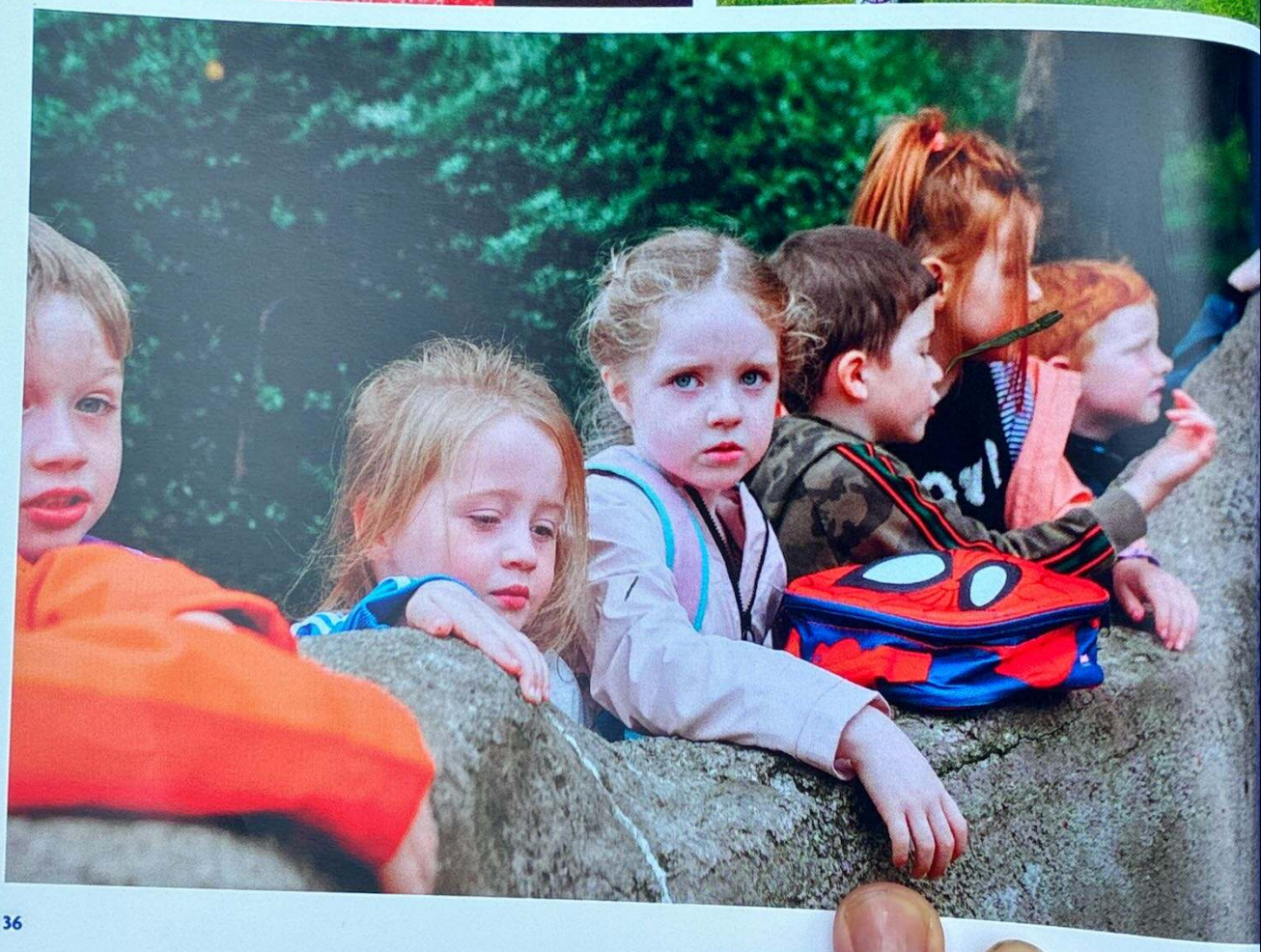
ar leith as spás normálta, sábháilte agus spreagthach a chruthú agus is iad a chabhraigh le teaghlaigh naisc agus caidrimh a chruthú lena bpiaraí, cé go bhfágann gnéithe eile, lena n-áirítear leithdháileadh acmhainní reatha, go bhfuil na seirbhísí seo teoranta i gcónaí agus neamhréireach, in ainneoin an éilimh shuntasaigh.

Chun feabhas a chur ar aschur seirbhíse soláthair seirbhíse Gaeilge do theaghlaigh, tá infheistíocht shuntasach agus tacaíocht reachtúil ag teastáil ionas go bhforbrófar, go seachadfar agus go leathnófar an tseirbhís go cuí de réir an éilimh pobail atá ann. Tá gá freisin le hacmhainní teanga cuí a chur ar fáil do theaghlaigh le bheith in ann a bheith rannpháirteach sa bhaile chun cultúr de thumadh teanga a ghiniúint agus chun deiseanna a chur ar fáil don chéad teagmháil ionas go ndéanfar é sin trí Ghaeilge. Níl dabht ar bith ach go gcuirfidh sé seo le pobal na Gaeilge atá ag fás agus le hiarrachtaí athbheochana a bhfuil eagraíochtaí pobail ag tabhairt fúthu agus le líonra pleanála teanga na Gaeilge, Fís an Phobail. D'fhéadfaí cás a dhéanamh go gcruthódh cur i bhfeidhm na moltaí seo mar aon le tacaíocht straitéiseach le haghaidh iarrachtaí reatha chun cleachtas comhoibríoch leanúnach a fhorbairt agus a fheabhsú leis na páirtithe leasmhara ar fad atá in earnáil na Gaeilge do theaghlaigh, d'fhéadfaí cás a dhéanamh go gcruthódh siad sin meicníocht inbhuanaitheacht do phobal na Gaeilge go ceann na nglúnta go leor a thiocfaidh inár ndiaidh.

Lucky

TEASTAS
Ríonach Nic Giolla Bhéin





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Foras na Gaeilge

COMMUNITY FUND

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Acknowledgments

...from Fís an Phobail

'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge' is an umbrella group made up of community organisations, academics and parents that are located within the language planning area of West Belfast and we want to ensure that families have the confidence and are supported to live their lives more fully through the Irish Language in West Belfast. It is our aim that Irish language organisations in West Belfast will work cohesively to support families to maximise their Irish Language journey at every stage of the cycle, ensuring that Irish is a living language in the home.

We are extremely grateful to the Department for Communities and to the National Lottery Community Fund for providing the funding for this research. We are also indebted to our core funders of Fís an Phobail, Foras na Gaeilge, through their pioneering Irish Language Network Scheme.

Special recognition must go to the parents and children who regularly use family services through Irish in the area and who, through their positive participation, are helping to shape the development of a sector. Fís an Phobail work closely with our community partners, primarily, Glór na Móna, Ionad Uibh Eachach and Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiach to develop comprehensive service provision in the area. The vital work of Ionad Uibh Eachach, Ionad na Fuiseoga and Teach Mamó merit particular credit for their high quality childcare provision through Irish, which is the foundation stone for our local revival. This work is supported, particularly in relation to training, by the committed work of Altram and Gaelchúrsaí. Other organisations such as Seachtain na Gaeilge and Laochra Loch Lao CLG are providing regular events and services which deeply enrich the experience of families living their lives through Irish in the area.

We are grateful to our friends in Wales who welcomed us for the transformations study visit, where we learnt so much and also to Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta. We visited these inspirational pioneers in Connemara and they are a fantastic example for us to follow. We are always grateful to Glór na nGael for their ongoing support and advice.

Finally, we would like to thank Dr Órla Nig Oirc for the comprehensive and groundbreaking work she has done with this important research report.

...from Author

It was an incredible pleasure for me to undertake this research on the family sector within the West Belfast Language Planning network area. This was a valuable experience for me, particularly as I embark on my own journey as an expectant mother who will be raising a family through Irish in the autumn and I thoroughly enjoyed the conversations and discussions with every participant who generously shared their experiences and practices with me. I am sincerely grateful to all those who shared their time with me during the course of this research. In addition, I want to thank the committee of 'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge' and Fís an Phobail for providing me with this opportunity; it is you that are delivering this pioneering work on a daily basis and you all deserve enormous credit for the work you do. Finally, I want to thank those who had the foresight to fund this important research.

Foreward

Professor Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones
Director of the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies
President, European Language Equality Network

Tá an-áthas orm cuireadh a fháil chun aghaidh a scríobh ar an tuarascáil thábhachtach seo.

As an academic and as President of the European Language Equality Network, I understand how important it is to build language revitalisation on two solid foundations: the evidence base and critical insights that robust research provide as well as the community empowerment and democratic mandate that grass roots initiatives bring to our collective actions. In this report, we see both of these elements at work and I'd like to congratulate Dr. Órla Nig Oirc for the quality of the research and Fís an Phobail for commissioning the work. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

We rightly expect our elected politicians to develop public policies based on evidence. In the same way, we – as activists, speakers and supporters of minoritized languages – can make our arguments all the more compelling and the policy changes we propose all the more incisive when we draw on the expertise of engaged researchers. The crisis facing many of the world's languages, our shared cultural and linguistic heritage, is well known: the solutions to these challenges need to be just as prominent. We want positive answers for the future of our languages.

The revitalization of the Irish language through community initiatives in Belfast and the north of Ireland is becoming increasingly recognized at international level. The sustained actions of social movements, over many years and often in adverse conditions, is truly a source of inspiration to many member organizations of the European Language Equality Network. In this report, we also read about the importance of connecting people and the value of such exchanges. Our languages can learn from each other: acquisition and use among children and youth is at the top of everyone's list and we need to know what is working where in the field of cultural and linguistic socialization of younger generations through minoritized languages, just as much as stories of immersion education in each other's countries.

Looking to the past, we can see how much has been achieved since the scoil was founded over fifty years ago. Today, census data shows that knowledge of the Irish language is growing at an exciting pace. Now is the moment to be building more opportunities for further use of the language. Ádh mór leis an obair.

It is infinitely easier to socialise children into an environmentally utilised language than into one the remains unutilised outside of the easily compartmentalised school-experience...It is the linkage (with intergenerational social functions through the second language) that enables the threatened language to become a first language of a new generation...Were this linkage to come apart, then the school would again lapse into being only a second language institution and the threatened language would become compartmentalised there, having neither backward nor forward linkages

Joshua Fishman, 2001

Introduction

Fís an Phobail, the representative community network which is leading the work of the Irish Language Plan (Foras na Gaeilge, 2021) in West Belfast is a Language Planning Network which facilitates a cross-thematic, area-based representative Project Steering Forum involving 11 Irish medium development organisations in West Belfast. Irish medium youth and community organisation Glór na Móna are the lead body on the Language plan with strategic, operational and financial responsibility for overseeing the Language plan on behalf of the Fís an Phobail network and is one of two named organisations based in the North of Ireland currently undertaking the extensive task of embedding language planning practice at grassroots level. This involves strengthening linkages between existing and upcoming community and language initiatives and identifying gaps, and where possible, developing programmes and projects to fill those gaps, in their respective areas. West Belfast gained language planning network status in 2018 with their Language Plan being approved in March 2020, as a result of the pioneering, community-led revival which took root with the establishment of the Shaws Road Gaeltacht and subsequently the formation of the first Irish-medium primary school 'Bunscoil Phobail Feirste' over 50 years ago, which led to a surge of growth and interest in the language, represented by the diverse and organic infrastructure being developed from the bottom-up. Achieving status as a language planning network area saw the appointment of a language planning coordinator in September 2022. The overall aim of the West Belfast Language Network (Fís an Phobail) to support the development of a critical mass of speakers to foster and strengthen a sustainable language community in the years ahead. The official recognition for this network provides national status for our work and connects us with other language planning areas across Ireland, both in the Gaeltacht and outside of it. Additionally, the additional resources that accompany the project provides the space with which to implement some elements of our ambitious plan which recognises and assesses existing provision and develops an action plan to strengthen and expand on them and importantly to fill gaps in provision identified through the language plan, in the years ahead.

A key element of community language planning which has been highlighted as a priority for further development and investment is that of family language planning, policy, services delivered through the Irish language. Irish language family services are in operation in the West Belfast area and have been intrinsic in the creation and promotion of spaces for social language acquisition, exchange and learning, the language plan recognised that there still remains a considerable amount of development

to be undertaken in order to improve and sustain this vital remit in language planning. Through the coordinated efforts of the West Belfast Language Plan, a committee of local family and early years service providers and practitioners, alongside parents, a steering committee, 'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge', was established and now meets on a regular basis to discuss, collaborate and plan future events as part of the wider West Belfast Irish Language Network. The inspiration for this research arose from discussion on sectoral development and unearthing potential opportunities for development in family provision via this committee who have commissioned this piece; with the view to shaping future practice and policy implementation in relation to Irish language family services.

This report will function as an evaluative review of current family Irish language service provision within the Irish language Network Area of West Belfast for families who are either raising their families through the Irish language or for families who are choosing to attend Irish language services, to support their children to speak and use Irish on a daily basis. A contextual overview of the current landscape of Irish language provision in particular in relation to familial contexts will be provided next along with an account of relevant scholarship in relation to family language immersion and the benefits of indigenous immersion and community participation. The aims of this research paper will then be discussed before addressing the research questions used as part of a mixed methodological, participatory approach which was implemented as part of the data collection portion of the study. Discussion and analysis of the findings will be presented from the surveys (Appendix A) and semi-structured focus group discussions (Appendix B) conducted with participants before drawing conclusions and collating the next steps for action in order for family language services and provision to further flourish and expand in a way which meets the needs of the increasing number of people who are raising children bilingually and which encourages the strengthening of the community-led revival in the most important of remits – language usage at home. The next section will provide an overview of the Irish language community context in the North of Ireland, in particular in relation to family services and language planning efforts.

Contextual Overview

Over the past few decades, there has been a notable surge in the number of speakers and the level of interest in the Irish language in the North of Ireland, in particular. This organic growth is reflected in the 2021 Census results, which reported that 5,969 respondents use Irish as their main language with over 43,500 (2.37% of the population) reporting that they use Irish daily. Census data also reported on the locality of Irish speakers, with Belfast highlighted as the focal point of Irish language daily use where 36,837 residents reported proficiency in the language. This growth is attributed to various factors, including the continued rise in Irish-medium education at all levels, enhanced service provision for members and newcomers of the Irish-speaking community and the campaigning efforts of language advocacy groups. The establishment and phenomenal growth of Irish language schools specifically and the inclusion of Irish in mainstream education curricula more generally have played crucial roles in fostering a new generation of speakers, despite dwindling uptake in the study and offering of modern languages, in particular of Irish, at secondary level in English-medium schools in recent years as a result of the drive towards STEM third level career and degree pathways amongst students. Additionally, media outlets and community led initiatives promoting the language have contributed to its rising popularity and visibility in public life. Thousands of adults are enrolled in weekly Irish language classes, which are delivered by a myriad of community based organisations.

The inception of Irish-medium education in the North of Ireland can be credited to the pioneering efforts of Irish language activists during the late 1960s (O'Baoill, 2007). Despite statutory and political opposition across the North, these families courageously established a housing settlement community, immersive educational curricula and schools and other community based Irish-language public services. Their efforts laid the foundation for the burgeoning Irish-medium education sector, which continues to experience consistent growth and interest (McKendry, 2007; McAdory and Janmaat 2015,). These transformational developments are an example of community based language planning which Hornberger (1996) describes as 'bottom-up rather than top-down' organic and grassroots rather than official or government supported. Recent figures from the latest Census (NISRA 2021) and the Department of Education (2023) indicate that Irish-medium education remains an increasingly popular choice and the fastest growing sector in education here in spite of long-standing structural inequalities[1], with approximately 7,500 students enrolled in Irish-medium education in the academic year 2023/24.

Immersive language schools and services play a crucial role in restoring linguistic proficiency among younger generations who have limited opportunities to use their heritage language at home, which has been widely documented internationally in indigenous language contexts (Ó Baoill, 2007; Kipp, 2009; Hinton, 2011; McCarty and Nicholas, 2014, Lewis and Simons, 2016). They provide marginalised and minoritised languages with what prominent sociolinguist Joshua Fishman referred to as 'breathing space' for the language to take root and flourish. This is especially noteworthy in the Irish-medium sector, where many students come from families where Irish tends not to be the primary language of all primary caregivers; this will be further discussed below. These are, in sociolinguistic terms, second language learners. Therefore, both formal and informal early-immersion programs and services are vital in supporting the promotion and development of indigenous languages, and in the case of this study, the resurgence of the Irish language in the North of Ireland.

[1] https://www.independentreviewofeducation.org.uk/files/independentreviewofeducation/2022-09/Comhairle%20na%20Gaelscolaiochta.pdf

The rapid development of Irish-medium education has been strengthened further by the organic growth of a broader, community-based language infrastructure. This was, in large part, facilitated by the creation of the All-Ireland funding body, Foras na Gaeilge, as part of the Good Friday Agreement which provided, for the first time since the creation of the state, investment into Irish language community projects on a consistent basis in the north. The growth of this community infrastructure provided additional social domains for the language to flourish, outside of formal education. While formal, immersive education is recognised by Joshua Fishman, Miquel Strubell and other leading sociolinguists as being the bedrock for successful revitalisation, they also recognise that it cannot function successfully without a cohesive, integrated approach which helps 'socialise children into an environmentally utilised language outside of the easily compartmentalised school-experience' (Fishman, 2001,p.15) . The ultimate goal for this revivalist model is the successful transmission of the target language at home, as pioneered in the Shaws Road Gaeltacht community. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this has happened, albeit on a limited basis, with, primarily, past pupils of Irish-medium schools who themselves were raised through English, now choosing to raise their own children through Irish.

It is imperative to note at this point, the variances which exist amongst the demographic of families within the West Belfast language planning area; those families where Irish is the first language (L1) of the home, those families where one parent has proficiency in Irish (One-parent-one-language or OPOL) or families where no caregivers have proficiency in the language but choose Irish-language immersion for their children's formal education and thus strive to access additional family services to enhance their linguistic exposure, given the well-established importance of early-immersion for linguistic and cognitive development.

Despite the critical role which immersion education plays in language revitalisation efforts in indigenous language communities worldwide, Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin (2015) suggests that the establishment and practices of formal language immersion to be found in the Gaeloideachas model of education are simply not sufficient on their own to 're-Gaelicise' the population. Language immersion through formal education is limited in its capacity for revitalisation; and tends to withhold the language to the confines of school classrooms and formal education settings. This is arguably why the development of community language initiatives and services have enhanced social language learning and exposure opportunities for all members of the community, in particular for children and young people who may have limited access to the language outside of the formal school setting. It is in these spaces where the language becomes a means of socialisation, connection, belonging and allows the language to develop and flow naturally as a means of communication.

The establishment and development of burgeoning Irish-language early years' education services have also played a vital role in community and sectoral language revitalisation. Early years' education provides increased exposure to the language for children of preschool age as well as providing opportunities to engage parents in their children's learning experience. In spite of this success, as evidenced by the census figures and the growth of IME, the Irish language community, voluntary and early years' sector continue to be subject to crippling funding cuts and discrepancies in relation to service resource and provision (Ní Gréacháin, 2023; Lynch, 2023; An Dream Dearg, 2023[2]; Conradh na Gaeilge, 2022). In January 2023 the early years' sector was faced with funding cuts of up to 45% and threatened loss of Pathway Funding, despite political and statutory duties relating to early years' service provision for children in the North of Ireland. This potentially disastrous decision was initially remedied with the recovery of 40% of funding before the reinstatement of the Stormont executive in early 2024, with the current Education Minister allocating a £25m support package for the early learning and child care sector (Department of Education, 2024). Despite this, no commitment was given that specific funding would be made available to pathway groups and there was no mention of Irish-medium childcare in the ministers statement. Currently, many early years' providers continue to struggle to meet the costs of providing their core services. The importance of Irish language early years and the shortcomings in relation to statutory support was recently highlighted to the Children's Commissioner for the North of Ireland during a best practice visit at local Irish language day care services:

> *the Irish medium early years sector also faces many challenges, with the lack of sustained incremental investment and a bespoke workforce strategy, coupled with growing demand for places in our early years settings, we need commitment and proactive engagement from government*
>
> **(Altram, 2024[3])**

There is certainly much scope and appetite for further development of community Irish-language services, in particular, those which attend to the needs of families and language support in the home, which requires a comprehensive and cohesive strategic approach which further promotes a culture

[2] Petition to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education raised to curtail cuts to Early Years funding - https://www.dearg.ie/en/uirlisi/stad-an-slad

[3] Full report available at: https://www.niccy.org/news/commissioner-receives-cead-mile-failte-in-irish-early-years-childcare-settings/

of the usage and reproduction of the Irish language. McCarty (2018) affirms that language planning is often seen to be a phenomenon which is undertaken by statutory or governmental bodies with Tollefson (1991 cited in McCarty, 2018) arguing that 'government backed language planning frequently has inequitable consequences for speakers of minoritised or lesser used languages.' This research, being undertaken in line with Fís an Phobail's aims, operates as a metric to assess current provision, explore the gaps which exist in current services and thereby aim to raise awareness about the many opportunities and benefits which raising families through Irish brings to young Gaels.

It is important that any development strategy focused on family matters is shaped by recommendations from the stakeholders themselves (parents raising children through or with Irish) and rooted in language planning theory and best-practice. McCarty (2018) asserts that language planning is a practice in which families, communities and even individuals partake in every day; to that end, it is the intention of this research to assess and highlight, from the bottom up, evidenced through participatory research, the various needs and pathways for development and advocacy for family services delivered through the Irish language as part of the West Belfast Language Planning Network.

Before moving to discuss the methodological approach of this research, it is important to further lay out the various opportunities and benefits of bilingual and immersive indigenous services for families and those wishing to access and partake in family language services.

Summary of Research Literature on Family Language Immersion in Indigenous Contexts

It is widely reported and accepted that when considering bilingual and immersion education programmes, a plethora of advantages associated with second language acquisition and early immersion are evident (Bialystok, 2011,2018; Feldman and Shen, 2012; Jawad and Mutalib, 2021; Trebits et. al 2021). According to Trebits et. al (2021) bilingual children show improved metalinguistic awareness, greater working memory capacity, higher non-verbal intelligence and more efficient executive function abilities overall than their monolingual peers. Criticisms involving class and socio-economic disadvantages and illiteracy amongst bilingual language communities have also been documented yet also challenged and debunked with Bialystok (2018) arguing that exposure to bilingualism can be deemed as a cognitive asset which contributes to later academic success. The cognitive and communicative advantages associated with bilingualism however, only begin to unearth the wealth of advantages which cultural and linguistic indigeneity can provide for minoritised communities who have suffered under the imposition and perpetuation of colonisation, which will be discussed next.

Although language immersion programmes and curricula through formal schooling environments have been instrumental in the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages on a worldwide basis (Engman, McGurk and Mac Kenzie, 2023) there remains a need for social and informal opportunities and initiatives in order to enhance and engender environments where indigenous language usage and engagement can develop into living community languages. According to Hinton, Huss and Roche (2018), most countries worldwide have only one or a few official languages which receive widespread statutory support and exposure through media outlets and in their education systems. This linguistic dominance comes as a result of 'language shift' (Fishman, 1991) caused by the corrosive implications of colonialism on indigenous peoples; a process which has worldwide impacted landscapes, psyche, languages and natural resources. As a result of the corrosive nature of language shift, very few of the world's indigenous languages exist in spheres outside of the spoken-word community who strive to uphold and preserve their native languages:

> *The destruction of languages is an abstraction which is concretely mirrored in the concomitant destruction of intimacy, family and community, via national and international involvements and intrusions, the destruction of local life.*
>
> **(Fishman, 1991, p.4)**

McCarty (2021) claims that the impact of reconnection and revitalisation of indigenous languages helps to improve overall well-being through creating opportunities to reinforce culture, to integrate, to empower and to foster inclusion. However, Biddle and Swee (2012) highlight that the amount of existing empirical research in this area is deficient, in particular in relation to mental health outcomes and impacts. However, scholarship in relation to mental health benefits of indigenous language engagement has been undertaken by Chandler and Lalonde (2008) which suggests that engaging young people in practices of cultural preservation can help to prevent and lower rates of suicide amongst indigenous young people. Notwithstanding this, Walsh (2018) calls for further longitudinal,

quantitative studies involving indigenous health professionals to be carried out in relation to overall health outcomes of indigenous populations.

Fishman's enrichment theoretical model provides a holistic approach to language revitalisation, emphasising the need for comprehensive and community-driven efforts to ensure the sustainable use of endangered languages. The enrichment model suggests active participation of the language community and emphasises the need for community led initiatives rather than top-down approaches. Fishman also suggests the intergenerational transmission of language at home is crucial to undoing language shift through creating opportunities in family settings and exposure to the language through multiple domains. This model also stresses that efforts should be made to grant status to the language in official settings as well as being in receipt of adequate resources and support in order for it to flourish and adapt. Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (2001), below, sets out a model for successful language revitalisation:

Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale	
1.	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level
2.	The language is used for local and regional mass media and government services
3.	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders
4a.	Literacy in the language is transmitted through education
4b.	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form throughout the community
6.	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language
7.	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it with their elders but is not transmitting it to their children
8.	The only remaining speakers of the language are member if the grandparent generation

Recommendations made as a result of this theoretical model include that of talking circles, community language campaigns, education models and interventions which prioritise community and cultural connectivity (Hodge and Nandy, 2011). Such recommendations and practices arising from this theory echo the community-led feats of activism and engagement which have been gathering momentum over the last number of decades in the Irish language community in Belfast and across the North of Ireland. However, the realm of community participation also includes family and home language support and use which Piller and Gerber (2018) argue needs to increase if parents wish for their children to have competencies in more than one language other than English.

Next, the current provision of family language services in the West Belfast language planning area will be discussed.

Current Provision of Early Years and Family Language Services in the Irish language Context in West Belfast

Before examining the provision of family language services, it is first worthwhile to acknowledge the various policies pertaining to these services across the North of Ireland. In the North of Ireland early years' services are governed by a range of policies and frameworks designed to support the development and education of children and young children. These policies aim to ensure high standards of care and education, promote equality and inclusion, and support parents and families. The most recent of policies developed at statutory level, 'Children and Young People's Strategy '2020-2030' aims to improve the well-being of children and young people focusing on health, education, safety, and economic well-being. It includes specific objectives and actions for early years' services. More specifically, the Department of Education's 'Early Years (0-6) Strategy' focuses on improving outcomes for young children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It emphasises high-quality early education and care, workforce development, and support for parents and families. Both strategies highlight significant demographic circumstances of the Irish language community, with commitments to providing better conditions for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds, where the vast majority of the Irish language community in West Belfast reside (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2000). This is further substantiated by the 2021 Multiple Deprivation Measures data which denotes West Belfast as having the highest proportion of residents (76%) living in the 'most deprived Super Output Area of Northern Ireland', Additionally, programmes such as Sure Start and the Pre-School Education programmes as well as support initiatives for early years' community settings via the Pathway Fund strive to assure access and equal opportunity for families wishing to avail of early years' services. Whilst these policies set apart particular demographics including children with additional learning needs, newcomer children, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds; they lack, in particular, in reference to children being raised bilingually, early years Irish-medium education and the various, linguistic-specific provisions required to attend to the needs of bilingualism and immersion in Early Years settings.

Early years, family language services and organisations have developed significantly in the last decade or more in an attempt to meet demand and the needs of service users within the Irish language speaking community of West Belfast[4]. This development can be closely linked to the similar practice implemented by Irish language schools from the inception of the sector; where demand for additional learning support and, for example, assistance with homework was required, schools launched support initiatives such as homework clubs, additional sessions in early years and youth clubs to attend to the needs of their students and parents.

With the aforementioned increase in school enrolments in Irish-medium education along with the rise in families choosing to raise their children through Irish, community and educational initiatives have followed suit with the development of varying levels of service provision ranging from day care services to immersive language activities to ensure opportunities for early language immersion and social use of the Irish language are available for local residents. Currently, there exists three day care services within the West Belfast language planning area as well as several community organisations and projects who provide family language services through festivals and events organised as part of their community outreach programmes. Statutory bodies and regional support organisations such as Glór na nGael and Altram provide consultation, support, training and resources to community organisations, families and schools in their efforts to provide immersive Irish-language early years' services. In order to facilitate a cohesive and collaborative strategy involved with providing immersive family language services, Fís an Phobail have appointed the first Irish Language Family officer, in post from 2023, to coordinate and facilitate language programmes and events as part of the overall strategic aims of the West Belfast Irish language plan.

Despite the shortcomings in relation to early years Irish-language policy frameworks and the continued absence of an Irish Language Strategy, the Irish language community has made significant developments in provision of services, with minimal statutory support. As part of this research, it is crucial to look at additional contextual examples of family provisions, in order to highlight further opportunities for development, collaboration and implementation of best practice. The next section will discuss family language provision in Wales after meeting with various representative organisations of Mudiad Meithrin in Cardiff, Wales in March 2024.

[4] Community organisations such as Ionad Uíbh Eachach have led these pioneering efforts. More recently, other community groups and private providers such as Ionad na Fuiseoga and Teach Mamó have developed Irish-medium early years services to meet growing demand.

Case Study in Cardiff, Wales (March 2024) - sharing examples of best practice

In March 2024, 'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge', a cohort of Irish language community and early years officers representative of various organisations accompanied the team of Fís an Phobail on a Department for Communities funded case-study visit to Wales in order to explore provision for Early Years and Family Immersion services in the Welsh-medium (WM) context. The trip provided an extremely worthwhile insight into the various policy, statutory and organisational inputs which have helped to develop, sustain and provide many opportunities for families who are raising their children through Welsh to engage socially and informally with the language. Efforts to promote Welsh-medium family services are multi-faceted, involving various initiatives, policies, and organisations. These efforts aim to increase the use of the Welsh language from early childhood, addressing both community engagement and the growing interest in Welsh medium education. Mudiad Meithrin is central to these efforts, an umbrella organisation which provides expertise in early years and family language education. Their initiative, Cymraeg for Kids, aims to recruit non-Welsh speaking parents, particularly in South East Wales where Welsh language usage is lower. They focus on raising awareness, promoting bilingualism from infancy, and providing activities such as baby massage, yoga, and rhyme time.

Strategic statutory policy development has gained significant momentum with the implementation of The Welsh Government's strategy, Cymraeg 2050, which has an overall aim of achieving one million Welsh speakers by 2050. This includes increasing daily Welsh usage, especially among young children, by integrating Welsh language practices into health services, such as including informational leaflets in antenatal and discharge packs for new parents. Another statutory initiative includes the The ARFOR Programme, which focuses on economic development to attract Welsh speakers back to traditional heartlands which, similarly to the Irish Gaeltacht context, have experienced a decline in Welsh speakers. It strives to support and promote community-based initiatives and the establishment of WM schools in urban areas where interest in immersion education is rising rapidly. Additionally, The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 aims to ensure a thriving Welsh language as being a central part of a vibrant and dominant culture. This legislation underpins national strategies for promoting the Welsh language across all sectors of society. Furthermore, the development of the upcoming Welsh Education Bill will address language education across all life stages, with particular reference to immersion education and also aims to address gaps in provision for school leavers.

With the prolific statutory backing of Welsh language programmes and family language services, the work and services being carried out at ground level in particular in relation to family immersion experiences has also experienced significant developments. One of these initiatives includes Cymraeg i Blant, which runs groups for parents and children, aiming to double their daily use of Welsh. They set annual targets to engage with upwards of 21,000 parents through facilitating 2,800 group sessions, integrating language promotion into family health practices and local authority services. Mudiad Meithrin have also established their 'Set Up and Succeed Programme' which sets targets for the establishment of new 'Cylch Meithrin' (Welsh Medium Playgroups). By the end of 2021, an additional 43 new groups were established with statistics showing that where a playgroup is established within a WM school site, a transition rate of 90% to WM primary school can be expected.

In relation to workforce training and professional development, comprehensive training programs for early years' practitioners and facilitators in WM settings have been established and financially supported by Welsh government, including systems such as designing online booking platforms and small session sizes to foster connections with parents. Best practice and service delivery is inspected and assured by the inspection Body Estyn, who compile thematic reports and language pattern development tools in order to further support WM Early Years' stakeholders. Additional Programmes such as Coresi'r Bront and Cynllun Trochi Iaith have been developed which provide self-study units for language immersion and support for English medium (EM) playgroups transitioning to WM provision, offering resources for staff and promoting the use of Welsh in everyday activities like snack time and handwashing.

Despite the compelling advances made by community and educational groups along with continual support of the state, WM service provision has also experienced significant challenges which can be echoed in the Irish-medium context as will be explained throughout the remainder of this research. Challenges have presented in relation to staffing and recruitment regarding candidates with proficiency in appropriate language skills for family language practitioners. In spite of increasing parental engagement with family language programmes and a general surge in interest in Welsh-medium education, data collection and feedback participation requires improvement. Initiatives such as Cymraeg yn y Cartref have been established since the WM population tends to experience a drop-off of language speakers of post school age (20-44).

A multi-layered approach is evidently vital for the promotion of Welsh-medium family language services, involving government strategies, community engagement, and innovative educational programs. The collaboration between various organisations, supported by robust legislation and targeted initiatives is undoubtedly inspiring and should operate as a best-practice framework for the development of family education and services in other indigenous language contexts such as in the north of Ireland.

In the following section, the methodology and research questions implemented to carry out the data collection portion of this study will be discussed.

Methodology

This research adopts a mixed methodological, participatory approach through bilingual survey circulation and semi-structured focus group discussions to actively involve the voices of relevant stakeholders and parents who are choosing to raise their children through the medium of Irish who utilise and are associated with the early years and family services within the West Belfast area. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a systematic, strategic, and collaborative research approach which involves the exploration of an issue by the individuals affected by it (Baum, MacDougal & Smith, 2006).

After consulting with the language planning coordinator and family support officer from Fís an Phobail, as well as having the opportunity to attend the field work trip to Wales, the following general research questions were drafted and agreed upon to form the basis of the survey and focus group questioning for this research:

1. Discuss the programmes and services which you organise/attend which create opportunities for families to engage with Irish.
2. What advantages are associated with Irish language early years and family services for families wanting their children to be raised through Irish?
3. What are the practices/methods/resources available to parents wanting to promote Irish within the home?
4. What challenges are associated with current family language service provision?

In order to obtain data from as many parents as possible whilst also being unable to involve all service users in focus group discussions, a bi-lingual survey was circulated, one in Irish for families who are raising their children through Irish and an English version for families with parents whose children are attending family and language services in order for their children to learn Irish. Survey questions were compiled on Google Forms using a variety of multiple choice, Likert scales and comment box response options which examined Irish language services and resources for families in the West Belfast area. Survey data remained anonymous with no names or private full home addresses collected and participation in the survey was voluntary.

Following on from the survey data, a total of 5 additional data sets were collected during the data collection period of this research study involving semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with staff members of Irish language community groups, Irish language day-care managers, parents, representatives from statutory and advisory organisations and also a national family language transmission organisation operating in the Gaeltacht communities in the south of Ireland. All data sets were transcribed before undergoing manual thematic processing, which will be outlined in the section below. Participation in the focus group discussions was voluntary and all participants were assured anonymity in the final report of the research. Below is a summary table of focus group participants as they will be labelled in the discussion piece, next:

Participant/Representative Organisation	Number of Participants	Participant Discussion Code
Coiste ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge (Oifigigh agus Bainisteoirí) *Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge Committee (Officers and Managers)*	6	ATCG
Bainisteoir Curam Lae (Earnáil Príobhaideach) *Irish language daycare manager*	1	CL
Tuismitheoirí *Parents*	3	T
Eagraíocht Abhcóideachta *Advocacy Organisation*	2	EA
Eagraíocht Seirbhísí Ó Dheas *Service Organisation in the South of Ireland*	1	SOD

Next, I will discuss the data collected in both the surveys and focus groups before presenting concluding findings of the research and making recommendations for further development and enhancement of practice for family language services in the West Belfast Irish Language Planning Network Area.

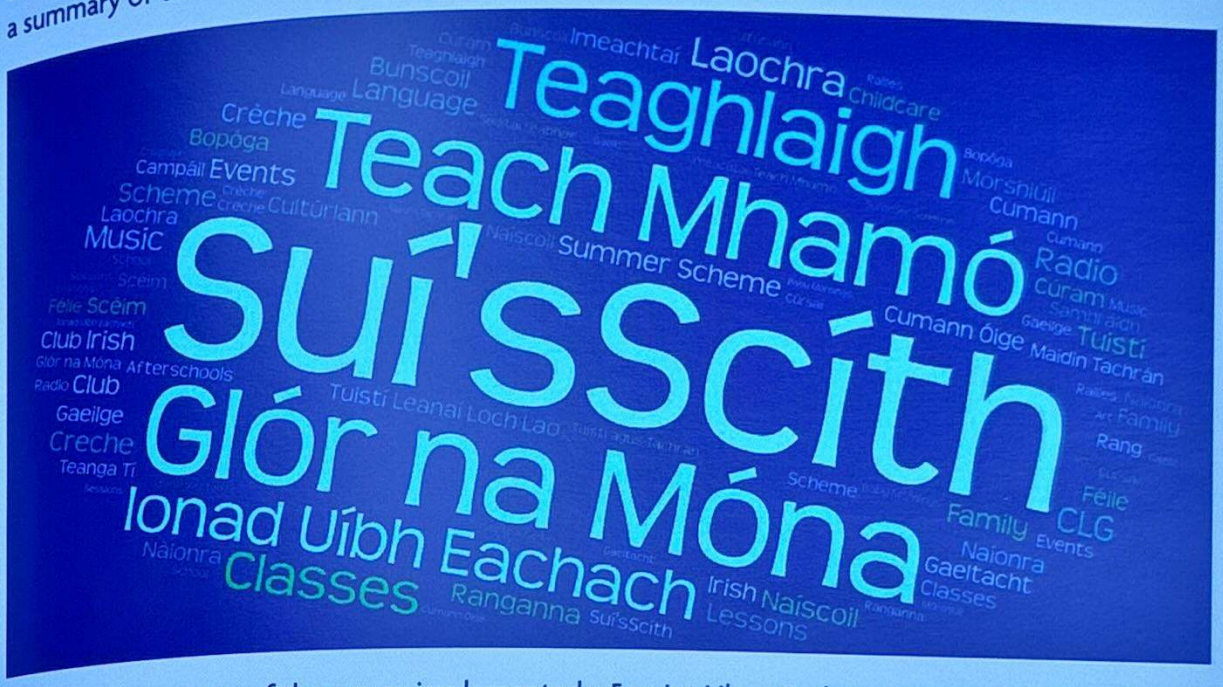
Discussion of Results

i) Survey

The sample size total of participation in the bilingual surveys for this research was 66 (N=66) with 27 respondents to the English version and 39 respondents to the Irish version of the survey. As participation was anonymised, postcodes of respondents were collected in order to differentiate the

respondents attending family language services who live within the West Belfast Language Planning Area (BT11, BT12, BT17) and those who perhaps travel to avail of the early years and family language services provided within the West Belfast area. The survey data showed that 38% of respondents to the English version of the survey live in the immediate language planning area whereas a significant 58% of respondents to the Irish version of the survey reported living within the language planning area of West Belfast. This suggests that while only 50% of overall respondents live within the present Irish language planning area of West Belfast, survey responses could suggest that parents are willing to travel to West Belfast to avail of services or are reporting in relation to Irish language family services available in their own areas. Reported postcodes ranged from BT5 (East Belfast) to BT79 (Omagh. Co. Tyrone).

All survey respondents have attended early years and Irish-language family services in some capacity and provided insight into a wide range of events and services in the comment box available. Below is a summary of the kinds of services they have attended with their families:



The following section of the survey implemented a 5 point Likert Scale to assess parental satisfaction of the available family and Irish language services in their immediate areas ranging from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (very satisfied). Across both Irish and English versions of the surveys, 53% of respondents scored current services 3 or below in relation to their satisfaction. Despite offering praise for the Irish-language services which they have attended, respondents dissatisfaction was reflected in the inconsistency of service programmes and the availability of programmes through the medium of Irish in comparison to that of which is offered in their local area through the English language. An additional comment box was added below this scale to encourage parents to discuss their answer. Many comments offered positive support and feedback in relation to the services which families had attended through the medium or in promotion of the medium of Irish, stating that the quality of staff and the events organised were to a high standard and that parents expressed gratitude for the ability to have access to Irish language services in their local areas. Events organised in conjunction with Laochra Loch Lao CLG were awarded particular praise for their efforts in creating opportunities for families to engage with the Irish language. It is also noteworthy that parents also attributed family events to the promotion of positive mental wellbeing, in particular at postnatal stage, and providing opportunities to meet with new and expectant mothers.

However, some feedback offered recommendations and made reference to Irish language service deficiencies in certain areas with many respondents stating that there is a distinct lack of Irish language family services available outside of the Belfast area, which informs the respondents dissatisfaction of current service provision, as aforementioned. Parents also stated that event advertisement can at times be unclear and there is a need to distinguish between events which are for learners of the language and events which are solely directed towards those raising their children through Irish. Comments were also made in relation to how family events tend not to occur frequently and consistently enough in order to provide key opportunities for language acquisition for pre-school age children. Parents also made reference to the challenges facing the sector in relation to budget cuts, staffing issues and again how limited choices can be, with English language offerings tending to be much more prolific for 0-3 age ranges.

The next section of the survey discussed practices and resources used within the home to promote and encourage use of Irish with children. Respondents highlighted that a range of methods are used within their home, with over half of parents in both surveys stating they use spoken word, taught phrases and vocabulary, with others using print and visual media as well as immersive play. Parents provided examples of these various mediums; a few parents referenced learning aid and resources produced by local community and early years Irish language organisations which have helped them integrate key phrases into their children's daily routine. A lot of parents mentioned the use of various books, songs, Irish language television programmes, for example, Cúla 4 as additional language contact for their children. Significantly, some parents who do not have fluency in the language stated that they tend to label items around the home in Irish to encourage them to use the Irish word in conversation and also encouraged their children attending Irish language education to assist them in using as much Irish as they could. Parents who are raising their children with Irish spoke of the importance in making first contact with their children in Irish and spoke of the challenges associated with maintaining an Irish language environment, especially when engaging with extended members of family who do not speak the language.

The final section of the survey included discussion of the persistent challenges which parents face in accessing Irish language family services and requested recommendations for future practice and implementation. Challenges included a lack of available services with more offerings available through English for families as well as a lack of services available particularly in rural areas for families living outside of Belfast. Many parents also spoke of their availability to attend services which take place during working hours, with recommendations made for more events to occur at weekends. Parents also made reference to increased access to Irish language health services including health visitor assessments and ante/postnatal classes in order to create further opportunities for first language contact. Recommendations also included the development of additional social spaces for families to gather and the development of an app to include songs, rhymes and stories which families can use for language development in the home.

ii) Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were carried out with community and early years' officers, daycare services manager, statutory and advocacy organisation representatives for Irish language early years and family services and with family services practitioners who are operating in the south of Ireland. Participants were chosen based on their experience and wealth of knowledge in the field of Irish-medium early years and family immersion services; it was also imperative to include input from services taking place outside of the Irish language planning area of West Belfast to explore potential for development and collaboration. After focus group discussions were transcribed and manually coded, the following 4 emergent themes arose from the data:

- Fostering Relationships and Parental Stewardship
- Resources and Support
- Training and Workforce Development
- Raising Awareness

Focus group results will now be discussed in line with these themes before analysis and concluding thoughts are presented.

Fostering Relationships and Parental Stewardship

The theme of fostering relationships among families and parents as well as the importance of the role of parents in fostering language acquisition was discussed at length. Both language and family services officers and parents offered significant insights from experiences of bringing families together and creating inviting, immersive spaces where the language can be seen and heard. One officer highlighted the importance of having family practitioners with language fluency to facilitate sessions so that consistent language policy can be implemented:

> **SOD:** *It is vital that parents come together organically, but it is also difficult to implement any language policy in this instance as no parent has authority over the other. This makes the role of the facilitator incredibly important, to implement the language policy and to introduce parents to each other.*

Parents provided valuable insights into their experiences of attending family language and early years services and the ways in which these services enhanced the language ability of their children and enabled them to forge new relationships with other parents. One parent in particular spoke of how their experience during the Covid-19 pandemic impacted their ability to access Irish-language family services as a result of social distancing measures.

> **T:** *Suí is Scith helped me enormously, services like these are sorely needed. A place where we can talk openly with other mothers' and where our children hear us talking together and hear us talking in Irish together, all around them.*

> **T:** *Before having children, you have no real understanding of what's needed but I couldn't be without the family services. I'm sure that the language transmission and acquisition of our children wouldn't be as strong where it not for these services and the language being so visible around them.*

> **T:** *It was a completely different experience for me raising the second child in the family. When my first child was born it was during covid and there was nothing going on. Suí is Scith became the highlight of the month, even just getting the opportunity to meet other families, which was incredibly important for me, particularly as I am not originally from this area.*

Participants also highlighted the importance of the role of parents in generating and fostering a 'tearmann teanga' (Language sanctuary) not only with their own children within their own homes but with other families in order to create a sense of community where the first contact is made through the medium of Irish to ensure the likelihood that these relationships and communications will continue through the medium of Irish.

> **SOD:** *Particularly with the first child...there is almost a 10 year period where you are focused on that child and that's when family services are really important and where there is big uptake. All the parents from the area come together and meet each other through Irish and this large group will be part of each other's lives for 20 years or so and if that original connection is made through Irish, there is a strong chance that it will continue through Irish.*

The importance of laying foundational language norms and parental stewardship was also alluded to when accessing services outside of the home environment when the potential for Irish language use to diminish is greater. Participants spoke about the impact of statutory and educational services which introduce English into their children's lives which can potentially impact their usage of Irish as they grow older:

> **SOD:** *The parent has a kind of 'authority' or control over the language that the child hears, that the child uses etc, but as they begin to engage with and integrate more within the wider community, this 'authority' diminishes because as the child becomes part of a bigger community we have to attempt to create and continue with language sanctuaries but parents don't have complete control over that.*

> **T:** *There is no avoiding English, we are swimming against the tide and, as far as I can see, when they (children) are under 5 you have a small window because as they get older they start to realise the difference and acknowledge that there is more English around them...my son is fluent in Irish and he attends Irish medium daycare but he is using English more and more as many of the other children that attend don't have Irish at home.*

The participants further highlighted the importance of the role and stewardship of parents in creating immersive language experiences in the home and how they act as the gateway to Irish immersion for their children hence the sustainability and growth of the Irish language speaking community. Participants spoke of how they strive to create programmes, resources and safe environments in order to empower and encourage parents, regardless of their language ability and this approach should be encouraged for parents to be able to use as much Irish as they have with their children on a regular basis:

> **ATCG:** *The vision we have is that from the beginning parents have the primary role in the education of their children. You cannot provide services through the medium of Irish without parents being involved in them, therefore if you are 'purchasing' a daycare service you are also purchasing something more holistic, you are buying into a community. In my view, in terms of language awareness, it is incredibly important that classes are available, resources, books etc...and that it is directed at parents. This is the first step in the door, they can avail of the classes, use the resources and the other services.*

> **ATCG:** *We want to raise the self-confidence of parents - we don't need to be worried about how fluent they are, even if you are learning, use whatever Irish you have, there are no rigid rules which determine that you can or cannot use Irish at home and that also makes family services such as these essential.*

> **ATCG:** *Some people were of the opinion that 'one language - language of home' which meant that if you weren't completely confident with Irish, that it was no use and I don't think that approach helped. You should always give priority to Irish, particularly attending events, having fun, singing etc...through Irish but we are all able to mix codes (languages), so we have to tell parents not to be too worried about changing from one language to the next.*

Participants also provided insight into the challenges surrounding promoting a consistent and immersive language environment due to the limited family-focused vocabulary they have and how there is a need to develop programmes or specific classes to teach set phrases of the home and vocabulary required to attend to their families.

> **T:** *The vocabulary that I have is lacking, I need the events to compliment what is happening at home. I don't know the songs or the rhymes...I was not raised through Irish and I didn't attend a Gaelscoil and as such I have a new vocabulary to learn. Even though I have spoken Irish I have never used it in the context of raising a child which means I'm learning new words everyday and this is why books are incredibly important too and why we need more of them.*

Resources and Support

Most of the focus group discussion centred around the resources and supports available to parents who are wanting to increase Irish language usage in the home for their parents. Participants working within an advocacy capacity made reference to their response to the impact of Covid-19 for families and created resources which would enable them to continue engaging their children with the language outside of their formal schooling experience. This further highlighted the importance of consulting with parents and addressing needs:

> **EA:** *We wanted to make sure that they, at the very least, have something to use at home, that children could hear Irish everyday, so we started to develop resources for parents. This became more important for us and we wanted to ensure that we were meeting our parents needs. We received feedback from parents who told us 'I thought I would never be able to read my child a story because they went to Irish school and I didn't' so we created stories based on the pandemic with themes such as, I can no longer see my friends, activities at home and others along those lines and from then, that directed that work that we do now.*

Practitioners and parents spoke at length in relation to the various services which they provide and spoke positively of their experiences through attending and facilitating events for families. Reference was made in particular to the Irish-medium GAA club, Laochra Loch Lao CLG for providing not only an opportunity for vocabulary and movement development, but also a social space in which young people are engaging with each other through the language as guided by their coaches:

> **ATCG:** *we have a sports club that operates through the medium of Irish. At the older end of the club, there is a lower percentage of children that have Irish at home but as you descend to the younger cohort there are more and more children who have Irish, in some form, at home and this indicates the way in which revitalisation is taking root...More and more we are seeing people choosing the club not solely because the club operates through Irish but because they themselves are living their lives through Irish.*

As well as these positive service developments, significant reference was made in relation to the benefits of having a family sector-specific officer in post who is able to create cohesive links between organisations in the immediate language planning area, support the duty placed on Irish language officers who are tasked with creating a comprehensive programme of events for all members of the community as well as being a point of contact for families to offer support and guidance regarding Irish language family services:

> **ATCG:** *It is a major advantage for us that, for the first time, we have a family officer working specifically in this area. Development officers and community workers are working across a very broad range of themes and are trying to deliver a programme with little resources. It is amazing that we now have someone providing strategic focus to this work, pulling the steering group together, developing services and working directly with parents.*

Participants also provided insight regarding shortcomings in provision of services and resources of which included discussion on various kinds of media and the accessibility, timing and frequency of services. One parent spoke highly of the reading facility at their local library which has a range of age appropriate Irish-language books, however; shortcomings were noted in relation to the amount of appropriate material ranging from books to television programmes which are suitable for children aged 0-3. They found that programmes for pre-school age children tend to have complex language structures:

> **T:** *Some of the programmes are not suitable - there is a lack of programmes for that 0-3 age group.*

> **T:** *There is a lack of reading materials for that 0-3 age group - I don't mind reading the same stories to them but without stories we have very little enjoyable resources to use with them. It is important that we have a high standard of pleasurable reading materials for both child and parent.*

> **T:** *If you look at Cbeebies, there are brilliant programmes such as story time for kids going to bed and it would be great if things like this were available through Irish.*

In relation to the accessibility of family services through the medium of Irish, parents and practitioners gave insight into the timing and frequency of events and how this can impact parents' ability to attend sessions. It was suggested that sessions targeted towards parents and babies or toddlers tend to take place on weekdays during working hours to attend to mothers who are on maternity leave at the time. Despite providing services to attend to the needs of new mothers, issues surrounding participation retainment and working parents were highlighted:

> **ATCG:** *For the most part with parent and toddler groups you are working with mothers but when their maternity period is over and they return to work you lose them and you have to start all over again.*

> **T:** *As parents, we love consistency. Our whole life is based on schedules and it helps to keep a routine...Saturday or Sunday morning, that is the most valuable time we have.*

> **T:** *When events are on once a fortnight and you miss one session it means that you may not be able to attend again for 6 weeks.*

> **T:** *I absolutely loved that Family Summer Scheme but this year, with being back at work, I will not be able to attend for the whole week. It would be a great help for us if events could be spread out instead of being condensed into one week, especially for parents who are working.*

Parents also spoke about the service deficiencies they have experienced in relation to Irish language focused family services and events due to living outside of the immediate West Belfast Irish language planning area. They spoke of how difficult it has been to create a persistent emphasis on engagement through Irish in the home without these services and how they would be willing to travel to Belfast to attend such services:

> **T:** *There is very little available in the areas outside of Belfast in terms of events, maybe one or two things during the week, they are good events but maybe directed at learners but for those raising children through Irish, it isn't suitable for me...there is plenty available through sure start etc...but they aren't suitable either because of my working hours. I need events and services at the weekend that are organised on a regular basis. I am happy to travel to Belfast, to Armagh, even as far as Monaghan. What we have now is primarily focused on those on maternity leave.*

Funding and investment in Early Years and Irish language family services was also referred to as an urgent matter of action for statutory and advocacy bodies to adequately meet demand and to resource these vital services. Officers spoke of how they are reliant on short-term, small, arbitrary funding pots in order to provide a programme of services which entails a significant amount of time and resource in relation to administration of these funding grants.

> **ATCG:** *We are dependent on small fundings pots to cover the programmes and facilitator costs. We deliberately keep the fees we charge as low as possible, many of our events are free. It is difficult to ask paents to pay £50-£60 for services when they are already struggling with the cost of living, particularly when they are raising children.*

Significant reference was made to the rising costs of living and the pressures on families across the North of Ireland in general to pay for family services with deficient statutory support, not to mention a lack of specific funding streams or policies in relation to Irish-medium provision of community based family services from statutory funders, including Foras na Gaeilge. This is in turn impacting families' ability to access key language services which will help to foster a culture of language immersion in the formative years of children's lives:

> **ATCG:** *Parents should be able to come to us at the beginning of a journey and continue with the programme for years with all the proper information provided and the necessary support. We simply don't have the resources to do this and it would require significant investment.*

> **CL:** *We are always saying that our service has to be at the highest standard possible but the support from the Government isn't there for our parents to enable them to pay for a high-quality service. There is no investment being out into Irish medium early years provision.*

Training and Workforce Development

Participants provided significant insight into the issues surrounding staffing issues and training deficiencies associated with early years and family service provision through Irish. One participant alluded to a 'recruitment crisis' which is impacting the sector as a result of a lack of qualified candidates

with the appropriate skill sets to work in early years and family settings. Issues relating to the training courses available for early years' practitioners were discussed which highlighted a lack of focus on immersion practices for trainees working in Irish-medium settings. Organisations rooted in the local community, Altram[5] and Gaelchúrsaí[6] have, however, pioneered immersion and early years training programmes which have been transformational and central to the development of the IM early years' sector.

Participants also reported that there has been a huge loss of employees from the sector as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and that it has been challenging to recuperate the amount of staff working in these facilities. A large factor impacting their decision to leave the family and early years' sector is a result of the low salaries paid to staff:

> **ATCG:** *The workforce isn't growing quickly enough. We don't have enough people coming through the system and it is extremely difficult to get funding to employ additional staff.*

> **CL:** *After covid, we lost lots of staff, a lot of them to the likes of Tesco and Lidl who were paying more money for less work and they wouldn't have had the same duties. It is very challenging to get staff in place and people don't understand the amount of work that goes into a day-care and the amount of learning the children do when they are with us.*

> **EA:** *The value placed on the roles in early years isn't good enough. They will stand up in Stormont and say how important and valuable the early years are...staff in the early years are responsible for childcare, child protection, the holistic development of the child, mental health, emotional health...they are responsible for so much yet the pay is very low.*

Participants were all in agreement that the rate of pay for early years' service workers hugely under-valued the responsibility and importance associated with working with families and young people. Participants argued that these workers are not valued in the same light as teachers for example, despite being educators who have caring responsibilities and require a unique skillset to work with young children and their parents. This accompanied with the lengthy process of acquiring the qualifications needed to work in early years and family service settings seems to operate as a deterrent for workers:

> **EA:** *A lot of those working in early years have a second job and sometimes 2 or 3 jobs and the majority are young women. The work is very challenging and the responsibility is very heavy and the salary doesn't match the workload.*

> **ATCG:** *It takes two years for someone to qualify for level 3 childcare and we are losing people because of this and therefore don't have enough people coming through. The work doesn't receive the proper value. When you look at the salary rates, it doesn't match the idea that early years are the most important years. Those working in the sector are treating terribly.*

[5] https://www.altram.org/

[6] https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057252048592

Participants further highlighted the demands on workers which are associated with the nature of early years and family services, stating that there is a bespoke skillset required to deal with families on a pastoral level, providing counsel and support for parents also. Parents provided high praise for Irish-medium practitioners in the Irish language planning area of West Belfast for their professionalism and expertise.

> **ATCG:** *When you are dealing with the families, especially the early years, people need to be very capable. You aren't only functioning as an early years worker, you also have to act as a counsellor and a social worker at times to deal with the various challenges that arise. It takes time to train people.*

> **T:** *Those employed in the Irish language projects we attend clearly have a lot of expertise. Before I had kids, I was completely unaware and thought that anybody could deal with children but this clearly isn't true.*

Raising Awareness

The final theme which was discussed during the focus group sessions involved raising awareness among parents, organisations and statutory bodies about the benefits of raising children through Irish and the benefits of early bilingualism. Participants spoke of the duty they have to inform parents of the many benefits of raising children bilingually. Participants spoke of the benefits of early immersion programmes and how family services provide extra years of language exposure before children begin formal education.

> **33:** *It is a great development opportunity for children that is provided by the early years experience through Irish. It gives children years of extra experience of being immersed in the language and this is the feedback we got from parents who don't speak Irish.*

Participants also spoke of the need for a holistic and collaborative approach to be adopted between statutory bodies and community and language groups in order to further expand provision and improve services. Participants also spoke of the additional advantages of increasing exposure to the language for the benefit of the Irish language community and its contribution to language revitalisation efforts.

> **SOD:** *An overarching approach linking community and state is what is needed to do this and this isn't really happening in my view. The language planning is doing brilliant work but I don't see the support coming from the top down.*

> **ATCG:** *We have to be confident about our vision. Of course there are advantages to bilingualism etc but there is something much deeper at play here. In our hearts and in our souls, we are pioneering language revitalisation and decolonisation and I think we should be confident to say that.*

Parents further highlighted the advantages pertaining to their children being raised through the medium of Irish and how they have developed cultural and linguistic awareness, how they will be an asset to their peers when they enter formal immersion education and will be a beacon of support for children who are not being raised through Irish and also how the language community has provided a sense of belonging for their children.

> **T:** *My son recognises when someone is speaking Irish or English, and he reprimands my partner and I when we speak in English. His understanding of the world is already very interesting, even how people speak and how he recognises that diversity. When we hear people talking together in the park who are maybe from different countries, he says to me 'are they speaking in Irish' as he recognises that is is a completely different language.*

> **T:** *We were told that my son would be so valuable in the classroom, almost like a support worker, because he had Irish at home. He will have a good understanding of what's going on and he will be able to follow instructions and other children can copy him.*

> **T:** *The way in which we feel a part of a community and how my son already feels part of this community. I think there is a clear sense of place involved and this is very important to us as a family.*

Participants also spoke of the progress which has been made in creating spaces where the Irish language can be engaged with on a social and organic level; how it is no longer primarily viewed as a mode of acquisition but as a means of communicating and engaging with Gaels. Participants praised the opportunities which are now available for parents, highlighting the significant developments made over the last decade in particular:

> **EA:** *For many years, there wasn't much available and there was a view that Irish was only a school subject. When I was teaching, there were pupils who felt, 'ok I will speak Irish here, but as soon as I head out the school gates, it will be English only. But now I feel there are much better options and that events are much better advertised.*

> **ATCG:** *I think we are in a healthier place now than we were 20 years ago when we were in school and Irish was a language spoken in school only. And I think this is the objective of this collaborative group coming together, that the language is to be heard and used in the places families usually go and that this happens as naturally as possible.*

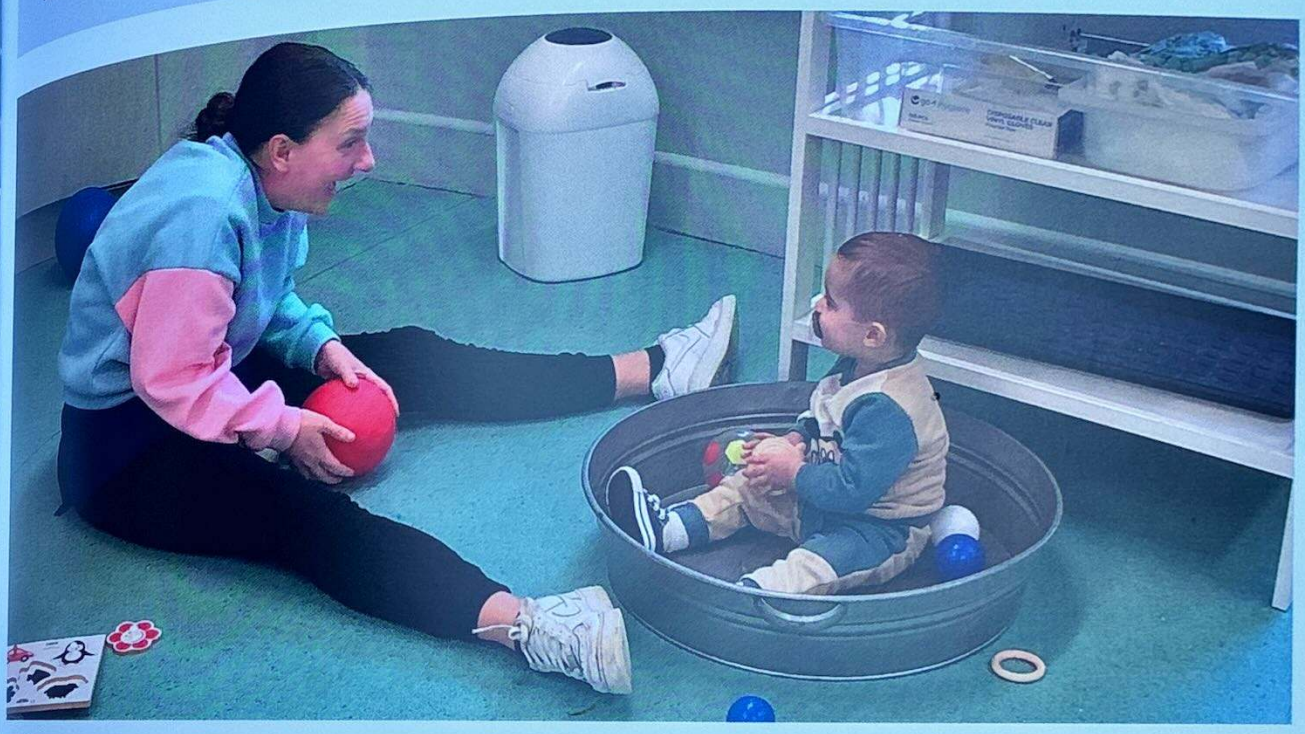
> **ATCG:** *The emphasis was placed on Irish medium education and that is the source but not the destination because we are aiming to build a sustainable language community and we can't do this through Irish medium education alone. Where we want to get to and the most challenging part of this work is inspiring people to raise their children through Irish as home.*

Participants spoke about the importance of continuing efforts of raising awareness not only of the cognitive benefits associated with bilingualism but also the importance of language and identity rights and how further opportunities can be generated and developed to encourage more families to engage with the Irish language at home.

> **EA:** *It took us a long time, for example, to collaborate with programmes such as the Department of Education's 'Getting Ready to Learn', especially because of covid and the conversations and campaigning that took place regarding legal obligations around language rights. People are now coming to us exploring opportunities for colloboration.*

> **ATCG:** *Raising awareness is crucial for that relationship with the baby and especially if you want that contact to be as natural as possible. We need to be understanding of this and what exactly we can do to support parents in taking these practical steps.*

After summarising the apparent themes from the research data collected as part of this evaluation, the next section will provide a summary analysis of research themes before making recommendations for further development of family language services.



Summary

The data collected as part of this evaluative research report unearthed rich and insightful accounts from various stakeholders in the Irish language family sector, including and most importantly, from parents themselves. The following themes were noted as common points of discussion among those parents, staff members of family service organisations, and representatives from advocacy and statutory bodies:

- Fostering Relationships and Parental Stewardship
- Resources and Support
- Training and Workforce Development
- Raising Awareness

Organisations involved in the Irish-medium early years and family sector are undeniably undertaking pioneering work to build and develop this field, often with little to no statutory support or sufficient investment in services. Despite these challenges, they continue to provide essential services which nurture the growth of the Irish language among young children and their families. This commitment underscores the dedication and resourcefulness of those working in the sector, which has been repeatedly evidenced in the research data. Steps must be taken in order to empower parents by supporting them to develop confidence and linguistic competency; this is essential in promoting the Irish language as a thriving, community language through developing and nurturing cultures of linguistic immersion in familial dynamics. By providing resources and support, parents can feel more capable of incorporating Irish into their daily lives, thereby reinforcing the language within the home. This empowerment can be achieved through workshops, support groups, service provision and accessible information about language acquisition. Awareness about the language of the home and family-focused vocabulary is vital and families need resources that cater to everyday interactions, helping to normalise the use of Irish at home. This focus on practical, family-centred vocabulary can make the language more accessible and usable in daily life within immersion or bilingual settings. It is also crucial for events and services to be available consistently and to be clearly advertised and distinguished between those aimed at families who already use Irish as the language of the home and those for families learning the language. This distinction helps ensure that events are appropriately targeted, fostering a supportive environment for all families regardless of their current language proficiency.

Regarding resource provision, the creation of age-appropriate resources is essential for the effective development of family language skills. These resources should cater to the developmental stages of children, making learning Irish an enjoyable and rewarding experience for both children and their parents alike. There is also a dire need for more services that encourage children to speak Irish with each other. Creating environments where children can interact in Irish helps them develop language skills in a natural and engaging way with their peers. It was suggested by many research participants that these services should be available at weekends on a regular basis to accommodate different family schedules and ensure consistent language exposure. Significant investment in community service provision and associated policy development are also required to support the growth of the Irish-medium family sector. This includes focusing on providing sufficient resources, both material and financial, to sustain and expand the reach and impact of these programs which are demonstrably needed by the burgeoning Irish language community.

With regard to training and workforce development opportunities, recognising and valuing the contributions of early years and family language service workers is crucial. Investment in their development and ensuring they have the necessary skills and qualifications will enhance the quality of education and care provided. This includes raising awareness about the benefits of bilingualism and the cultural significance of being an Irish speaker, which fosters a sense of community and belonging. A workforce development strategy is essential to support the growth of the sector which should include reviewing the qualifications required for family language services workers and providing specific training for family immersion service provision.

Finally, creating opportunities for language use beyond the classroom and formal early years' provision is imperative for sustaining the language for future generations. Encouraging the use of Irish in various contexts helps children and families see it as a living language, integral to their daily lives and broader community interactions. Raising awareness about the benefits of bilingualism is also essential; as evidenced throughout the report, bilingualism offers numerous cognitive, psychological, physiological, social, and cultural benefits. By promoting these advantages, more families may be encouraged to participate in Irish-medium education and support the language's growth within their individual communities and, crucially, within the home. To that end, raising awareness about the importance of creating opportunities that extend beyond the classroom helps sustain the language as a community language. Community events, extracurricular activities, parent-toddler events and other initiatives can provide practical and engaging ways for children and families to use Irish in everyday life.

The combination of survey and focus group data results reveals significant insights into the expressed needs and challenges faced by the Irish-medium family sector. By addressing the challenges and investing in key areas such as fostering relationships and parental stewardship, providing resources and support, developing the workforce, and raising awareness, a supportive and thriving environment for the Irish language can be created for the youngest members of our growing community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

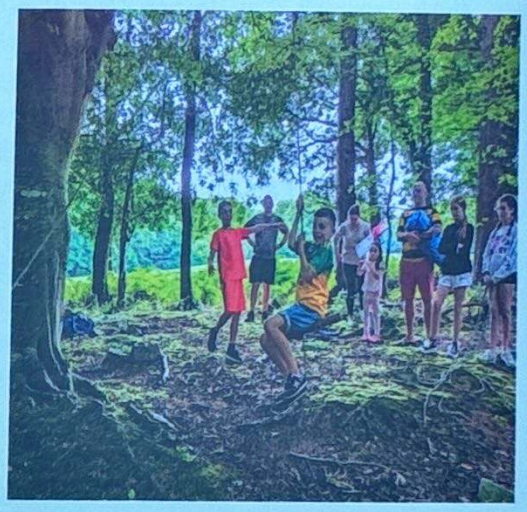
This evaluative research report examined current Irish-language family service provision in the Irish Language Planning Network Area of West Belfast. A contextual overview of the family sector was outlined as well as relevant scholarship and policy in relation to the implications of indigenous immersion programmes and service provision. The research questions were used as a guiding framework for the design of a multi-modal, participative methodology including the circulation of an anonymous survey amongst parents and five semi-structured focus groups and interview discussions with early years' practitioners, statutory and advocacy organisations as well as parents. In spite of a small sample size, the data and testimonies collected offered a comprehensive account of current service provision in the language planning area and beyond, which also included representation from outside of the West Belfast Area and the South of Ireland.

After data was collected, transcribed and thematically coded, four predominant themes emerged; Relationships and Parental Stewardship, Resources and Support, Training and Workforce Development and Raising Awareness. The following recommendations were highlighted by participants and require attention and implementation in order for Irish language family services to be enhanced and made sustainable for future generations:

- Development of a strategic, targeted and ongoing awareness campaign which highlights not only the cognitive advantages of early language immersion but also the physiological and psychological benefits of indigenous language promotion and preservation.
- Additional and enhanced service provision in the immediate Irish Language Planning Network Area to include increased opportunities for immersion and language contact in health services and antenatal care for expectant families, are which are adequately resourced and financially supported.
- Significant ongoing investment from statutory departments in order to enhance and increase provision of early years and Irish-language family services.
- Enhanced home learning and immersion resources to be developed and made available to families from pre-natal stage through to formal schooling age which have Irish-medium stakeholder input and are made accessible for Irish language users and learners depending on the needs of families.
- Design and implementation of a Irish-medium family service workforce development strategy which encourages and entices future uptake in family language practitioner roles as well as a review of current salary and working conditions for early years workers.
- Development of enhanced, language immersion focused training programmes for family language practitioners.
- Development of more age and language appropriate modes of language immersion through the creation of more media and print literature resources targeted for 0-3 years.
- Implementation of these recommendations in the Irish language planning area of West Belfast to create a model of best practice that can support the enhancement of services across Belfast and beyond, particularly in rural areas.

The findings suggest that current family Irish language services in the language planning area of West Belfast, whilst having had a significant impact on families who are both raising their children through Irish and those who are learning Irish with their children, have several shortcomings in relation to adequate funding, resources and workforce. Parents throughout the North of Ireland, who engaged with this research, have expressed notable support and positive commentary regarding the benefits of the services which they have attended. Programme facilitators who organised and hosted the sessions that helped to create social opportunities for their families to participate in received particular praise for creating a normalised, safe and encouraging space and have helped families forge connections and relationships with their peers. Although other factors, including current resource allocation, means that these services remain limited and inconsistent, in spite of significant demand.

In order to enhance the service output of Irish language family service provision, significant investment and statutory support is required in order for the service to be appropriately developed, delivered and expanded in line with demonstrable community need. There is also a need for language appropriate resources to be made available for families to be able to engage with in the home in order to engender a culture of language immersion and to create opportunities for first contact to be made through the medium of Irish. This will undoubtedly contribute to the growing Irish language community and revivalist efforts being undertaken by community organisations and the Irish language planning network, Fís an Phobail. The implementation of these recommendations along with strategic support for current efforts to develop and build upon persistent collaborative practice and communication with all stakeholders of the Irish language family sector can arguably create a mechanism of sustainability for the Irish language community for many generations to come.



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Appendix A - Sample of Survey Questions

Fís an Phobail Family Research Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of the data collection process for a research project currently being facilitated by the Irish language planning network for West Belfast, Fís an Phobail. This research will review existing Irish language family services for parents who have chosen Irish language immersion for their children and will seek to find gaps in current provision.

You are asked to complete the following questionnaire as part of the research; it should not take any longer than 10 minutes to complete. All participation in this research is voluntary and all survey participants will remain anonymous in the final report.

Thank you very much for your participation.

1. Please provide your postcode
2. Have you/your child attended any community based events/courses or early years services delivered through the medium of Irish?

   Yes

   No
3. Please give details of the services/events you/your child have attended
4. How satisfied are you with the range of events/services which are available to families wanting their children to be immersed in Irish in your area?
   (Rating 1 not satisfied at all - 5 Very Satisfied)
5. Please explain your above choice
6. Why have you chosen for your child to attend Irish language early years services?
7. Do you use any of the following practices or mediums to immerse your child in Irish in the home?

   Teaching phrases/vocab

   Storybooks

   Videos or Irish language television

   Play

   Other
8. Please give details, if possible, about the practices or mediums you use to encourage Irish language immersion in the home
9. Have you faced any issues or challenges in your efforts to access Irish language services for your child?
10. Please provide any recommendations or gaps in provision for Irish language early years services.

Appendix B: Sample of Focus Group Data Transcription

Tá réim seirbhís agus dualgas an- leathán againn, aithníonn muid trí réimse oibre as na dualgais sin, agus iad sin an baile, an pobal agus seirbhísí stáit agus clúdaíonn sé sin cúrsaí oideachais

'Úsáidim smacht ach ní smacht an focal is deise atá ann, is dóiche, nuair atá an páiste sa bhaile, tá an saghas 'ceannas' nó an smacht ag an tuismitheoir ar an teanga, a chloiseann an páiste, a úsáideann an pháiste, agus eile, de réir mar a thosaítear ag meascadh sa phobail, bíonn an ceannas sin ag laghdú mar nuair a théann an páiste amach sa phobal, caithfidh muid na rúin an tearmainn teanga a chur ar bun ach níl an ceannas nó an smacht iomlán sin ag an tuismitheoir'

Ansin nuair a théann tú isteach chuig na seirbhísí stáit, is minic nach mbíonn aon smacht nó rogha an an tuismitheoir

Babaí ar an bhealach - ceardlann réamhbhreithe, neamhspléach den soláthar atá ar fáil sna seirbhísí sláinte

Leabhrán - plean teanga teaghlaigh

2 bhliain d'aois - baby massage, treisíonn sé an cinneadh, rogha teanga atá déanta

Buggie buddies - tuistí ag dul amach ag siúil

Baby led weaning - leagan Gaeilge
Bualadh bosa - ranganna céadfacha - rud gaeltachta agus gaeilge

Grúpa tuistí agus tachrán - tábhachtach go dtagann tuistí le chéile go horgánach ach go mbíonn sé deacair aon polasaí teanga a chur i bhfeidhm mar ní bhíonn aon ceannas ag tuismitheoir amháin tharais a chéile, mar sin bíonn áisitheoir i gceist le polasaí teanga a chur i bhfeidhm is fáilte a chur roimh thuistí agus iad a chur in aithne ar a chéile

Ó thaobh LPT de, cuireann muid grúpa tuismitheoirí le chéile, suas le 20 tuismitheoir, agus cuireann muid ocáidí rialta ar bun dóibh, agus tagann siad le chéile go rialta, so tá aithne anois acu ar chéile, aithne á chur ar na gasúir le chéile agus eile

Ceardlann scéalaíocht agus amhránaíocht - Oireachtas

Grúpa leabhair
Clár ceannaireachta gaeltachta

Ag forbairt earraí gaeilge, ciseán leabhair in áiteanna poiblí, aon áit a mbíonn teaghlaigh ag cruinniú

Tá sé aitheanta go hidirnáisiúnta go mbíonn na blianta sin óna 0-2 na blianta is tábhachtaí maidir le sealbhú so sin an chéad rud, agus is mó an inchur a bheadh ag ocáidí Gaeilge agus ag líonraí agus ag gréasánú ídir na blianta sin do tuismitheoir agus don páiste
Go háirithe leis an chéad pháiste, bíonn na tuismitheoirí go hiomlán dírithe ar an pháiste ag an tsráth sin, bíonn saghas déich mbliana ansin nuair a bhíonn tú dírithe don pháiste sin, so is mó a bhíonn siad ag lorg na hocáidí sin, so bíonn na treochtaí seo ann, agus bím i gcónaí a rá leis an fhoireann, lean

an baby boom, tiocfaidh na tuismitheoirí sa cheantar sin le chéile, cuirfidh siad aithne ar a chéile trí Ghaeilge, agus bíonn meascán ann, bíonn tuismitheoirí ann ar as an áit iad, tuismitheoirí nua isteach, agus seo grúpa a bheas mar chuid mór de do shaol amach anseo, seo an dream a bheas le chéile ar feadh 20 bliain eile agus má cuireann tusa an caidreamh sin ar bun trí Ghaeilge, seans maith go leanfar sin trí Ghaeilge

Tá roinnt aiseolas faighte againn agus ceann de na rudaí is mó a chuir i bhfeidhm orm, bíonn daoine a rá 'cuireann daoine aithne ar a chéile? Sure tá aithne ag chuile duine ar a chéile anseo', tharla seo i gceantar beag tuaithe, agus dúirt bean cé go raibh a fhios agam céirbh iad na daoine sa cheantar, ní raibh aithne aici orthu, so tá difear ann idir aithne agus caidreamh, muna mbeadh an suíomh neamhfhoirméalta ann trí ghaeilge, seans go mbuailfeadh siad leis an duine céanna agus go dtosóidh siad i mBéarla agus leanfar ar aghaidh mar sin agus sin deis caillte

Go dtí gur thosaigh tuismitheoirí na gaeltachta ag feidhmniú go naisiúnta go hoifigiúil in 2018 ní raibh earnáil teaghlaigh ann, tá an earnáil teaghlaigh sin ag teastáil, agus tá an spás sin ann agus caithfear forbairt a dhéanamh air

Is áit chomh príobhaideach agus chomh pearsanta é an baile agus níl aon cheart moralta ag aon duine eile a bheith ag brú isteach air sin, agus tá sé sin an-thábhachtach dúinn. Ar ndóigh, sé an curam atá againn ná daoine a mhealladh, agus na buntaistí a bhaineann leis an Ghaeilge sa bhaile a léiriú dóibh, agus an tacaíocht a chur ar fáil agus mar sin

Dúshlán eile ná acmhainní, agus níl mé ag caint ar daoine leis an obair a dhéanamh, tá gearrchéim earcaíochta ar bun faoi láthair, níl na daoine caillithe ann, ach chomh maith leis sin, na daoine a bhfuil na scilleanna acu. Tá plean curtha in áit againne chun daoine a chur faoi oiliúint, daoine le grúpaí sugartha a dhéanamh, le cúrsaí a dhéanamh

Go ginearalta, sa Ghaeltacht ach go háirithe, ba chóir go mbeadh na seirbhísí ann trí Ghaeilge go nadurtha. Caithfidh tú dul amach agus iad a iarraidh, agus go háirithe mar thuismitheoir agus páiste in áice leat, níl tú ag dul raic a thógáil, ba chóir go mbeadh normalú déanta, gurb é seo atá ann agus sin sin

Ní athróidh sé sin thar oíche, is gá cur chuige iomlánach idir pobal agus stáit le sin a dhéanamh, agus feictear dom nach bhfuil sé sin really ag tarlú, tá an pleanáil teanga ag déanamh an-obair ach feictear dom nach bhfuil an tacaíocht acu ón mbarr anuas.