

NEWS RELEASE: Issued by The Centre for Mental Health and Community Research, Maynooth University

Friday, 20th September 2019.

## **Research highlights case for more State support for parenting intervention in the earliest years**

### **Early parenting programme significantly increases parental competence and wellbeing**

#### **Parenting programme benefits are sustained after two years**

The benefits to families of providing parenting support – from babyhood onwards – are highlighted in new research launched today by the centre for Mental Health and Community Research at Maynooth University.

The ENRICH programme involved a five-year research investigation of a new service called the *Upto2/Parent and Baby Programme* which combines many different health and education-related parenting supports and was delivered to almost 400 parents and their 0-2 year old children in West Dublin and Louth.

The research, funded by the Health Research Board, found that the parents who received the programme became more confident and more satisfied in their role and adopted more sensitive and proactive styles and skills when managing their young infants. These benefits were also sustained after two years.

Parent satisfaction with the programme was very high. For example, parents said they became more responsive and attuned to their infants' emotional needs during what many mothers described as a challenging time.

The research also explored in detail how the programme was delivered, and this involved inputs from over 60 participating stakeholders.

Speaking at today's launch Principal Investigator and Founder Director of the Centre for Mental Health and Community Research at Maynooth University, Professor Sinéad McGilloway said: "Through the ENRICH research, we have investigated a new approach to service provision, tailored to work with existing family health and social services, and which delivers measurable and tangible benefits to parents and their children in the first two years of life.

"We have also gathered detailed learning on what is needed to ensure that additional 'wraparound' programmes can be delivered successfully by both statutory and voluntary organisations who collaborated closely in designing and delivering this new programme.

"This research further evidences the importance of Government and child and family services adequately investing in universal, high quality, parenting support in order to deliver long-term benefits for families and society at large.

"Our research also shows how to effectively replicate this approach and therefore add value to current early health and social care service provision.

"We encourage decision-makers, managers and government to consider carefully the findings from our ENRICH research programme and ensure that they are used to inform services and policy so that more and more parents can be supported in their children's earliest years.

Health Research Board Chief Executive Darrin Morrissey said: "Results like this clearly demonstrate the value that health research has for people at all stages of life. The HRB is committed to supporting new research and evidence that improves people's health and informs health policy and practice".

Further findings in the research are:

- Feedback from parents and service providers found that greater universal early parenting supports are needed
- A strong focus on implementation (particularly on securing and sustaining parental engagement) is a vital ingredient of successful early parenting programmes
- Integrating additional evidence-based parenting programmes within existing child and family services, increases capacity and effectiveness throughout the sector.

Research in Ireland has suggested that every €1 invested in prevention and early intervention to support parents and children saves the State €4 in the long term. The National Economic and Social Forum stated a return on investment of €4-7 for every €1 invested.

**ENRICH** (EvaluatioN of wRapararound in Ireland for CHildren and families) is a five-year multi-component research programme being carried out by the Centre for Mental Health and Community Research at Maynooth University and funded by the Health Research Board.

The research involved the collection of extensive data over a period of two years, on parenting competencies, parent wellbeing, parent-infant relationships and child development with parents and children who participated in the programme were compared with a control group who accessed services as usual.

This research also provides an example of how university researchers can work successfully with partners in the community who, in this case, included Archways, the Deansrath Family Resource Centre, the Clondalkin Community Healthy Living Initiative, the Connect Family Resource Centre and the Genesis programme.

#### **Further Information**

The full research can be viewed at: [www.cmhcr.eu/enrichprogramme](http://www.cmhcr.eu/enrichprogramme)

Ronan Cavanagh, Cavanagh Communications: (086) 317 9731.